

OECD countries currently face major demographic changes. The number of elderly people is rising relative to the number of working age people, making population ageing one of the most pressing long-term challenges for European and non-European OECD countries alike. In the meantime, other factors, such as the increasing labour market participation of women and international migration are having an impact on the size and the composition of the labour force.

This **Migration Data Brief** explores how migration has shaped the labour force in European countries during the period 2005-2015, paying a special attention to the contribution of migrant women. It is based on estimates carried out under the joint OECD - European Commission project, "Migration Demography Database: A Monitoring System of the Demographic Impact of Migration and Mobility".

## Migrant women and European labour markets

- At the European level, between 2005 and 2015, recent immigrants represented about 20% of labour force new entries. This percentage is comparable for both men and women.
- During the same period, the share of the labour force with high levels of education increased by 40%. However, the contribution of recent migrants to this growth was only 16 percentage points, equally distributed between men and women.
- Due to their higher level of education, migrant women made a greater contribution to increasing the qualification level of the labour force.
- Trends highlight that the level of education of migrant women in the labour force has increased at faster rates than that of migrant men between 2005 and 2015 in most EU countries; the picture is more varied when foreign-born women are compared to native-born women.
- About 65% of migrant women aged 25-49 are concentrated in just 25 occupations. This proportion is similar for native-born women; however, native-born and migrant men are dispersed in a much larger number of occupations.
- Native-born and foreign-born women in European countries are concentrated in jobs such as cleaning services, sales and personal care assistance.

## What role have migrants played in changes to the EU labour force during the past decade?

In 2015, around 11.4 million citizens aged 20-64 from the EU28 and the EFTA countries resided in an EU member state different from their country of birth, up from 10.8 million in 2014 (European Commission, 2017). This trend has an impact on the dynamics and composition of the labour force. For European countries, the overall growth of the labour force (those employed or unemployed but actively looking for work) between 2005 and 2015 was 4.5%. The overall growth can be decomposed into four demographic groups: young entrants (people who have finished their studies in the last 10 years and have either started looking for a job or started working), recent migrants (foreign-born who have been living in the country for less than 10 years), recent retirees (people who have left the labour force in the last 10 years to retire), and individuals aged 25-54 (considered to be in the “prime age” of working life).

Table 1 shows the contribution of each group by sex to labour force changes in selected EU countries between 2005 and 2015. At the European level, recent immigrants represented about 20% of labour force entries, with variation nearly equally distributed across genders. Recent migrant women contribute to around half or more of labour force growth in Southern European countries (Italy, Portugal and Spain) and less than half in countries like Belgium, Germany and Switzerland.

Since the beginning of the millennium, women have represented around half of the total immigrant population. While the stock of migrant women has been relatively stable, the flows of migrant women have declined after a peak registered in 2009. This trend is mainly due to the different categories of entries that have characterised recent flows. In particular, family migration, in which women are more numerous, has grown at a slower pace than both labour and humanitarian migration – where the share of men is higher (OECD, 2017a).

As highlighted in the literature (Bielby and Bielby, 1992; Cooke, 2008), past trends were characterised by women following or joining their partner in the host country. As a result, foreign-born women generally needed more time than men to successfully enter the labour market. In recent years, however, an increasing number of women have participated in labour migration, resulting in an increase of the share of women among the migrant labour force in European countries. In addition, women have been increasing their share as EU mobile citizens; at 47% in 2015.

**Table 1 Contributions to labour force growth by demographic group and sex, 2005-2015, selected European countries (%)**

	Total labour force growth	Young entrants		Recent immigrants		Recent retirees		Prime age workers	
		Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
AUT	8.9	9.2	8.0	4.0	3.6	-6.9	-5.7	-3.2	-0.1
BEL	7.5	9.6	9.0	4.3	3.3	-7.5	-5.1	-4.5	-1.7
CHE	15.6	8.8	8.4	8.7	6.3	-5.8	-5.9	-4.5	-0.4
DEU	4.7	10.6	9.3	2.4	1.7	-7.7	-6.5	-4.4	-0.8
DNK	1.4	7.8	7.1	3.2	2.8	-7.1	-7.4	-3.4	-1.5
ESP	9.8	6.7	6.3	2.8	3.4	-8.5	-5.4	-0.7	5.1
FRA	4.9	9.3	9.0	1.6	1.2	-8.2	-7.6	-1.2	0.6
GBR	10.0	10.1	9.3	4.8	4.0	-6.3	-5.9	-4.2	-1.8
GRC	-0.8	7.7	7.8	1.1	0.9	-8.7	-5.7	-4.4	0.5
IRL	7.4	8.3	8.1	6.9	5.6	-5.6	-4.1	-8.0	-3.7
ITA	4.2	6.7	5.6	2.5	2.4	-7.3	-4.9	-1.5	0.7
LUX	37.1	8.6	8.2	21.2	16.8	-8.3	-5.9	-4.6	1.1
PRT	-6.2	6.9	7.4	0.6	0.8	-5.7	-6.0	-7.5	-2.7
SWE	10.8	10.6	9.8	4.5	3.7	-8.0	-8.5	-1.6	0.2
<b>EU-27</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>8.8</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>-6.8</b>	<b>-5.8</b>	<b>-3.2</b>	<b>-0.6</b>

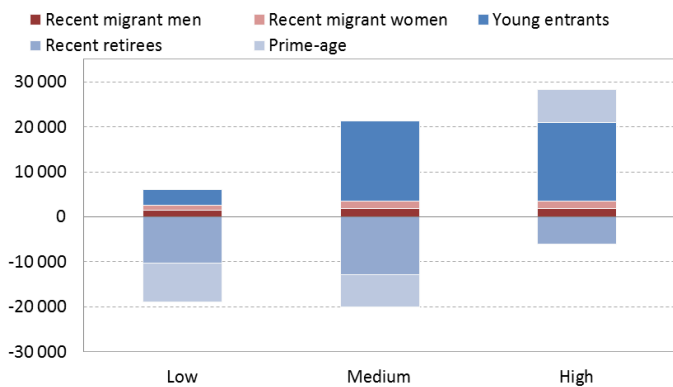
Source: European Labour force Survey.

Note: The total for Europe includes EU-27 countries except Croatia and Malta for which data was not available. The total labour force growth is the sum of the eight components: young entrants (men and women), recent immigrants (men and women), prime-age workers (men and women) and recent retirees (men and women).

Migrant women are also better educated than in the past. A number of factors contribute to this trend: the education level of women in developing countries has increased; more selective policies have led to more qualified migration; highly educated women are more likely to emigrate than highly educated men (Dumont, Martin and Spielvogel, 2007; OECD, 2017b).

Between 2005 and 2015, at the European level, the highly educated labour force increased by 40%. However, the contribution of recent migrants to this growth was only 16 percentage points, equally distributed between men and women. The proportion of men is slightly higher than that of women in both low and medium education levels (57% and 55% respectively). Due to their higher level of education, migrant women tend to make a greater contribution to increasing the qualification level of the labour force. Overall however, recent migrants, even if fundamental in increasing or maintaining the size of the labour force, have a limited impact on improving the workforce's qualification level.

**Figure 1 Contribution of the different demographic groups of labour force growth by education level in Europe, 2005-2015 (thousands)**



Source: European Labour Force Survey.

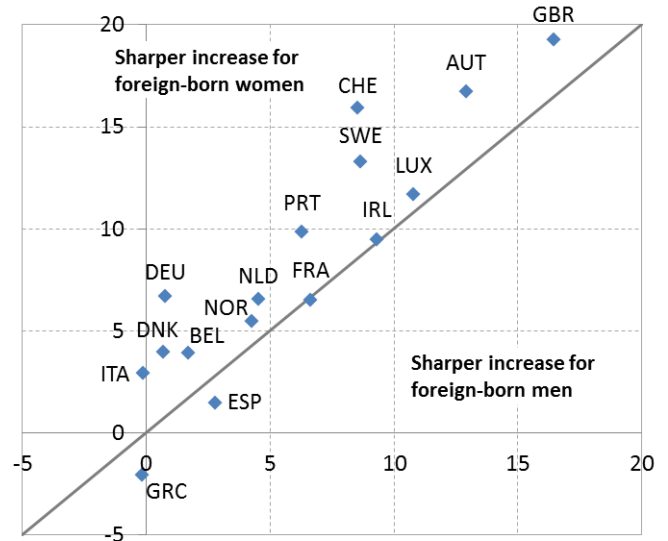
### Foreign-born women are better educated than men but still have lower participation rates

Over the years, trends also highlight that the level of education of migrant women in the labour force has increased faster than that of migrant men between 2005 and 2015 in all countries except Spain and Greece (Figure 2, panel a). The picture is more mixed when foreign-born women are compared to native-born women (panel b).

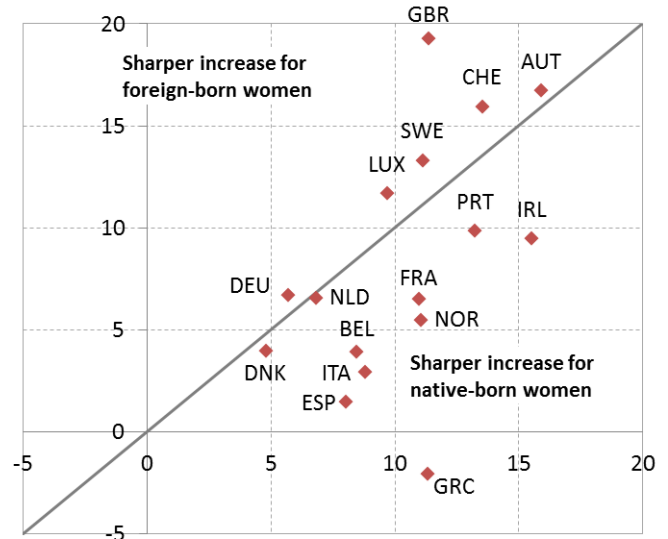
**Figure 2 Changes over time in the share of highly educated labour force among different groups in selected European countries, 2005-2015**

Population 15-64, values in percentage points

#### a. Comparison between foreign-born men and foreign-born women



#### b. Comparison between foreign-born women and native-born women



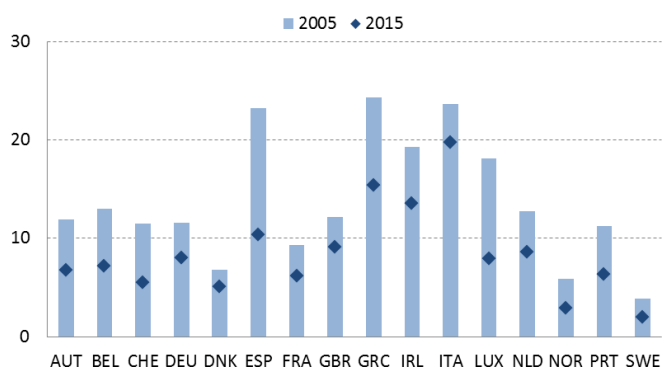
Source: European Labour Force Survey.

Yet, even if they are more educated than in the past, migrant women still have lower participation rates than men in all European countries. However, as shown in Figure 3, the gender participation gap has decreased in the last decade for both native-born and foreign-born people. The reduction of the gender gap was faster for the native-born than for migrant women in all countries, except Italy and Denmark.

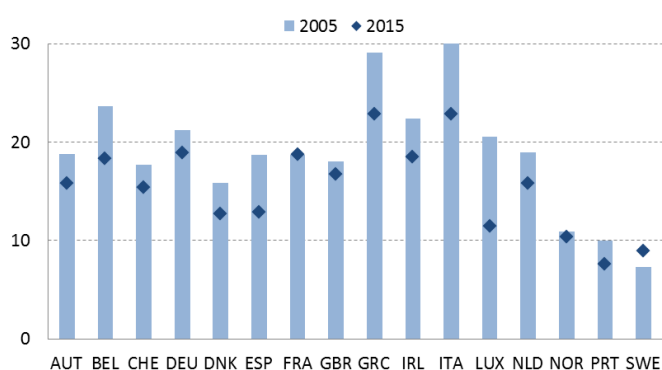
**Figure 3 Gap in participation rates among different groups, 2005-2015: Foreign-born women catch up**

Population 15-64, values in percentage points

**a. Declining gap between native-born men and native-born women**



**b. Declining gap between foreign-born men and foreign-born women**



Source: European Labour Force Survey.

Despite the decreased gap between men and women, labour market conditions of women are less favourable than those of men. In particular, women tend to earn less, work part-time more often and are less likely to reach management positions (OECD, 2017b).

Differences in relation to employment exist not only between men and women, but also between foreign-born and native-born women. This is for instance the case in terms of occupations, where migrant women and their native-born counterparts are more or less represented in different segments of the labour market.

More detailed analysis (Meghnagi and Spielvogel, 2018a) comparing native-born women aged 25-34 with foreign-born women aged 25-34 (in the country for five years or less), native-born women aged 30-39 with foreign-born women aged 30-39 (in the country for 6 to 10 years), and native-born women aged 35-49 and foreign-born women aged 35-49 (in the country for 11 years or more) reveals that, on average, both native-born and foreign-born women in European countries<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The analysis is conducted using data from the European Labour Force Survey for 2015 for 16 countries for which the sample was large enough: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy,

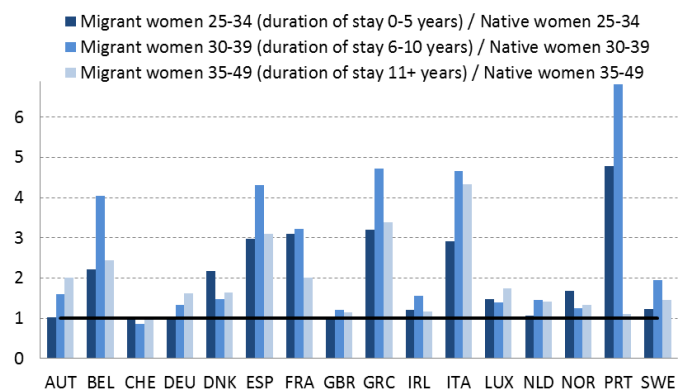
are concentrated in a relatively small number of occupations. These include *inter alia* cleaners, salespersons and personal care workers. About 65% of the overall female labour force aged 25-49 is employed in just 25 occupations, whereas native-born men are dispersed in 41 occupations and foreign-born men in 33 occupations. These results illustrate the difficulties that migrant women experience when entering the labour market which is reflected not only in terms of labour market participation rates but also as a higher segregation in few occupations.

**Does duration of stay in the host country affect the type of occupations held by migrant women?**

Migrant women tend to be concentrated in a very limited number of occupations after arrival in the host country. Concentration tends to diminish as migrant women establish in their host countries. However, in all countries migrant women tend to be more concentrated in fewer occupations than native-born women. Figure 4 gives a simple index that measures how much more migrant women tend to concentrate on fewer occupations, relative to native-born women (normalised to 1).

**Figure 4 Relative concentration of occupations for migrant women vs native-born women by age and duration of stay, 2015**

Ratio between concentration index of foreign-born and native-born women



Source: European Labour Force Survey.

Note: In this chart, the Herfindahl concentration index is used to explore to what extent different groups of women (foreign-born with different durations of stay and native-born) are concentrated in a small number of occupations.<sup>2</sup>

However, one should be careful when interpreting these findings as they do not control for the business

Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The total is calculated for the EU-27.

<sup>2</sup> The index is calculated as the sum of the squares of the shares of employment by occupation and ranges from 0 (if employment is distributed across many occupations) to 1 (if employment is concentrated in only one occupation). The chart shows the ratio of the concentration index of foreign-born women to that of native-born ones. A ratio greater than 1 indicates that the concentration index of foreign-born women is higher than that of native-born women.

cycle, and can therefore be influenced by changes in the labour market resulting from the 2008 crisis.

### **In which occupations are foreign-born women under- and over-represented?**

Women in the labour force, regardless of their country of birth, share common characteristics and are overrepresented in similar occupations. Looking at occupations with high shares of female employment, patterns can be observed when comparing different cohorts of native-born and foreign-born and their distribution across countries.

In the health sector, foreign-born women tend to be overrepresented in comparison to their native counterparts among doctors (ISCO code 221). On the contrary, they tend to be underrepresented in occupations such as nurses and nursing and midwifery associate professionals (ISCO codes 222 and 322). This finding suggests that the new generation of highly qualified foreign-born women play a significant role in the higher skilled occupations in the health sector.

In occupations related to education, migrant women are underrepresented in nearly all countries. This is particularly true for teachers in primary and secondary education (ISCO codes 233 and 234). Luxembourg, Sweden and Switzerland are however noticeable exceptions.

In finance, administration, and marketing (ISCO codes 241, 242, 243) the picture is more mixed. In most countries, these occupations are more common among the younger generation of migrant women, as a consequence of their higher education levels compared to older cohorts. When analysing the corresponding group at a lower skills level, business and administration associate professionals (ISCO codes 331, 332, 334), migrant women of all ages tend to be underrepresented.

In legal, cultural, and social occupations (ISCO codes 261, 263), foreign-born women of all ages tend to be underrepresented compared with their native-born counterparts. This is not surprising as these jobs require language skills as well as the country-specific knowledge that is not easily transferred and learnt; therefore creating a potential barrier for immigrants.

Clerical occupations (ISCO category 4 as a whole) represent 16% of total employment for native-born women aged 25-49 and only 9% for foreign-born women of the same age. When looking at specific occupations in this group, migrant women are underrepresented in nearly all of them.

Migrant women play a significant role in occupations related to personal services (ISCO code 51). Foreign-born women of all ages working as cooks (ISCO code 512) outnumber their native-born counterparts. In addition, overrepresentation is also strong in occupations such as restaurant waiters. The role of foreign-born women is less pronounced in occupations such as hairdressers and beauticians (ISCO code 514), where they are still underrepresented in a number of countries, even if the gap seems to diminish with higher age and duration of stay.

In the sales sector (ISCO code 52), migrant women are underrepresented in all countries in Southern Europe (Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal) as well as in Belgium and Germany; the gap between native and foreign-born women is smaller when looking at the foreign-born that have been in the country for more than 10 years.

Foreign-born women working as personal care workers (ISCO code 53) are very often overrepresented, especially as personal care workers in the health sector (ISCO code 532), even if the gap seems to diminish with higher age and duration of stay.

Elementary occupations represent the main source of employment for immigrants, both men and women, in most countries. For domestic, hotel and office helpers and cleaners (ISCO code 911), the gap between foreign-born and native-born women decreases with age and duration of stay. Even if less evident, the same is true for women who work as food preparation assistants (ISCO code 941). Indeed, young foreign-born women may start in those jobs as they arrive in the country without appropriate language skills, but then switch to other types of occupations as they establish.

### **Are foreign-born women more likely to enter growing or declining occupations?**

In the past decades, EU countries have been characterised by significant changes in terms of the occupational composition of the labour market. Most countries have seen a progressive polarisation of the labour force, with medium skilled jobs stagnating while highly and low skilled jobs growing at a faster pace. This also corresponds to a greater increase of both high and low paid occupations.

Recent OECD work shows that more than half of recent immigrants, both men and women, have entered fast growing occupations and their share of employment in declining occupations is similar to new entrants. However, when looking at occupations in more detail, recent migrants are underrepresented in seven out of thirteen highly skilled occupations and tend to be

overrepresented in a number of low-skilled occupations, indicating that efforts should be made to further enhance their labour market integration especially for non-EU migrants.

When looking at female employment, most occupations where migrant women are overrepresented are also growing at the European level. This is true at different skill levels: for doctors among highly skilled occupations, for cooks and waiters among medium-skilled occupations, and for transport and storage labourers, as well as for food preparation assistants, among low-skilled occupations.

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## Useful links

[www.oecd.org/migration](http://www.oecd.org/migration)

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