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Unpacking the double penalty:

The Labour Market Integration of EU Foreign-Born Women in Europe

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Why should you read this research?

EU foreign-born women, defined as women born in an EU country but residing in another Member State, are, on average, more educated than any other group examined in this analysis, more so than native-born men, native-born women, and EU foreign-born men. By conventional logic, this should translate into stronger labour market outcomes.

It does not. EU foreign-born women are the only group facing a statistically significant unemployment penalty. They are the most likely to be overqualified for their job. They have the highest rates of part-time and temporary employment. They are the least likely to be self-employed. These patterns hold even after accounting for age and education, even among women who have lived in the host country for over a decade, and even within a population that enjoys near-full labour market access under EU free-movement rights.

Neither gender nor migration background alone explains what EU foreign-born women experience in the labour market. This thesis argues that their disadvantages can only be understood by examining both dimensions together, and that doing so reveals something that looking at either in isolation cannot.

Introduction

Migrant women occupy a complex position in research on labour market integration in the European Union: they are theoretically central yet often empirically marginal. Quantitative studies on labour market integration of migrant women have typically examined their situation through one of two partial lenses, comparing migrant women to native women to isolate a nativity gap, or comparing them to migrant men to isolate a gender gap, rather than placing both dimensions within a single analytical framework. Even when studies do consider both gender and migration simultaneously, they are often limited to one or a few countries or to a narrow subset of labour-market outcomes. As a result, the literature has yet to reach a definitive answer to a seemingly simple question: do migrant women face a double penalty in the EU labour market, one that exceeds what gender and migration background would predict separately? More broadly, which mechanisms drive any such penalties?

Using microdata from the European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) Public Use Files for 2010–2013 across 22 EU member states, this research focuses on EU foreign-born women, defined as women born in an EU country other than their country of residence, analysing them within a four-group comparison structure alongside native-born men, native-born women, and EU foreign-born men. It examines labour market integration as a multidimensional process, covering first labour force participation, employment status and employment quality. Controls are introduced sequentially to assess how far differences in age, education, occupation, sector, and firm size account for raw gaps, and how much remains unexplained. Due to limitations of the PUFs, the analysis is restricted to EU foreign-born individuals, 98.8% of whom carry EU nationality and therefore enjoy near-full labour market access and welfare provision under free-movement rights. The institutional constraints that often shape migrant disadvantage, such as restricted legal statuses, tied work permits, or welfare access, are therefore largely absent. The penalties identified here should thus be understood as a lower-bound estimate of the disadvantages likely to be faced by non-EU foreign-born women.

The main finding of this research is that migrant women's disadvantages in the labour market vary systematically by outcome and across countries. This suggests that the interaction between gender- and migration-related mechanisms depends on the specific outcome under consideration and on the type of mechanism most relevant to it.

In labour force participation, EU foreign-born women face a penalty that is gender-driven but compounded by migration-specific mechanisms, once age and education are controlled for. This shift reveals that EU foreign-born women's comparatively higher educational attainment and concentration in prime working ages were masking an underlying double disadvantage. As the literature suggests, penalties in labour force participation are primarily gendered, arising from household specialisation incentives driven by expected discrimination, lower expected returns to employment, care work obligations, and gender norms that direct women towards domestic roles. For EU foreign-born women, these incentives might be compounded by the tied-mover dynamic, which further incentivises household specialisation, and by

post-migration disruption of kin networks, which reinforces care burdens relative to native women. Variation across countries is therefore also consistent with differences in public provision of care and degrees of defamilialisation.

Once in the labour force, EU foreign-born women are the only group facing a clear and significant unemployment penalty, pointing to a double disadvantage concentrated among them. Age and education do not explain this gap. However, conditional on being unemployed, they do not face a higher probability of long-term unemployment once controls are added, which may reflect selective return migration of those who remain jobless longest. EU foreign-born women are also the least likely to be self-employed, a penalty that persists after controls. Turning to employment quality, part-time work shows a large gender penalty, initially higher for EU foreign-born women than native-born women. However, the migrant-specific excess disappears entirely once occupation and sector are controlled, reflecting their concentration in elementary occupations and in domestic and household services. Within full-time employment, however, EU foreign-born women work longer hours than native-born women after controls, yet still fewer than native men. In terms of contract duration, EU foreign-born women share significant raw penalties compared to the other groups which attenuate substantially with occupational controls. Monthly pay is primarily structured by gender, with native-born women showing comparable penalties to EU foreign-born women in the likelihood of being in the top income quintile and higher penalties in the bottom income quintile, after adding occupational controls. Overqualification produces the clearest intersectional result: EU foreign-born women are the most disadvantaged group, even after adding controls.

These results are consistent with the gendered imperfect transferability of skills. In particular, high-skilled social care work is disproportionately performed by women and is subject to stringent accreditation requirements and complex recognition systems, making it structurally harder for migrant women than for migrant men to have their qualifications recognised and to enter licensed occupations. The tied mover dynamic further reduces their expected returns, shortens their job searches, and increases exposure to taste-based discrimination, all of which may drive their higher unemployment and overqualification rates relative to all other groups. The same gender constraints that reduce women's labour force participation also push them towards flexible and part-time employment, sorting them into occupations, sectors and firms compatible with care responsibilities. For migrant women, however, migration-specific constraints, imperfect skill transferability, lower reservation wages, shorter job searches, and discrimination, compound this tendency, channelling them into secondary labour market segments, in particular low-skilled social care. This involuntary segregation, rather than a preference for reduced hours, is consistent with the full-time hours reversal observed in the data. The gendered non-recognition of skills and the hourglass economy might further explain both why migrant women face difficulties moving out of these segments and why overqualification remains significant even after many years of residence. Finally, country-level variation in these outcomes might reflect the demand for low-skilled labour, formal qualification recognition systems, particularly in social care, employment protection

legislation, and the generosity and eligibility rules of welfare provision, all of which might compound or weaken the constraining mechanisms described above.

The findings point to clear policy implications: migrant women's labour market integration depends not only on individual characteristics, but also on how institutions organise social care, regulate precarious sectors, and recognise foreign skills. Policies that expand universal care provision, improve job quality in feminised sectors, and make qualification recognition more effective are therefore central to reducing the disadvantages identified in this research.

The research proceeds as follows. The next chapter reviews the interdisciplinary literature on gender inequality, migrant integration, and the specific mechanisms shaping migrant women's labour market outcomes. The methodology chapter then explains the data, four-group comparison strategy, outcome measures, and modelling approach. The empirical chapters present the findings for labour market outcomes, years of residence, and macro-regional variation. The conclusion draws out the implications of these findings for research on intersectionality and for policy debates on labour market integration of migrant women.

Interdisciplinary state of knowledge

This interdisciplinary state of knowledge examines the mechanisms through which migrant women experience disadvantages in the labour market. These disadvantages cannot be understood solely through theories of gender inequality or migrant integration taken separately. Rather, they emerge from the interaction between gender- and migration-related mechanisms, which together produce distinct forms of labour market disadvantage. This chapter therefore first reviews the main theories explaining labour market penalties for women, then those accounting for migrant penalties, and finally the approaches that clarify how these dimensions intersect in the case of migrant women. These theoretical perspectives are essential both for structuring the methodology of this thesis and for interpreting its findings. The chapter then turns to quantitative empirical studies on migrant women to synthesise the literature's main empirical findings and identify its principal gaps.

1. Theories on the gender penalty in the labour market

In the euro area, the gender gap in the labour market is closing, but at a decreasing pace (European Central Bank, 2025). In 2005, the gender earnings gap was 50%, 15 percentage points higher than in 2023. Decomposed, the 35% earnings gender gap in 2023 is made up of 10.5% labour force participation gap, 13.4% hourly wage gap and 10.7% gap in hours worked.

Theories on gender inequalities in the labour market explain why this gap continues to persist. They can be categorised as theories that explain the gender penalty through gendered agent-level decisions, and those explaining how exogenous structural mechanisms, whether at the labour market or institutional level, translate and compound those decisions into unequal outcomes. These theories interact and reinforce one another, collectively explaining why women are less likely to participate in the labour market, tend to work fewer hours, and earn lower wages than men.

1.1 Gendered agent-level decisions

Identity, a person's sense of self, is linked to the social categories into which society is divided (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000). Gender, as a social category, is tied to gender norms, defined as "social norms defining acceptable and appropriate actions for women and men in a given group or society" (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020, p. 413). Individuals learn, adopt and internalise these norms through socialisation, a process occurring primarily during childhood. Through this process, gender norms become embedded in individuals' preferences and psychological traits, and therefore also the skills they develop, producing systematically different dispositions between men and women that shape their decisions. Once internalised, following gender norms reinforces an individual's identity and thereby increases their utility (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000).

However, gender norms don't necessarily need to be internalised to constrain behaviour, as they can also be external, operating through social pressure or coordination mechanisms (Cortes et al., 2026). When an individual holds discordant norms, that is, personal attitudes that diverge from prevailing gender norms (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020), they might choose not

to follow the behavioural prescriptions associated with their gender category (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000). This generates an identity externality: violations of behavioural prescriptions associated with a specific social category threaten the identity of the members of that group, causing them a loss of utility. Group members may therefore sanction the non-conforming individual through scorn, ostracism or harassment, even at a personal cost.

Beyond sanctions and the threat thereof, external gender norms shape individual behaviour through the preference for conformity and the human need for social approval and belonging (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020). Individuals may therefore act in accordance with what they believe others are doing and what they believe is expected of them, independently of their own private attitudes (Cortes et al., 2026).

Understanding the content of gender norms is essential for explaining gendered agent-level decisions in the labour market. Gender norms have historical origins that persist through vertical intergenerational transmission, ensuring cultural continuity long even after the original economic rationale has disappeared (Cortes et al., 2026; Fernández & Fogli, 2009). Connell (1987) identifies three structural categories of gender norms that shape what individuals "should do" and what individuals "should be". The structure of labour governs the sexual division of work, prescribing that work is divided into "men's jobs" and "women's jobs" and directing individuals towards job categories on the basis of sex through education and the development of certain skills rather than others. The structure of power attributes authority and control to men both within and outside the household. The structure of cathexis governs emotional relations, desire and attachment, feminising care and emotional labour both in the domestic sphere and in the labour market.

The definition of what women and men "should be" therefore impacts their psychological traits and preferences, which in turn affect the skills they develop. This has important consequences for gendered labour market outcomes. Despite the emerging general consensus that men and women are more alike than they are different (Olivetti et al., 2024), Bertrand (2011)'s research indicates that women are less competitively inclined, less likely to initiate negotiations for salaries, raises or promotions, and more risk-averse. These attributes can make certain high-paying occupations appear less compatible with the forms of behaviour socially expected of women than of men, who are more often associated with assertiveness, confidence, and competitiveness. Similarly, because women are expected to be more agreeable, altruistic and socially minded, they are directed towards occupations centred on helping others, such as care, education and health (Bertrand, 2011), which are relatively low-paying sectors.

Above all, gender norms assign household labour and care work to women while designating men as primary providers (Jayachandran, 2021). This idealised social and economic arrangement organises society into heterosexual, male-headed nuclear families that live primarily from the man's labour market earnings (Fraser, 1994). In its ideal form, the model prescribes breadwinning for men and unpaid caring and homemaking for women. The persistence of this model has clear empirical support and consequences for women's labour market outcomes. Because women are expected to prioritise household and care work, they

are more likely to reduce their labour market participation and seek greater workplace flexibility than men.

1.2 Structural mechanisms

1.2.1 Discrimination

There are three main theories on gender discrimination: the discriminatory taste model, statistical discrimination theory and monopsonistic discrimination. The discriminatory taste model distinguishes between two groups: the majority, or non-discriminated group, and the minority, or discriminated group (Becker, 1971). Discrimination is represented by the discrimination coefficient, an additional cost that accounts for the disutility caused to employers, co-workers or consumers by contact with the discriminated group. This cost raises the perceived wage rates offered by the employers to the discriminated group, it reduces the wage rates of the employees who have to work with the discriminated group, and increases the prices of consumer goods produced by the discriminated group. Because the discrimination coefficient makes it more costly for majority employers to hire minority workers, the minority group receives lower wages. Furthermore, when members of the two groups are perfect substitutes, a profit-maximising employer will prefer a homogeneous workforce, producing market segregation.

Statistical discrimination theory assumes that productivity is unobservable due to a lack of perfect information in the labour market (Arrow, 1971). Therefore, employers use proxies to estimate an individual's true productivity. These proxies include a noisy signal, such as a test score or interview, and group factors based on stereotypes or preconceptions (Arrow, 1971; Coate & Loury, 1993), such as the belief that women are more likely to have intermittent career horizons due to pregnancy and childcare. The importance of the group factors in estimating an individual's productivity depends on the perceived reliability of the noisy signal; the less reliable the signal, the more the employer relies on group identity. Statistical discrimination might impact both hiring and promotion. In the hiring process, if group factors decrease perceived productivity, employers may only hire individuals from that group if their wage rates are low enough to recoup the personnel investment (such as training) the firm must make (Arrow, 1971). This can lead to lower wage rates for the stereotyped group or their total exclusion from certain labour markets. In terms of promotion, statistical discrimination affects how employers assign workers to high-reward tasks or promotions (Coate & Loury, 1993). Given lower group factors, the noisy signal must be higher for members of the stereotyped group than for others to convince the employer they are qualified. This means the discriminated group faces more exacting "standards" and a lower probability of being rewarded, which reduces that group's rational incentive to invest in the human capital required for that occupation. Finally, statistical discrimination theory explains a feedback loop or self-fulfilling prophecy (Arrow, 1971; Coate & Loury, 1993). The discrimination practised by the employer causes an effect, such as lower investment in skills, lower wages or exclusion from certain occupations, which ultimately confirms and reinforces the original negative stereotype.

In imperfect labour markets, firms might have monopsonistic power, thus they can change wages without immediately losing all workers (Manning, 2003). This is because some

workers might have mobility costs, search frictions or heterogeneous preferences which prevent them from leaving the firm as soon as their wages decrease or which constrain them to accept lower wages. These firms can therefore pay their workers less than their marginal productivity. In terms of gender inequality, women generally face higher mobility costs than men because they are more likely to require a restricted commuting range, part-time work, or specific schedules. As a result, they tend to value non-pecuniary job attributes more highly than pay, experience higher search frictions, and are therefore less able to search for and accept better-paid offers. Women therefore have a less wage-elastic labour supply than men, allowing monopsonistic firms to hire them at lower wages, while men are more likely to reject or find better paying offers. This might be expressed as women being paid less than men for the same occupation in the same firm (bargaining channel), or as more women employed in low-paying firms than men (sorting channel). Legal constraints related to paying different wages to men and women in the same role and workers' demands for fairness create practical constraints to this type of within-firm discrimination. However, despite laws prohibiting discrimination, firms can pay premiums above the wage rates, so these gaps persist even when base pay appears equal.

1.2.2 Human capital

Human capital theory assumes rational individual and household choices (Becker, 1964; Becker, 1985). Because there are increasing returns from specialised human capital, there is an incentive to impose a sharp division of labour within a household. Even if men and women begin only with small differences in comparative advantages, these differences will be magnified because even a small comparative advantage might push one spouse or the other to specialise fully in the market or in the household. As women are more likely to specialise in household and child rearing, they will expect a limited time career horizon, meaning that they will expect their amount of time spent in the labour force to be intermittent or brief. As this expectation is positively correlated to incentives to invest in human capital, women will make lower investments in their human capital. The lower human capital might explain why women have lower labour market outcomes than men. However, although human capital differences historically explained a substantial part of the gender pay gap, their explanatory power has weakened as men’s and women’s educational attainment and labour market experience have converged. Becker’s theory remains relevant not because it alone explains contemporary gender gaps, but because it identifies the household incentives underlying specialisation. Where women face perceived or real lower market returns, it becomes rational for households to allocate more unpaid labour to them, thereby increasing their likelihood of seeking employment compatible with family responsibilities.

1.2.3 Occupational or sectoral barriers

Goldin (2014b)’s pollution theory assumes that technological shocks can lower the minimum skill requirement for a job and, because of asymmetric information in the labour market, the value of these shocks is known only to incumbents in those occupations. The theory further assumes that society acts as the arbiter of prestige, which is linked to one’s occupation and its difficulty. Because of asymmetric information, society can only update its information about jobs’ difficulties by observing the identity and social category of new entrants, judging social

categories by their perceived average skills or competences rather than individual merit. This perceived median is itself biased by statistical discrimination and stereotypes which are linked to historical productivity differences. Indeed, Goldin argues that society continues to perceive women's median skills and abilities to be lower than men, even where this is no longer empirically supported.

Consequently, if women enter an occupation, society infers that it must have been deskilled, even when it is not the case. The perceived deskilling of an occupation pollutes the prestige and reputation associated with it. Men in segregated occupations therefore oppose the entry of women to protect their group identity and prestige. The resulting occupational segregation is non-monotonic, concentrating at both the low end and the high end of the occupational hierarchy.

Because women face barriers in entering certain occupations, this may produce overcrowding in "female" occupations, artificially creating a large supply of labour which lowers women's marginal productivity and wages compared to equally skilled workers in "male" occupations (Bergmann, 1974; Edgeworth, 1922). Conversely, this also artificially raises men's wages, as the supply of labour in "male" fields is reduced. Occupational segregation therefore becomes a source of profit for employers, which can contribute to overcoming aversion for the discriminated group and make it profitable to have labour-intensive production. Occupational segregation is also profitable for men, who have higher wages than they would in an integrated, competitive market.

England et al. (1994)'s devaluation theory offers a complementary but distinct explanation, arguing that it is not that women concentrate in low-paid occupations, but that occupations become low-paid precisely because they are associated with women. Gender norms depreciate the labour and skills performed by women, and sustain the perception that women deserve or need less pay than men. These norms generate cognitive biases among decision-makers when judging the merit or "worth" of certain occupations or certain workers, leading to lower evaluations of tasks or occupations perceived as feminine and underestimating the economic contribution of women or "female" jobs. Because of their perceived lower value, "female" occupations or tasks receive lower wages. England theorises that these biases become institutionalised and perpetuated through organisational inertia and market survey transmission. First, employers often use past wages within their own organisations to set current pay levels, effectively "freezing" historical bias into the system. Second, when firms use market surveys to set competitive wages, they inadvertently transmit the discriminatory biases of other firms into their own pay structure.

1.2.4 Firm-level mechanisms

Finally, Goldin (2014a) explains how firm-level mechanisms reveal why women are paid less even when they are in the same sector or occupations as men. Occupations have different degrees of substitutability between workers, so they differ in the ease with which one employee can be replaced by another to perform a task without a loss in productivity or increase in transaction costs. Jobs with high substitutability have linear pay structures, whereby pay is linear with respect to the hours worked. Jobs with low substitutability have convex or non-linear pay structures, whereby earnings increase disproportionately with the

number of hours worked. Such occupations therefore penalise workplace flexibility in terms of wages and career progression. Here, flexibility refers to continuity of employment, number of hours, precise timing (the ability to work specific hours), predictability and availability.

Linear and convex pay jobs may be more prevalent in different occupations and industries. Because women are on average more likely to seek workplace flexibility, they may sort more often into occupations and industries in which pay is more linear. However, linear and convex pay structures may also coexist within the same occupation and industry across different firms, or across public and private employers. In frictional labour markets, firms have some wage-setting power, which allows employers to pay different wages for similar work. Wages therefore depend not only on labour supply and demand, but also on firm-specific wage premia linked to the bargaining surplus available at a given firm. That surplus may vary with productivity and with firm-specific characteristics such as market power, client base, or reputation. Jobs with lower worker substitutability are often associated with more convex pay structures, and such jobs may also be concentrated in firms that pay higher wage premia. As a result, when women sort into more linear-pay jobs, they may earn less not only because of the pay structure itself, but also because these jobs are more often located in firms or segments of the labour market with lower wage premia. Moreover, even when women enter convex-pay jobs, they may still face wage and promotion penalties because these jobs reward long, continuous, and inflexible availability.

1.2.5 Institutions and welfare regimes

To understand these mechanisms, it is necessary to consider how feminist scholars reformulated Esping-Andersen's (1990) original framework of welfare regimes (Orloff, 1993).

Social welfare can originate from the state, the market or the family and the degree to which a welfare state permits people to "uphold socially acceptable standards of living independently of market participation" is termed decommodification (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Feminist scholars argue, however, that this concept rests on the implicit assumption that the typical citizen is already integrated into the labour market as a worker, an assumption that historically reflected the experience of the male breadwinner rather than that of women (Orloff, 1993). Because women were often assigned unpaid care and domestic work within the household, they frequently accessed social rights only indirectly, through their position as wives or mothers, rather than as independent right-bearers. In this sense, decommodification as originally theorised could reproduce rather than challenge women's dependence on the family.

This critique led feminist scholars to introduce additional dimensions of welfare regimes that are more attentive to gender inequality. First, Orloff (1993) introduced the dimension of "commodification", defined as the right to access to paid work. Second, Lister (1997) introduced the concept of "defamilialisation" or "individualisation", defined as the "degree to which individual adults can maintain a socially acceptable standard of living independently of family relations, whether through their own paid work or through social security provision" (p. 172). In practice, this refers to the capacity to form and maintain an autonomous household and thereby achieve economic independence. Defamilialisation is therefore central

to understanding whether welfare states enable women to avoid economic dependence on marriage and to exit unsatisfactory or oppressive family situations.

From a gender perspective, the literature identifies two main dimensions through which welfare states reproduce or challenge the sexual division of labour: defamilialisation, which concerns the structure of social entitlements and taxation, and the provision of care, which concerns the organisation of care as a public or private responsibility. These two channels shape women's incentives and capacity to engage in paid work.

Lewis's (1992, 1997) classification of welfare states is essential for understanding how welfare states can support or hinder defamilialisation through the structure of social security and taxation systems. In strong male breadwinner states, a firm dividing line exists between the public and private spheres, with the household as the basic unit of welfare. This welfare regime rests on the assumption that men perform paid work and women perform unpaid care and domestic work. It has two tiers of social provision. The upper tier of social insurance provides entitlements based on contributions and is less intrusive in monitoring behaviour. It distinguishes between direct right-bearers or citizens, traditionally working husbands who receive more generous entitlements based on their contributions, and indirect right-bearers, traditionally non-working wives receiving less generous indirect entitlements based on their husbands' contributions. The lower tier of social assistance refers to means-tested entitlements based on familial status, traditionally intended for non-working mothers without a husband. This lower tier is less generously funded and more intrusive in monitoring behaviour. This system supports women's dependence on men and creates an incentive not to work because part-time work is not included in the social insurance system, because entitlements from low-paid work might be lower than derived entitlements or because pay might be too high to receive means-tested entitlements. This is reinforced by joint taxation at high marginal rates, which creates a secondary earner trap whereby a wife considering entering the labour market faces a punitive tax rate that can make paid work financially irrational.

Essential for the analysis of welfare states and gender is the concept of social care, defined as the activities and relations involved in meeting the physical and emotional requirements of dependent adults and children, and the normative, economic and social frameworks within which these are assigned and carried out (Daly & Lewis, 2000). Thanks to the introduction of this concept, Daly and Lewis categorise welfare states by the degree and way in which they provide social care. At the macro level, they examine sectoral responsibility, the division of the care load between the state, market, family and voluntary sector, and care infrastructure, defined as the balance between cash benefits and service provision. At the micro level, they examine the influence of the welfare state in the distribution of care among individuals, specifically who performs and receives caregiving between men and women, and the economic, social and normative conditions under which that work is carried out.

Taken together, these structural mechanisms show that gender inequalities in labour market outcomes are not simply the result of individual choices, but are produced and reinforced by employers, occupational structures, firms, and welfare institutions.

2. Defining labour market integration and its importance

Stemming from the general definition of integration (Garcés-Mascareñas & Penninx, 2016), labour market integration refers to the process of becoming an accepted part of the host society's labour market and economic system.

Successful labour market integration benefits both migrants and the host society (Ager & Strang, 2008). It encourages self-reliance of migrants, which ensures economic independence. In turn, it allows them to plan for their future, giving them a reason to settle in the host society, securing stability and continuity. Furthermore, it gives migrants the ability to support their family in their country of origin through remittances. As the workplace is the principal site for meeting members of the host community, employment allows migrants to improve their language skills, gain cultural knowledge and build social capital, which can offer further employment opportunities. By allowing migrants to move away from welfare dependency, contributing to the economic growth and filling the labour shortages in the local economy, employment might also positively impact the attitudes of the host society. Because labour market integration is not only an indicator of successful integration but also serves as a resource that supports and drives progress in almost every other dimension of integration, it is regarded as both a "marker" and a "means" of integration quality.

As integration is a two-way process shaped by migrants' own efforts and the way in which society adapts to accommodate them (Garcés-Mascareñas & Penninx, 2016), its measurement is inherently comparative (Entzinger & Biezeveld, 2003). Hence, labour market integration is assessed by how migrants compare to natives in terms of access to institutional facilities, skill alignment and employment or entrepreneurship outcomes.

3. Theories on migration penalty in the labour market

As in the previous chapter, theories of the migration penalty in the labour market can be grouped into three broad strands: those focusing on migrants' characteristics, resources and incentives; those examining how employers assess, sort and reward migrants in the labour market; and those highlighting how the institutional framework shapes both migrants' opportunities and employers' behaviour. This classification allows for a more in-depth understanding of the interplay between individual actors at the micro level and the institutional structures of host countries at the macro level (Kogan, 2007). As with the gender penalty, differences in characteristics, resources and constraints between natives and migrants can generate divergent labour market outcomes. These initial gaps are then shaped through migrants' interactions with employers and further amplified, channelled or mitigated by national institutional contexts.

3.1 Migrant-side mechanisms

3.1.1 Human capital

The original human capital theories were grounded in the classical assimilation model, which conceptualises integration as a natural, linear, and irreversible process in which migrants progressively shed their culture of origin and adopt the dominant culture of the host society

(Alba, 1997; Chiswick, 1978). According to this model, integration is mainly driven by the individual characteristics of migrants, in particular their human capital and their ability to accumulate it (Gordon, 1964). According to these theories, integration starts with low employment outcomes and improves as migrants increase their human capital, sometimes even exceeding the natives due to higher motivation (Friedberg, 1996).

Integration is not only driven by measured human capital, such as years of schooling or experience, but also innate or unmeasured, like ability, work motivation and effort (Chiswick & Miller, 2009). The degree and speed of integration depend on the amount of universalistic competences, human capital related to merit and associated to productivity, and instrumental skills, such as the host country's language proficiency and occupational training, the technical knowledge and orientation for local jobs (Gordon, 1964).

Human capital can be foreign-sourced, therefore acquired in the immigrant's country of origin, or domestic-sourced, acquired in the host country (Friedberg, 1996). The value of foreign-sourced capital depends heavily on its international transferability (Chiswick & Miller, 2009). The most significant barrier to integration is therefore the imperfect portability of human capital acquired abroad which causes human capital depreciation, the loss of economic value or productivity of an individual's skills, education and work experience when they move from their country of origin to a host country (Friedberg, 1996).

International transferability depends on three main factors: formal recognition from the host country, recognition by employers in the host country and relevance for the labour market of the destination country. Formal recognition of foreign credentials includes recognition of foreign education, which requires a process of confirming that a foreign degree is equivalent to a domestic one, and recognition of licences necessary to practice a regulated profession (Pfeffer & Skrivanek, 2018). This is important for labour market integration because, as employers cannot directly observe a person's productivity, they rely on credentials that act as signals of competence and productivity (Spence, 1973), as discussed above. However, as qualifications are formal abstractions of individual skills which are based on country-specific standardisation, employers might mistrust foreign credentials due to their lack of information about foreign institutions, education systems and standardisation methods. This lack of trust occurs more easily when foreign credentials are not officially recognised and equalised to native ones. Finally, certain skills may remain intrinsically valuable but cannot be fully used or rewarded in the host country without complementary country-specific competences such as language proficiency, institutional knowledge, or familiarity with local professional practice (Friedberg, 1996). This is evident for professions such as law or medicine. Colonial ties further contribute to making the human capital of migrants from certain countries of origin more portable than others, given shared language and institutional ties (Kogan, 2007).

Domestic-sourced human capital is therefore not only valuable because it does not require a transferability process, but also because it raises the economic return of foreign-sourced capital (Friedberg, 1996), by translating it into terms rewarded by the host labour market thanks to the country-specific human capital it generates. This translation occurs both in a literal sense, as language proficiency allows migrants to use their skills in the local context, and more broadly, by enabling them to apply their foreign human capital in ways that are

valued and recognised in the host society through a better understanding of domestic institutions and norms.

Imperfect transferability therefore generates structural mismatch in the labour market, manifesting itself in overeducation, overqualification, and occupational downgrading, as migrants may lack the country-specific human capital required to practise their original professions (Chiswick & Miller, 2009; Friedberg, 1996).

3.1.2 Intended duration of stay

The intended duration of stay determines what Adda et al. (2022) call the pay-off period: the investment horizon over which a migrant expects to remain in the host country long enough to recoup the costs of investing in country-specific human capital. Since such capital is valuable in the host country but loses much of its value upon return to the country of origin, migrants with shorter intended stays have weaker incentives to invest in it.

The intended duration of stay also shapes migrants' relationship to wages and working conditions in ways that directly affect their labour market position (Adda et al., 2022). Unlike permanent migrants, who plan to consume their income in the host country and therefore evaluate wages against local living costs, temporary migrants anticipate spending a significant portion of their earnings in their country of origin. Because the host country's currency typically commands greater purchasing power at home, temporary migrants perceive the real value of their wages as higher than their nominal value would suggest in the host country context. This depresses their reservation wage, the minimum wage at which they are willing to accept a job, making them more likely to accept employment below their qualification level. It also produces what Adda et al. (2022) describe as an intertemporal substitution of leisure: temporary migrants are willing to work harder and accept lower-status jobs in the present in exchange for higher consumption and leisure later in their country of origin. Together, these dynamics help explain why temporary migrants are often overrepresented in low-quality jobs and secondary labour market segments, even when their human capital endowments would otherwise qualify them for better positions.

3.1.3 Social capital

Social capital theories are closely associated with the segmented assimilation model (Portes & Zhou, 1993). According to this model, integration is not a linear process of assimilation of migrants into a homogeneous and mainstream society. It can instead have different results and trajectories depending on the characteristics of the specific migrant community and their interaction with the host society.

Social capital is defined as “the ability of actors to secure benefits and access resources by virtue of their membership in social networks and other social structures” (Portes, 1998, p.6). While it operates at the individual level as a personal asset, it is simultaneously a collective property: a set of shared resources, norms and trust that characterises a group and is available to all its members. At the collective level, social capital depends on network closure, meaning the density of ties within a group, which in turn creates structural holes: gaps between

disconnected segments of a social network that limit the flow of information and resources across groups.

From Granovetter's (1973) theory on strong and weak ties, social capital can be differentiated in two main dimensions: bonding and bridging (Lancee, 2012). Bonding social capital describes strong ties within one's own community, family networks or ties with co-ethnics, and is grounded in strong mutual trust and group solidarity. Its primary function is to help individuals "get by": it provides access to the ethnic economy, facilitates informal job referrals, and enables the transfer of resources to newer community members. Yet bonding capital carries risks. It can generate social obligations and pressure, with less successful members drawing heavily on those who have done well; individual achievement may even be read as a betrayal of collective identity, while group norms and social control can erode personal autonomy. Most importantly, bonding social capital tends to connect individuals who already move in the same social circles and share the same information, meaning they rarely serve as bridges to new resources or opportunities. By depriving co-ethnic members of new outside information, it might create mobility traps. Finally, it may also channel community members into ethnic labour market niches, a dynamic explored further below.

Bridging social capital, by contrast, consists of cross-ethnic thin ties that connect people across different social groups, and is characterised by more diffuse trust and an outward-looking orientation. Where bonding capital helps people get by, bridging capital helps them "get ahead": contact with members of the host society expands migrants' access to resources and knowledge, job vacancy information, application support, and broader labour market awareness. It also provides exposure to information that does not circulate within co-ethnic networks, reducing redundancy. Finally, bridging capital can act as a partial buffer against discrimination, helping to reduce employer uncertainty and counteract prejudice or distrust. The absence of bridging social capital might therefore contribute to perpetuating their labour market exclusion and prevent them from enjoying better employment outcomes.

3.1.4 Job search theory

Search theory helps explain how human capital constraints, limited social capital, anticipated discrimination and shorter time horizons can jointly reduce migrants' search intensity and channel them into unemployment, overqualification or low-quality jobs. The theory suggests that individuals search for a job as long as the expected utility of a potential job alternative exceeds the utility of remaining in their current situation, such as unemployment or their current job (Kogan, 2007). This is determined by three factors: search costs, subjective probability of success and the expected utility of a new job. First, because migrants often lack social capital and country-specific human capital, they face higher search costs in terms of time and resources. Second, migrants have a lower subjective probability of success, especially if they fear discrimination. Third, depending on their intended duration of stay, they might have a shorter pay-off period, which reduces the utility of their potential new job which reduces their incentive to invest in a long search.

3.2 Employer-side mechanisms

3.2.1 Discrimination

As discussed in the previous chapter, the main mechanisms of labour market discrimination, especially taste-based and statistical discrimination, also apply to migrants. In this context, employers may use signals such as nationality, ethnic origin, foreign-sounding names, accent, religion or foreign credentials to classify applicants and assess their suitability. However, discrimination might also be based on the legal status of an applicant. Taste-based discrimination arises from negative perceptions or prejudice towards particular migrant or ethnic groups, whereas statistical discrimination arises when employers rely on group-based stereotypes to infer productivity in the presence of imperfect information. The intensity and form of discrimination may therefore vary across migrant groups depending on the prejudices and stereotypes associated with them, the characteristics that allow employers to classify applicants into particular social groups, and the degree to which employers trust and recognise foreign qualifications and experience. This implies that discrimination may vary across migrant groups and across host countries, as the type or connotation of prejudices and stereotypes associated with different social groups may diverge.

3.3 Institutional mechanisms

3.3.1 Immigration policy and legal status

Immigration policies determine the quantity and selection mechanisms used to regulate entry and residency and shape the characteristics of incoming migrants, such as the level of skills they possess (Kogan, 2007). This is the most direct way in which immigration policies affect migrants' employment outcomes.

Immigration policies are translated into different legal statuses organised within a classificatory system that governs migrants' eligibility for specific rights (Morris, 2003). This system is the foundation of civic stratification: a state-produced system of unequal membership in which rights and protections are distributed according to a migrant's legal category.

Civic stratification therefore creates a complex hierarchy of partial membership that regulates the time, speed and conditions of a migrant's economic participation. The most evident feature of legal statuses affecting employment is the degree of access they grant to the labour market (Morris, 2003). While some have full and immediate access, others may face phased or delayed access. Migrants can also have restricted or tied access, for instance to a specific job, employer, occupation or family member. Finally, some migrants carry an active prohibition on employment. The requirements for accessing a given legal status may also affect employment, as labour market performance and self-maintenance are often prerequisites for migrants to obtain more permanent statuses and therefore greater legal security.

The rules governing civic stratification also have less evident and direct consequences for employment (Morris, 2003). First, employer sanctions for hiring migrants who are not allowed to work might create indirect deterrence, as employers might avoid hiring even fully entitled migrants to minimise risks. Second, tied access to the labour market and

self-maintenance requirements might contribute to what Morris (2003) defines as “civic deficit”, whereby migrants may fail to claim legitimate benefits or report workplace abuse because they fear losing their current or future more secure legal status.

Legal statuses can therefore place migrants under conditions of enforced vulnerability (De Genova, 2002). This is particularly true for irregular migrants living under conditions of deportability, that is, under the threat of being deported. Vulnerability creates labour subordination and produces a workforce that is easily controlled and cheap, because their legal vulnerability strips them of the bargaining power and social entitlements that would otherwise raise the cost of their labour. The vulnerability of irregular migrants is further intensified by the fact that they can easily be discharged, as they lack labour rights, and just as easily replaced.

3.3.2 Economic and labour market context

The economic structure of the host society shapes migrants' labour market integration in significant ways. The hourglass economy thesis holds that deindustrialisation, characterised by the offshoring of production, and technological change have restructured high-income economies (Portes & Zhou, 1993). The resulting occupational distribution is polarised: high-wage positions for high-skilled workers at the top, low-wage jobs at the bottom, and a shrinking middle that makes upward mobility increasingly difficult for manual workers.

This polarisation results in a dual labour market structure divided into a capital-intensive primary sector, comprising the most desirable jobs in the economy and a labour-intensive secondary sector (Kogan, 2007; Piore, 1979). The primary sector is characterised by jobs that require specific skills and expertise, which gives employers an incentive to retain workers. To do so, employers offer stable and long-term employment with high levels of job protection, high status and pay, internal promotion ladders and autonomy. The secondary sector is made up of firms that lack the capital to regularise labour and need to keep labour costs low. This results in precarious, unstable and dead-end jobs with high employee turnover, low pay and poor conditions, strict discipline and close supervision.

Because of the mechanisms described in the previous chapters, migrants tend to be channelled towards the lower end of this structure, making it hard for them to engage in upward mobility. Furthermore, as natives generally shun these unattractive jobs, a structural demand is created for foreign workers (Kogan, 2007). Moreover, ethnic niches may emerge when a group occupies a specific sector and restrict newcomers or outsiders from accessing jobs in that sector.

Countries with a strong demand for the secondary sector tend to absorb migrants into the workforce more easily (Kogan, 2007). Furthermore, countries also vary in their labour market regulations, operationalised through the strictness of Employment Protection Legislation (EPL), which refers to the rules governing the hiring and firing of workers. These regulations create a divide between insiders and outsiders: those who are protected by EPL, generally employed in the primary sector, and those who lack such protections, typically working in the secondary sector. While providing security for the insiders, strict EPL effectively creates challenges for outsiders to enter the protected primary sector. In fact, in strict EPL countries, employers have higher financial costs related to dismissing an unsuitable worker. This affects

their behaviour when hiring, as they will set higher standards for applicants and be more risk-averse. Given that migrants often possess credentials that employers perceive as less familiar or less reliable, this environment increases the risk of statistical discrimination, disproportionately excluding migrants. On the other hand, in more flexible markets, employers are more willing to take risks on migrants because they can fire them if they are unsuitable. Finally, countries with deeply rooted underground economies allow a proliferation of jobs in the informal sector which attract irregular migrants, while providing no social protection or rights (Reyneri & Fullin, 2008), as explained above.

3.3.3 Welfare regimes

Different welfare regimes shape migrants' labour market outcomes through their rules of eligibility and the generosity of welfare provision. These factors affect migrants' search costs, namely the time and resources available to sustain a longer search (Kogan, 2007), and their reservation wages, that is, the wage threshold at which they stop searching and accept a job.

In terms of generosity of provision, liberal welfare regimes are characterised by deliberately limited and often stigmatised benefits that increase migrants' search costs by preventing them from sustaining a long period of unemployment and reducing migrants' reservation wages (Kogan, 2007). Conservative welfare regimes are systems where social insurance is strictly tied to previous work experience and financial contributions. This model creates an insider-outsider cleavage in which migrants who lack a local work history face difficulties accessing welfare provision. Although the mechanisms differ, the consequences for migrants' employment in conservative regimes are often similar to those in liberal regimes. Finally, social-democratic welfare regimes are universalistic and egalitarian, offering comprehensive support. This financial cushion allows migrants to sustain a longer search for higher-status jobs that match their educational credentials, though it can result in higher initial unemployment rates compared to other regimes.

Migrants' access to social provision is determined by the interaction between welfare regimes and immigration policies, which can take three main forms (Sainsbury, 2006). Immigration and welfare regimes can operate in a complementary and reinforcing logic. For instance, conservative welfare regimes, in which social benefits are tied to prior work and financial contributions mirror an exclusionary regime which establishes employment and self-maintenance as prerequisites for permanent and more secure legal statuses. Therefore, migrants cannot access the main tier of social insurance without prior work experience, and if they rely on lower means-tested assistance, they may risk losing a more secure legal status. On the other hand, welfare and immigration regimes can exist in a competing and conflicting logic. For example, inclusive regimes, based on ius soli and relatively easy access to naturalisation, might coexist with liberal welfare regimes with low social benefits exclusively provided to citizens. Migrants may obtain more secure legal statuses, but they must be naturalised in order to access social benefits. Finally, these regimes can be aligned in a dynamic of inclusive symmetry. In social-democratic regimes, residence might be the requirement for obtaining both citizenship and social entitlements, making it easier for migrants to obtain a more secure status and to be included in the welfare system.

4. Theories on migrant women's labour market integration

4.1 Intersectionality as a theoretical framework

Crenshaw (1989) argues that dominant conceptions of discrimination are designed to address subordination along a single categorical axis. This is problematic because it captures only the experiences of those who face disadvantage along a single axis of discrimination. It therefore does not capture the intersectional experience of those affected by discrimination along multiple dimensions, such as migrant women. Crenshaw further argues that individuals exposed to multiple forms of discrimination do not simply experience the sum of separate disadvantages, but a distinct form of disadvantage produced by their interaction. Disadvantages are therefore more selective and interactive than a simple sum of separate parts (Schieckoff & Sprengholz, 2021). Anthias et al. (2012) further conceptualise intersectionality as the interplay of three distinct but intersecting dimensions: ethnicity, class and gender.

Given the interplay of these dimensions, migrants cannot be treated as a homogeneous group, since differences in ethnicity, class, and gender produce distinct experiences. For instance, gender norms in both the country of origin and the host country jointly shape migrant women's experiences. Gender norms in the home country impose constraints that follow women into the diaspora, especially because they are frequently constructed as the carriers of the home culture and ideology of their ethnic group (Yuval-Davis et al., 1989). Similarly, stereotypes and prejudices associated with different ethnic groups may vary across host countries, shaping the degree and form of discrimination migrant women experience.

4.2 The tied-mover theory and gendered migration legal statuses

Mincer's (1978) insight that migration decisions are made at the household level, with families migrating when their total net gain is positive, is essential for understanding migrant women's labour market integration. In this framework, the net family gain is the sum of each family member's individual gains from migration, calculated as expected returns minus costs. Whether migration occurs depends not only on the absolute size of these gains, but also on their distribution within the household. In particular, migration becomes less likely when one spouse's expected gains are negative and therefore offset the other's positive gains.

According to Mincer (1978), in cases where the family's overall gain remains positive despite one spouse facing losses, that spouse becomes the "tied mover": an individual who migrates even though migration reduces their own expected welfare because their loss is smaller than their partner's gain. This concept is especially relevant for migrant women, who are more likely than men to occupy this position. One explanation is that women often face lower expected labour market returns and greater career interruptions, making them more likely to incur negative employment consequences from migration. Bielby and Bielby (1992) however, argue that women's greater likelihood of becoming tied movers cannot be explained by differences in expected returns alone. It is also shaped by gender norms that assign men the provider role and devalue women's careers regardless of their qualifications. Furthermore, women are socialised to place the interests of their family before their own (Shihadeh, 1991).

In more traditional couples, men move for their own gains, regardless of the wives' losses, taking the wives' subsidiary role for granted (Bielby & Bielby, 1992).

The tied mover is therefore likely to experience employment losses and income decline after migration (Mincer, 1978). These losses tend to be greater over longer distances, as destination labour markets become less familiar and the location choice is optimised primarily around the principal earner. Because priority is given to that earner, the tied mover is also more likely to assume non-market responsibilities, such as establishing the household after migration, which can delay labour market entry. Lower expected returns further reduce incentives to search intensively for work or to invest in human capital. Employers may also perceive tied movers as less stable employees who may relocate again for their spouse's career, reducing employers' incentives to invest in them and thereby producing a form of statistical discrimination that is especially relevant for migrant women. Together, these mechanisms contribute to lower labour force participation and higher unemployment.

The assumptions underlying women's overrepresentation among tied movers mirror those embedded in traditional migration legal categories (Kofman, 2004). In both cases, men are constructed as independent "producers" and women as dependent "reproducers", reflecting the male-breadwinner model. Family migration is thus often legally interpreted as a secondary and dependent form of movement tied to the male primary earner. This can place women in dependent legal statuses that restrict their autonomous right to work and limit their access to rights and benefits (Kofman et al., 2000). Dependent status may also trap women in abusive relationships by tying their residence permit to marriage with the principal migrant spouse.

4.3 Post-migration care burdens

Migration often leads to long periods of transnational family separation, which involves more than physical distance: it can disrupt everyday solidarity and the shared routines through which family life is sustained (Kofman & Raghuram, 2015). As a result, families may no longer be able to rely on the immediate, nearby support networks that are central to social care in their home countries. The restoration of kin networks is almost impossible in host countries due to restrictive immigration policies. This makes the reconstruction of extended support networks difficult and shifts care responsibilities back onto the household, where they are often absorbed by women.

As explained in the previous chapter, women are often forced to choose employment on the basis of flexibility rather than skills or job quality. While many native families in Global North countries can outsource care, thereby reducing women's need for labour market flexibility, migrant women often lack the same possibility. Furthermore, just as welfare states vary in how they grant social rights to migrants, they also differ in how they incorporate migrant women into the public provision of care (Sainsbury, 2006; Williams, 2012). Their more limited access to such services places migrant women at an additional disadvantage relative to native women.

4.4 Gendered recognition of skills

The gendered valuation of human capital operates through normative frameworks rather than neutral assessments of competence (Kofman & Raghuram, 2015).

Embrained knowledge, which refers to conceptual reasoning, abstract analysis and theoretical expertise, is predominantly associated with men. It is ranked highest in labour market hierarchies precisely because it is perceived as acquired through deliberate effort and formal study. Its grounding in universal scientific and theoretical frameworks renders it generic and highly portable, making it relatively straightforward to transfer and recognise across national borders.

Skills predominantly associated with women follow a different logic. Embodied knowledge, referring to practical thinking, and encultured knowledge, comprising shared meanings, language and sociality, tend to be constructed as natural feminine attributes rather than acquired expertise. This strips such skills of economic recognition and justifies their treatment as unskilled labour both in terms of job quality and legal status. This devaluation is compounded by the setting in which such skills are exercised: competences performed in private domestic contexts carry substantially less value than identical competences performed in formal institutional settings.

Feminised professional sectors such as nursing are characterised by embedded knowledge, situated within specific institutional and political contexts, and encoded knowledge, found in manuals, codes of practice and formal curricula. Encoded knowledge, present in traditionally highly regulated professions, is subject to stringent accreditation barriers that force migrants to undergo expensive retraining, language examinations or courses to have their skills officially recognised in the host country. Embedded knowledge is often treated as insufficiently mobile, allowing professional associations to justify social closure and protect national labour markets from foreign competition by refusing to recognise foreign credentials. Occupations generally associated with women therefore not only carry lower value than those associated with men, but are also structurally more difficult to transfer across borders.

4.5 The global care chain theory and occupational segregation

The global care chain is central to understanding migrant women's labour market outcomes (Hochschild, 2014; Parreñas, 2001). It consists of a series of links between people organised around paid or unpaid social care. Due to gender norms, this chain is composed primarily of women.

The global care chain typically begins in poorer regions and ends in wealthier ones. These chains are often rooted in long-standing colonial and historical ties between sending and receiving countries (Yeates, 2009). The global care chain establishes a transnational hierarchy shaped by class, gender, race and citizenship (Parreñas, 2001). The first tier consists of class-privileged women in receiving countries who purchase the low-wage care services of migrant workers in order to free themselves from unpaid work without renegotiating a fairer division of labour with their partners. The second tier consists of migrant domestic workers who provide care in wealthy countries while simultaneously purchasing even lower-wage

services from poorer women in their countries of origin to care for their own families. The third tier consists of women in sending countries who are too poor to migrate and who assume the reproductive responsibilities left behind by migrant women for minimal or no pay. Yeates (2009) however, extends the framework beyond private households to institutional settings such as hospitals, nursing homes and nurseries, and to highly skilled jobs.

Hochschild (2014) argues that the global care chain is the result of four main factors. First, the global wage gap, that is, the large discrepancy between the earnings available in a migrant's home country and the significantly higher wages offered for similar or even less-skilled work in wealthier nations. Second, the rise in female labour force participation, the decline of traditional kin care and ageing populations have generated a growing demand for care in wealthy countries. As states have failed to provide sufficient care, this has shifted the burden onto families, which are then compelled to outsource it to others. Even when state-funded care exists, modern welfare states are increasingly shifting from public provision of care toward "cash-for-care" models, which incentivize hiring low-paid migrant labour in often unregulated secondary markets (Williams, 2012). Third, the global care chain reflects the persistence of the male breadwinner model, which positions women in care roles and migrant women in particular as "surrogate wives" or nannies.

Overall, Parreñas (2001) highlights the interconnection of patriarchy and capitalism in producing this phenomenon. Sending countries lose public investment in the training and education of those who migrate, while also experiencing chronic understaffing and a loss of intellectual capital. At the same time, remittances help fund the education and training of future generations (Yeates, 2009). In this way, sending countries become simultaneously dependent on receiving countries, which gain significant economic and social advantages. These advantages include access to highly skilled labour without bearing the costs of education and training, and often at low wages. This is because the influx of migrant labour increases labour supply, which both suppresses wage growth and provides a more vulnerable workforce with lower reservation wages and a greater willingness to accept poorer working conditions.

As explained above, social care work encompasses a wide range of occupations whose skills are typically coded as feminine and therefore systematically devalued. At the lower end of the skill hierarchy, care tasks associated with embodied knowledge, such as domestic labour, are culturally constructed as natural feminine attributes rather than acquired expertise, which strips them of economic recognition and justifies their treatment as low-skilled work. This effect is intensified when the work is performed in private rather than institutional settings.

Globalisation and the expansion of the global care chain have compounded this devaluation by increasing the supply of migrant women workers in these segments. Because migrant women often face lower reservation wages, they are more likely to accept poor working conditions, which further suppresses wages and labour standards in already undervalued occupations (Parreñas, 2001).

At the higher end of the skill hierarchy, social care sectors such as nursing are characterised by encoded and embedded knowledge that is subject to stringent accreditation requirements and professional closure. As established above, these barriers are more likely to affect

migrant women than migrant men because the occupations themselves are feminised, making it harder for women to transfer human capital across borders. Migrant women therefore face a dual constraint: they are simultaneously pushed out of higher-skilled care occupations by accreditation barriers and channelled into lower-skilled care segments by lower reservation wages, shorter job searches, and anticipated discrimination. Together, these mechanisms produce a pattern of involuntary concentration in the most precarious and undervalued segments of the social care sector.

5. Empirical studies on migrant women

5.1 Empirical evidence

Quantitative studies on migrant women usually examine either nativity gaps, by comparing migrant women with native women, or gender gaps, by comparing migrant women with migrant men. Findings are difficult to compare directly because studies differ in their definitions of migrants, comparison groups, outcomes, controls, data, and methods. Since Schieckoff and Sprengholz (2021) provide a comprehensive review of first-generation immigrant women's labour market integration in Europe between 2000 and 2020, the discussion below relies mainly on their synthesis, with only limited use of more recent studies.

5.1.1 Labour force participation

In Northwestern European countries, migrant women consistently participate less in the labour force than native women, with the gap being particularly large for non-EU migrant women from Muslim-majority countries (Schieckoff & Sprengholz, 2021). The opposite is true in Southern and some Central and Eastern European countries, where migrant women often have higher labour force participation rates than native women. Gaps are largely explained by age, education, and the household structure, particularly the presence of a husband and young children. Remaining gaps are often linked to socio-cultural factors such as gender role attitudes, host-country language skills and duration of stay, while migration channel and labour market access restrictions also appear to matter (Bredtmann & Otten, 2025; Kanas & Müller, 2021). Some studies also suggest that lower expected returns to labour market participation, including possible discrimination, may discourage participation.

Among migrants, studies show that women always participate less than men without evident geographical trends, except for the fact that only in North Western countries, non-EU migrants are consistently more disadvantaged than EU migrants (Schieckoff & Sprengholz, 2021). Gender gaps in labour force participation among immigrants are mainly associated with household factors and socio-cultural factors: marriage and children tend to reduce women's participation but increase men's, while host-country language proficiency, host-country orientation and more egalitarian gender attitudes are associated with higher participation among immigrant women. As such, differences in country of origin might also play a role.

Holistic evidence remains rare: the only study identified by Schieckoff and Sprengholz (2021) that compares migrant women, native women, migrant men and native men in Germany in one model shows that nativity and gender disadvantages are not simply additive and vary strongly by origin group.

5.1.2 Employment and unemployment

Migrant women generally face higher unemployment than native women across most European countries, but the size of this disadvantage varies widely by destination country and country of origin (Schieckoff & Sprengholz, 2021). In Northwestern Europe, non-EU migrant women are usually more disadvantaged than EU migrant women. Human capital explains part of these gaps, but often not all of them. By contrast, household factors seem to matter much less for unemployment than for labour force participation. Host-country-specific resources such as language proficiency, social contacts and cultural adaptation often reduce the remaining disadvantage, and employment outcomes tend to improve with duration of stay (Lee, 2022). Some evidence also suggests a positive role for naturalisation.

Compared to migrant men, the picture is inconsistent (Schieckoff & Sprengholz, 2021). In some countries migrant women have similar or even lower unemployment than migrant men and this does not differ if they have EU or non-EU origins. Household factors rarely have a strong gender-specific effect on conditional unemployment, whereas migration order appears to matter more, although it remains underexplored. Fleischmann and Dronkers (2010), covering 13 European countries, find no significant conditional gender gap in unemployment.

Salikutluk et al. (2020) show that Turkish women in Germany have higher raw unemployment than native women, immigrant men and native men. However, once education, labour market experience, language proficiency and social contacts are controlled for, immigrant women are estimated to have lower unemployment probabilities than native and compatriot men, while the nativity gap among women disappears.

5.1.3 Employment conditions and quality

Migrant women have higher part-time rates than native women especially in Southern Europe and some Northwestern countries, and higher temporary contract rates in almost all of Southern Europe and many Northwestern and CEE countries (Schieckoff & Sprengholz, 2021). Household factors, particularly the presence of children, drive gaps in part-time rates among women but not men. In terms of wages and occupational status, the strongest disadvantages are generally observed for non-European and non-Western migrant women, whereas women from Europe and other Western countries often face smaller penalties or none at all. Education and household factors reduce these gaps, but substantial disadvantages frequently remain, especially because immigrant women often receive lower returns to their qualifications and are more likely to be overqualified (Akgüç & Parasnis, 2023). Over time, some wage and occupational gaps narrow, but assimilation is selective and often incomplete, with important differences across countries and origin groups. These outcomes are also particularly dependent on types of welfare regimes and labour market structures. In some countries, like the UK and Ireland, however, overqualification gaps increase after controlling

for education, while in others (Germany, France, Denmark and Sweden) education reduces the penalty or has no effect (Finland and Norway) (Lee, 2022). Occupational sorting is substantial: sales, services, elementary occupations and personal services account for 40% of all migrant women's employment.

Female immigrants also tend to earn less and work part-time more often than male immigrants across Europe. By contrast, gender gaps in occupational status and contract stability appear less consistent and vary more by destination country and origin group. In Western Germany, Sprengholz and Hamjediers (2024) find that, after accounting for differences in work attachment, individual resources and occupational segregation, unexplained wage gaps are small between immigrant women, immigrant men and native women, but remain large relative to native men.

5.1.4 Summary of the findings

Migrant women experience very heterogeneous labour market outcomes. This does not only occur across ethnic groups and host countries, as a consequence of different reception contexts (particularly immigration and welfare regimes, labour market structures and discrimination levels) and socio-cultural factors, but also because of the heterogeneity of studies in terms of data sources, years of reference and populations taken into consideration. Studies show that labour market outcomes improve over time, even though gaps often don’t close completely.

The main theoretical determinants of gendered and migrant labour market penalties are broadly supported by empirical evidence on migrant women. However, the relevance of different factors in explaining raw gaps varies greatly across studies.

5.2 Gaps in the literature

- Intersectional or holistic approach: There is a clear lack of studies adopting a holistic or genuinely intersectional approach that compares migrant women simultaneously with native women, migrant men and native men. Most studies examine either nativity gaps among women or gender gaps among migrants, which makes it difficult to assess migrant women’s overall labour market disadvantage. The few studies that do this are concentrated in Northwestern Europe.
- Labour market outcomes: The literature covers labour force participation, employment and wages relatively well, but self-employment is clearly underexplored. The overall coinciding disadvantage of migrant women across multiple outcomes also remains insufficiently studied.
- Reference period and geographical coverage: More recent evidence remains limited and geographically uneven. The internationally accessible literature is dominated by Northwestern Europe, while Central and Eastern Europe is almost absent and countries such as Portugal, Greece, Austria and Switzerland are comparatively underrepresented.
- Control variables and selection processes: Future studies should pay greater attention to origin-specific differences, migration channel or motive, migration order,

household economic standing, host-country-specific capital, selection into labour force participation, remigration, naturalisation, and perceptions or evidence of discrimination.

- Cross-country approach: There is a need for comparable cross-country studies using harmonised data and common methods to distinguish how much of migrant women's labour market disadvantage is due to individual characteristics and how much reflects country-level institutions, migration regimes, labour market structures and welfare arrangements.

6. Addressing the gaps in the literature

In response to the gaps identified in the literature, this thesis adopts a holistic comparative framework that places migrant women within a four-group structure comprising native-born men, native-born women, migrant men, and migrant women. This design is intended to avoid the "pigeon-holed" approach identified in previous research, whereby studies typically examine either nativity gaps among women or gender gaps among migrants, making it difficult to assess migrant women's overall labour market disadvantage. By analysing these groups within the same dataset and empirical framework, the thesis aims to provide a more coherent assessment of how gender and migratory background jointly shape labour market outcomes of migrant women.

The thesis also responds to the narrow outcome focus of much of the existing literature by examining both labour market access and employment quality. It therefore considers a broad set of outcomes. This broader outcome strategy makes it possible to assess whether migrant women face disadvantage only in entering employment or also in the quality and stability of the jobs they obtain. A further strength of the study is that these outcomes are analysed using the same harmonised dataset and a common empirical framework, allowing for a more comparable overview of migrant women's labour market integration across outcomes, which is often difficult to achieve when drawing on separate studies focused on single outcomes.

A final contribution of the thesis lies in its cross-country comparative design. By using harmonised EU-LFS microdata, the analysis applies common definitions, sample restrictions, weights, and modelling choices across countries and years, thereby improving the comparability of estimated gaps. This directly responds to the lack of cross-national comparative research on migrant women's labour market integration identified in the literature review. The final part of the analysis extends this contribution through an exploratory comparison across European macro-regions, examining whether the magnitude of disadvantage varies systematically across broader institutional contexts. Taken together, these analyses help distinguish the share of migrant women's disadvantage associated with observable individual characteristics from the share that is more likely linked to differences in national or regional context.

Methodology, data and sources

1. Research question and hypotheses

Drawing on the mechanisms reviewed in the previous chapter, this analysis expects EU foreign-born women to face compounded disadvantages relative to all three comparison groups, driven by the interaction of gender- and migration-specific mechanisms. However, given that different mechanisms are theoretically more relevant for different outcomes, the nature and magnitude of this disadvantage is expected to vary across the labour market outcomes examined. Furthermore, since the vast majority of EU foreign-born respondents hold EU nationality and therefore face few legal or immigration policy constraints, the disadvantages identified are expected to be moderate.

This analysis is therefore guided by two research questions:

1. Do EU foreign-born women face a double penalty in the EU labour market, one that exceeds what gender and migration background would predict separately?
2. Which mechanisms, identified in the theoretical framework, best account for the patterns observed?

2. Data and sources

This study relies on microdata from the European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS), the harmonised labour force survey coordinated by Eurostat and implemented by the National Statistical Institutes of the Member States. The EU-LFS is particularly well suited to the aims of this research because it provides individual-level information on migratory background, labour market and job characteristics, education, household characteristics, and demographic background. This microdata structure is essential for the research design, as the analysis requires individual-level comparison groups and a sufficiently rich set of controls. A further advantage of the EU-LFS is its scale, which is particularly valuable for a comparative analysis of migrant women, who often constitute a relatively small subgroup in cross-national survey data.

The choice of the EU-LFS is justified by further considerations. First, it matches the geographical scope of the thesis, since it is specifically designed for harmonised labour market analysis across EU countries. Second, its standardised structure and codification rules make it possible to apply common definitions, sample restrictions, and modelling choices across countries and over time, which is essential for comparative analysis.

The original empirical design of this thesis was developed for the full EU-LFS Scientific Use File. However, due to delays in obtaining access to that dataset, the empirical analysis presented here is conducted using the anonymised Public Use Files (PUFs). Although the PUFs preserve the same general formats and variable names as the scientific use files, it covers fewer countries and years and provides a lower level of detail for several variables than the full EU-LFS structure. Eurostat further states that public microdata cannot be used

for statistical inference about the wider population. The present analysis should therefore be understood as a constrained implementation of the original design rather than as its final form. Data preparation, variable construction, sample restrictions, and the analytical strategy were structured to mirror the intended full EU-LFS workflow as closely as possible, so that the same framework can later be replicated on the Scientific Use File once access is granted, with only those adjustments required by differences in variable detail and availability.

3. Analytical sample

3.1 Geographical and time coverage

The original empirical design was intended to cover the period from 2010 to 2019. This choice was motivated by two considerations. First, it was designed to remain within a stable EU-LFS framework, as the survey structure and variable system changed under the new legal framework introduced from 2021 onward. Second, it was intended to avoid the Covid-19 period, which would constitute a major confounding factor for the analysis of labour market outcomes. In practice, however, due to PUF limitations, the empirical implementation reported in this thesis is limited to the period from 2010 to 2013. The analysis covers 22 EU member states: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, and Slovakia.

3.2 Population and sample restrictions

The analytical sample is restricted to individuals living in private households and excludes persons in compulsory military service, in line with the target population of the EU-LFS. Given the focus of the thesis, the sample is further restricted to the working-age population. In the anonymised PUF, however, age is available only in grouped form, so an exact 15 - 64 age restriction cannot be implemented. For this reason, the age band 55 - 74 is retained, as it includes both individuals below and above the intended upper age limit. Observations with missing values on core sample-defining variables, including sex, age, ILO labour status, household type, and country of birth, are excluded. Observations with missing student or apprentice status are also excluded because student status is central to the interpretation of both labour force participation and employment outcomes. Since observations with missing student status cannot be classified reliably, retaining them would therefore introduce ambiguity into the analytical sample and reduce the comparability of results across groups. Finally, observations with missing or weight coefficients equal to 0 are excluded. After these restrictions are applied, the analytical sample contains 8,123,221 observations. For the regression analysis, all students are dropped from the sample, which then amounts to 7,964,995.

4. Operationalisation of variables

The analytical framework draws on a set of variables grouped by their function in the analysis: the explanatory variables, migratory status and sex, which define the core

comparison groups; outcome variables capturing labour force participation and labour market success, including employment status and employment quality; and a sequence of controls covering human capital, labour market and firm-level characteristics.

4.1 Explanatory variables

The two main explanatory variables are migratory status and sex. Sex is coded as a binary variable distinguishing men and women. Migratory status is operationalised using country of birth rather than nationality. Country of birth provides a more reliable indicator of migratory status because a person born outside the country of residence has, by definition, a migratory background, whereas nationality may reflect naturalisation and therefore understate it.

In the broader EU-LFS structure, country of birth and nationality are available in more detailed anonymised groupings from 2004 onwards, allowing a more differentiated identification of origin groups. In the full research design, this makes it possible to distinguish between native-born, EU foreign-born, and non-EU foreign-born individuals. In the PUFs used in this study, however, confidentiality constraints reduce country of birth and nationality to three values only: born in the country of residence, born in another EU country, and no answer. The no-answer category is treated as missing and excluded from the analysis. As a result, the non-EU foreign-born category is structurally absent from the PUF, and the implemented empirical analysis only distinguishes between native-born and EU foreign-born individuals.

4.1.1 Groups of analysis

The groups of analysis are constructed by combining migratory status and sex. In the full research design, this produces six groups: native-born men, native-born women, EU foreign-born men, EU foreign-born women, non-EU foreign-born men, and non-EU foreign-born women. In the PUF-based implementation, however, only the first four groups are observed, as explained above.

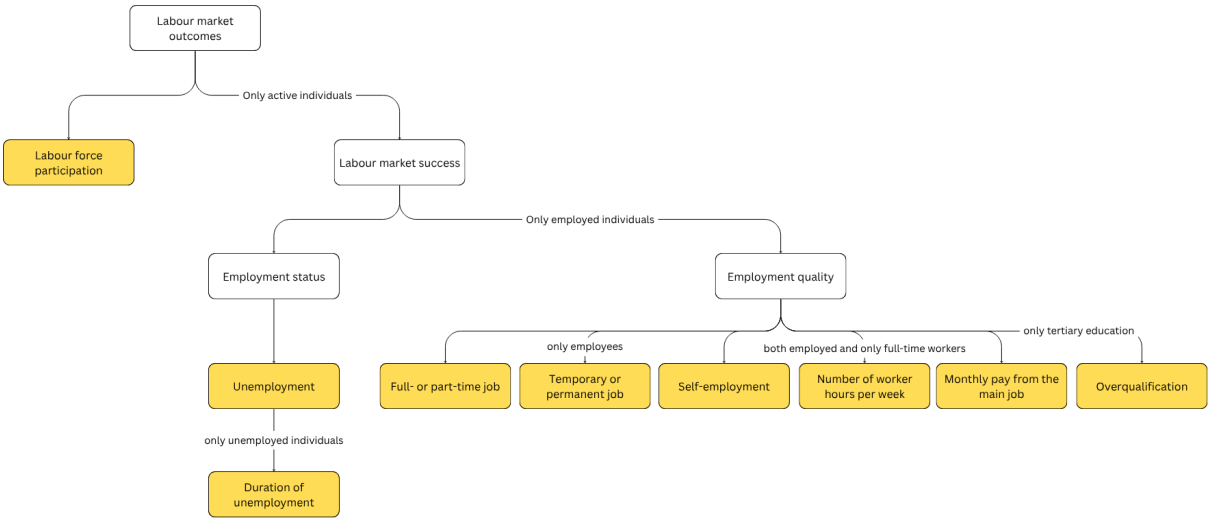
4.2 Outcome variables

Following the literature reviewed in the previous chapter, this study examines three sequential categories of labour market outcomes. The first, labour force participation, captures whether an individual is economically active, that is, either employed or unemployed and actively seeking work. It is measured across the full working-age sample. The second category concerns employment status among labour-force participants and is operationalised through unemployment, measured as whether an active individual is unemployed rather than employed. This distinction is important because employment rates in the total population conflate unemployment and inactivity, which reflect different mechanisms and different types of labour market exclusion which are theoretically different and linked to different factors. Among unemployed individuals, the duration of unemployment is additionally examined, as it captures the risk of long-term labour market exclusion. Both variables are derived from the ILO work status variable (ILOSTAT), which classifies individuals as employed, unemployed, or inactive according to standard ILO

criteria. Duration of unemployment is measured using the variable on unemployment duration, which distinguishes between less than 6 months, 6–11 months, and 12 months or more.

The third category, employment quality, is restricted to employed individuals and covers six dimensions: full- or part-time status, permanency of the employment contract, self-employment, usual hours worked per week, measured both among employed individuals and full-time workers, monthly pay, and overqualification. Overqualification is measured only among tertiary-educated employed individuals.

Full- or part-time status is measured as a binary variable distinguishing full-time from part-time employment. Contract type captures whether the main job is temporary or permanent and is relevant only for employees rather than the self-employed. Self-employment is measured as a binary distinction between employees and the self-employed. Usual weekly hours worked in the main job are measured as a continuous variable; values of zero indicate that hours vary considerably. Monthly pay from the main job is measured in monthly pay quintiles. Finally, overqualification is operationalised using Eurostat's standard definition: tertiary-educated individuals employed in occupations that do not normally require tertiary education, corresponding to ISCO major groups 4 to 9.



4.3 Control variables

4.3.1 Human capital variables

Educational attainment is captured through the three-category education variable, distinguishing low education (lower secondary or below, ISCED 0–2), medium education (upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary, ISCED 3–4), and high education (tertiary, ISCED 5–8). Age is also included as a control variable. In the anonymised PUF, age is reported in broader bands than in the fuller EU-LFS structure, namely 0–14, 15–24, 25–39, 40–54, 55–74, and 75 or older. Years of residence is not included in the main control blocks of the regressions, but is analysed separately in an additional model examining heterogeneity

by duration of residence. In the PUF, years of residence is anonymised into three categories: born in the country of residence, one to ten years of residence, and eleven or more years.

4.3.2 Labour and firm-level variables

Occupation is captured through the one-digit occupational classification. In principle, this requires harmonisation across the change from ISCO-88 to ISCO-08. In the PUF, however, the post-2011 one-digit occupation variable is the usable one, while its pre-2011 predecessor is empty. As a result, occupation can only be used in the PUF-based employment-quality models for 2011 onward. Economic activity is recorded through the one-digit NACE Rev. 2 industrial classification. Firm size classifies the number of persons employed at the local unit into five categories.

5. Empirical strategy

5.1 Main analysis

The central objective of the empirical strategy is to assess migrant women's labour market integration in the European Union through comparison with migrant men, native-born women, and native-born men. Because labour market integration is inherently comparative, this four-group framework makes it possible to identify the relative disadvantage faced by migrant women and to examine it from an intersectional perspective, by situating it in relation to both gender and nativity gaps. However, given the limitations of the Public Use File, the analysis is restricted to EU native-born and EU foreign-born individuals. The sample is also restricted to respondents who are not in regular education.

Empirically, this is done through a sequence of regression models. The analysis begins by estimating the raw gap between groups while accounting for country and year fixed effects, which absorb time-invariant cross-country differences and common year-specific shocks. By using an interaction term of migratory status and sex in a single model rather than running separate models for men and women, all four groups are estimated simultaneously, which allows the intersectional objective above to be met. Controls are then added progressively in blocks in order to assess how far differences in observable characteristics account for the initial gap and how much of it remains after adjustment. M1 refers to the raw gap with country and year fixed effects, M2 to human capital variables (age and education), M3 to labour market variables (occupation and sector) and M4 to firm-level variables (size of the firms' local unit). In practice, for labour force participation and employment status, which includes unemployment and unemployment duration, only M1 and M2 are measured. For employment quality, M3 is also measured and M4 in case of monthly pay outcome. Therefore, in all cases when M3 is added, the period of analysis is 2011 to 2013, as the occupation variable is only present in the PUFs after 2010. Since overqualification is constructed using education and occupation, M2 only adds age as control, while M3 only sector.

In cases where adding occupation and sector controls causes structural sample loss (more than 10%), due to PUF limited coverage of some variables, all models are re-estimated on the common restricted sample to ensure that comparisons across models reflect differences in covariate adjustment rather than changes in sample composition. This is also why M4 is restricted to observations with monthly pay only: given the already limited sample size, adding firm-level controls does not result in an excessively large additional loss of observations.

Throughout all models, standard errors are clustered at the country level to account for the non-independence of observations within countries, reflecting shared institutional context and survey design features.

For binary outcomes (labour force participation, unemployment, part-time work, temporary employment, self-employment, and overqualification) Linear Probability Models (LPM) are used. This is because, differently from a logit or probit model, the coefficients are interpretable directly as a percentage point difference in the probability of the outcome between a given group and the baseline, which is native-born men. Furthermore, logit models cannot absorb fixed effects but must estimate them. For usual weekly hours, a continuous variable, hours are calculated as logarithms and gaps are measured using simple OLS, to interpret coefficients as percentage differences from the baseline. For ordered categorical outcomes (duration of unemployment and position in the monthly pay distribution) ordered logistic regression models are estimated. Since the raw coefficients of ordered logit are calculated as log-odds which are hard to interpret, average marginal effects (AMEs) on the probability of the outcome category of interest are computed. Specifically, these AMEs capture the percentage-point difference in the probability of being in long-term unemployment (twelve months or more), or of being in the top or bottom quintile of the monthly pay distribution, between a given group and the native-born male baseline. Where relevant, post-estimation linear combination tests (lincom) are conducted to assess whether differences between non-reference groups are statistically significant, as these comparisons are not reported directly by the interaction model, whose coefficients are expressed relative to the native-born male baseline.

5.2 Years-of-residence analysis

As an extension of the main analysis, EU foreign-born respondents were further divided by years of residence in the country of survey in order to examine whether labour market gaps vary with duration of stay. In the PUF, years of residence were grouped into two categories, 1–10 years and 11 or more years, and combined with sex to construct a six-group comparison: native-born men, native-born women, EU migrant women with 1–10 years of residence, EU migrant women with 11+ years of residence, EU migrant men with 1–10 years of residence, and EU migrant men with 11+ years of residence. This model was applied only to labour force participation and overqualification. The same Linear Probability Model for labour force participation and overqualification was measured but integrating the new categories.

5.3 Country-level comparative analysis

A final exploratory analysis examines cross-country variation by grouping the selected countries into two broad European macro-regions, North-Western and Southern Europe. To ensure significance, only the top 10 countries in terms of sample size are selected. Rather than estimating a formal second-stage macro-level model, the analysis compares country-level coefficients and then interprets them qualitatively in relation to broader regional patterns. In the findings, this extension is also used to discuss labour force participation and overqualification. The macro-regional comparison therefore serves as a descriptive cross-country exercise designed to assess whether the disadvantages observed for EU foreign-born women appear systematically larger or smaller across broader institutional settings, while remaining cautious about causal interpretation.

Discussion of the findings

1. Analytical sample and descriptive profile

1.1 Sample distribution by groups, years and countries

In weighted terms, 48.1% of the analytical sample are native-born men, 49.1% native-born women, 1.3% EU foreign-born men, and 1.6% EU foreign-born women (Table 1 in Appendix). The composition of the analytical sample is remarkably stable across years (Table 2 in Appendix). By contrast, the distribution of EU foreign-born groups varies substantially across countries (Table 3 in Appendix). The weighted share of EU foreign-born respondents in each country sample is highest in Luxembourg (40.35%), Ireland (13.59%) and Cyprus (12.04%), and is also comparatively large in France (3.92%), Spain (4.84%) and Italy (3.47%), whereas it is small and sometimes close to zero in several Central and Eastern European countries.

1.2 Sample distribution by human capital variables

The four groups also differ in their basic demographic profile. EU foreign-born respondents are less represented than native-born respondents at both ends of the age distribution and are instead more concentrated in the prime working-age categories (Table 4 in Appendix). In weighted terms, only around 9% of EU foreign-born respondents are aged 15 - 24, compared with around 15% of native-born respondents. By contrast, around 68% of EU foreign-born respondents fall in the 25–39 and 40–54 age groups combined, compared with about 55% of native-born respondents.

Educational attainment also slightly differs across groups (Table 5 in Appendix). Weighted estimates show that 24.4% of EU foreign-born women and 22.7% of EU foreign-born men have high educational attainment, compared with 22.4% of native-born women and 20.7% of native-born men. At the same time, low education remains common in all groups, but EU foreign-born women have the lowest share with low education (35.5%), while it is more prevalent among native-born women (38.2%) and EU foreign-born men (38.7%). EU foreign-born women appear to be the most educated group, as they have both the highest share of tertiary attainment and the lowest share of low education.

Student status differs across groups (Table 6 in Appendix). In weighted terms, around 11.1% of native-born men and 11.3% of native-born women are students or apprentices in regular education, compared with 5.9% of EU foreign-born men and 6.4% of EU foreign-born women. The share in regular education but on holidays is small in all groups, below 1%. These will, however, be excluded from the regression analysis.

1.3 Years of residence

Among EU foreign-born respondents, the majority have lived in the country of residence for more than ten years (Table 7 in Appendix). In weighted terms, 58.5% of EU foreign-born men and 57.3% of EU foreign-born women fall into the 11+ years category.

1.4 Sample distribution by labour market and firm-level variables

The occupation distribution among employed respondents reveals two patterns that are central to the empirical analysis that follows (Table 8 in Appendix). The first is a strong gendered division of labour that cuts across nativity groups. Men are heavily concentrated in craft and related trades, plant and machine operator roles, and technical occupations, while women cluster in service and sales work, professional occupations, and clerical support.

The second pattern concerns nativity-specific occupational downgrading that is disproportionately concentrated among EU foreign-born women. Within each sex, the foreign-born group shows a downward occupational shift relative to the native-born, but this shift is far more pronounced among women. The share of EU foreign-born women in elementary occupations stands at 28.2%, compared to 10.2% among native-born women, 13.5% among EU foreign-born men, and 7.3% among native-born men. EU foreign-born women are also less represented among technicians and associate professionals (10.1% versus 16.6% for native-born women) and clerical support workers (8.3% versus 15.2%), and have the lowest representation in managerial positions of all four groups (2.8%), compared to 4.0% among native-born women, 5.0% among foreign-born men and 6.9% among native-born men. Taken together, elementary occupations and service and sales work account for nearly 59% of EU foreign-born women's employment. This finding is directly consistent with the secondary labour market argument developed in the theoretical framework, which more evidently impacts EU foreign-born women compared to EU foreign-born men.

Sectoral distributions among employed respondents reveal clear gendered and nativity-specific sorting (Table 9 in Appendix). The dominant pattern across all groups is concentration in the aggregated services sector, which accounts for over 40% of employment in every group. Among men, EU foreign-born workers are substantially more concentrated in construction than native-born men (23.8% versus 11.6%), while native-born men are more represented in agriculture and industry. The most analytically striking result concerns the activities of households as employers (NACE T), which covers private households employing domestic personnel. EU foreign-born women are heavily concentrated in this category at 18.1%, compared to only 2.0% among native-born women, 0.7% among EU foreign-born men, and 0.5% among native-born men. This finding is directly consistent with the global care chain argument developed in the theoretical framework, whereby migrant women are

disproportionately channelled into domestic and reproductive labour, where work is structurally devalued and largely informal.

Among employed respondents with valid and determinable firm size information, the most striking feature is the position of native-born women compared to all other groups (Table 10 in Appendix). In fact, this group is the most concentrated in small firms (1 to 10 people) at 23.14%, compared to EU foreign-born women (13.57%). At the same time, they are also the group least concentrated in large firms (45.30%) compared to EU foreign-born women (52.47%).

1.5 Country of birth and nationality

Among EU foreign-born respondents, the large majority hold EU nationality, either because they are nationals of the country of residence (30.1%) or because they are EU non-nationals (68.7%), while only 1.2% fall into the missing category (Table 11 in Appendix). In total, 98.8% of EU foreign-born respondents in the analytical sample carry an EU nationality. This is analytically relevant because it implies that some institutional constraints associated with migration are largely absent for this population. EU free-movement rights grant foreign-born EU nationals almost full and immediate access to host country labour markets and welfare provision, which means that the penalties documented in the regression analysis cannot be attributed to legal status or migration policy constraints. This also implies that the findings for EU foreign-born women in this analysis constitute, in all likelihood, a lower bound of the disadvantages that would emerge for non-EU foreign-born women in EU-LFS data.

2. Main regression analysis

2.1 Labour force participation

In the raw specification, native-born men are the reference group, with a baseline labour force participation rate of 73.8 percent (Figure 1; Table 12 in Appendix). In the raw model, both female groups face significant participation penalties relative to native-born men. Native-born women are 14.2 percentage points less likely to be in the labour force, while EU foreign-born women face a penalty of 9.5 percentage points. However, a formal test of the difference between these two groups confirms that in the raw model they are statistically indistinguishable from each other. EU foreign-born men display a positive but statistically insignificant coefficient. These raw gaps therefore point to a substantial gender penalty for both native and EU foreign-born women, but no statistically detectable nativity penalty at this stage.

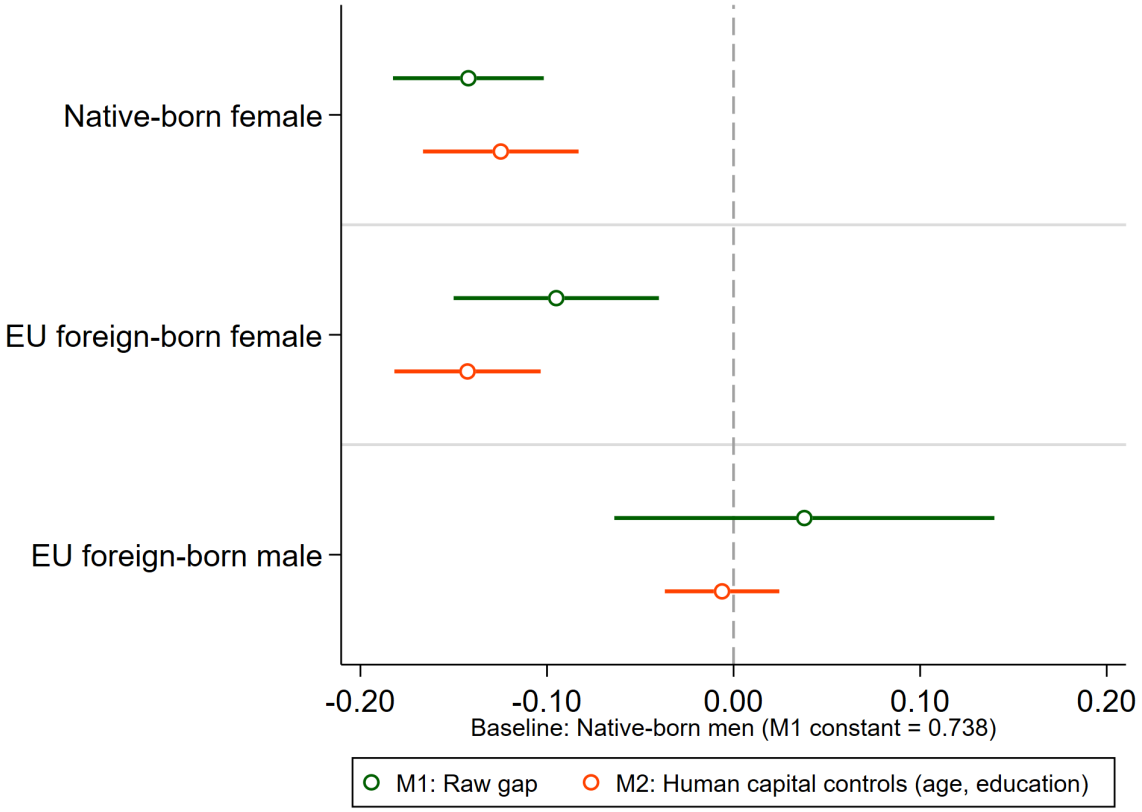


Figure 1. Coefficient plot: percentage-point difference in probability of labour force participation relative to native-born men (EU-LFS PUF, 2010 - 2013)

Once age and education are controlled for in M2, the patterns slightly change. The native-born female penalty narrows only marginally. The EU foreign-born female penalty instead increases to 14.3 percentage points and is now significantly larger than the native-born female penalty. The EU foreign-born male coefficient becomes essentially zero and remains insignificant throughout. Since M2 controls jointly for age and education, the shift from M1 to M2 suggests that compositional differences in these characteristics, such as the fact that EU foreign-born women are the most educated group, partly mask the disadvantage of EU foreign-born women in the raw model. Once these characteristics are held constant, a modest double penalty emerges. A nativity penalty, therefore, only seems to affect migrant women, albeit modestly.

As labour force participation reflects both supply-side decisions and perceived employment prospects, native and migrant women share several gender constraints: household specialisation incentives driven by lower expected returns, anticipated discrimination, and gender norms. For migrant women specifically, three additional mechanisms may compound this general gender penalty. First, tied migration reduces expected returns from labour and incentivises household specialisation, since women who move primarily to support a partner's career have weaker initial attachment to the host labour market. Second, the disruption of kin networks after migration raises care constraints relative to native women, who can rely on established family support. Third, gender norms from the country of origin may

independently depress participation, as they follow women into the diaspora and shape decisions independently of host-country conditions.

Part of the remaining adjusted gap may still reflect unobserved differences in household structure, care responsibilities, and host-country-specific human capital that cannot be captured in the PUF specification.

2.2 Employment status

The probability of unemployment for native-born men in the labour force, after absorbing country and year fixed effects, is 10.4 percent (Figure 2; Table 13 in Appendix). In the raw model, native-born women are not significantly more likely to be unemployed compared to native men. EU foreign-born men display a larger coefficient of 3.5 percentage points, but this is also too imprecisely estimated to be read as clear evidence of a nativity penalty. EU foreign-born women, by contrast, face a significant unemployment penalty of 4.4 percentage points relative to native-born men. A formal test also shows that EU foreign-born women are more likely to be unemployed than native-born women in the raw model, while the difference between EU foreign-born women and EU foreign-born men is not clearly detectable at this stage. The raw pattern therefore does not point to a general female unemployment penalty, but rather to a nativity disadvantage that is most clearly detectable among EU foreign-born women, since the only statistically significant gaps are those between this group and natives. By contrast, a gender penalty is not clearly evident in the unemployment results: the gap between native-born women and native-born men is virtually inexistent, while the gap between EU foreign-born women and EU foreign-born men is very small and imprecisely estimated. M2 barely changes this pattern.

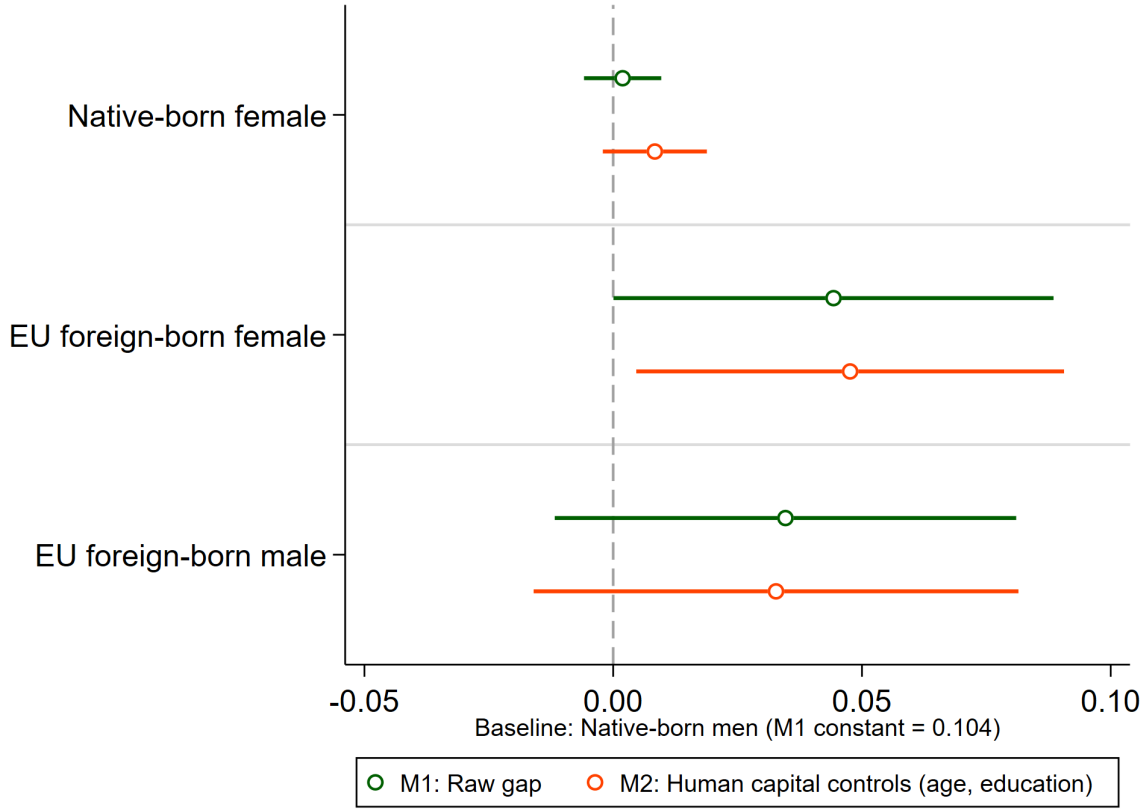


Figure 2. Coefficient plot: percentage-point difference in probability of being unemployed among labour force participants relative to native-born men (EU-LFS PUF, 2010 - 2013)

Theories on gender penalties in the labour market do not often point to differences in employment rates, but rather to differences in employment quality or labour force participation. This might explain why native women do not show statistically significant gaps compared to native men. At the same time, the higher unemployment likelihood among EU foreign-born women might point to a nativity gap that is concentrated among them. Since age and education do not seem to significantly change the gaps, the unexplained gap may reflect migration-specific mechanisms, specifically mechanisms that are more relevant for migrant women. For instance, tied-move dynamics may reduce investment in country-specific human capital and weaken incentives to search for jobs or acquire further human capital when expected returns are lower, as well as increase statistical discrimination against them. These results might also point to gendered recognition of skills, which might make human capital transferability for women harder and may itself reinforce statistical discrimination in hiring.

Part of the remaining adjusted gap may reflect differences in host-country-specific human capital, social capital, or migration-order effects that cannot be captured in the PUF specification. The omission of household variables is likely to be less consequential here than for labour force participation, which is consistent with the empirical literature reviewed.

Conditional on already being unemployed, the pattern differs from that observed for unemployment duration (Figure 3; Table 14 in Appendix). In the raw model, native-born

women do not differ significantly from native-born men in the probability of being long-term unemployed (12 months or more). EU foreign-born men, by contrast, are 6.2 percentage points less likely than native-born men to experience long-term unemployment, and this gap remains almost unchanged after controlling for age and education. EU foreign-born women also display a lower estimated probability of long-term unemployment in the raw model, but this gap is only weakly significant and becomes smaller and statistically insignificant once controls are added. One plausible mechanism to explain these findings is selective return migration: migrants who remain unemployed for longer may be more likely to return to their origin country, so the long-term unemployed are underrepresented in the sample.

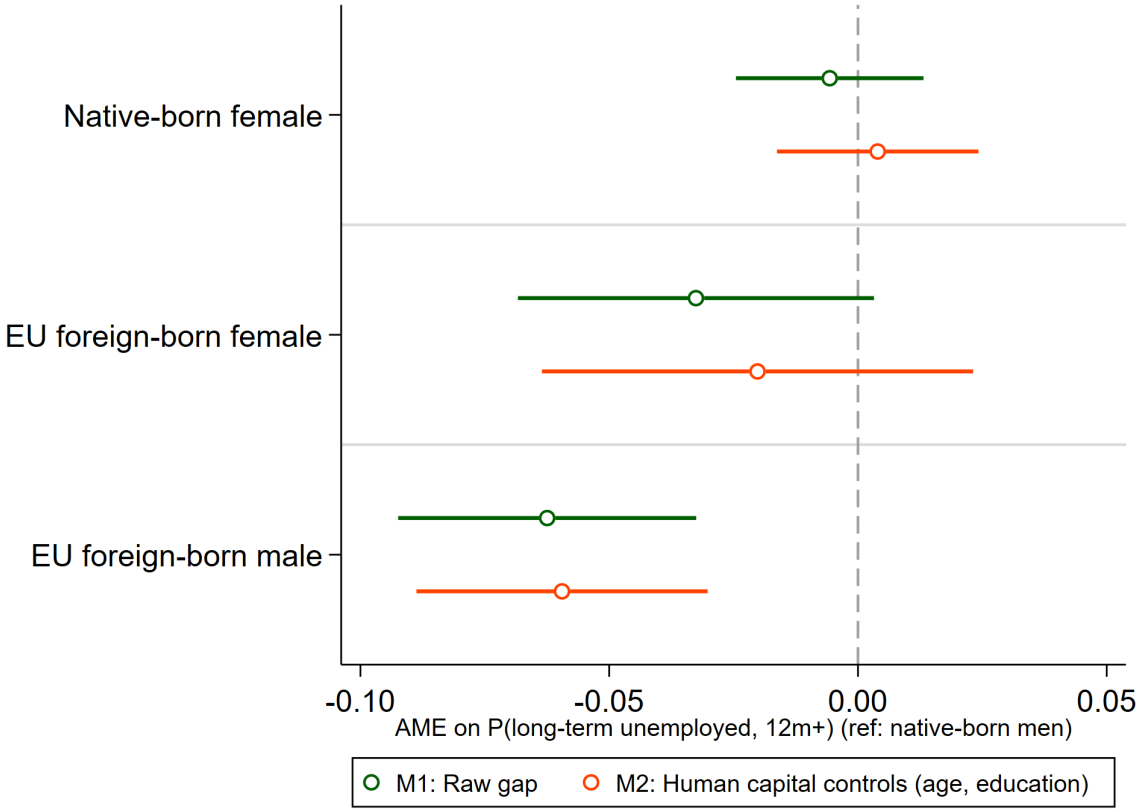


Figure 3. Coefficient plot: percentage-point difference in probability of being in long-term unemployment (>12 months) among unemployed respondents relative to native-born men (EU-LFS PUF, 2010 - 2013)

Finally, EU foreign-born women are substantially less likely to be self-employed than native-born men, and this penalty persists after controls (Figure 4; Table 15 in Appendix).

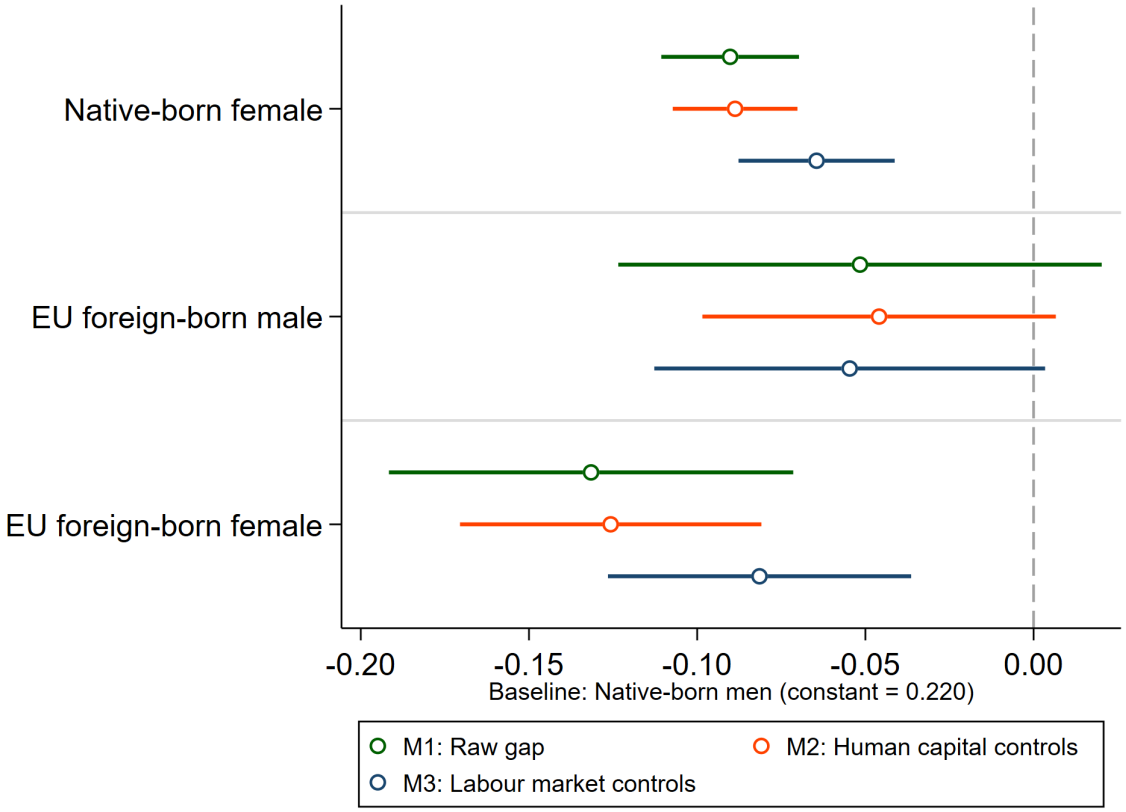


Figure 4. Coefficient plot: percentage-point difference in probability of being self-employed among employed respondents relative to native-born men (EU-LFS PUF, 2011 - 2013)

2.3 Employment quality

2.3.1 Full- or part-time job and usual weekly hours

The part-time rate for native-born men in employment, after absorbing country and year fixed effects, is 7.2 percent (Figure 5; Table 16 in Appendix). The sample is restricted to employed individuals between 2011–2013, the period for which occupation is available in the PUF.

In the raw model (M1), both female groups show large and highly significant differences in part-time work relative to native-born men. Native-born women are 21.5 percentage points more likely to work part-time, and EU foreign-born women are 28.0 percentage points more likely. A formal comparison between the two female groups confirms that this difference is statistically significant in the raw model. EU foreign-born men, by contrast, show no significant difference from native-born men. These raw results therefore point to a strong gender gap in part-time work, together with an additional nativity gap affecting EU foreign-born women relative to native-born women. Once age and education are introduced in M2, the pattern remains almost unchanged. This suggests that compositional differences in age and education do little to explain the higher incidence of part-time work among women overall, and do not account for the additional disadvantage initially observed among EU foreign-born women.

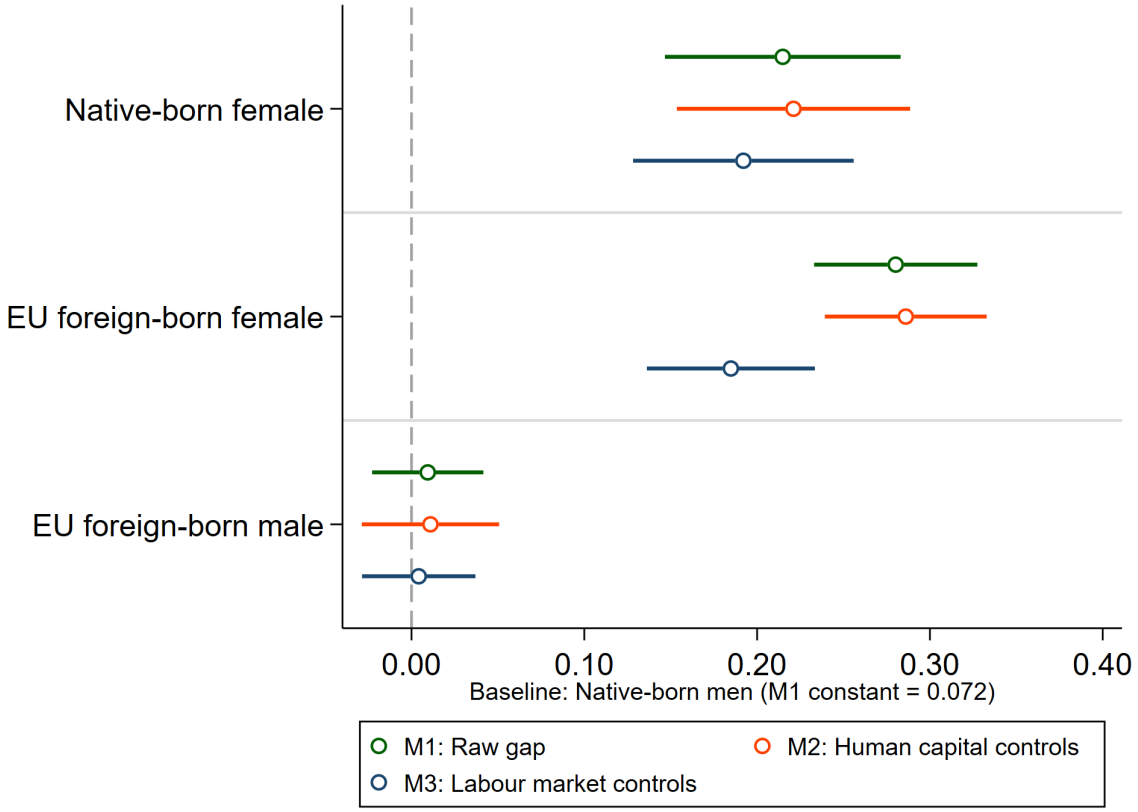


Figure 5. Coefficient plot: percentage-point difference in probability of being in part-time employment among employed respondents relative to native-born men (EU-LFS PUF, 2011 - 2013)

The picture changes more substantially once occupation and sector are included in M3. The coefficient for native-born women falls only moderately to 19.2 percentage points, whereas the coefficient for EU foreign-born women declines much more sharply to 18.5 percentage points. A formal test shows that the two female groups are no longer statistically different from each other. EU foreign-born men remain close to zero and insignificant throughout. This indicates that the higher likelihood of part-time work among EU foreign-born women compared to native-born women is largely accounted for by their concentration in different occupations and sectors. At the same time, both female groups remain far more likely than men to work part-time, showing that part-time work is primarily structured by gender.

These findings are consistent with theoretical explanations according to which women face stronger care constraints and a greater demand for workplace flexibility because of gender norms and household specialisation. For migrant women, these constraints may be compounded by mechanisms such as tied migration, post-migration care burdens, and gender norms shaped in the country of origin. However, the sharp reduction in the coefficient for EU foreign-born women once occupation and sector are controlled for suggests that occupational and sectoral sorting appears central to explaining their initially higher incidence of part-time work. One plausible interpretation is that, beyond the general tendency for women to sort into occupations, sectors and firms compatible with greater flexibility, migrant women may be

more concentrated in labour-market segments in which part-time work is more common, especially in low-skill social care sectors. This is supported by EU foreign-born women's highest concentration in elementary occupations compared to more high-skilled occupations and in activities of households as employers, seen in the first section of this chapter. This pattern cannot therefore be attributed to care constraints alone. It may also reflect broader processes of secondary-sector segregation linked to discrimination, imperfect transferability of skills, shorter job searches or lower reservation wages.

Finally, identifying the role of care constraints more directly would require household-level controls, which are not available in the PUF specification. Moreover, occupation and sector controls do not capture possible sorting across firms with different productivity levels, wage premia, and flexibility structures. In this sense, part of the remaining gender gap may also reflect unobserved sorting between firms rather than only sorting between occupations and sectors. This might be significant given the higher concentration of native women in smaller firms compared to the other groups in the sample analysed. Furthermore, the weekly hours results are broadly consistent with the part-time findings, suggesting that the additional disadvantage of EU foreign-born women operates largely through occupational and sectoral allocation (Figure 6 in Appendix; Table 17 in Appendix).

Among full-time employed workers, in M1 native-born women work approximately 6.2% fewer usual weekly hours than native-born men, while EU foreign-born women also display a negative gap of 3.6% (Figure 7; Table 18 in Appendix). By contrast, EU foreign-born men do not differ significantly from native-born men. Once age and education are added in M2, the pattern remains almost unchanged. After occupation and sector are introduced in M3, both female gaps narrow slightly. A formal comparison in M3 shows that native-born women work significantly fewer hours than EU foreign-born women. Overall, this indicates that women work fewer usual weekly hours than native-born men even within the full-time employed sample, but that this disadvantage is larger for native-born women than for EU foreign-born women. The weekly-hours findings are therefore only broadly consistent with the part-time results: both point to a gender gap, but within the full-time sample there is no additional migrant-specific female disadvantage, and occupational and sectoral controls do not substantially alter this pattern. This reversal is suggestive evidence that EU foreign-born women's higher part-time rate reflects involuntary segregation into part-time sectors and occupations rather than a preference for reduced hours, lending further support to the segmented labour market interpretation.

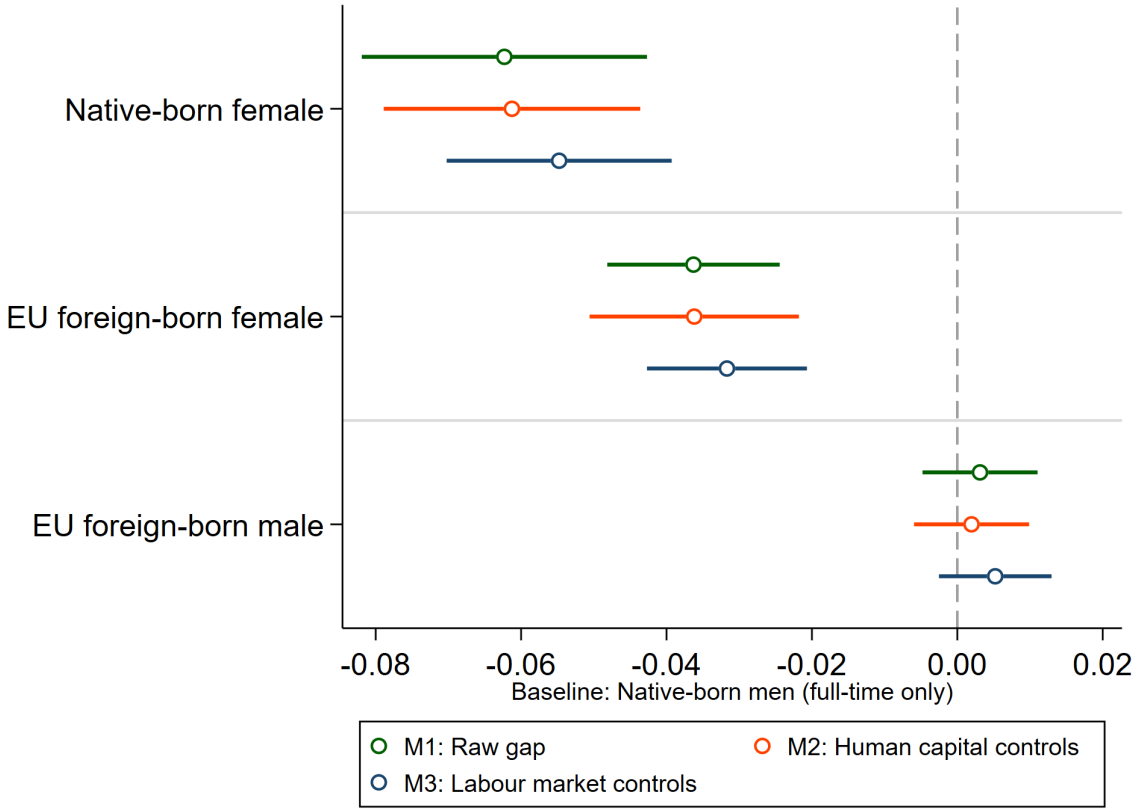


Figure 7. Coefficient plot: approximate percentage differences in usual weekly hours among full-time employed respondents relative to native-born men (EU-LFS PUF, 2011 - 2013)

2.3.2 Temporary or permanent job

The probability of holding a temporary contract for native-born men in employment, after absorbing country and year fixed effects, is 10.5 percent (Figure 8; Table 19 in Appendix). The sample is restricted to employees between 2011–2013, the period for which occupation is available in the PUF.

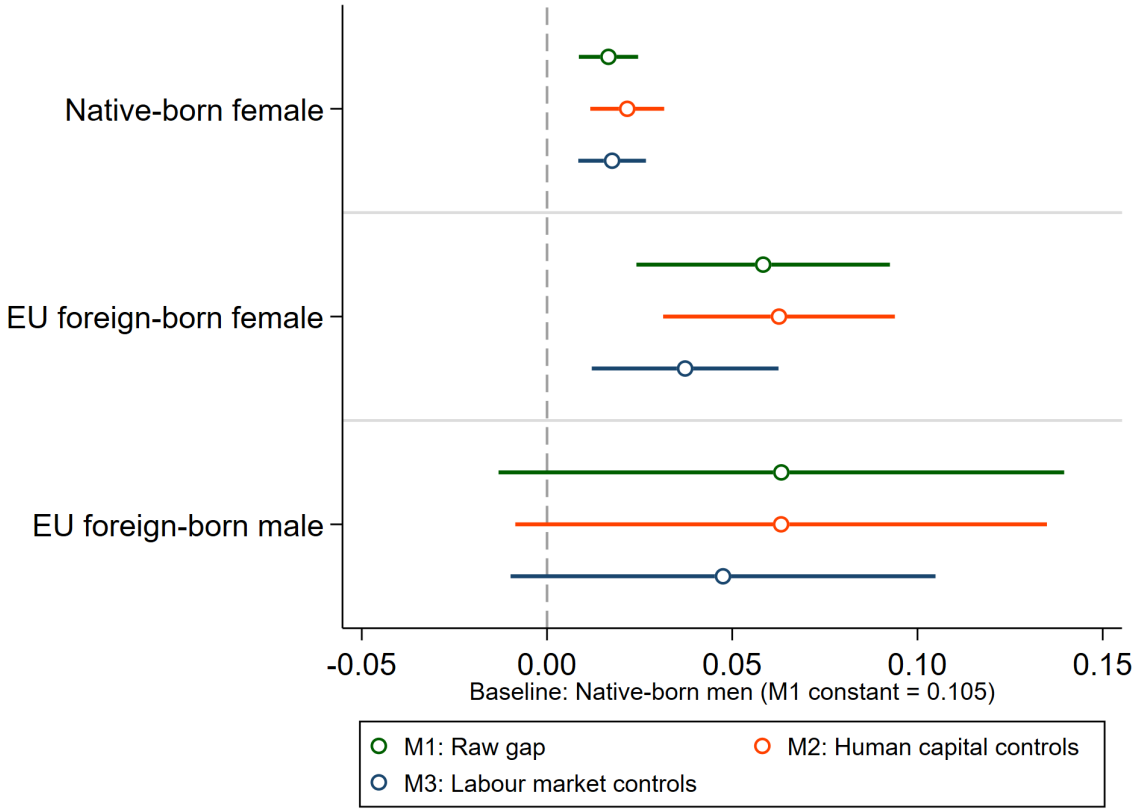


Figure 8. Coefficient plot: percentage-point difference in probability of being in temporary employment among employees relative to native-born men (EU-LFS PUF, 2011 - 2013)

In the raw model, native-born women are 1.7 percentage points more likely than native-born men to hold a temporary contract, while EU foreign-born women face substantially larger penalties of 5.8 percentage points. The distance between these two groups is significant. EU foreign-born men also show a positive coefficient of 6.3 percentage points relative to native-born men, although this estimate is only marginally significant and should be interpreted cautiously given the wide confidence intervals. Not much changes once age and education are controlled for. When occupation and sector are added, however, the EU foreign-born female coefficient falls to 3.7 percentage points and the EU foreign-born male coefficient to 4.8 percentage points, whereas the native-born female gap remains small and broadly stable. The excess temporary-contract penalty of migrant women relative to native women becomes much smaller once occupation and sector are controlled for. Similarly, EU foreign born women do not differ from EU foreign-born men in M3.

For temporary contracts, the results point more clearly to migration-related mechanisms than to gender-specific ones, which distinguishes this outcome from part-time work. Two mechanisms are particularly relevant, which are consistent with the changes in M3. First, dual labour market segmentation implies that migrant workers, especially migrant women, are disproportionately channelled into the secondary sector where temporary contracts are structurally more prevalent. Second, the intended duration of stay depresses migrants' reservation wages regarding contract stability: migrants expecting a shorter stay have lower

incentives to hold out for permanent positions and are more willing to accept temporary arrangements.

2.3.3 Monthly pay

Given that monthly pay quintile is missing for around 94 percent of the PUF sample, these findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than definitive. In the raw specification for the probability of being in the bottom monthly pay quintile among employed individuals, native-born women are 15.3 percentage points more likely to be in the bottom quintile than native-born men, while EU foreign-born women are 11.0 percentage points more likely (Figure 9; Table 20 in Appendix). EU foreign-born men do not differ from native-born men. Once age and education are controlled for in M2, the penalty for native-born women remains almost unchanged, while the penalty for EU foreign-born women increases markedly to 14.7 percentage points. This suggests that compositional differences in human capital partly mask the relative disadvantage of EU foreign-born women in the raw model. The introduction of occupation and sector controls in M3 reduces the monthly pay penalties for both female groups, but more clearly for EU foreign-born women, whose coefficient falls from 14.7 to 12.2 percentage points. Once firm size is added in M4, the penalties fall further to 13.8 percentage points for native-born women. These results point to a strong gender penalty, whereas the absence of clear and robust differences between EU foreign-born men and native-born men suggests that nativity plays a more limited role here. Interestingly, point estimates appear generally larger for native-born women than for EU foreign-born women, except in M2, where the two penalties become much closer. This pattern is broadly consistent with the overqualification results discussed below, in the sense that EU foreign-born women may have relatively high formal education that is not fully translated into equivalent labour-market rewards.

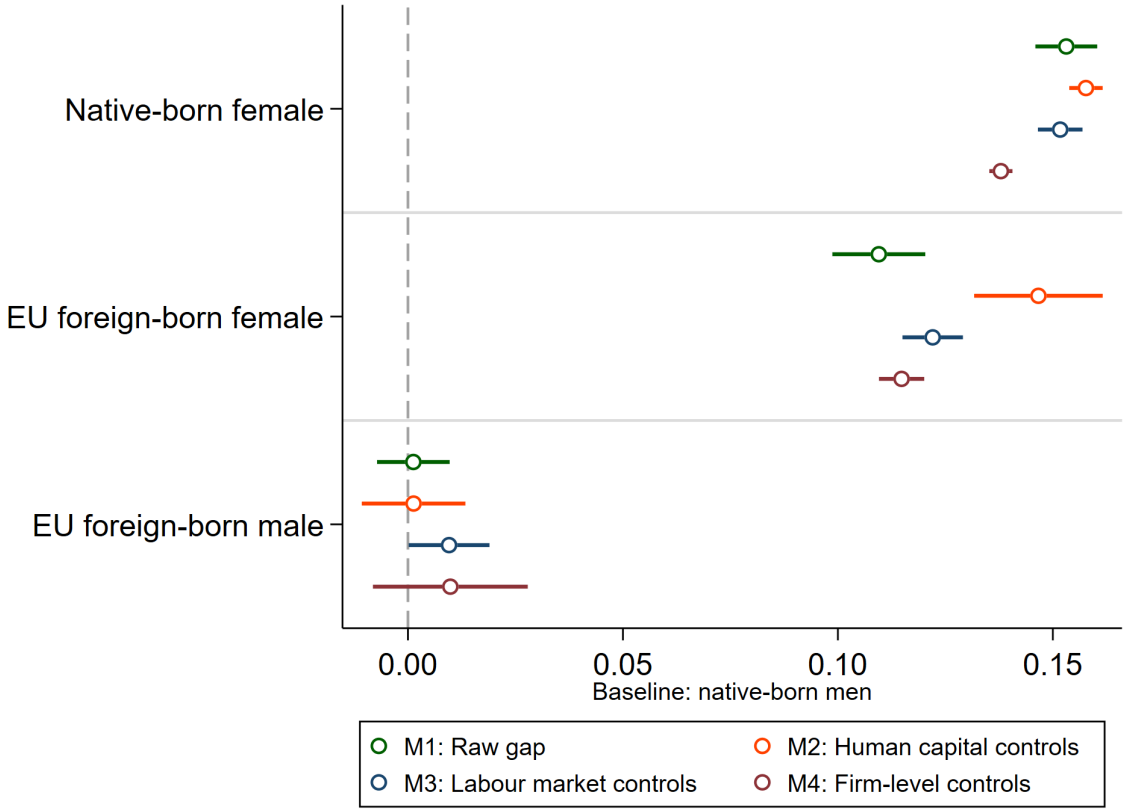


Figure 9. Coefficient plot: percentage-point difference in probability of being in the bottom monthly pay quintile among employed respondents relative to native-born men (EU-LFS PUF, 2010–2013)

Unlike wages, monthly pay does not allow us to distinguish clearly whether one group is paid less per hour or whether its lower monthly pay reflects fewer hours worked. The gender penalty observed here may therefore reflect several of the mechanisms discussed in the previous chapters, including differences in working hours, occupational sorting, and firm-level allocation. However, while migrant women generally experience similar or larger disadvantages than native women in other outcomes, here native-born women appear slightly more disadvantaged. Occupational and sectoral sorting appears to matter somewhat more for EU foreign-born women in this specification, in line with the results on part-time work and with their higher concentration in low-skilled occupations and sectors. However, firm size, which can be interpreted as a broad proxy for firm-level sorting, appears to matter somewhat more for native-born women. This is also consistent with the fact that, among all groups, it is native-born women that are the most concentrated in small firms and the least concentrated in large firms. Given that firm size is only a broad proxy, this should be interpreted cautiously, but it may indicate that firm sorting plays a somewhat larger role for native-born women than for EU foreign-born women in this monthly pay measure, whereas occupational and sectoral controls appear to account for a somewhat larger share of the EU foreign-born female penalty. For native-born women, the remaining gap may be linked more strongly to firm allocation, possibly because flexibility constraints related to care and unpaid work channel

them towards lower-paying firms. By contrast, for EU foreign-born women, the larger attenuation after the inclusion of occupation and sector controls is consistent with stronger segregation into lower-paying labour-market segments. This interpretation seems consistent with the results on part-time and full-time hours worked. This interpretation should however remain cautious, since neither firm size nor occupation and sector fully capture firm productivity, wage premia, or dual labour-market segmentation directly.

Results for the probability of being in the top monthly pay quintile among employed individuals are very similar, but the differences between native-born and EU foreign-born women are smaller in point estimates and the changes across models are more limited (Figure 10; Table 21 in Appendix). The same general conclusion therefore holds: monthly pay disadvantage appears to be driven primarily by gender rather than nativity.

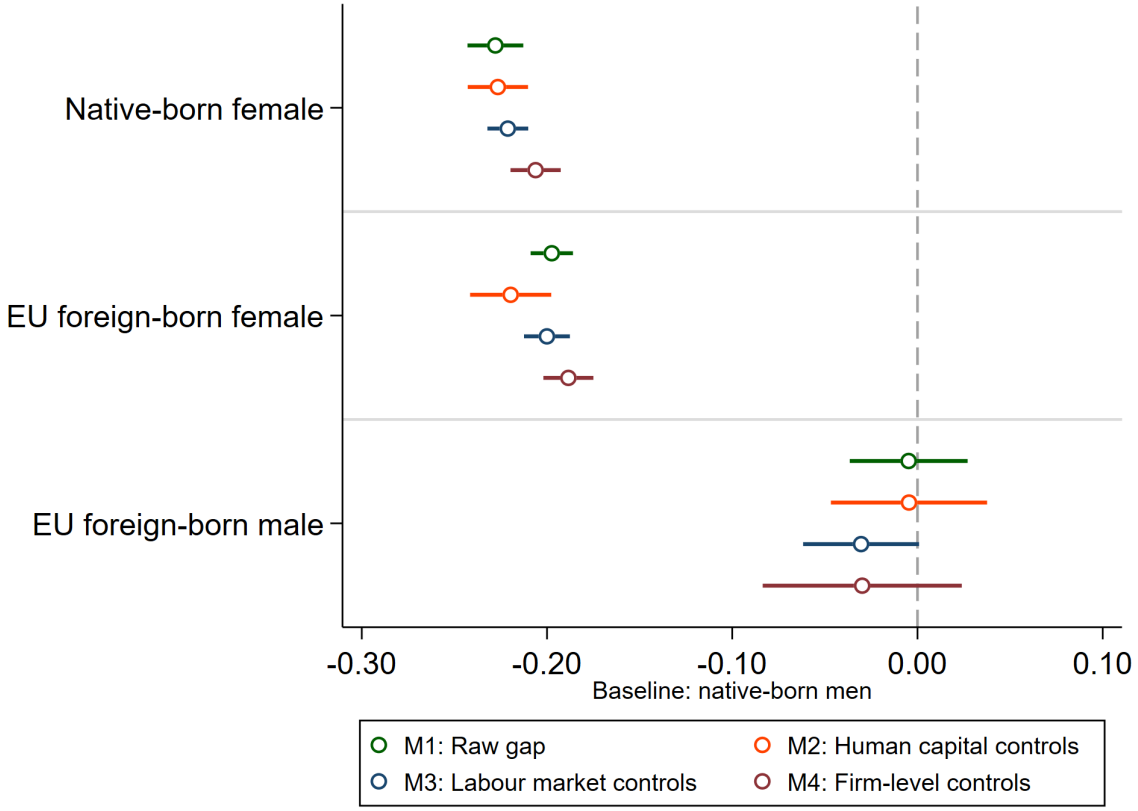


Figure 10. Coefficient plot: percentage-point difference in probability of being in the top monthly pay quintile among employed respondents relative to native-born men (EU-LFS PUF, 2010–2013)

2.3.4 Overqualification

The overqualification rate for native-born men with tertiary education in employment, after absorbing country and year fixed effects, is 20.0 percent (Figure 11; Table 22 in Appendix). This baseline captures the share of highly educated employed native-born men who hold jobs that do not normally require tertiary education.

In the raw model (M1), the contrast between groups is stark. EU foreign-born women face an overqualification penalty of 13.5 percentage points relative to native-born men, a large and highly significant gap. In addition, they are 10.9 percentage points more likely to be overqualified than native-born women and 9.0 percentage points more likely to be overqualified than EU foreign-born men. By contrast, EU foreign-born men and native-born women are not statistically distinguishable from each other. The picture remains remarkably stable after adding age and sector controls. These results therefore show a large and persistent disadvantage that is specific to EU foreign-born women rather than common to migrants or women more generally, making overqualification one of the clearest outcomes in the analysis in which a migrant-specific female disadvantage emerges.

The fact that the penalty remains large after controlling for age shows that EU foreign-born women are not overqualified simply because they are younger, while the inclusion of sector controls suggests that broad sectoral allocation does not explain much of their disadvantage. The pattern is made more striking by the descriptive profile documented above: EU foreign-born women are the most educated group in the analytical sample. This makes the results particularly consistent with the gendered non-recognition of foreign human capital. High-skilled social care work, where women are often concentrated, and which is characterised by embedded and encompassing skills, is often characterised by strict accreditation requirements and difficult recognition processes. In this way, highly educated migrant women are systematically unable to translate their formal qualifications into commensurate employment, in a way that neither native-born women nor EU foreign-born men experience to the same degree. The results are also consistent with tied mover theory, which is linked to lower expected returns, shorter job searches, lower incentives to invest in country-specific human capital, and statistical discrimination.

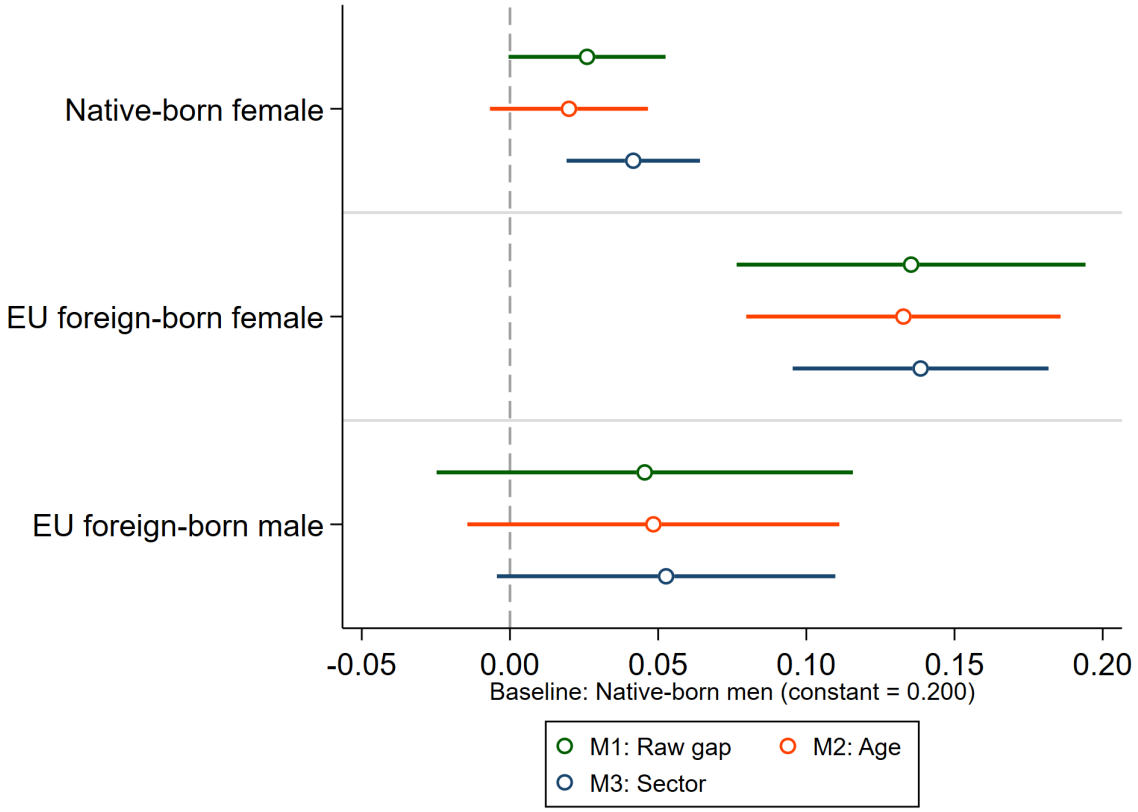


Figure 11. Coefficient plot: percentage-point difference in probability of being overqualified among tertiary-educated employed respondents relative to native-born men (EU-LFS PUF, 2011 - 2013)

3. Years-of-residence analysis

After splitting EU migrants by years of residence, the labour force participation results do not show clear evidence of assimilation once age and education are controlled for (Figure 12; Figure 13; Table 23 in Appendix). Among men, the more favourable raw result for those with shorter residence appears largely compositional, suggesting that they are concentrated in age or education groups that are more likely to participate in the labour force. Among women, the opposite pattern emerges: the relatively small raw gap for those with shorter residence becomes much larger after controlling for age and education, which suggests that their comparatively favourable human capital profile was masking an underlying participation disadvantage. The absence of a clear assimilation pattern in labour force participation may reflect the fact that this outcome appears to be structured more strongly by gender than by nativity. This is theoretically consistent: if the gap is driven primarily by persistent gendered constraints, then the accumulation of host-country-specific human capital or social capital over time would not be expected to close it, because the underlying mechanisms are not primarily informational or skill-based.

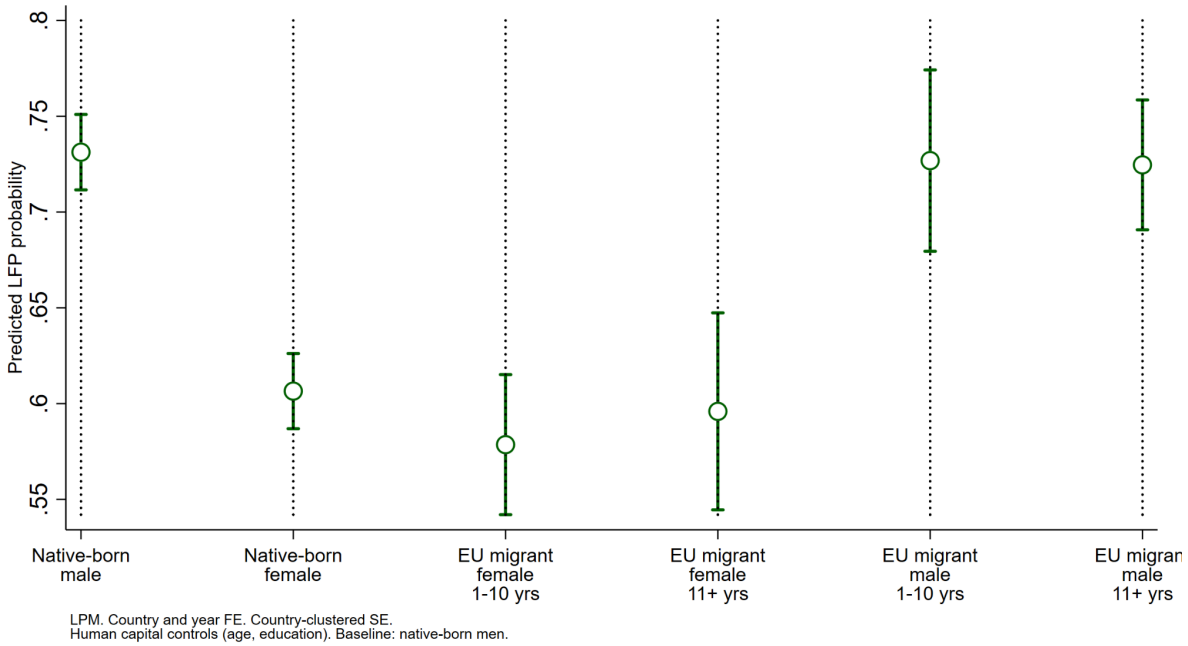


Figure 12. Predicted probability of labour force participation by analytical group and years of residence (EU-LFS PUF, 2010 - 2013)

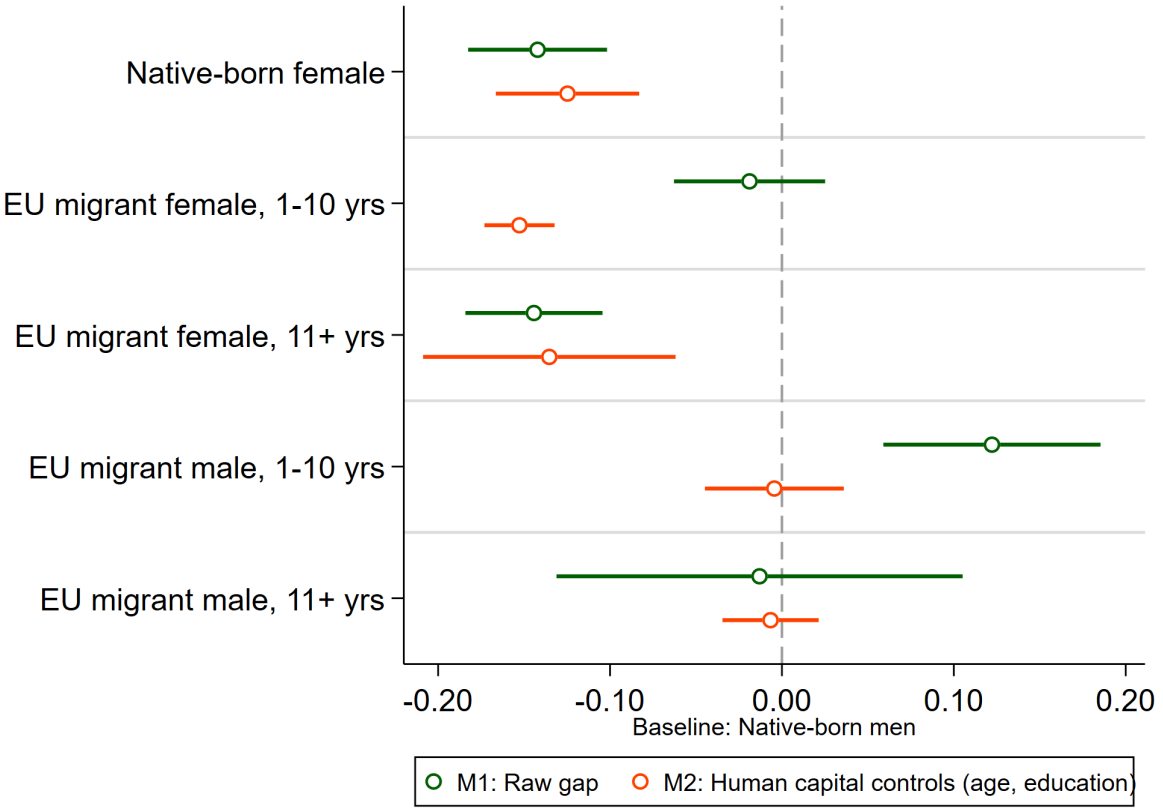


Figure 13. Coefficient plot: percentage-point differences in probability of labour force participation by analytical group and years of residence relative to native-born men (EU-LFS PUF, 2010 - 2013)

The raw years-of-residence model suggests clearer assimilation in overqualification than in labour force participation (Figure 14; Table 24 in Appendix). EU migrant women with 1–10 years of residence are 22.2 percentage points more likely to be overqualified than native-born men, while those with 11 or more years of residence are 8.2 percentage points more likely. A formal comparison confirms that the penalty is significantly smaller among longer-residing migrant women. A similar pattern appears for men: EU migrant men with 1–10 years of residence are 13.0 percentage points more likely to be overqualified than native-born men, whereas EU migrant men with 11 or more years are not statistically different from the baseline. The difference between the two male migrant groups is also significant. Adding age controls leaves the coefficients essentially unchanged, which suggests that differences in age composition explain little of the overqualification gap.

For overqualification, country-specific human capital and social capital accumulated over the years may help explain why the gaps shrink so significantly, as they can facilitate human capital transferability and job searches. In addition, those who stay longer might also have had a longer intended duration of stay with higher expected returns, higher reservation wages and therefore longer job searches that might have allowed them to find jobs more in line with their qualifications. However, assimilation appears incomplete for women, since even after longer residence their overqualification penalty remains positive and significant. This persistent gap might be consistent with occupational segregation in the secondary labour market sector, stringent accreditation requirements and licensing for high-skilled social care sectors, and the hourglass economy, which may create obstacles to migrants' upward mobility. The limitation of these results, however, lies in the fact that these two groups of migrants might not be comparable since the apparent assimilation pattern may partly reflect self-selection, longer initial intended duration of stay, or simply different types of migrants across cohorts.

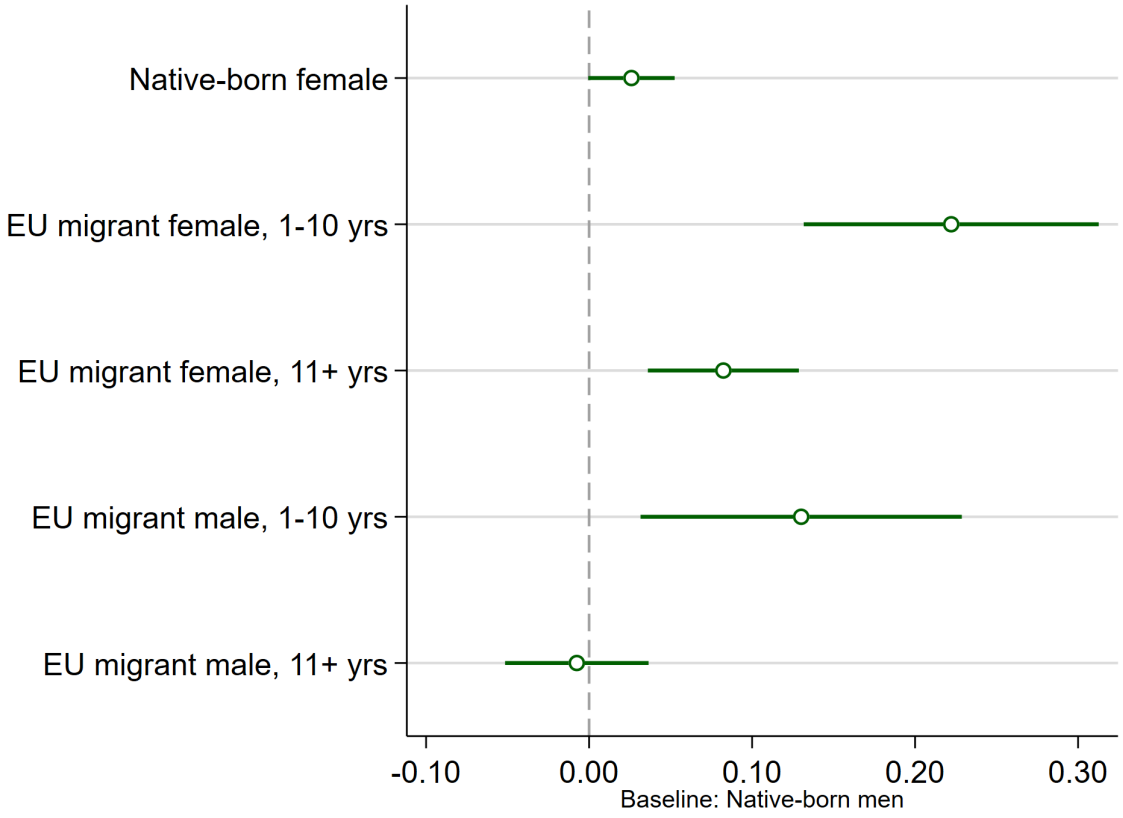


Figure 14. Coefficient plot: percentage-point difference in probability of being overqualified among tertiary-educated employed respondents by analytical group and years of residence relative to native-born men (EU-LFS PUF, 2011 - 2013)

3. Country-level comparative analysis

The ten countries selected appear to show a clear systematic pattern of gender disadvantages in labour force participation, after controlling for age and education (Figure 15, Figure 16, Table 25 in Appendix). Women show almost uniformly lower rates compared to men, regardless of migratory status, except in Denmark, where the percentage-point difference for native-born women and foreign-born men compared to native-born men is similar. EU foreign-born women are almost always the most disadvantaged group, with the exception of Italy and Greece, where they are slightly less disadvantaged than native-born women. This might also be partly due to the fact that native-born women in those countries have particularly low labour force participation rates. Nativity penalties among men are much less systematic, as EU foreign-born men are in some countries slightly above, and in others slightly below, native-born men.

Across countries, the labour force participation gap of EU foreign-born women often appears to reflect a combination of the general female penalty and the country-specific nativity position of EU foreign-born men. In this sense, migrant women's disadvantages tend to follow native women's penalties and EU foreign-born men almost perfectly, as their relative position to native women shifts with whether migrant men in the same country are closer to

or further from the native-born male baseline. This might point to the fact that migrant women are affected by penalties in similar ways as native women or foreign-born men.

There is not a perfect macro-regional pattern. Adjusted EU foreign-born female gaps are typically smaller in the North-Western countries, with Ireland as a major exception at -19.6 percentage points, while in the Southern countries they are more often in the 10-to-20 percentage point range, reaching -21.3 percentage points in Cyprus and -19.3 percentage points in Italy. The most striking Southern feature is the raw-to-adjusted reversal: migrant women look much less disadvantaged in the raw model and, in Portugal, they are even above native-born men, but after controlling for age and education they become negative in every Southern country (Figure 17).

Given the evident gender penalty in labour force participation, welfare states might have an important influence on the size of these gaps for women. In particular, the public provision of care is critical in reducing care constraints, which might be higher for EU foreign-born women given post-migration disruption of kin networks. This might explain why women in Southern states appear to fare generally worse than in North-Western states, given that the privatised family care model of Mediterranean states assigns care primarily to the family, with limited public support (Daly & Lewis, 2000). This might also explain why female penalties are smaller in France than other countries, given the country's universal and generous family allowances and public childcare provision (Lewis, 1992, 1997).

The degree of defamilialisation, that is, the extent to which welfare states enable individuals to maintain economic independence independently of family relations, might also be a key institutional moderator of this gender penalty. Ireland, despite being a North-Western country, displays an exceptionally large adjusted EU foreign-born female penalty, consistent with its historically strong male-breadwinner model (Lewis, 1992, 1997). By contrast, Denmark, a weak male-breadwinner state characterised by universal childcare, separate taxation and individual welfare entitlements, shows smaller gender penalties among the countries examined.

Figure 15. Coefficient plot: adjusted percentage-point difference in probability of labour force participation by country in North-Western Europe relative to native-born men (EU-LFS PUF, 2010–2013).

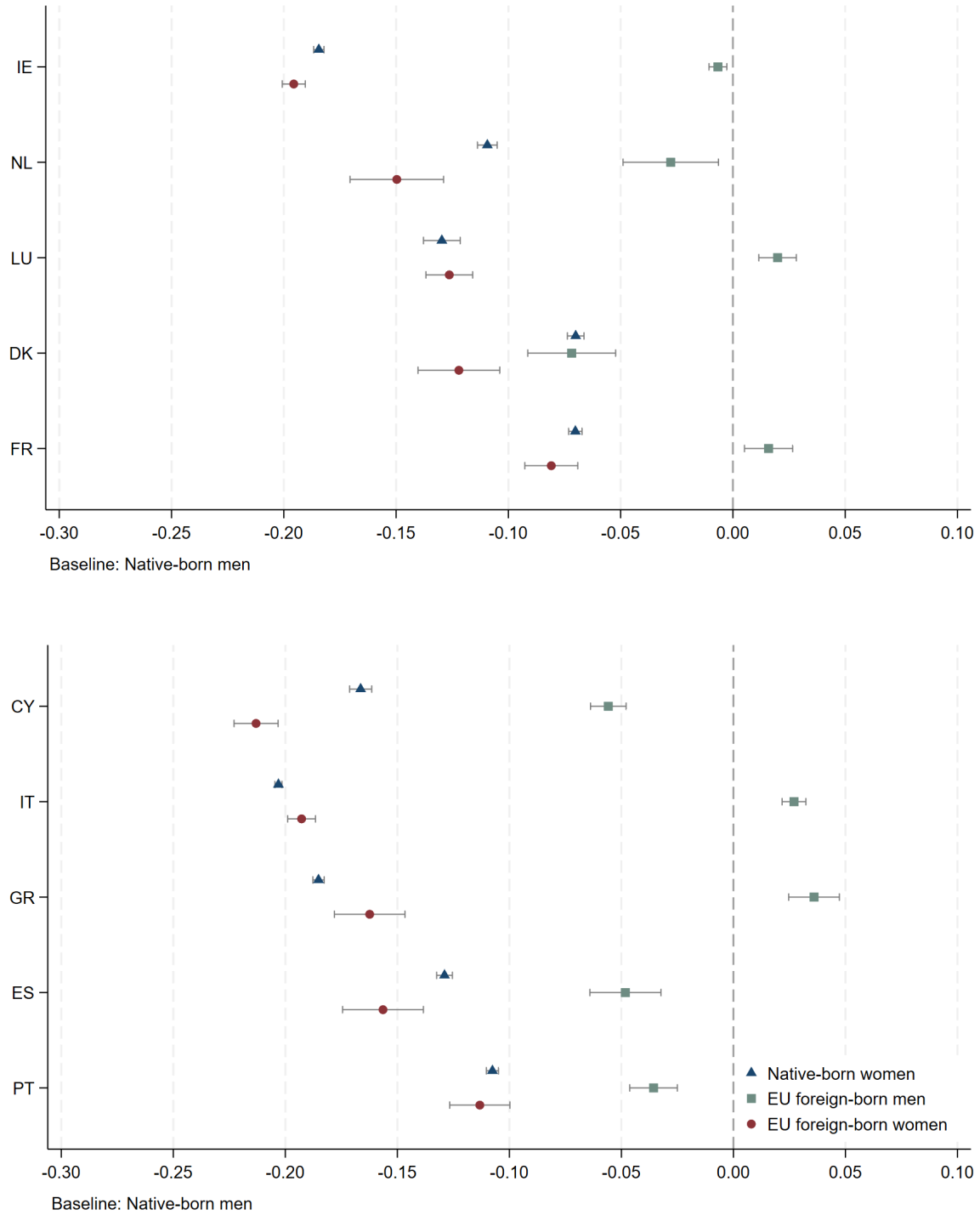


Figure 16. Coefficient plot: adjusted percentage-point difference in probability of labour force participation by country in Southern Europe relative to native-born men (EU-LFS PUF, 2010–2013).

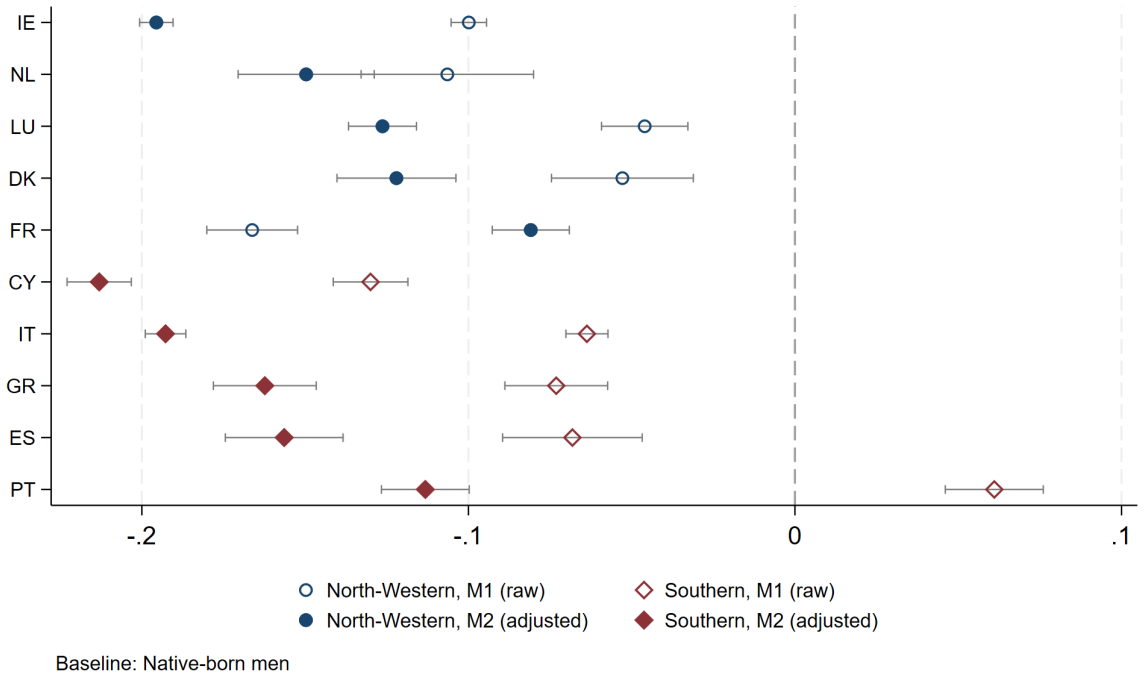


Figure 17. Coefficient plot: raw and adjusted percentage-point difference in probability of labour force participation for EU foreign-born women by country and macro-region relative to native-born men (EU-LFS PUF, 2010–2013)

Country-level differences in overqualification might be directly linked to the system of official recognition of foreign qualifications and licensing, which might affect migrant women more heavily than migrant men due to the gendered recognition of skills (Figure 18 in Appendix, Figure 19, Figure 20 Table 26 in Appendix). This might explain why in countries like the Netherlands, where care work is organised through formal health-sector institutions and has strict authorisation and licensing requirements, the nativity gap in overqualification is only present for women (Reyneri & Fullin, 2008). As demand for care is rooted in an informal, household-based model in Southern Europe, even highly educated women may experience a drastic downgrading of social status because their foreign professional credentials are not utilized or recognized in the domestic care market.

The sharper Southern penalties may also fit with the fact that countries like Italy, Spain or Greece have segmented labour markets and higher demands for unskilled or low-skilled jobs, compared to countries like Denmark, the Netherlands or Luxembourg (Kogan, 2007). Ireland, for example, which is exceptional compared to other North-Western states in the size of the nativity gap, is characterised by an hourglass economy, which creates obstacles for upward mobility. Particularly relevant might be the demand for care-related jobs in the secondary sector, given the weaker provision of public care in Mediterranean states or aging populations, like in Italy (Morris, 2003). These apparent patterns might also indicate variations in labour market regulations. Stricter Employment Protection Legislation, such as those in Italy, Spain and Portugal, might create barriers for migrants to move from low-quality, unskilled jobs into better-matched employment.

Finally, variations in overqualification gaps, especially among North-Western states, might also be explained by the generosity and eligibility of welfare provisions, which allow longer job searches and higher reservation wages. Social-Democratic regimes, like Denmark, have the highest levels of welfare support and most inclusive eligibility criteria, based on residency (Kogan, 2007). Conservative regimes, like France or the Netherlands, have systems centred on employment, which might force migrants to accept low-paying jobs for which they are overqualified. In liberal regimes, like Ireland, migrants are forced into the labour market quickly. These interpretations should, however, remain cautious, since the countries' regressions do not identify these institutional mechanisms directly.

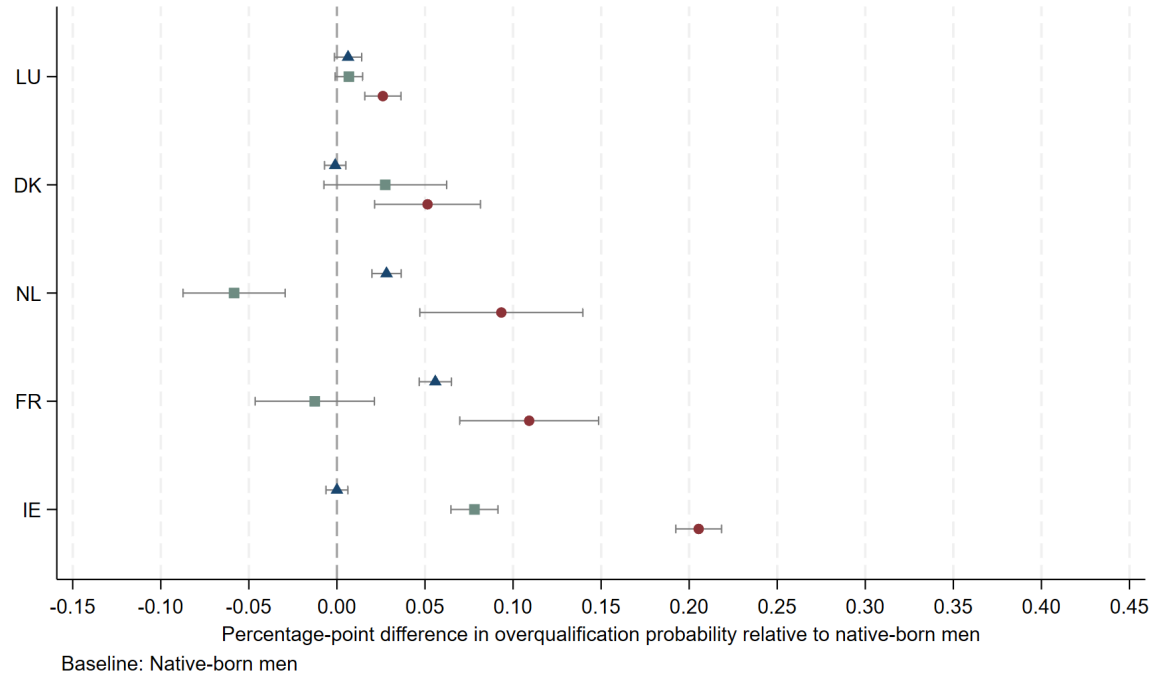


Figure 19. Coefficient plot: adjusted percentage-point difference in probability of being overqualified among tertiary-educated employed respondents by country in North-Western Europe relative to native-born men (EU-LFS PUF, 2011–2013).

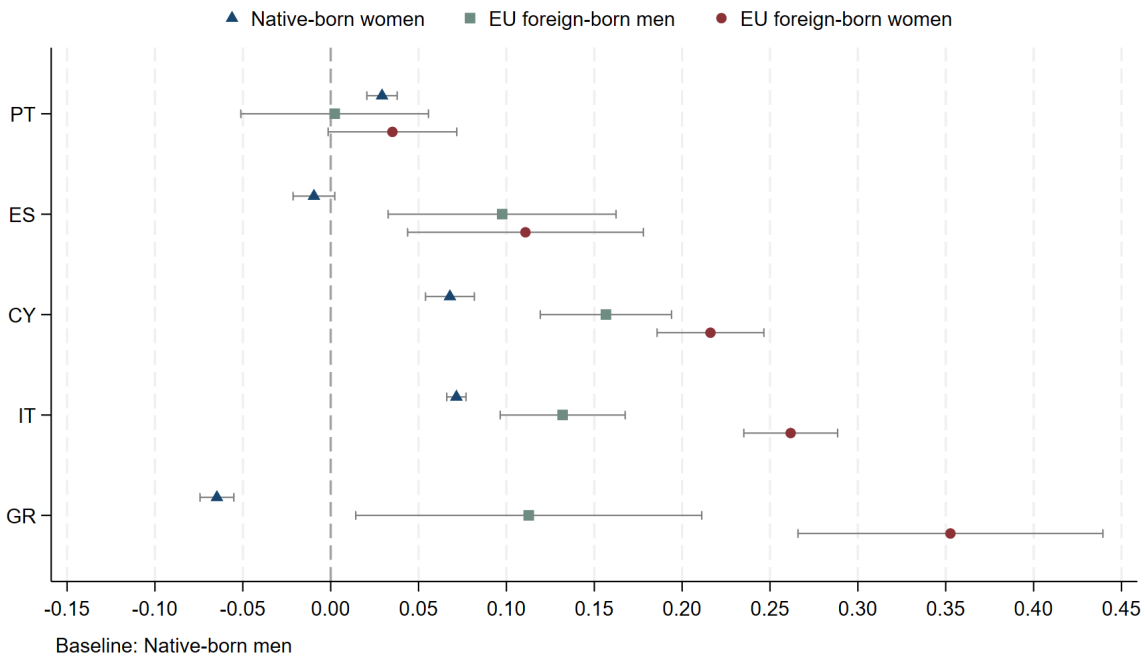


Figure 20. Coefficient plot: adjusted percentage-point difference in probability of being overqualified among tertiary-educated employed respondents by country in Southern Europe relative to native-born men (EU-LFS PUF, 2011–2013).

Conclusion: policy recommendations based on findings

EU foreign-born women face labour market disadvantages that vary systematically across outcomes and countries rather than amounting to a uniform double penalty. In participation, a hidden double penalty emerges once compositional differences are controlled for, with no clear sign of assimilation over time. In employment status, they are the only group facing a significant unemployment penalty, and are the least likely to be self-employed. In employment quality, their double penalty in part-time and temporary work largely disappear with occupational controls, while overqualification produces the clearest intersectional disadvantage. Although this penalty decreases over time, it remains significantly higher than for the other groups. Pay disadvantage, by contrast, appears to be driven primarily by gender rather than migration status. Finally, Southern European countries display typically larger penalties than North-Western ones in labour force participation and overqualification.

Based on the findings of this research and the mechanisms identified in the literature, policies aimed at improving EU foreign-born women's labour market integration should focus on three main points: universal public care provision for migrants and citizens, regulation and professionalisation of low-skilled social care sectors and recognition of professional credentials and licences for high-skilled social care sectors.

The disadvantages documented in this analysis are closely linked to care burdens, which are especially pronounced for migrant women. Affordable, accessible and universal childcare and elderly care should therefore be made available on an inclusive basis, explicitly covering migrants regardless of length of residence and from the earliest possible stage after childbirth. Cash-for-care models may alleviate care constraints, but they also risk reinforcing a secondary labour market in which care is outsourced to private households and disproportionately performed by migrant women in precarious, unstable, and weakly protected jobs. Universal public care provision thus appears to offer the strongest response, since it can reduce both the unequal care burdens that push women out of the labour market or into flexible work, and the segmentation of care labour itself.

Social care work comprises occupations whose skills are often coded as feminine. Because many of these jobs rely heavily on embodied knowledge and are performed in private households, where public provision is limited, they are often constructed as low-skilled and therefore devalued relative to work in other sectors. This, in turn, contributes to their under-regulation and to their concentration in the secondary segment of the labour market. Reducing precarity in these sectors of social care is therefore essential. This requires extending collective bargaining coverage to domestic and care workers and ratifying ILO Convention No. 189 across all EU member states, in order to align their working conditions more closely with those of other employees and ensure adequate labour and social protection. Such measures would help reduce the involuntary concentration of migrant women in precarious forms of employment and improve employment quality for those already working in these sectors.

Given the gendered nature of skill recognition, some occupations attributed to women often have stringent accreditation barriers or cumbersome recognition of qualification processes. To reduce EU foreign-born women's disadvantages, EU policy should work to simplify and broaden the recognition of professional qualifications, especially in these feminised sectors, reduce excessive national discretion in licensing systems, and allow provisional access to regulated employment while recognition procedures are ongoing. Simultaneously, stronger frameworks for validating informal and non-formal skills would help reduce the information asymmetries that currently devalue migrant women's competences and contribute to occupational downgrading. Where professional practice depends on host-country-specific knowledge, recognition systems should be complemented by accessible bridging courses that allow foreign-trained workers to update their legal, institutional, linguistic, or technical knowledge and re-enter employment at their qualification level.

This analysis has several limitations that shape how the findings should be interpreted. The use of the EU-LFS Public Use Files, rather than the full Scientific Use File, substantially narrows what can be observed: non-EU foreign-born groups are excluded, country coverage is incomplete, and key household variables are unavailable. As a result, the disadvantages identified for EU foreign-born women likely understate the situation of more vulnerable migrant groups, especially those in irregular or informal work who are largely invisible in the data. The analysis is also limited to first-generation migrants and cannot account for several important factors, including country-specific human capital such as language proficiency, country of origin, migration channels, social capital, and direct or perceived discrimination. Variable aggregation, in age, occupation, and sector, reduces the precision of controls, while missing data and small subsamples limit the reliability of estimates, particularly for income and cross-country comparisons. The macro-regional analysis should therefore be read as illustrative rather than as a robust test of welfare-regime differences. Finally, because the data are cross-sectional, the findings cannot support causal claims regarding assimilation. Future research should use the full Scientific Use File, which incorporates richer individual and household variables and a larger and more representative sample across EU countries, together with the missing controls described above. Extending coverage to informal work where possible, and relying on panel data would test the proposed mechanisms more rigorously.

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Appendix

Figures

Figure 6. Coefficient plot: approximate percentage differences in usual weekly hours among employed respondents relative to native-born men (EU-LFS PUF, 2011 - 2013)

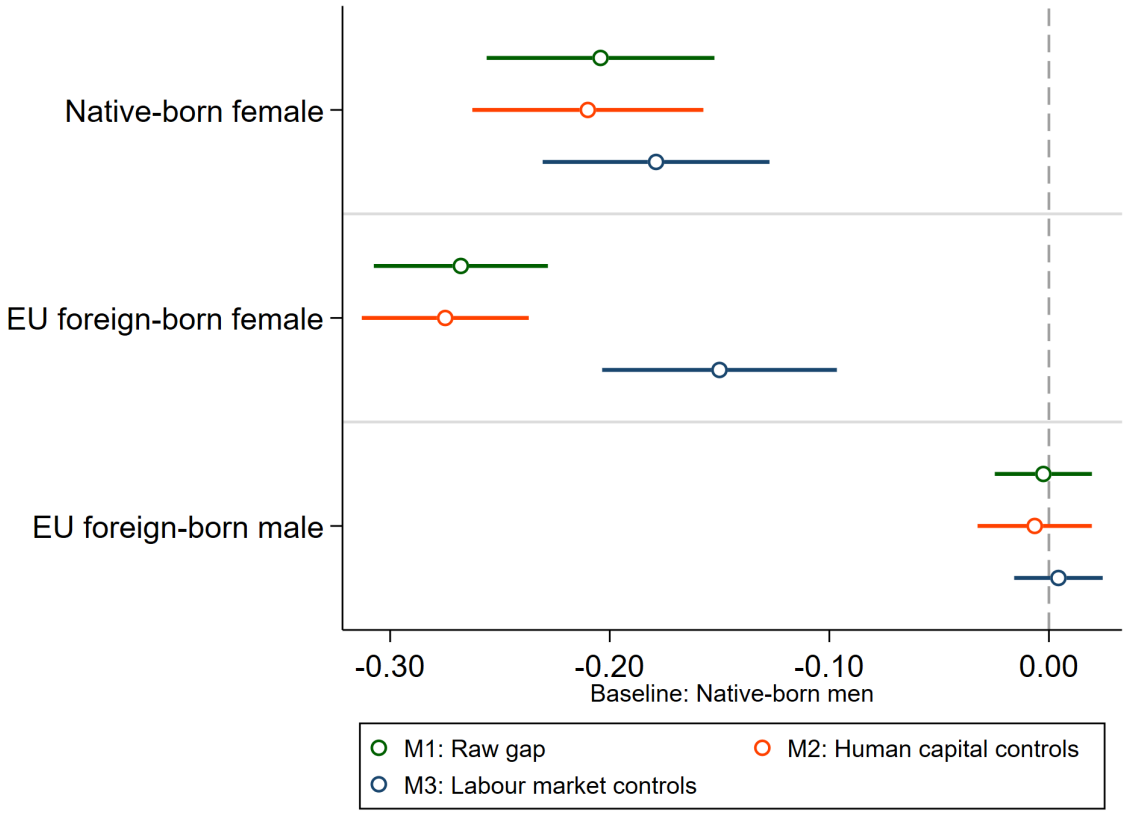
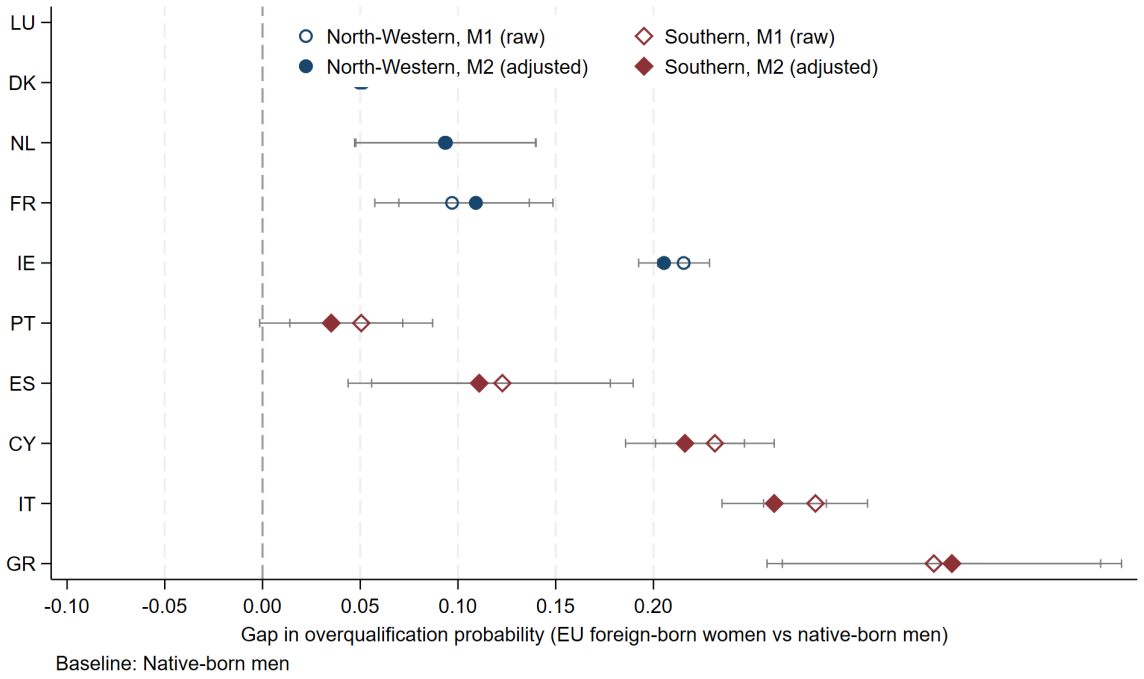


Figure 18. Coefficient plot: raw and adjusted percentage-point difference in probability of being overqualified among tertiary-educated employed respondents for EU foreign-born women by country and macro-region relative to native-born men (EU-LFS PUF, 2011–2013)



Tables

Table 1. Composition of the analytical sample by analytical groups (EU-LFS PUF, 2010–2013)

Group	Unweighted N	Unweighted %	Weighted %
Native-born men	3,835,169	47.21	48.10
Native-born women	4,064,999	50.04	49.05
EU foreign-born men	98,073	1.21	1.29
EU foreign-born women	124,980	1.54	1.56
Total	8,123,221	100.00	100.00

Table 2. Composition of the analytical sample by year and analytical groups (EU-LFS PUF, 2010–2013)

Group	2010 N	2010 weighted %	2011 N	2011 weighted %	2012 N	2012 weighted %	2013 N	2013 weighted %
Native-born men	964,763	47.88	927,826	47.96	887,472	47.98	1,055,108	48.49
Native-born women	1,026,092	49.08	986,072	49.00	943,254	48.96	1,109,581	49.14
EU foreign-born men	25,366	1.40	24,589	1.39	25,235	1.37	22,883	1.06
EU foreign-born women	31,550	1.65	31,234	1.65	32,055	1.70	30,141	1.31
Total	2,047,771	100.00	1,969,721	100.00	1,888,016	100.00	2,217,713	100.00

Table 3. Country distribution of EU foreign-born groups in the analytical sample (EU-LFS PUF, 2010–2013)

Country	EU foreign-born men (weighted %)	EU foreign-born women (weighted %)table	Total EU foreign-born (weighted %)
Austria	0.00	0.00	0.00
Belgium	0.00	0.00	0.00

Bulgaria	0.00	0.01	0.01
Cyprus	5.37	6.67	12.04
Germany	0.00	0.00	0.00
Denmark	1.48	1.75	3.23
Estonia	0.18	0.24	0.42
Spain	2.31	2.53	4.84
Finland	0.27	0.32	0.59
France	1.86	2.06	3.92
Greece	0.64	1.09	1.73
Hungary	0.50	0.67	1.17
Ireland	6.59	7.00	13.59
Italy	1.38	2.09	3.47
Lithuania	0.09	0.11	0.20

Luxembourg	20.59	19.76	40.35
Latvia	0.29	0.44	0.73
Netherlands	1.09	1.40	2.49
Portugal	0.78	0.92	1.70
Romania	0.00	0.00	0.00
Slovenia	1.22	1.38	2.60
Slovakia	0.08	0.12	0.20

Table 4. Age distribution by analytical group (weighted percentages)

Age group	Native-born men	Native-born women	EU foreign-born men	EU foreign-born women	Total
15–24	15.72	14.77	9.42	9.22	15.08
25–39	26.67	25.33	35.10	35.81	26.26
40–54	29.05	28.62	33.38	32.35	28.94
55–74	28.56	31.28	22.10	22.62	29.72
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 5. Educational attainment by analytical group, non-missing only (weighted percentages)

Highest educational attainment	Native-born men	Native-born women	EU foreign-born men	EU foreign-born women	Total
Low: Lower secondary or below	36.67	38.19	38.73	35.45	37.42
Medium: Upper secondary	42.61	39.40	38.62	40.19	40.95
High: Third level (5–8)	20.73	22.40	22.65	24.36	21.63
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 6. Student or apprentice status by analytical group, non-missing only (weighted percentages)

Status	Native-born men	Native-born women	EU foreign-born men	EU foreign-born women	Total
Student/apprentice	11.11	11.28	5.88	6.43	11.05
Not student/apprentice	88.05	87.86	93.68	93.18	88.11
In education, on holiday	0.84	0.86	0.44	0.39	0.84
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 7. Years of residence in the country by foreign-born group (weighted percentages)

Years of residence	EU foreign-born men	EU foreign-born women	Total
1–10 years	39.35	40.92	1.15
11+ years	58.49	57.30	1.65
Missing	2.16	1.78	0.06
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 8. Occupation distribution among employed respondents by analytical group, non-missing only (weighted percentages)

Occupation (ISCO 1-digit)	Native-born men	EU foreign-born men	Native-born women	EU foreign-born women
Managers	6.85	5.08	3.98	2.80
Elementary occupations	7.26	13.47	10.22	28.22
Armed forces occupations	1.50	0.25	0.37	0.03
Professionals	14.83	14.49	20.16	14.91

Technicians and associate professionals	16.02	12.39	16.56	10.05
Clerical support workers	6.26	2.82	15.23	8.30
Service and sales workers	11.37	10.23	23.24	30.78
Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	5.74	2.02	3.90	0.51
Craft and related trades workers	19.03	29.37	3.07	2.36
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	11.14	9.88	3.27	2.03
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 9. Sector distribution among employed respondents by analytical group, non-missing only (weighted percentages)

Sector (PUF NACE coding)	Native-born men	Native-born women	EU foreign-born men	EU foreign-born women	Total
A. Agriculture, forestry and fishing	7.06	5.12	3.90	1.93	6.09

B. Mining, manufacturing, utilities and waste	22.19	11.52	18.47	8.30	17.24
F. Construction	11.57	1.59	23.75	0.48	7.19
G. Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	13.87	15.55	10.92	11.34	14.53
H. Transport, accommodation, information, finance, real estate, professional, administrative, public, education, health and other services	44.54	63.89	41.95	59.43	53.23
T. Activities of households as employers; own-use household production	0.48	2.01	0.67	18.06	1.40
U. Extraterritorial organisations and bodies	0.30	0.32	0.35	0.45	0.31
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100

Table 10. Firm size among employed respondents by analytical group, , non-missing only (weighted percentages)

Number of persons at local unit	Native-born men	Native-born women	EU foreign-born men	EU foreign-born women	Total
1 to 10 people	17.48	23.14	15.42	13.57	20.14
11 to 19 people	11.48	14.24	8.95	14.21	12.79
20 to 49 people	16.48	17.32	16.39	19.75	16.88

50 or more	54.56	45.30	59.24	52.47	50.18
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 11. Nationality and country-of-birth-based migratory status (weighted percentages)

Nationality groupings	Native-born	EU foreign-born	Total
National of country of residence	98.45	30.14	96.51
EU non-national of country of residence	1.55	68.68	3.46
Missing	0.00	1.18	0.03
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 12. Labour force participation, linear probability model (EU-LFS PUF, 2010–2013)

Labour force participation - LPM (EU-LFS PUF, 2010-2013)

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Human capital controls (age, education)
Native-born female	-0.142***	-0.125***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	0.038	-0.006
	(0.447)	(0.681)
EU foreign-born female	-0.095***	-0.143***
	(0.002)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.738***	0.746***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	7140137.000	7120481.000

Within R2	0.023	0.350

LPM with country and year fixed effects. Country-clustered standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: non-students with valid labour market status. Constant represents predicted LFP for native-born men at reference categories. Baseline category: native-born men. Sample size: M1 N=7,140,137; M2 N=7,120,481; M1 to M2 loss = 0.3% (below threshold, no matched-sample M1 needed). * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 13. Unemployment among labour force participants, linear probability model (EU-LFS PUF, 2010–2013)

Unemployment among LF participants — LPM (EU-LFS PUF, 2010–2013)

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Human capital controls (age, education)
Native-born female	0.002	0.008
	(0.616)	(0.111)
EU foreign-born male	0.035	0.033
	(0.135)	(0.177)
EU foreign-born female	0.044**	0.048**
	(0.050)	(0.032)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.104***	0.336***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	4510632.000	4496547.000
Within R2	0.000	0.046

LPM with country and year fixed effects. Country-clustered standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: labour force participants only. Constant represents unemployment probability for native-born men at reference categories. Baseline category: native-born men. Sample size: M1 N=; M2 N=; M1 to M2 loss = % (below threshold, no matched-sample M1 needed). * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 14. Unemployment duration (≥12 months) among unemployed respondents, ordered logit regression (EU-LFS PUF, 2010–2013)

Unemployment duration — AME on P(long-term unemployed, 12m+) (EU-LFS PUF, 2010–2013)

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Human capital controls (age, education)

Native-born female	-0.006	0.004
	(0.555)	(0.701)
EU foreign-born male	-0.062***	-0.059***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born female	-0.033*	-0.020
	(0.074)	(0.361)
Observations	449304.000	445091.000

Average marginal effects from ordered logit. Country-clustered standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: unemployed only. Outcome: P(durune=3) = probability of unemployment duration 12 months or more. Baseline category: native-born men. Sample size: M1 N=449304; M2 N=445091; M1 to M2 loss = .9%. * $p < 0.10$,** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 15. Self-employment among employed respondents, linear probability model (EU-LFS PUF, 2011–2013)

Self-employment — LPM (EU-LFS PUF, 2011–2013)

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Human capital controls (age, education)	M3: Labour market controls (occupation, sector)
Native-born female	-0.090***	-0.089***	-0.065***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	-0.052	-0.046*	-0.055*
	(0.150)	(0.083)	(0.064)
EU foreign-born female	-0.132***	-0.126***	-0.081***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.220***	0.130***	0.161**

	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.045)
Observations	2951935.000	2951935.000	2951935.000
Within R2	0.015	0.035	0.145

LPM with country and year fixed effects. Country-clustered standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: employed, 2011-2013 (isco1d non-missing). PUF stapro coding: 0=self-employed, 5=employee. All three models run on identical M3 sample for comparability. Baseline category: native-born men. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 16. Part-time employment among employed respondents, linear probability model (EU-LFS PUF, 2011–2013)

Part-time work — LPM (EU-LFS PUF, 2011-2013)

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Human capital controls (age, education)	M3: Labour market controls (occupation, sector)
Native-born female	0.215***	0.221***	0.192***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	0.009	0.011	0.004
	(0.550)	(0.572)	(0.793)
EU foreign-born female	0.280***	0.286***	0.185***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.072***	0.146***	0.099
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.188)
Observations	2954482.000	2954482.000	2954482.000
Within R2	0.087	0.101	0.133

LPM with country and year fixed effects. Country-clustered standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: employed, 2011-2013 (isco1d non-missing). M2->M3 loss 27% structural: isco1d missing for all 2010 observations. All three models run on identical M3 sample for comparability. Baseline category: native-born men. Sample size: M1 N=; M2 N=; M3 N=2954482; M1->M3 on common sample.* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 17. Log usual weekly hours among employed respondents, OLS regression (EU-LFS PUF, 2011–2013)

Log usual weekly hours — OLS (EU-LFS PUF, 2011-2013)

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Human capital controls (age, education)	M3: Labour market controls (occupation, sector)
Native-born female	-0.204***	-0.210***	-0.179***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	-0.003	-0.006	0.004
	(0.814)	(0.610)	(0.659)
EU foreign-born female	-0.268***	-0.275***	-0.150***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	3.671***	3.593***	3.690***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	2816818.000	2816818.000	2816818.000
Within R2	0.071	0.085	0.128

OLS with country and year fixed effects. Country-clustered standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: employed with non-zero hours, 2011-2013. hwusual==0 (hours vary considerably) excluded. M2->M3 loss 27% structural: isco1d missing for all 2010 observations. All three models run on identical M3 sample for comparability. Baseline category: native-born men. Sample size: M1 N=; M2 N=; M3 N=; M1->M3 on common sample.* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 18. Log usual weekly hours among full-time employed respondents, OLS regression (EU-LFS PUF, 2011–2013)

Log usual weekly hours (full-time only) — OLS (EU-LFS PUF, 2011-2013)

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Human capital controls (age, education)	M3: Labour market controls (occupation, sector)
Native-born female	-0.062***	-0.061***	-0.055***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	0.003	0.002	0.005
	(0.421)	(0.613)	(0.176)
EU foreign-born female	-0.036***	-0.036***	-0.032***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	3.724***	3.704***	3.727***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	2375566.000	2375566.000	2375566.000
Within R2	0.027	0.029	0.077

OLS with country and year fixed effects. Country-clustered standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: full-time employed (ftpt_bin==0) with non-zero hours, 2011-2013 (isco1d non-missing). hwusual==0 excluded. Full-time restriction isolates hours variation conditional on full-time status, avoiding compression from differential part-time prevalence across groups. M2->M3 loss 27% structural: isco1d missing for all 2010 observations. All three models run on identical M3 sample for comparability. Baseline category: native-born men. Sample size: M1 N=2375566; M2 N=2375566; M3 N=2375566; M1->M3 on common sample. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 19. Temporary contract among employees, linear probability model (EU-LFS PUF, 2011–2013)

Temporary contract — LPM (EU-LFS PUF, 2011-2013)

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Human capital controls (age, education)	M3: Labour market controls (occupation, sector)
Native-born female	0.017***	0.022***	0.018***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)

EU foreign-born male	0.063*	0.063*	0.048*
	(0.100)	(0.081)	(0.100)
EU foreign-born female	0.058***	0.063***	0.037***
	(0.002)	(0.000)	(0.006)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.105***	0.396***	0.511***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	2357381.000	2357381.000	2357381.000
Within R2	0.001	0.055	0.074

LPM with country and year fixed effects. Country-clustered standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: employed, 2011-2013 (isco1d non-missing). M2->M3 loss 26% structural: isco1d missing for all 2010 observations. All three models run on identical M3 sample for comparability. Baseline category: native-born men. Sample size: M1 N=; M2 N=; M3 N=; M1->M3 on common sample.* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 20. Bottom monthly pay quintile among employed respondents, ordered logit regression (EU-LFS PUF, 2010–2013)

Bottom monthly pay quintile — AME on P(bottom quintile) (EU-LFS PUF, 2010–2013)

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Human capital controls (age, education)	M3: Labour market controls (occupation, sector)	M4: + Firm size
Native-born female	0.153***	0.158***	0.152***	0.138***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	0.001	0.001	0.010**	0.010
	(0.771)	(0.832)	(0.046)	(0.283)

EU foreign-born female	0.110***	0.147***	0.122***	0.115***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	233997.000	233632.000	230274.000	225582.000

Average marginal effects from ordered logit. Country-clustered standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: employed with non-missing monthly pay decile. NOTE: incquint ~94% missing in PUF — results indicative only. Baseline category: native-born men.* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 21. Top monthly pay quintile among employed respondents, ordered logit regression (EU-LFS PUF, 2010–2013)

Top monthly pay quintile — AME on P(top quintile) (EU-LFS PUF, 2010–2013)

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Human capital controls (age, education)	M3: Labour market controls (occupation, sector)	M4: + Firm size
Native-born female	-0.228***	-0.227***	-0.221***	-0.206***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	-0.005	-0.005	-0.030*	-0.030
	(0.769)	(0.831)	(0.057)	(0.277)
EU foreign-born female	-0.197***	-0.220***	-0.200***	-0.188***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	233997.000	233632.000	230274.000	225582.000

Average marginal effects from ordered logit. Country-clustered standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: employed with non-missing monthly pay decile. NOTE: incquint ~94% missing in PUF — results indicative only. Baseline category: native-born men.* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 22. Overqualification among tertiary-educated employed respondents, linear probability model (EU-LFS PUF, 2011–2013)

Overqualification — LPM (EU-LFS PUF, 2011–2013)

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Age	M3: Sector
Native-born female	0.026*	0.020	0.042***
	(0.054)	(0.135)	(0.001)
EU foreign-born male	0.045	0.048	0.053*
	(0.193)	(0.124)	(0.069)
EU foreign-born female	0.135***	0.133***	0.139***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.200***	0.383***	0.791***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	802959.000	802959.000	794641.000
Within R2	0.002	0.012	0.065

LPM with country and year fixed effects. Country-clustered standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: tertiary-educated employed. NOTE: ~26% missing in PUF (isco1d absent for 2010). Reliable in SUF. M2: age only (education dropped — sample restricted to tertiary). M3: adds sector controls (occupation dropped — defines outcome). Baseline category: native-born men. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 23. Labour force participation by analytical group & years of residence, linear probability model (EU-LFS PUF, 2010–2013)

LFP assimilation — six-group model (EU-LFS PUF, 2010–2013)

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Human capital controls (age, education)
Native-born female	-0.142***	-0.125***

	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU migrant female, 1-10 yrs	-0.019	-0.153***
	(0.383)	(0.000)
EU migrant female, 11+ yrs	-0.144***	-0.135***
	(0.000)	(0.001)
EU migrant male, 1-10 yrs	0.122***	-0.004
	(0.001)	(0.823)
EU migrant male, 11+ yrs	-0.013	-0.007
	(0.821)	(0.628)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.738***	0.746***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	7134015.000	7114742.000
Within R^2	0.024	0.351

LPM with country and year fixed effects. Country-clustered standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: non-students with valid group6. Migrants with missing yearesid_clean excluded. Assimilation test (M2): lincom 4.group6 - 3.group6 for women, lincom 6.group6 - 5.group6 for men. Baseline category: native-born men. M1->M2 loss .3% (below threshold). * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 24. Overqualification among tertiary-educated employed respondents by analytical group & years of residence, linear probability model (EU-LFS PUF, 2011–2013)

Overqualification assimilation — six-group model (EU-LFS PUF, 2011–2013)

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Age controls
Native-born female	0.026*	0.026*
	(0.054)	(0.054)
EU migrant male, 1-10 yrs	0.130**	0.130**

	(0.012)	(0.012)
EU migrant male, 11+ yrs	-0.008	-0.008
	(0.726)	(0.726)
EU migrant female, 1-10 yrs	0.222***	0.222***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU migrant female, 11+ yrs	0.082***	0.082***
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.200***	0.200***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	802282.000	802282.000
Within R^2	0.003	0.003

LPM with country and year fixed effects. Country-clustered standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: tertiary-educated employed, valid group6. Overqualified = hatlev1d==2 & isco_major 4-9. Automatically 2011-2013 (isco1d missing 2010). M2: age controls only (education excluded: tertiary sample; occupation excluded: defines outcome). Assimilation test (M2): lincom 6.group6 - 5.group6 for women, lincom 4.group6 - 3.group6 for men. Baseline category: native-born men. M1->M2 loss 0% (below threshold). * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 25. Labour force participation by country, linear probability model (EU-LFS PUF, 2010–2013)

Cyprus (Southern) — Labour force participation

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Personal controls (age, education)
Native-born female	-0.170***	-0.166***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	0.022***	-0.056***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born female	-0.130***	-0.213***

	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.805***	0.785***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	101048.000	100738.000
Within R2	0.035	0.319

LPM with year fixed effects. Robust standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: non-students. Baseline category: native-born men. M1 N = 101048; M2 N = 100738. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Denmark (North-Western) — Labour force participation

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Personal controls (age, education)
Native-born female	-0.083***	-0.070***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	-0.001	-0.072***
	(0.917)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born female	-0.053***	-0.122***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.751***	0.741***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	209210.000	206859.000
Within R2	0.008	0.337

LPM with year fixed effects. Robust standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: non-students. Baseline category: native-born men. M1 N = 209210; M2 N = 206859. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Spain (Southern) — Labour force participation

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Personal controls (age, education)

Native-born female	-0.145***	-0.129***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	0.048***	-0.048***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born female	-0.068***	-0.156***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.761***	0.823***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	265864.000	265864.000
Within R2	0.025	0.359

LPM with year fixed effects. Robust standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: non-students. Baseline category: native-born men. M1 N = 265864; M2 N = 265864. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

France (North-Western) — Labour force participation

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Personal controls (age, education)
Native-born female	-0.085***	-0.070***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	-0.079***	0.016***
	(0.000)	(0.004)
EU foreign-born female	-0.166***	-0.081***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.741***	0.774***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	331825.000	331825.000

Within R2	0.010	0.407

LPM with year fixed effects. Robust standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: non-students. Baseline category: native-born men. M1 N = 331825; M2 N = 331825. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Greece (Southern) — Labour force participation

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Personal controls (age, education)
Native-born female	-0.198***	-0.185***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	0.166***	0.036***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born female	-0.073***	-0.162***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.739***	0.816***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	427147.000	427135.000
Within R2	0.044	0.392

LPM with year fixed effects. Robust standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: non-students. Baseline category: native-born men. M1 N = 427147; M2 N = 427135. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Ireland (North-Western) — Labour force participation

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Personal controls (age, education)
Native-born female	-0.166***	-0.184***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	0.085***	-0.007***
	(0.000)	(0.001)
EU foreign-born female	-0.100***	-0.196***

	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.770***	0.713***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	540243.000	528690.000
Within R2	0.037	0.270

LPM with year fixed effects. Robust standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: non-students. Baseline category: native-born men. M1 N = 540243; M2 N = 528690. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Italy (Southern) — Labour force participation

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Personal controls (age, education)
Native-born female	-0.213***	-0.203***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	0.165***	0.027***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born female	-0.064***	-0.193***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.690***	0.631***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	1564410.000	1564321.000
Within R2	0.050	0.357

LPM with year fixed effects. Robust standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: non-students. Baseline category: native-born men. M1 N = 1564410; M2 N = 1564321. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Luxembourg (North-Western) — Labour force participation

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Personal controls (age, education)

Native-born female	-0.161***	-0.130***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	0.111***	0.020***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born female	-0.046***	-0.126***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.707***	0.829***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	44871.000	43696.000
Within R2	0.044	0.484

LPM with year fixed effects. Robust standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: non-students. Baseline category: native-born men. M1 N = 44871; M2 N = 43696. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Netherlands (North-Western) — Labour force participation

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Personal controls (age, education)
Native-born female	-0.126***	-0.109***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	-0.004	-0.028**
	(0.795)	(0.011)
EU foreign-born female	-0.106***	-0.150***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.774***	0.839***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	192233.000	191279.000

Within R2	0.019	0.340

LPM with year fixed effects. Robust standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: non-students. Baseline category: native-born men. M1 N = 192233; M2 N = 191279. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Portugal (Southern) — Labour force participation

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Personal controls (age, education)
Native-born female	-0.113***	-0.108***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	0.140***	-0.036***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born female	0.061***	-0.113***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.770***	0.857***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	406057.000	405914.000
Within R2	0.018	0.308

LPM with year fixed effects. Robust standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: non-students. Baseline category: native-born men. M1 N = 406057; M2 N = 405914. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 26. Overqualification among tertiary-educated employed respondents by country, linear probability model (EU-LFS PUF, 2011–2013)

Cyprus (Southern) — Overqualification among tertiary-educated employed

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Age
Native-born female	0.102***	0.068***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	0.181***	0.157***
	(0.000)	(0.000)

EU foreign-born female	0.231***	0.216***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.228***	0.551***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	18436.000	18436.000
Within R2	0.022	0.050

LPM with year fixed effects. Robust standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: tertiary-educated employed (2011-2013). Baseline category: native-born men. M1 N = 18436; M2 N = 18436. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Denmark (North-Western) — Overqualification among tertiary-educated employed

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Age
Native-born female	-0.002	-0.001
	(0.542)	(0.748)
EU foreign-born male	0.025	0.027
	(0.157)	(0.122)
EU foreign-born female	0.049***	0.051***
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.105***	0.303***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	45914.000	45914.000
Within R2	0.001	0.007

LPM with year fixed effects. Robust standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: tertiary-educated employed (2011-2013). Baseline category: native-born men. M1 N = 45914; M2 N = 45914. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Spain (Southern) — Overqualification among tertiary-educated employed

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Age
Native-born female	0.001	-0.010
	(0.926)	(0.116)
EU foreign-born male	0.106***	0.098***
	(0.002)	(0.003)
EU foreign-born female	0.123***	0.111***
	(0.000)	(0.001)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.332***	0.534***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	40763.000	40763.000
Within R2	0.002	0.016

LPM with year fixed effects. Robust standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: tertiary-educated employed (2011-2013). Baseline category: native-born men. M1 N = 40763; M2 N = 40763. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

France (North-Western) — Overqualification among tertiary-educated employed

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Age
Native-born female	0.060***	0.056***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	-0.031*	-0.013
	(0.067)	(0.466)
EU foreign-born female	0.097***	0.109***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.161***	0.365***

	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	50040.000	50040.000
Within R2	0.006	0.029

LPM with year fixed effects. Robust standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: tertiary-educated employed (2011-2013). Baseline category: native-born men. M1 N = 50040; M2 N = 50040. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Greece (Southern) — Overqualification among tertiary-educated employed

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Age
Native-born female	-0.046***	-0.065***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	0.100**	0.113**
	(0.047)	(0.025)
EU foreign-born female	0.343***	0.353***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.251***	0.585***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	37522.000	37522.000
Within R2	0.007	0.039

LPM with year fixed effects. Robust standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: tertiary-educated employed (2011-2013). Baseline category: native-born men. M1 N = 37522; M2 N = 37522. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Ireland (North-Western) — Overqualification among tertiary-educated employed

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Age
Native-born female	0.010***	0.000
	(0.002)	(0.999)

EU foreign-born male	0.077***	0.078***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born female	0.215***	0.205***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.286***	0.540***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	97928.000	97928.000
Within R2	0.015	0.036

LPM with year fixed effects. Robust standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: tertiary-educated employed (2011-2013). Baseline category: native-born men. M1 N = 97928; M2 N = 97928. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Italy (Southern) — Overqualification among tertiary-educated employed

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Age
Native-born female	0.084***	0.072***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	0.137***	0.132***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born female	0.283***	0.262***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.110***	0.267***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	103309.000	103309.000
Within R2	0.021	0.043

LPM with year fixed effects. Robust standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: tertiary-educated employed (2011-2013). Baseline category: native-born men. M1 N = 103309; M2 N = 103309. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Luxembourg (North-Western) — Overqualification among tertiary-educated employed

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Age
Native-born female	0.007*	0.006
	(0.087)	(0.109)
EU foreign-born male	0.007*	0.007*
	(0.084)	(0.089)
EU foreign-born female	0.027***	0.026***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.011***	-0.008*
	(0.000)	(0.071)
Observations	8238.000	8238.000
Within R2	0.005	0.005

LPM with year fixed effects. Robust standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: tertiary-educated employed (2011-2013). Baseline category: native-born men. M1 N = 8238; M2 N = 8238. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Netherlands (North-Western) — Overqualification among tertiary-educated employed

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Age
Native-born female	0.033***	0.028***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	-0.060***	-0.058***

	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born female	0.094***	0.093***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.124***	0.266***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	39792.000	39792.000
Within R2	0.004	0.009

LPM with year fixed effects. Robust standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: tertiary-educated employed (2011-2013). Baseline category: native-born men. M1 N = 39792; M2 N = 39792. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Portugal (Southern) — Overqualification among tertiary-educated employed

	M1: Raw gap	M2: Age
Native-born female	0.037***	0.029***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
EU foreign-born male	0.013	0.002
	(0.615)	(0.934)
EU foreign-born female	0.051***	0.035*
	(0.007)	(0.060)
Constant (native-born male baseline)	0.081***	0.226***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	27438.000	27438.000
Within R2	0.004	0.028

LPM with year fixed effects. Robust standard errors. Probability weights (coeff). Sample: tertiary-educated employed (2011-2013). Baseline category: native-born men. M1 N = 27438; M2 N = 27438. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

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Unpacking the double penalty: The Labour Market Integration of EU Foreign-Born Women in Europe

Maddalena Cappelli

Abstract

This research examines whether EU foreign-born women face a distinct labour market disadvantage in the European Union and which mechanisms explain it. Using anonymised Public Use Files from the EU Labour Force Survey for 22 member states between 2010 and 2013, and an analytical sample of around eight million observations, it compares four groups, native-born men, native-born women, EU foreign-born men, and EU foreign-born women, across labour force participation, unemployment, employment quality, pay, and overqualification, with sequential controls for age, education, occupation, sector, and firm characteristics. The findings show that there is no uniform double penalty; instead, disadvantages are outcome-specific. EU foreign-born women are the only group facing a clear unemployment penalty, the least likely to be self-employed, and the most likely to be overqualified even after controls. Their higher part-time and temporary-work penalties shrink once occupational sorting is considered, while pay disadvantage appears primarily gendered rather than migration-specific. These patterns are interpreted through tied migration, post-migration care burdens, the gendered non-recognition of foreign skills, and segmentation into feminised secondary labour market niches. The study concludes that reducing these disadvantages requires broader universal care provision, better recognition and licensing of foreign qualifications, and stronger regulation of feminised sectors.

Key words

Labour market integration; Migrant women; Intersectionality; Gender penalty; Nativity penalty; European Union