

MOTHER KNOWS BEST: ANALYSING THE EXCLUSION OF NON-EU FEMALE MIGRANTS IN EU LABOUR MARKET

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“The second half of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st has brought significant change to the power dynamics of sex and gender. While the gender labour participation and wage gap has shrunk significantly, women still dominate unpaid work leading an unfair burden with significant economic consequences for the way in which women make labour allocation decisions. Ella Hensey investigates this issue with particular focus on migrant women in the European Union. Hensey shows how cultural expectations lead migrant women to remain in low-paying, stagnant jobs with significant consequences for the women themselves as well as for the labour market as a whole.”

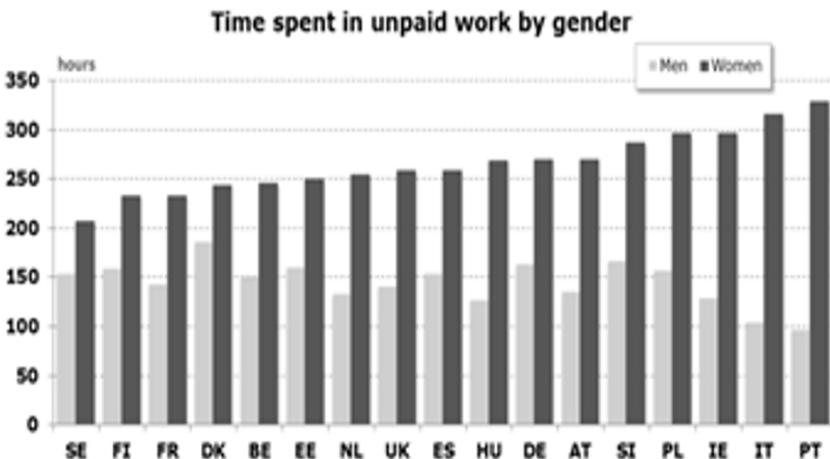
Introduction

Unpaid care work, most often undertaken by women, is crucial to the efficient functioning of the economy. Although employment rates for women are increasing across the European Union, there is still a clear gender gap when it comes to female labour force participation in the EU. This essay will consider the burden of unpaid labour and its implications to female labour market integration with specific emphasis on non-EU migrant women. Due to the concept of complementarity, migration is useful in pushing the native population into ‘higher-quality’ management jobs while immigrants can fill ‘lower-quality’ jobs (Baldwin & Wyplosz, 2020). Of course, the quality of a job is subjective; however, for the sake of this paper, we will consider low quality jobs as offering little social protection and employment rights. Through analysis of different patterns of labour market integration across the EU, we will discuss the economic consequences of the exclusion of migrant women from the labour market. In addition, the lack of EU level acknowledgement and policy recommendations to Member States regarding female migrant labour market integration will be discussed.

Burden of Unpaid Labour in the EU

Unpaid care work creates serious implications for women's ability to participate in the labour market and the quality of work they can acquire (Ferrant, et al., 2014). Despite progress in women's educational attainment across the world, their labour market participation rates are still only 54% compared to 81% for men (Cantillon & Teasdale, 2021). Figure 1 depicts the unequal distribution between men and women regarding time spent on unpaid work in the EU. This distribution invokes a 'motherhood penalty' and 'fatherhood premium' in which the more children a family have will lower the number of hours a woman tends to work while having little effect on men (Cantillon & Teasdale, 2021).

Figure 1



Source: European Commission (2016)

Due to the burden of unpaid labour, women often face barriers in increasing their education or skills that make them desirable to employers, pushing women into either not participating in the labour market at all or engaging in low-quality part time work in the informal sector. Social norms and cultural perceptions regarding gender in the EU results in women spending 13 more hours than men every week on unpaid care and housework labour (Cantillon & Teasdale, 2021). Unpaid care work limits time available for women to engage in the labour market and occupy high-quality jobs. The burden of unpaid labour and social norms prohibit women from translating additional skill into increased labour force participation due to lower returns to education (Ferrant, et al., 2014). Stereotypes regarding a women's role in a heterosexual relationship still strongly

persist in the EU, with 44% of Europeans believing the main role of a woman is to take care of her home and children while 43% believe the most important role of a man is to work and earn money (European Commission, 2020). Women do not exist in an economic environment of unconstrained choice, being only bound by budget constraints; due to social norms regarding gender roles, women face additional barriers in furthering their education and skills.

There are four main patterns of labour market integration across the EU (Anxo, et al., 2006). The first—the ‘universal breadwinner’ model—is visible in Nordic countries such as Sweden and Denmark. These countries can be seen to have the most equal distribution of unpaid labour in figure 1. This pattern involves marriage and children having a positive impact on women’s employment rates (Anxo, et al., 2006). The second is the ‘modified breadwinner’ model. Visible in France, motherhood is still associated with the withdrawal from the labour market for some women although the majority continue to work full-time (Anxo, et al., 2006). The third is the ‘exit or full-time’ model visible in Mediterranean countries. This the most traditional model and houses the lowest female employment rates and a clear negative impact of family formation on female labour market integration (Anxo, et al., 2006). Finally, a model of ‘maternal part-time’ work is visible in Dutch speaking countries, Germany, and the UK. While the differences in the quality of part time work differ between countries, part-time work is considered the norm for mothers (Anxo, et al., 2006). Understanding the vast differences across EU nations regarding female labour market integration is crucial to understanding how migrant women are particularly vulnerable to the labour market disadvantages faced by women.

Adverse Effects for Migrant Women

The discrepancies among EU countries in terms of gender norms and patterns of labour market integration disproportionately impact migrant women and poses the question of whether full European labour market integration can be achieved while these divergences persist. Migrant women must find their way in the EU labour market while enduring the intersection of both female and migrant discrimination. The gender gap within the EU is even higher among migrants. This is due to multiple factors. First, labour force participation in general is lower among migrant populations compared to the native-born population (Barslund, et al., 2017). Second, gender gaps in labour force participation rooted in cultural and societal norms carry over from the migrant’s home country. For example, gender norms regarding child and domestic care create barriers to gaining additional education and skills (Barslund, et al., 2017).

In theory, increasing a woman’s education and skills and decreasing fertility rates will bolster female labour force participation (Ferrant, et al., 2014). However, this assu-

mption fails to acknowledge that there are cultural norms and beliefs that can limit a woman's ability to decrease her fertility rates. In wealthier EU countries, care work is often outsourced and passed onto other women, notably migrant women (Cantillon & Teasdale, 2021). In fact, Denmark is one of the only countries where parenthood is associated with a minor increase in employment for women due to their 'universal breadwinner' model (Sikiric, 2021). What the model fails to acknowledge, however, is that childcare is outsourced-often to migrant women. The pattern clearly dismisses the presence of migrant women and how children impact their labour market integration. Outsourcing childcare creates a 'care drain' in which migrant women leave their own unpaid care responsibilities in the hands of other women, often their daughters, to tend to the care work of wealthy families (Cantillon & Teasdale, 2021). This creates a cycle in which migrant women are stuck in jobs with little social protection and employment rights that lack opportunities for upward mobility (Cantillon & Teasdale, 2021).

Economic and Social Implications of Non-EU Migrant Women Exclusion

There are serious economic implications for this barrier to entry for migrant women into the labour market. According to the European Commission, the gender employment gap costs the EU an economic loss of €370 billion per year (European Commission, 2022). The persisting gender gap in employment wastes valuable human capital and creative capacity. In Austria, where 8.44% of the working age population consists of non-EU nationals, barriers to entry for migrants-particularly women-causes inefficiencies in the labour market (Galgoczi, 2020). The capacity for migrants to integrate into the labour market is of course affected by individual barriers such as language skills or lower education (Galgoczi, 2020); however, in the case of migrant women they are further prohibited from integration due to the burden of unpaid care work. This situation begs for the existence of programs and policies in EU Member States that help integrate migrant women into the labour force by providing language and skills courses along with childcare. From an economic point of view, a more skilled and educated work force will increase output and thus boost growth within the economy (Baldwin & Wyplosz, 2020). However, the inequality between labour market participation of migrant men and women must also be considered. Migrant men are far more likely to participate in the labour market. Shrinking this gap would provide a larger and more productive labour force (Barslund, et al., 2017). EU member states must consider their country's personal pattern of labour market integration and design policies and programs to help integrate migrant women.

Migrant women are often financially dependent on their husbands, making it difficult to migrate or find work on their own (Sikiric, 2021). In addition, migrant women are most likely to enter the EU under a dependent status-of either wife or mother-in

hopes of improving their chances of gaining legal entry (Kofman & Sales, 1998). This dependent status prohibits migrant women from pursuing higher quality jobs and pushes migrant women into the informal sector. This financial dependency and labour market exclusion can also have social implications. There appears to be a positive correlation between labour market integration and social integration (Barslund, et al., 2017). Non-EU migrant women may experience marginalization in their host country and lack the ability to integrate socially (Barslund, et al., 2017).

Looking Forward: Change in Approach Needed Within EU Institutions

There are currently no EU level policies that specifically promote integration of non-EU migrant women into the labour market. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) puts forth recommendations to the Commission and Parliament regarding inclusion of migrant women into the labour market and the costs of non-integration to the European economic environment (Trantina & Moreno Díaz, 2018). In their “Opinion on Inclusion of Migrant Women in the Labour Market” adopted in 2015, the EESC calls on European institutions to utilise the European Semester to create country-specific recommendations that will increase female migrant labour integration according to the specific circumstances of each country (Ouin, 2015). This recommendation considers the different patterns of labour market integration seen in the EU, as discussed earlier in the paper, so each country can increase labour market integration given their current model. These measures may include language courses, support services and access to childcare. The EESC acknowledges the economic advantages of integrating migrant women into the labour market and how their presence may help the EU combat challenges such as its ageing population and falling birthrate (Ouin, 2015). These suggestions from the EESC are invaluable and should be internalized by EU level institutions as a crucial step toward overall gender equality and labour market integration.

While the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 does indicate a significant in the push from the Commission towards gender equality across the EU, there are no goals specific to the integration of migrant women into the labour market. The strategy acknowledges adversity faced by migrant women a; particularly, that only 55.3% of women born outside the EU are in employment and that 80% of care is provided by informal care - notably from migrants (European Commission, 2020). However, the urgency and importance of integrating migrant women into the labour force is not appropriately addressed. Elements that are specific to migrant women need to be considered in the EU Gender Equality Strategy, such as the burden of unpaid care work that has been highlighted throughout this paper.

Conclusion

Although often unrecognized, the EU economy would not be able to function without women working in unpaid domestic roles. As educational attainment and labour market opportunities increase in the EU among women, it is important to look at who is taking on these domestic roles. Migrant women, due to financial dependency on their husbands, cultural norms in their own country, and the already visible discrepancies in labour market integration in the EU are often left with domestic care roles as their only option for work. Migrant women are forgotten when it comes to labour market integration and struggle to fully integrate into society and the work force. The burden of unpaid care work particularly affects migrant women and makes their integration into the EU labour market an even more arduous task than it would be already given their gender. This has serious economic and social implications causing the EU significant losses in unrealized growth every year. As there is no current EU level policy regarding immigration and labour market integration, this essay supports a more complete internalization and adoption of the recommendations outlined by the EESC and a larger inclusion of the specific needs of migrant women in the EU Gender Equality Strategy.

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