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Labour Market Integration of
Migrants in the
European Union

La reconnaissance des
qualifications, des diplômes et
des compétences en Europe:
une étape importante vers
l'intégration socioéconomique
des réfugiés

The Integration of Migrants
and Asylum Seekers
into the Labour Market:
the Case of Italy



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Labour Market Integration/ Discrimination in the EU with a Focus on Migrant Women

Various research and reports show the structural exclusion of some migrant groups from the European labour market, in spite of a multitude of integration plans, projects and approaches focused on improving the access of migrants to employment.

by Ojeaku Nwabuzo

Employment can provide significant opportunities to support migrants' inclusion into society and labour market participation appears to be a priority for most Member States - often regarded by the state and other actors as a significant indication of successful integration. Our research and reports on discrimination and employment have, over the years, highlighted a multitude of labour market integration plans, projects and approaches that have been highly effective in improving migrants' access to employment. However, through our recent research into this area and across the majority of EU Member States (see Nwabuzo, Schaefer 2017; ENAR 2018), evidence shows how the labour market can structurally exclude certain migrant groups along racial/ethnic, gender and class lines. The period of review for the report on migration *Racism and discrimination in the context of migration in Europe 2015-2016* (Nwabuzo, Schaefer 2017) followed the rising numbers of migrants entering the EU. We noted a shift - along the continuum - in some governments' rhetoric around immigration and integration. Integration policies, which were being developed in response to the rising numbers of migrants bore a closer resemblance to a "one-way" integration approach in terms of the values that migrants were being asked to adopt and adhere to. The political rhetoric, in some Member States, was firmly against the EU's values of solidarity and in particular the EU Common Basic Principles on Immigrants' Integration. The first principle of which defines integration as a «dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States» (Carrera, Faure Atger 2011).

Structural Discrimination

The Western liberal view of concepts such as "personal responsibility" and "meritocracy" are important to discussions of equality in employment as these concepts suggest that individuals control their fate regardless of their social position, and that individual behaviours and choices determine material outcomes. The neoliberal approach to immigration policies in the EU expects that migrants - some of which will be highly qualified - will support the competitiveness of the economy. Ethnic origin should be irrelevant and upward social mobility through employment possible. The labour market, however, is not a neutral, open playing field with equal access for all, but is organised along a specific set of values and political, cultural and economic structures, where imperialist and racial hierarchies continue to exist. It can be argued that these structural forces impede certain minorities' ability to fully participate in societies and at the same time provide a mechanism to solidify popular conceptions of who can be "integrated" or not. Values that we, as members of a society, are taught to enact are continuously being redefined and reimagined through public policies such as labour market integration plans.

In certain regions in Belgium, newcomers are expected to follow integration courses and can be fined if they don't participate. They must pass certain exams and if they fail, they may face difficulties in finding a job and social housing. The measures, although not discriminatory in themselves, may indirectly impact on some nationalities and groups such as migrant women that have low literacy rates in their own language. Knowledge

Evidence shows how the labour market can structurally exclude certain migrant groups along racial/ethnic, gender and class lines. © Rawpixel

of the local language (or perceived lack thereof) can also be used as an instrument of exclusion and employers' standards can be set unrealistically high. For instance, a Belgian municipality used a written exam as part of their recruitment process "green maintenance" ("groendienst" - the maintenance service for parks, plants and trees) - a procedure which excluded many low-skilled, immigrant workers applying. Legal restrictions on access to the labour market, lack of skills/qualification recognition and discrimination can be significant structural barriers to inclusion that certain approaches to integration fail to acknowledge. Often migrants work in positions that do not reflect their qualifications and experience and in some cases migrants in need of humanitarian protection have been encouraged to accept job opportunities irrespective of whether they meet standards such as the minimum wage. Labour market integration approaches that solely address migrants' employability, where the focus is on rapid "activation" and integration of migrants in the labour market, mask the broader structural barriers to employment. Integration plans should recognise that migrants, in particular refugees, may have lived through traumatic events and find it difficult to build up a new life in an unknown country. Migration status alone may completely exclude certain groups from access to labour market integration plans and services. These restrictions differ across the EU but can include: people without legal residence status, certain asylum seekers, non-EU students, au-pairs, labour migrants with no prospect of permanent employment and their family members.

Racialized Labour Markets

Racialized labour markets are the result of processes where the dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times and in response to shifting needs (Delgado, Stefancic 2017). We see the impact of racialisation in the labour market with differential occupational attainment, labour market participation, and earnings of ethnic and racial minorities. The labour market itself can be described as a structural force that conditions divergent trajectories on ethnic and racial groups (Valdez, Golash-Boza 2018). Member States (Austria, Spain, Italy and Portugal) in 2015/2016, reported that the recession from 2008 and slow economic recovery had a specific impact on the integration of migrants into the labour market (Nwabuzo, Schaefer 2017). In these instances, the labour market is not simply a product of market forces, but mediated by government policies and institutions, where some ethnic groups are privileged over others. Racism and racial discrimination can have an economic dimension within the labour market when there is a desire to keep limited resources and employment opportunities from foreigners. Data available in some Member States reveal that there is differentiated labour market integration performance by nationality. In most Member States, foreign or non-EU citizens have lower rates of employment than EU nationals (see table 1). A closer look at the data available reveals that there are smaller differences in the employment rates for people from the EU15, North America and Latin America and the "native" born population. In certain Member States evidence suggests that foreign-born

Integrazione e discriminazione nel mercato del lavoro UE con un *focus* sulle donne migranti

L'articolo si basa principalmente su dati e analisi forniti dai report 2017 e 2018 dell'ENAR (European Network Against Racism) su razzismo e discriminazione nel mercato del lavoro in Europa. Nel corso degli anni, molti progetti sono stati messi in campo per migliorare l'accesso dei migranti all'occupazione, tuttavia, gli ultimi report hanno mostrato come il mercato del lavoro in Europa possa escludere alcuni gruppi sulla base di discriminazioni razziali/etniche, di genere, di classe.

Alla base si è notato un cambiamento da parte di alcuni governi riguardo all'approccio sull'integrazione, che viene ora intesa a senso unico: i valori dei Paesi ospitanti devono essere condivisi dai migranti. Eppure, i principi di base comuni dell'UE sull'integrazione degli immigrati definiscono l'integrazione come processo di mutuo adeguamento e di incontro tra le parti.

Per esempio, in alcune regioni del Belgio, i nuovi arrivati sono tenuti a seguire corsi di integrazione e possono essere multati se non vi partecipano. Inoltre, devono superare determinati esami e, se falliscono, possono incontrare serie difficoltà nel trovare un lavoro e un alloggio sociale. Le misure – sebbene di per sé non discriminatorie – possono avere un impatto indiretto su alcune nazionalità e gruppi come le donne migranti, che hanno bassi tassi di alfabetizzazione nella loro lingua d'origine. I dati disponibili indicano che una sorta di “gerarchia razziale” nei mercati del lavoro europei postcoloniali persiste. Più in generale, le restrizioni legali all'accesso al mercato del lavoro, il mancato riconoscimento delle qualifiche e la discriminazione possono essere ostacoli significativi all'inclusione, eppure questi aspetti cruciali non sempre sono riconosciuti dai comuni approcci all'integrazione.

La mancanza di dettagli nelle statistiche sull'occupazione rende quasi impossibile giungere a conclusioni statistiche assolute sulla discriminazione razziale. Tuttavia, i dati e le relazioni indicano che i migranti “razzializzati”, provenienti da Paesi extra UE, hanno livelli più bassi di occupazione, lavorano nelle fasce più basse del mercato del lavoro e detengono posizioni che non riflettono le loro capacità e i livelli di qualifica. Le donne migranti, in particolare, hanno un'esperienza specifica di forme strutturali di discriminazione.

Per esempio, in Finlandia, nel 2014, il divario nel tasso di occupazione delle donne nate all'estero rispetto alle donne finlandesi era del 17,4% (fonte: ENAR 2018). A Malta, un'indagine del 2016 su donne richiedenti asilo ha rilevato che l'85,7% delle intervistate era disoccupato e un terzo di loro non occupava un posto di lavoro a causa di responsabilità in famiglia, avendo bambini o persone a carico.

persons from Africa and Asia have lesser prospects of establishing themselves on the labour market than other immigrants. The picture is complex and lower educational attainment and language barriers are a factor in the lower employment rates, however, the data available does indicate that the hierarchy of race in post-colonial European labour markets still remains.

Through the testing of companies, there is clear evidence of discrimination of those with a foreign sounding name; having their applications rejected more than those with traditional European sounding names. The recruitment practices of 40 French companies with more than 1,000 employees were tested between April and July 2016. Job offers were responded to by two candidates with the same professional skills but with their ethnicity identifiable by their first and last names. Each company was tested between 30 and 40 times to ensure reliable results. The analysis showed that, for men and women

Member State	Nationals	Foreign citizens	EU citizens	Non-EU citizens
Austria	75,8%	65,8%	75,2%	55,9%
Belgium	68,5%	58,3%	66,5%	45,2%
Bulgaria	67,2%	45,5%	n.a.	n.a.
Croatia	60,5%	45,1%	n.a.	38,8%
Cyprus	67,2%	71,1%	68,3%	75,1%
Czech Republic	74,8%	77,3%	79,0%	76,0%
Denmark	77,8%	65,1%	77,3%	56,4%
Estonia	77,7%	69,8%	61,6%	70,1%
Finland	73,5%	58%	72,9%	48,1%
France	70,8%	53,3%	67,9%	46,6%
Germany	79,6%	65,8%	76,7%	57,0%
Greece	54,9%	55,4%	56,8%	55,1%
Hungary	68,9%	71,1%	70,9%	71,4%
Ireland	69,5%	65,0%	70,3%	55,3%
Italy	60,3%	62,4%	66,3%	60,7%
Latvia	73,9%	64,3%	78,5%	64,0%
Lithuania	73,4%	68,2%	n.a.	70,8%
Luxembourg	69,2%	72,7%	74,5%	57,4%
Malta	67,9%	65,0%	67,4%	63,2%
Poland	67,8%	66,7%	79,8%	62,3%
Portugal	69,2%	65,6%	72,5%	63,5%
Romania	66,0%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Slovenia	69,1%	70,0%	62,3%	71,3%
Spain	62,5%	57,6%		62,2%
Sweden	82,1%	61,7%	78,8%	50,7%
United Kingdom	77,2%	73,8%	82,0%	63,3%
EU-28	70,6%	63,7%	73,4%	56,7%

TABLE 1:
Employment rates of population aged 20-64 by country of citizenship, 2015. Source: Eurostat 2015.

alike, foreign sounding names were detrimental to candidates, especially when the name is North African sounding. Ethnic minorities are underrepresented in management positions and there are high rates of over-qualification among migrants and ethnic minorities. In Spain, for example, more migrant women hold a degree than Spanish women but they are still overrepresented in low-skilled jobs. Studies show that second generation migrants still struggle to find employment that matches their education attainment compared to their white peers (Lessard-Phillips *et al.* 2014), which implies that discrimination may be a significant factor in their participation in the labour market.

Migrant Women

In our most recent report, *Racism and discrimination in Employment in Europe 2013-2017*, a section was dedicated to women of colour in the labour market. The term “women of colour” refers to women of racial, ethnic and religious minority background, and does not necessarily relate to skin colour and often includes

migrant women. The research and data collected by national researchers and experts across Europe identified that migrant women face discrimination at every stage of the recruitment process and can have lower employment rates. EU Member States provided evidence of distinct disparity between the employment rate of women who were born abroad and those not. A clear example was provided in Finland, where the gap in the employment rate of women who were born abroad measured against Finnish women was 17.4% in 2014 (ENAR 2018).

Migrant women's experiences in the labour market conform to the gendered roles, attributes and behaviour that society deems socially appropriate for women and men. This includes the division of labour, access to and control over resources and decision-making and constraints, opportunities and needs facing women and men. For example, whilst there are disparities in labour market participation based on nationality there are also specific factors that impact on women such as childcare responsibilities. In Malta, a 2016 survey of female asylum seekers found that 85.7% of the surveyed individuals were unemployed and a third of them did not occupy a job due to childcare responsibilities or dependents (*ibid.*). Structural discrimination of migrant women is evident in the segmented labour market. Domestic work is where the intersectionality of race, gender, class and nationality; and the "matrix of oppression" is highly visible. Not only is domestic work traditionally seen as gendered work, but also class and the stereotypes of nationality come into full effect with migration forces creating ever deepening lines of stratification, discrimination and exploitation. In Greece, for example, the Filipino population is estimated at 25,000 and they almost exclusively work in the domestic sector. Their presence in Greece dates back to the 1970s and the profile of the women as "Christians, English speakers, passive and soft spoken" made them more appealing to the wealthy society of the country. They are not protected by any collective agreement employment contract, but work on the basis of individual contracts or even oral agreements and are not covered by labour inspection mechanisms.

There is a strong relationship to subordination and dependency that typifies jobs usually held by migrant women. In some Member States, immigration laws reinforce their dependency as they prevent migrant workers from changing employers. Some workers may not necessarily speak the language of the country of employment, are unaware that they have rights that are being infringed, and may not know where to go for help (ILO 2003). Some may be in an irregular situation which makes them even more vulnerable to violence or ill treatment.

The vulnerability of migrant women to discrimination, exploitation and abuse is also reported to be on the increase in some Member States due to hardened attitudes towards migrants in general and because gender-based attitudes and perceptions are slow in changing. In Ireland in 2017, compensation was awarded to an Irish citizen of Thai origin who was asked racially discriminatory questions during her interview for a sales assistant job, including where she «came from», «how she got an Irish passport» and «how she became Irish» (ENAR 2018). A survey in Poland shows that migrant women encounter discrimination very often. Muslim women in particular felt there had been a deterioration of Poles' attitudes toward Muslim people in the years when there were higher rates of immigration

from Muslim countries and negative anti-migrant/Muslim rhetoric delivered in the public sphere (ENAR 2018).

Conclusion

According to the available labour statistics, those migrants facing the least amount of difficulty gaining employment outside of their country of birth are those born within the EU28 but the picture is complex. The lack of fine-grained detail in employment statistics render it near impossible to come to any absolute statistical conclusions regarding racial discrimination. However, the data and reports indicate that racialised migrants from countries outside of Europe, have lower levels of employment rates, work in the lower echelons of the labour market and hold positions that do not reflect their skills and qualification levels. Migrant women, in particular, have a specific experience of structural forms of discrimination that policy makers need to acknowledge and develop tailored integration plans and solutions in response. The extent of structural discrimination and exclusion of minorities and migrants from the labour market brings into question how diversity is valued in the EU labour market, which operates within neoliberal capitalist modes of production that reproduce, reinforce and recreate conditions for racial discrimination.

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