# THE GENDER DIMENSION OF OVEREDUCATION OF MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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### Abstract

In this exploratory piece, I use the OECD Databases on Migration (DIOC) to an formulate some stylized facts about the situation of migrants in the European Union. Specifically, I examine the extent to which male and female migrants work in jobs that match education attainment. To capture the development over time, I compare the situation based on the oldest available data (reference years 2000/01) with the most recent ones (reference years 2015/16). I identify that, compared to native workers, migrants are more likely to be mismatched and both the extent of overeducation and the difference vis-à-vis the native workers has grown in the examined period. Women, while increasingly represented among migrant workers, are more likely to be mismatch. The region of origin of the migrants matters as well.

## Keywords

Migration, DIOC, Skill Mismatch, Women's Work, Migrant Hierarchies

### I. Introduction

The European Union (EU) has become one of the main destinations of global migration flows in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Major factors contributing to these movements were twofold. Firstly, the "Eastern" enlargements of the EU in the noughties led to an increase in internal migration from "new to old" member states in particular following the Great Recession immediately after the end of the decade (Baláž & Moravčíková, 2017; Kahanec et al., 2010; Kahanec & Fabo, 2013). Secondly, the EU has been a major destination of asylum seekers, by the virtue of its stability and relative geographical proximity to unstable regions in Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa (Hatton, 2016, 2017; Léonard & Kaunert, 2019). In consequence, the importance of migrants on the European labor force has increased substantially.

In this study, I focus our attention on the labor outcomes on these migrants. Specifically, I focus my analysis around skill mismatch, which conceptually implies a situation where a worker is employed in a job that does not match her skill level. Skills are notoriously hard to measure, which is why they are typically proxied by the level of education attainment (Fabo & Tijdens, 2014). For this reason, the phenomenon is sometimes also referred to as "overeducation". Nonetheless, there is quite some disagreement amongst labor scholars with regards to how to actually identify an "overskilled" – or for that matter "overeducated" worker and thus how to measure the phenomenon (McGuinness, 2006). In economics, skill mismatch is typically associated with inefficient allocation of human capital, while empirical studies associate it with lower workers satisfaction, mobility and training participation and higher turnover (Verhaest & Omey, 2006).

For this analysis, I am using the Databases on Migration (DIOC). Unlike commonly used data sources, such as the EU Labor Force Survey (LFS) or EU Survey of Incomes and Living Conditions (SILC), DIOC is focused specifically on mapping the migrant worker population in the Organization For Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for member states, which include a majority of EU members<sup>2</sup>. It also utilizes a range of administrative sources, such as national censuses and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Cyprus, Malta, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia are not members. Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia joined OECD during the

population registries, on top of the representative surveys. On the downside, the database only covers a limited range of variables, which limits the depth of the analysis (OECD, 2016). While the limited scope of coverage limits the usability of DIOC for causal analysis, the width of the coverage makes the data suitable for an exploratory study. (Widmaier & Dumont, 2011).

To study the development in time, I am using the oldest and the most recent available DIOC data, covering the reference periods of 2000-2001 and 2015-2016 respectively. I am only including the EU members, which are covered by all analyzed variables, limiting my analysis to sixteen out of twenty-seven EU member countries in total (see Table 1 for covered countries). The covered countries contain about 86 per cent of the total EU population, making the coverage quite comprehensive.

Over the course of examined period, the structure of European economies underwent a transformation due to continuing shift from manufacturing to servicing economy (See Table 1 showing the declining share of blue-collar employment in the examined period). This change had implications for migrant labor demand as well: The traditional Cold War era migration framework was intended to facilitate temporary migration of working aged men capable of satisfying the demand for blue-collar workers in Western European mines and factories. A typical example of such a system was the West German "Gastarbeiter" system (Bhagwati et al., 1984). This system was still partly relevant in the early years of the examination period, although the country of origin of migrants shifted following the end of Cold War from Turkey and the Iberian Peninsula to the post-communist European countries in the East (Mandel, 1990; Rudolph, 1996).

Country		Total employment	Total hours worked			
	2000	2015	2000	2015		
EU 27	35%	28%	38%	30%		
Czechia	44%	40%	44%	40%		
Denmark	25%	19%	29%	22%		
Germany	30%	26%	33%	28%		
Ireland	34%	23%	39%	27%		
Greece	35%	25%	35%	26%		
Spain	35%	21%	38%	23%		
France	24%	20%	28%	22%		
Italy	32%	27%	35%	29%		
Hungary	41%	31%	44%	33%		
Luxembourg	27%	20%	29%	22%		
Netherlands	22%	17%	26%	21%		
Poland	49%	42%	48%	43%		
Portugal	46%	33%	45%	31%		
Slovakia	40%	34%	40%	35%		
Finland	33%	26%	36%	29%		
Sweden	26%	22%	29%	24%		

Table1: Share of employment in industry and agriculture 2000-2015

Data: Eurostat – Table Employment by A\*10 industry breakdowns [NAMA\_10\_A10] Note: The figure represents the share of employment in NACE Rev. 2 activities A-F on total employment. EU 27 represents the total per 27 EU member states as of 2020.

Over the course of the noughties, deindustrialization progressed in the EU and the remaining manufacturing work was increasingly taken over by the machines (Acemoglu & Autor, 2010; Arntz

analyzed period.

et al., 2016; Autor & Dorn, 2013; McGuinness et al., 2023). In response to these changes a new system has emerged to provide labor in the service and caring sector, where replacement of human labor with machines remains difficult (Beblavý et al., 2016; Black & Spitz-Oener, 2010). A typical example of such migration is the "au-pair" live-in nanny, which brough millions of predominantly female workers from Eastern Europe and Asia to North Western European countries (Isaksen, 2010; Sekeráková Búriková, 2023; Sekeráková Búriková & Miller, 2010; van Riemsdijk, 2013). In addition to temporary movements, the ascension of the formerly Communist countries to the EU led to a permanent migration of millions of citizens of these countries to the north and west, seeking better quality of life and economic opportunities (Fabo & Belli, 2017). These migrants were largely balanced with respect to gender<sup>1</sup> (Kahanec & Fabo, 2013). These underlying changes to migration of migration" in the literature (Castles & Miller, 1993; Tittensor & Mansouri, 2017). The trend of equal representation of men and women on the migrant labor force is also visible in the analyzed data.

The Eastern enlargements of the European Union led to a strong migration flows of qualified migrants towards from the "new" to the "old" member states (Kahanec et al., 2013). A vast body of literature posits that these migrants often ended up employed below their skill level or ended up performing less skilled worked compared to their occupation in the home country (Currie, 2007; Favell, 2008; Johnston et al., 2015). In consequence I expect to identify skill mismatch when analyzing the labor market outcomes of migrants in the EU. As gender remains an important predictor of labor market outcomes (Kahanec & Zaiceva, 2009; Webb, 2015), the skill mismatch rates continue to differ per gender.

The final consideration of my analysis is connected to the region of origin of the migrants. Hierarchies between migrants, separating the Western "expats" from other migrants have been well documented in the literature (Ford, 2011; Leschke & Weiss, 2023). These hierarchies are reflected in the data and observable in the varying skill mismatch rate among migrants originating from various parts of the word, with Western migrants holding "adequate" jobs far more often than their non-Western peers.

## II. Labor migrants' inflows in the EU

In this section, I present the size and gender characteristics of migrant workers in the EU. As expected, the intensive migration inflows have led to a major increase of the share of migrants on European workforce. Nonetheless, the pace of the growth was uneven. The choice of the destination countries within the EU has varied greatly, reflecting the legal framework and socio-economic condition of the individual member states.(Guzi et al., 2021, 2023; Palmer & Pytliková, 2015).

In consequence, while the share of migrant workers on the labor market has increased nearly everywhere, there share of migrants on the workforce more than doubled in Ireland, Germany, Spain, Italy or Finland but barely moved in most "Visegrad countries" – Czechia, Poland and Slovakia, with Hungary being a notable exception<sup>2</sup> (Figure 1). In addition, different member states attracted widely different migrants in terms of their country of origin – while many Latin Americans have made their home in Spain, Ireland chiefly welcomed immigrants from the new EU member states (see the Table A1 in the Appendix).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The gender ratio was balanced for single migrants and slightly skewed towards male migrants among those with families, as women were more likely to remain at home with children, while their husbands left to establish a new home for the family abroad. A special case of mobility are the humanitarian movements of refugees that can be very skewed in terms of gender. For example those migrants taking the dangerous sea route to Europe tend to predominantly male, while arrivals from Ukraine which does not allow military aged men to leave the countries are predominantly female (Aksoy & Poutvaara, 2021; Andrews et al., 2023)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> With growing prosperity of these countries and Russian invasions of the neighboring Ukraine, these countries became a major migrant recipients after 2015 (Okólski, 2021).



Figure 1: Share of migrants on labor force in the EU member states

Own calculation, data DIOC. Note: Luxembourg not displayed due to chart scaling

The gender breakdown of migrant stocks show that while in 2000, more than six out of ten migrant workers in the EU were male, by 2015 the share of women has grown to 46%, which makes it identical to the share of women on the native labor force (Figure 3). In terms of education<sup>1</sup>, the gap between native and migrant workers in terms of the share of women has closed across all examined categories of education attainment.



Figure 3: Share of women on migrant and native workforce in the EU per education category

Own calculation, data DIOC.

The region of origin also determines the share of women on migrant workforce (Figure 4). The share of women among Latin American migrants was already nearly equal to men in 2000 and by 2015, female migrants were the majority among migrant workforce from the Latin American region. The share of women among migrants from non-OECD European countries has reached a near gender

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> For the sake of simplicity and comparability I use the *edu\_lfs* variable in DIOC to measure "education attainment". The corresponding ISED categories are as follows - "low" (ISCED 0-2, roughly up to lower secondary education), "medium" (ISCED 3-4, roughly secondary education and "high" (ISCED 5-8, roughly tertiary education),

parity by 2015. Among other regions of origin, the share of women mostly increased, migrants from Oceania and North America being the exception, but remains somewhat short of parity. The share of women among African migrants has increased, but remains under 40%, likely reflecting a large portion of migrants traversing through dangerous irregular routes.



Figure 4: Share of women on migrant workforce per country of origin

Own calculation, data DIOC.

# III. Skill mismatch of migrant workforce

In this section, I discuss the skill mismatch of migrant workers (Figure 5). In general, the incidence of skill mismatch is much greater among migrants than among native workers. Nonetheless, while among native workers, the extent of skill mismatch increased only slightly between 2000 and 2015 and does not differ too much between genders, among migrants the women with medium education are much more likely to be mismatched compared to their male peers. Additionally, the extent of mismatch has grown greatly in the examined period.





Own calculation, data DIOC.

Zooming in on the occupational distribution of highly educated migrant workforce (Table 2) we clearly see a decline in the share of educated migrants working in professional occupations over the examined period. Among men, the share fell from 48% to 42%. Furthermore, there was also a decline in the share of managers from 15% to 10%. Meanwhile, the service and blue-collar occupations have gained in importance – 8% of highly educated male migrants work in services and 14% in skilled blue-collar jobs, compared with 4% and 12% respectively in 2020. The share of skilled male migrants in elementary occupations increased from 4% to 6% Among educated women migrants, the share of professionals fell from 43% to 39%. At the same time, the share of service workers grew from 9% to 15% and 11% of educated female migrant workers worked in elementary occupations, up from 5%. **Table 2: Occupational distribution of highly educated migrant workers in the EU.** 

	Occupation	2000	2015
	Managers	15%	10%
	Professionals	48%	42%
u.	Technicians	17%	15%
Ĕ	Administrative workers	$\begin{array}{c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c $	5%
ant	Service workers	4%	8%
gre	Skilled agriculture workers	1%	1%
ž	Craft and trade workers	7%	8%
	Operators	3%	5%
	Elementary occupations	4%	6%
	Managers	7%	6%
<b>-</b>	Professionals	15%         48%         17%         3%         4%         rs       1%         7%         3%         4%         7%         3%         4%         7%         3%         4%         7%         3%         4%         7%         3%         4%         7%         3%         4%         7%         3%         9%         rs       0%         1%         1%         5%	39%
ner	Technicians	25%	17%
uo/	Administrative workers	8%	10%
rant w	Service workers	9%	15%
	Skilled agriculture workers	0%	0%
Aig	Craft and trade workers	1%	1%
2	Operators	1%	1%
	Elementary occupations	5%	11%

Own calculation, data DIOC.

In addition to gender, the probability of mismatch is also influenced by the region of origin (Table 3). The incidence of skill mismatch among migrants from Western (North America or OECD member European countries) remain visibly lower among migrants from other regions. The Latin American and non-OECD European migrants are most likely to be mismatched.

	<b>Fable 3: Share of mismatched</b>	workers per region	of level of education	and region of origin
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	Ν	Nedium ec		High education						
	Mer			en	Mer	ı	Women			
High school	2000	2015	2000	2015	2000	2015	2000	2015		
Africa	11%	17%	14%	26%	20%	36%	21%	34%		
Asia	14%	18%	21%	26%	21%	35%	30%	43%		
Europe - non	11%	15%	21%	31%	23%	43%	26%	49%		
OECD										
Europe - OECD	8%	11%	14%	19%	18%	27%	19%	31%		
North America	6%	8%	5%	6%	10%	13%	14%	17%		
Oceania	6%	4%	5%	7%	21%	20%	21%	18%		
South America	14%	19%	25%	36%	28%	39%	35%	48%		

Own calculation, data DIOC.

#### **IV.** Conclusion

In the exploratory analysis, I have confirmed the growing importance of migrants for the European labor markets. I have further identified the growing feminization of migration, the extent of which depends on the region of origin, which is likely a proxy for the nature and regularity of migration flows.

I have further identified major skill mismatches. While caution is advised in reading too much into a rather crude measure of mismatch that I was able to distill from the data, the share of mismatched migrants grew substantially from 2000 to 2015 and that this change was gendered, disfavoring women. This seems largely related to migrants taking jobs that natives "would not do" (Guzi et al., 2021) – blue-collar jobs in case of men and elementary occupations in case of women. This implies inefficient allocation of human capital. It might also hinder integration of those migrants who stay long term if they end up working predominantly alongside other migrants.

Thirdly, in line with the literature, there appears to be a difference in labor market outcomes of Western and non-Western migrants, even among the highly educated migrants. This can reflect the lower quality of education – real or perceived – in the non-Western countries (Hardoy & Schøne, 2014). It can also reflect prejudices on the part of the employers, who might favor Western staff in professional workplaces. Again, regardless of the cause, these frictions lead to a decreased efficiency of human capital allocation.

The issue of skill mismatch of migrants is a multi-faceted phenomenon, interacting closely with other dimensions such as gender, national origin. More research attention is needed to further clarify these relationships and to develop the right policy tools to enable the European Union to take advantage of the skills that migrants, and female migrants in particular, bring with them.

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# Appendix

# Table A1: Distribution of the countries of origin per destination countries

	2000					2015								
	Africa	Asia	Europe	Europe - OECD	North America	Oceania	South America	Africa	Asia	Europe	Europe - OECD	North America	Oceania	South America
Czechia	1%	8%	53%	37%	1%	0%	0%	1%	14%	35%	48%	1%	0%	1%
Germany	0%	10%	62%	27%	0%	0%	0%	3%	19%	31%	43%	1%	0%	2%
Denmark	7%	25%	36%	25%	4%	1%	3%	6%	29%	15%	44%	3%	1%	3%
Spain	20%	5%	21%	13%	1%	0%	40%	15%	7%	18%	17%	1%	0%	42%
Finland	6%	11%	54%	23%	3%	1%	1%	7%	19%	26%	45%	2%	0%	2%
France	54%	9%	18%	16%	1%	0%	2%	48%	11%	5%	31%	1%	0%	4%
Greece	4%	10%	71%	9%	3%	2%	1%	4%	18%	53%	19%	3%	2%	1%
Hungary	1%	6%	84%	8%	1%	0%	1%	2%	10%	70%	15%	2%	0%	1%
Ireland	4%	6%	43%	38%	5%	3%	1%	5%	10%	8%	70%	3%	1%	3%
Italy	22%	11%	36%	16%	3%	1%	11%	14%	16%	43%	14%	1%	0%	11%
Luxembourg	4%	2%	48%	44%	1%	0%	1%	5%	3%	7%	83%	1%	0%	1%
Netherlands	9%	16%	43%	6%	0%	0%	26%	16%	18%	7%	38%	2%	1%	18%
Poland	1%	5%	82%	11%	1%	0%	0%	5%	18%	48%	24%	3%	1%	2%
Portugal	60%	2%	15%	10%	1%	0%	11%	40%	3%	10%	27%	2%	0%	17%
Slovakia	0%	1%	55%	43%	0%	0%	0%	1%	6%	23%	70%	1%	0%	1%
Sweden	6%	20%	42%	24%	1%	0%	7%	9%	33%	18%	32%	1%	0%	6%

Own calculation, data DIOC