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# Migrant women in the EU labour force

## Summary of findings

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Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunity (DG EMPLOY)

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# Preface

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This research was commissioned by the European Commission to improve understanding of the labour market outcomes of migrant women in the EU, and of the policies that affect these outcomes. The present document is a summary of the main findings of the study, also presented in full in a report.

The findings of this study are relevant for policy makers and researchers with an interest in migration, gender equality and employment outcomes, and to NGOs and others working to facilitate labour market integration of migrants and women.

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## Executive summary

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Given the demands of the Lisbon Strategy for economic growth, it is important to note that Europe is experiencing high levels of labour demand across a wide range of sectors in the economy. According to research conducted for the European Commission, many EU Member States are experiencing serious skill shortages, particularly of qualified IT workers, healthcare professionals, engineers, and education and social service personnel. These shortages not only hamper productivity and growth in the EU; they can also undermine national and regional targets in the provision of health, education and social services. Demand for unskilled labour is also high; according to European Commission figures, there are around three million unfilled jobs across Europe.

Additionally, the Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men calls for progress in areas such as the reconciliation of work, private and family life, and the elimination of gender stereotypes in society. The roadmap also underlines the need to combat the multiple discrimination faced by migrant women. As the research in this report highlights, these substantive areas of gender equality require facilitation of all women's participation in the workforce through the provision of a range of support services and facilities.

In this broader context, sustained and well-managed immigration will be required to meet the needs of the EU labour market, and ensure social cohesion, inclusion and equity across Europe. However, in order to help address these contemporary challenges, migrant women and men must be able to participate in their receiving countries' labour forces.

The case for studying the role and situation of migrant workers, both women and men, is thus compelling, and this has become an area of increasing research interest. In addition, there are more specific reasons to focus on the particular situation of *women* migrants in the labour market. First, there is a relative dearth of informative research on the issue – studies have traditionally focused on the experiences of migrant men in their receiving economies. Second, women make an increasingly significant economic contribution – including women migrants - to families and communities through paid work (they have always done so through unpaid work). And third, in order to address inequalities between women and men in line with gender equality and social justice agendas we need information about their current situation.

Against the backdrop of these challenges and gaps in information, this study presents an overview of the situation of women migrants in the EU labour market; indicates key features of women migrants' participation in the EU labour force revealed by this analysis; raises issues and challenges related to women migrants' integration to work in Europe; and investigates lessons from some existing programmes and policies with the potential to address the integration of women migrants into labour markets. Through the present analysis, and assessment of selected policies and programmes, this study highlights a need to better integrate the gender dimension into relevant immigration policies, and the migration dimension into gender policies.

The objectives of this study are to better understand the labour market outcomes of migrant women in the EU, and the policies and programs that potentially affect these outcomes. Migrants are defined in this report as having a foreign country of birth. They include both foreign nationals and naturalised citizens. The study's focus is on migrant women born outside the EU ("third-country migrants"). For additional analytical insights, migrant women from third countries are compared with migrant women born in other EU countries, and with native-born women and third-country migrant men. Third-country migrants constitute the large majority of all female migrants (third-country plus those with EU countries of birth) in the labour forces of all countries except Luxembourg and Belgium in our study.

The empirical results of this report are based primarily on analysis of the anonymised EU Labour Force Survey (LFS) dataset, for the year 2005. The results of our LFS analyses are initially from the 20 EU countries in 2005 for which third-country migrant women can be identified, and subsequently from the 14 EU countries whose 'foreign-born' women are primarily from movement between countries and not the reconstitution of political boundaries. Countries omitted due to unavailability of variables or adequate-sized samples to identify third-country migrants are Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy and Malta. Countries omitted due to reconstitution of political boundaries are the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), Poland and Slovakia. A major advantage of the year 2005 for our study is that the EU LFS in that year included an *ad hoc* module on "Reconciliation between Work and Family Life". Because we find that migrant women are much less likely than are native-born women to combine employment with having young children, this module offers especially useful insights into a gendered analysis of migrant women's labour-market challenges and outcomes.

## 1.1 Determinants of migrant women's labour force participation

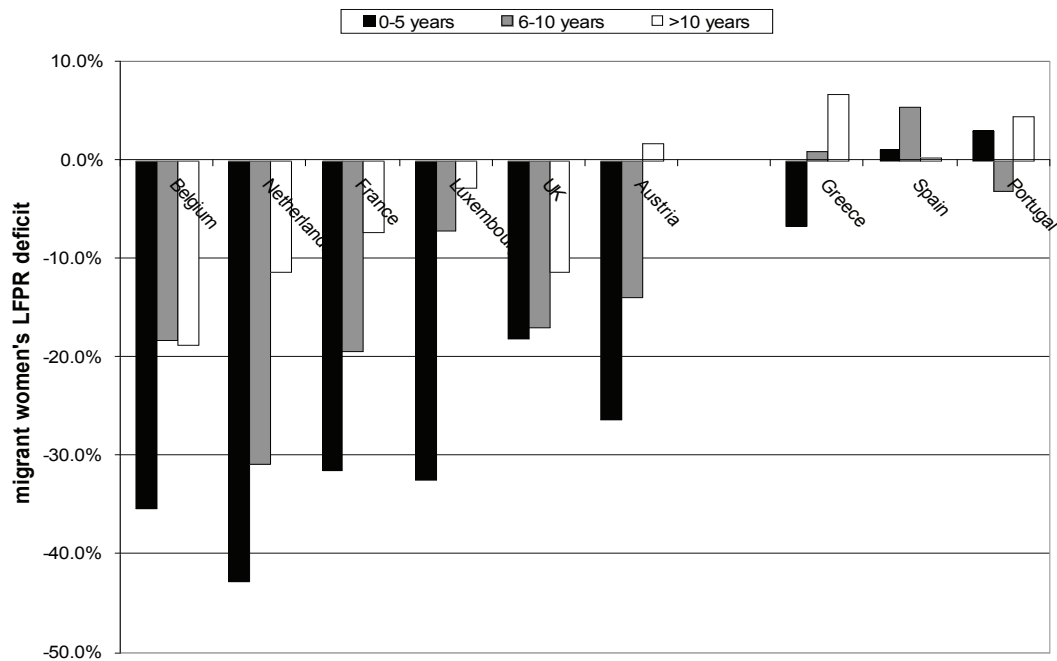
Four country groupings emerge from comparisons of the labour force participation rates of third-country migrant women with native-born women in the same country. In the 'old' migrant-receiving countries (Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, Austria), the labour force participation rates of third-country migrant women are substantially lower than those of native-born women. In the 'new' migrant-receiving countries of Southern Europe (Greece, Spain and Portugal), the labour force participation rates of third-country migrant women are higher than those of native-born women. The 'Nordic' countries of Denmark and Sweden vary in how recent have been their major migration flows, but both follow much more closely the labour force participation patterns of the 'old' migrant-receiving countries than of the 'new' migrant-receiving countries. Finally, in the 'accession' countries (Cyprus, Czech Republic and Hungary), a very heterogeneous pattern of labour force participation is found.

Migrant women in the 'new' migrant-receiving countries are on average younger, and this partly explains their higher labour-force participation than native-born women. Additionally accounting for differences in marital and family status and education removes almost all of the difference in the labour-force participation rates between migrant and native-born women in the 'new' migrant-receiving countries. Accounting for differences in socio-demographic characteristics, however, changes little the labour-force participation deficits of third-country migrant relative to native-born women in the 'old' migrant-receiving and Nordic countries.

Two major determinants of migrant women's lower labour-force participation rates are age of youngest child, and how recently the migrant woman arrived in the receiving country. Having a child under 5 years old reduces the labour-force participation of migrant women much more than it does for native-born women. This is especially significant for explaining migrant-native

differences in labour-force participation because third-country migrant women are much more likely to have young children in their households than are native-born women.

Figure S1: Migrant women's labour force participation rate (LFPR) deficits relative to native-born women, by years of residence, 2005



Source: EU LFS 2005

Notes: 'LFPR deficit' is measured by the difference between migrant women's labour force participation rate and native-born women's labour force participation rate. Results control for differences between migrant and native-born women's ages, marital statuses, ages of youngest child and education.

In the 'old' migrant-receiving countries, but not in the 'new' migrant-receiving countries, very low labour-force participation rates are seen among third-country migrants during their initial years in the receiving country, when compared to native-born women with otherwise similar socio-demographic characteristics (see Figure 1). Consistent with adaptation of migrant women to the receiving-country labour market, these initial labour-force participation deficits are much reduced, and in some cases (Austria and Luxembourg) eliminated, with additional time lived in the receiving country. Because the initial labour-force participation deficits are so large in the old migrant-receiving countries, however, even after six to ten years in the country the labour-force participation rates of third-country migrant women in the Netherlands, Belgium, France and the U.K. are still all at least 15 percentage points lower than those of native-born women with comparable socio-demographic characteristics.

## 1.2 Migrant women's double disadvantage in the labour market

Unemployment, involuntary part-time employment and temporary-contract employment are used to evaluate the labour-market 'double disadvantage' of being both a migrant and a woman. Unemployment of third-country migrant women is much greater relative to native-born women in the 'old' migrant-receiving countries than it is in the 'new' migrant-receiving countries of Southern Europe. Across the EU, the unemployment rates of third-country migrant women are 2.7 percentage points higher than those of third-country migrant men (14% and 11.3% respectively).

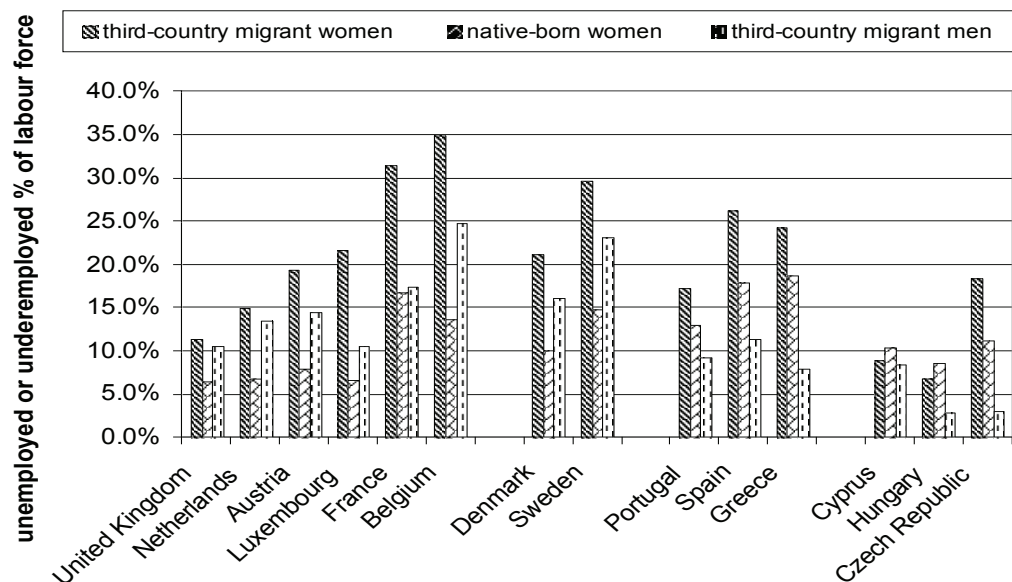


Of the two dimensions of disadvantage (gender and migrant), the migrant unemployment differential (for women) is generally larger than the gender unemployment differential (for migrants). Comparing EU-born migrant women with those born in third countries reveals a third axis of disadvantage: third-country migrant women's unemployment rates are 5.6 percentage points higher than those of EU migrants (14% and 8.4 respectively). This suggests that factors other than migration itself are key to understanding the labour-market disadvantages of third-country migrant women.

A novel contribution of the present study to the literature on migrant disadvantage is its consideration of underemployment (involuntary part-time employment) and short-term (temporary-contract) employment. Underemployment and temporary-contract employment are especially important for evaluating migrant women's disadvantage in the 'new' migrant-receiving countries of Southern Europe, as both these forms of employment disadvantage are common in those countries. They are also consistently more prevalent among third-country migrant women than among native-born women in these countries.

Underemployment is not only more common among migrant women than among native-born women. It is also more common among migrant women than migrant men. Taking into account underemployment accordingly accentuates the 'gender disadvantage' dimension of migrant women's 'double disadvantage' in both old and new migrant-receiving countries. This is seen in Figure 2, where we sum proportions unemployed or underemployed of the labour forces of migrant women, native-born women and migrant men.

Figure S2: Unemployment or underemployment as a proportion of the third-country migrant labour force of women and men and of native-born women, 2005



Source: EU LFS 2005

Temporary-contract employment is a further source of migrant women's employment disadvantage. The highest proportions of temporary-employment contracts among employed migrant women are seen in the 'new' migrant-receiving countries of Southern Europe, and in Cyprus and the Czech Republic in the Accession group. In both Spain and Cyprus more than half of employed migrant women have temporary contracts. Of the 'old' migrant-receiving and Nordic countries, only in Sweden do migrant women have a high proportion with temporary-employment contracts. Migrant women's disadvantage on the temporary-contract employment measure is related mostly to the migrant dimension. Regarding the gender dimension, very

similar proportions of migrant women and migrant men are in temporary-contract employment in most of the countries analysed.

This results in a consistent ‘double disadvantage’ conclusion for migrant women in the ‘new’ migrant-receiving countries: ‘unemployment and underemployment’ is more prevalent among migrant women than among native-born women, and is more prevalent still than among migrant men. In the ‘old’ migrant-receiving and Nordic countries, where migrant men’s proportions unemployed or underemployed exceed those of native-born women, the ‘migrant’ dimension of disadvantage appears to be especially high. That is, the difficulties in obtaining employment or full-time employment faced by migrant women in the ‘old’ migrant-receiving and Nordic countries appear to be due to their third-country migrant status more than to their being *female* third-country migrants.

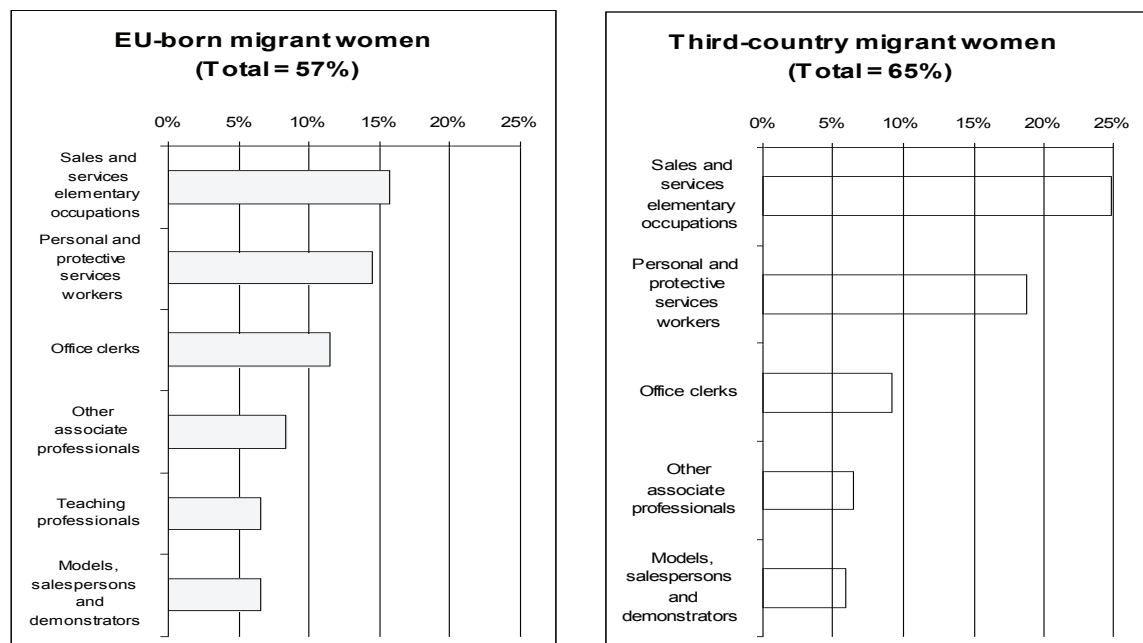
### 1.3 Occupational segregation and concentration of migrant women

Occupational segregation and concentration have been researched widely in connection with both gender and racial/ethnic inequalities in the labour force. The concept of segregation in the labour market is usually used to refer to the tendency for men and women to be employed in different occupations from each other. Concentration refers to the tendency of different groups in the labour force to be represented in higher proportions than others in certain types of occupations or sectors of employment.

Studies of worldwide migration have shown that the majority of migrant women workers are employed in service sector occupations (e.g. catering, domestic, and healthcare occupations). In some regions, women migrants are also found in the manufacturing sector. Within the services sector, demand for female migrant labour is increasing in low-skilled jobs such as domestic work – including cleaning and child care, hotel cleaners and waitresses – as well as in skilled occupations such as nurses and other health care workers. Significant numbers of migrant women are also involved in prostitution and the sex industry – some of them involuntarily through trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Our analysis of the EU LFS data reveals both a high degree of gender segregation within the labour market (i.e. women and men, both native-born and migrant, tend to do different jobs in the economy) but also a significant incidence of concentration in a small number of job types. While rates of concentration in particular occupations differ, migrant and native-born women tend to work in the same occupational sectors. Moreover, the data show that migrant women are more highly concentrated in a few occupational sectors (62% of them working in five sectors) than are migrant men (43%) and native-born women (55%). That is, a larger proportion of migrant women are employed in a few occupational sectors than the proportion of native-born women or migrant men concentrated in the same *number* of occupational sectors.

Figure S3: Occupational concentration amongst EU-born and third-country migrant women, 2005\*



Source: EU LFS 2005

Notes: \* Data are for Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Greece, Hungary, Luxemburg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom.

In addition, migrant women are more highly concentrated in occupations that typically require lower skill, with sales and services elementary occupations and personal and protective services accounting for two-fifths of all migrant women’s employment. Their concentration in the lowest skilled sectors limits their rights as workers, their mobility in the labour market, their opportunities for career progression, and their chances for human capital development.

Disaggregating the category of ‘migrant women’ into the two sub-groups, EU-born and third-country migrant women, reveals that the latter group are much more highly concentrated in a few low-skilled occupational sectors than are EU-born migrant women (see Figure 3). The ‘total’ in each box denotes the aggregate percentage of the group (migrant women, native-born women, migrant men and native-born men) employed in the occupation sectors with the highest concentration of workers. Within this distribution, third-country migrant women are more highly concentrated than EU-born migrant women in the two lowest skilled occupation sectors (sales and services elementary occupations and personal and protective services). While the sectors of occupation identified through the LFS do not allow for a finer level of detail in the actual jobs that migrant women hold, the data provide clear evidence of occupational concentration of migrant women in low skilled sectors, including those encompassing domestic, catering, hotel and healthcare employment. The high levels of concentration of third-country migrant women in these sectors indicates that their integration into the EU labour force is at best fractional; they have jobs but lack many of the rights and opportunities that full integration entails, which is often compounded by their status as illegal immigrant. This situation highlights that even when migrant women are actually employed, the quality of their employment tends to be poor, exposing them to social and economic vulnerability.

#### 1.4 Labour market integration of skilled migrant women

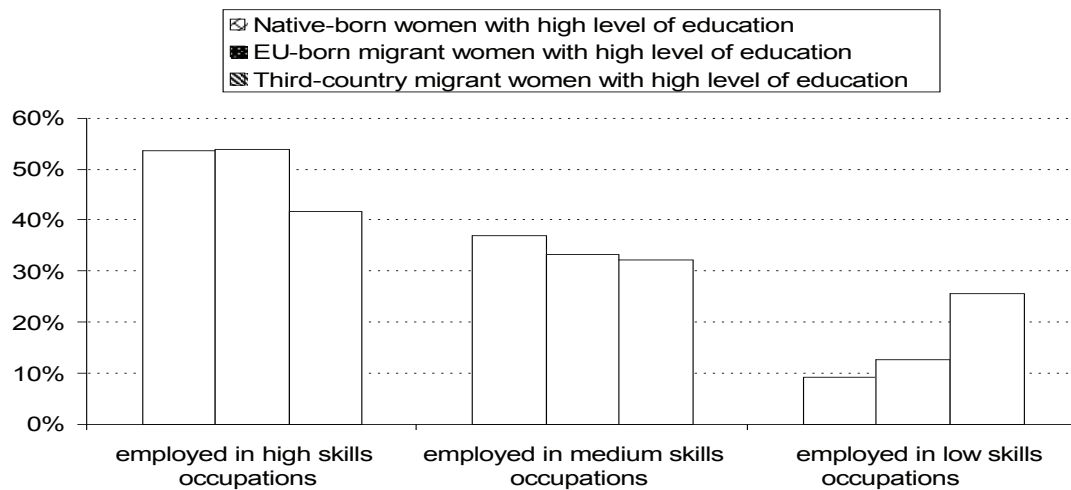
Immigration of skilled, and particularly of highly-skilled workers, has in recent years become an important element in the economic development and innovation policies of industrialised nations. This is because some of the skills necessary to improve competitiveness and growth in the global economy are so specialised and in such short supply that they need to be sourced globally. Migrant women employed at the highly-skilled level represent only a minority of these sought-after workers, however, although their numbers have been increasing during the past decades. The preponderance of men in the ranks of highly-skilled migrants is in part a reflection of the fact that immigration policies of developed nations tend to favour medical, upper-level management, engineering, information technology and physical research skills. Given continuing disparities in the proportion of third-country men and women who go into these careers, individuals with the relevant skills are still more likely to be men than women.

Nonetheless, the proportion of women migrants who hold a tertiary degree is, in many regions, almost on a par with that of immigrant men. It is likely that the lower rates of employment of skilled migrant women relative to skilled native-born women and skilled migrant men is attributable to problems in the recognition of foreign degrees, as well as factors such as country of origin attitudes regarding women's employment, language barriers, and immigrants' limited access to public sector jobs. The latter in particular affects women more significantly than men, because the professions in which women tend to be concentrated are those which are predominantly regulated by the public sector.

In the present study, the issue of the integration of high-education migrant women is examined with reference to two key research questions. The first is whether the integration of migrant women in the labour market varies by education level. In order to do this, we compared EU-born migrant women, third-country migrant women, and native-born women of low, medium and high education across three different indicators: labour force participation, employment and unemployment rates. The second question focused on the extent to which high-education migrant women in Europe were employed in occupational sectors commensurate with their skill levels.

In relation to the first question, our analysis suggests that across all three groups, higher education levels improve integration into the labour force when measured through labour force participation, unemployment rates and employment rates. Nonetheless, for higher education levels, the situation of third-country migrant women is systematically worse than that of their counterparts of equivalent education. That is, third-country migrant women of high education level have lower rates of labour force participation, higher unemployment rates and lower employment rates than their counterparts. In contrast, low education third-country migrant women exhibit very similar labour market participation and employment rates as low education native-born women, although the former are significantly more likely to be unemployed. EU-born migrant women are in a more favorable situation than third-country migrant women across the three indicators at all levels of education.

Figure S4: Distribution of high education native-born, other EU-born and third-country migrant women by occupation skill level, 2005



Source: EU LFS 2005

Notes: \* Data are for Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Greece, Hungary, Luxemburg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom.

In examining the question of jobs commensurate with education, the present study's analysis of 2005 EU LFS data indicates that a significant minority of migrant women with high education levels are employed in low skilled sectors of the economy. High-education migrant women are more 'at risk' than native-born women of equivalent education of being 'under-employed', that is in employment that requires a lower level of education than they hold. Third-country migrant women of high education levels are more likely than either native-born or EU-born migrant women to be employed in low-skilled sectors of employment. High-education migrant women born outside the EU are twice as likely to be employed in low skill jobs as EU-born and native-born women with the same level of education (see Figure 4).

The higher incidence of 'de-skilling' amongst third-country migrant women is yet another indicator of the systematic disadvantage faced by this group in the EU labour force. It also suggests the importance of taking into account not only the standard quantitative measures of labour force outcomes (such as participation and employment rates) but also measures of the underemployment of migrant women relative to the skills they bring to the EU labour markets.

## 1.5 The role of policies and legislation

The study undertook two case study analyses. In the first, the effect of Spain's 'exceptional' regularisation process of 2005 on migrant women was analysed. This is an informative case study as regularisation is a policy deliberately targeted towards the integration of migrants into the work force. Two-fifths of the 700,000 applicants for the 2005 regularisation were women, the majority of whom were employed in domestic service occupations. The initial impact of the programme was therefore largely in regularising migrant women in domestic employment, although there are some indications that the regularisation allowed some migrant women to move into better paid jobs. Regularised migrants employed in domestic services occupations (who are mostly women) remain vulnerable. Spain's Special Regime of Domestic Workers regulating domestic employment does not include unemployment benefits, mandatory written contracts in all cases, or recognition of professional illnesses and accidents. The demand for migrant women in domestic service employment in Spain arises from an equal gender

opportunities agenda that applies primarily to native-born women; public infrastructure and services for domestic and care responsibilities is *not* provided directly but *indirectly* in the form of migrant women who allow native-born women to better reconcile work and family life.

In the second case study, the extent to which the labour market outcomes of migrant women are influenced by the same work-life balance policies as native-born women across Europe was explored qualitatively and quantitatively. Germany, the United Kingdom and Denmark and Sweden were analysed in more detail as examples of three different welfare models. Access to key gender equality measures such as the provision of childcare and guarantees of return to work after maternity leave may be less available to migrant women than native-born women due to immigration policies that do not allow for work permission of wives or other family members of migrant men, and due to greater difficulties obtaining permanent employment.

Potential problems of access of migrant women to the benefits of work-family reconciliation policies and programmes are suggested by of EU LFS findings of much lower employment rates of migrant women than native-born women with children less than 5 years old. Access to employment appears to be more limiting than access to work-family reconciliation policy measures such as subsidised child-care. Among migrant women who are working, use of formal child-care tends to be similar to that of native-born women in the same country. In response to questions about work-family balance, however, migrant women with children are much more likely than are native-born women to report wishing to work more (or to work in the case they are currently not working).

## 1.6 Emerging policy questions

This study looked specifically at the position and level of integration of migrant women in the EU labour market. Our analysis found that third-country migrant women's frustrated efforts to participate more fully in the labour force, with full use of their skills, are seen in their higher unemployment, more frequent part-time employment because of inability to find full-time work, greater likelihood of temporary-contract employment, and higher incidence of 'de-skilling' compared to EU-born migrant women, native-born women and migrant men. These are all indicators of difficulties integrating third-country migrant women into the labour force. Our research also reveals significant differences between Member States in levels of integration of migrant women measured through these indicators. However, the empirical analysis afforded by the EU LFS does not elucidate drivers underlying migrant women's differential outcomes in different Member States.

Put together, the findings in this study indicate that barriers other than education levels, numbers of children, and willingness to work, influence migrant women's outcomes in the labour force. While these other barriers may include lack of language proficiency and unfamiliarity with the labour market of the receiving country, the study suggests the possibility that structural, systemic obstacles are also at play. These may include inadequate provision of adequate housing (i.e. in locations conducive to better employment outcomes), limited rights (especially for certain groups of migrants such as asylum seekers or irregular migrants) to access key public services, and discrimination in the labour market on the basis of nationality, ethnicity, religion and/or gender.

This suggests that there may be traction to be gained by implementing policies both for improving and expediting migrant women's integration, and for reducing discrimination. Through an assessment of two policy responses to the specific challenges that migrant women face in the EU labour force (namely the regularization policies in Spain and work-family

reconciliation measures across the EU), the study found that a 'policy mix' is likely to be required that tackles migrant women's disadvantage in the labour force from different angles. A multiplicity of factors, which are often deeply entwined, affect a migrant woman's propensity to participate in the labour force, for example number of children, level of education and skills, language proficiency, as well as factors extrinsic to the migrant herself, such as legal barriers and discrimination. Initiatives addressing these issues within a coordinated approach are likely to achieve better outcomes than those tackling individual aspects in isolation. The evidence from our policy case studies is particularly telling in this respect: single policies (such as regularization or work-family reconciliation packages) which address specific aspects of migrant women's situation in the labour force are necessary but insufficient to produce the expected results. However, developing coherent, comprehensive policy approaches that confront these challenges and help optimise women migrants' contributions to their host societies continues to be a challenge in the EU.

One of the main challenges is that the evidence available on the situation of migrant women is still erratic and research in this field is still limited. The often segmented, compartmentalised nature of policy-making also militates against the development of a suite of measures tackling migrant women's disadvantage from multiple perspectives. The development of a coherent policy approach to confront the challenges faced by migrant women in the EU labour force can also be hindered by political conjuncture. For example, fears about the pressures placed by immigrants on public services, communities and cultures, as well as concerns about the threat of terrorism, have become widespread amongst citizens in immigrant-receiving countries in the EU, contributing to a lack of political appetite for measures to help immigrants integrate into their host societies. Rather, political emphasis is increasingly placed on measures to 'control' and 'manage' migration.

These barriers to the development of comprehensive policy approaches to improving migrant women's opportunities in the labour force need not be intractable. First, current governmental and non-governmental interest in migration can be harnessed to ensure that a robust evidence base is built on the situation of migrant women in the EU labour force, which includes existing and ongoing research. Second, in many ways the EU has become an important actor in setting migration policies, not least because of the removal of internal borders and strengthening of the common external border. With the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon the formal responsibilities of the EU and the effectiveness of its decision making processes will further increase. Given the shared concerns across Europe both with managing migration and optimising its positive impacts on receiving societies, the EU may want to explore how best to support the exchange of information and good practices. Third, against the background of intense public interest, but also some open hostility towards immigrants, there is a growing need for a stronger, more balanced pan-European debate about the social and economic contribution of immigration and immigrants to the region. It is imperative to provide evidence to allay public concerns not only about security, crime and social cohesion, but also possible mistrust and resentment about the development of measures that are perceived to favour migrant workers. Governmental and European institutions have an important role to play in this respect, given their power in shaping perceptions and understandings of migration and the contribution of immigrants to host societies.

Finally, the study highlights the increasing need for immigration and integration policies to focus on the specific situation of migrant women, targeting their economic and social inclusion in receiving countries. This integration and inclusion will require removing barriers to full labour force participation by those migrant women who seek full time and permanent work, but who are instead limited to part-time and insecure positions with few if any benefits. Integration

and inclusion will also mean finding ways to include skilled and educated migrant women in the labour force in work commensurate with their education and skill levels. Finally, better social and economic integration of migrant women would be facilitated by re-valuing the work of migrant women in receiving economies. The skills and capacity that all women provide European economies are increasingly significant given the agenda for jobs and growth. The European agenda for greater gender equality specifically calls for facilitation of this female participation. However, it is not always acknowledged that until now many women's growing participation at work has been facilitated by migrant women's increasing participation in the caring and domestic work that in most households was traditionally the province of native-born women. These migrant women, in a sense, are increasingly providing the infrastructure that facilitates higher numbers of native-born women to enter paid employment, especially in medium and high skill occupations.

While providing employment to a significant proportion of migrant women, work in the domestic and care sector remains problematic. A growing body of evidence suggests that the unregulated, insecure and privatised nature of migrant women's domestic service leaves them vulnerable, facilitating the occurrence of labour exploitation and human rights abuses. The protection of domestic and care workers and the provision of security and benefits are crucial to ensure that the economic and social successes of some are not built on inequalities and on exploitation of others. These changes require effective and practical measures and policy instruments. Such changes also require a systemic re-valuation of domestic and care work, its role in the economy and in society and its contribution to the welfare of communities if the rights and opportunities of domestic and care workers are to be realised.