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Executive Summary of the 10th Migration Observatory Report

“Immigrant Integration in Europe”

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This is the 10th edition of the Migration Observatory annual report on immigrant integration in Europe.

The report draws on data from the latest edition of the European Labour Force Survey (2024) and is structured in two parts. In the first, we provide a concise, easily accessible, and up-to-date overview of the size, characteristics, and relative economic performance of the foreign-born population across European countries. In the second part, we analyse how such aspects have evolved over the last ten years, comparing size, demographic profile, educational attainment, and labour market outcomes of immigrants in 2015 and in 2024.

The decade 2015-2024 was characterised by structural upgrading and employment expansion across Europe. Migrants participated in this transformation and improved in absolute terms across several dimensions. However, relative gaps with natives narrowed only marginally. The stability of baseline gaps masks substantial internal shifts in origin composition, duration of stay, and cross-country dynamics. Economic integration progressed, but convergence remained partial and uneven.

The key findings are summarised below.

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PART I - IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION IN EUROPE IN 2024

IMMIGRANT POPULATION - SIZE AND CHARACTERISTICS

BOTTOMLINE: More than one in eight residents of the EU is an immigrant. This ratio increases to almost one in six when focusing on EU14 countries, where most immigrants live. The number of foreign-born residents in the EU remained stable from 2023 to 2024. About one in five immigrants living in a European country in 2024 have emigrated within the previous five years. About half of the immigrants are European. The share of tertiary-educated natives and immigrants is strongly correlated across countries.

- In 2024, immigrants account for 12.7% of the total population in the EU (EU27). Most of them (52.5 million) live in an EU14 country, where the share of immigrants in the population is 16%.
- Immigrant concentration is highly heterogeneous across countries. The share of immigrants ranges from as low as about 0.4% in Romania, 0.43% in Bulgaria to as high as 23% in Sweden, 34% in Switzerland, and 56% in Luxembourg.
- In 2024, about one in five immigrants (19%) living in a European country had emigrated within the previous five years, whereas in 2023 this share was 18%. Among the countries with more than 1% of immigrants in the population, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Poland have this share above 25%.
- Most immigrants (53%) were born in another European country: 29% are from an EU member state, while an additional 24% were born in a European country outside of the EU. Among the other areas of origin, Africa and the Middle East account for 18% of all immigrants, while 16% are from Asia and 13% from the Americas or Oceania.
- Among the foreign-born population, 52% are women. The share of immigrant women is highest, around 60%, in the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania).
- Overall, one-third of immigrants have tertiary education, and a similar share have completed lower secondary education, with the remainder having reached upper secondary education. However, the educational levels of immigrants vary considerably across destinations.

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- Differences in immigrants' education across member states reflect the educational level of natives: countries with higher shares of university-educated natives also have higher fractions of immigrants with tertiary education and vice versa.
- Italy has the least educated immigrants (only 15% have tertiary education) and the second lowest (after Romania) share of natives with tertiary education (24%). Conversely, Luxembourg and Ireland have among the highest shares of tertiary educated immigrants, respectively 62 and 66%.

EMPLOYMENT

BOTTOMLINE: Immigrants have a lower probability of employment than natives, especially in central and northern Europe. The employment gap is stable relative to previous years and is smaller for earlier migrants and for those from EU countries. When individual characteristics are taken into account, gaps change only slightly.

- On average, across Europe, immigrants are nine percentage points less likely to be employed than natives. The gap decreases by only two percentage points when individual characteristics are taken into account, leaving a seven percentage point gap.
- Employment gaps are more sizable in central and northern European countries like the Netherlands (-15 percentage points), Finland (-14 percentage points), France and Belgium (-13 percentage points), and Sweden and Germany (-12 percentage points).
- Smaller employment gaps are visible in Portugal (-1 percentage points), the Czech Republic (-2 percentage points), and Italy (-3 percentage points) which also displays the lowest native employment probability in Europe. In Ireland, immigrants are as likely as natives to be employed; in Luxembourg, Malta and Poland, the differential is positive.
- Immigrants' age-gender-education profiles cannot fully explain differentials in employment probabilities, indicating that additional immigrant-specific factors contribute to these gaps.
- The employment probability of EU immigrants is only two percentage points lower than that of natives, whereas immigrants from outside the EU display a disadvantage of

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11 percentage points. Such differences do not depend on demographic and educational characteristics: individuals with the same age-gender-education profiles face fewer difficulties finding a job if they come from an EU rather than a non-EU country. Institutional factors like free mobility within the EU and the normative framework play a central role in explaining this difference.

- The probability of employment is higher for immigrants who have spent more time in the host country. The immigrant-native gap is eleven percentage points lower (18 versus 7 percentage points) between immigrants with less than five years of residence and those who have been in the country for six years or more.

OCCUPATIONAL STATUS

BOTTOMLINE: Immigrants are considerably more likely than natives to be employed in low-pay and low-status occupations, even after accounting for differences in personal characteristics such as education.

- Immigrants' occupational distribution is more polarised than that of natives. Immigrants are much more concentrated than natives in the least qualified occupations and are absent from the middle part of the occupational distribution (measured by the Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status, ISEI).
- EU immigrants are employed in more prestigious and better-paid occupations than non-EU immigrants.
- Immigrants' probability of working in an elementary occupation is 12 percentage points higher than natives. Likewise, natives are more concentrated than immigrants in the three highest-paid occupational categories: managers, professionals and associate professionals (48% versus 35%).
- The concentration in elementary occupations is higher for non-EU than EU immigrants. The share of non-EU immigrants in elementary occupations does not significantly change with years since migration. Non-EU immigrants who have been in the country for no more than five years are 15 percentage points more likely than natives to work

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in an elementary occupation. Among their conationals who arrived earlier, the gap is only slightly lower (13 percentage points).

- As with the employment gap, differences in individual characteristics between immigrants and natives can explain only a small part of the occupational disadvantage of immigrants. They account for 23% of the differential probability of having an elementary occupation and 38% of the differential probability of working in one of the three highest-paid occupational categories.
- In countries where the occupational distribution of immigrants is more similar to that of natives, immigrants tend to perform better also in terms of employment probability. Conversely, a higher immigrant likelihood of being at the bottom of the occupational distribution relative to natives is associated with a more significant employment probability gap. This correlation suggests that misallocation across occupation and employment assimilation are associated, not alternative.

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PART II - A DECADE OF CHANGE IN THE ECONOMIC INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS (2015-2024)

SIZE AND CHARACTERISTICS

BOTTOMLINE: Between 2015 and 2024, migrants became a structural component of EU countries, increasing from 12.1% to 15.5% of the population in EU14 countries, albeit with significant cross-country heterogeneity. Moreover, the composition of migrant populations shifted away from predominantly EU-origin toward an increasingly larger presence of non-EU migrants.

- In EU14 countries, about one in six residents was foreign-born in 2024, whereas only one in ten was foreign-born in 2015. Across the EU27, the increase was similarly sustained, though levels are lower.
- The increase was uneven across EU Member States. Malta (+19 percentage points) and Cyprus (+8 percentage points) recorded strong growth, while Greece remained broadly stable, and Latvia and Lithuania experienced slight declines. Migrants remain primarily concentrated in Western European countries.
- The composition of origins changed over the decade. In EU14 countries, the share of EU-born migrants declined from 35% to less than 28%, while the share of migrants from West Asia and North Africa increased from 18% to 20%. In countries such as Germany and Austria, these shifts were particularly pronounced.
- The share of migrants from the Americas also increased, especially in Spain, where it rose from 37.5% to 49% of the foreign-born population.

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EDUCATION

BOTTOMLINE: Educational attainment improved among migrants over the decade. However, similar or stronger educational upgrading among natives meant that relative education gaps did not narrow in most countries. Educational convergence was therefore partial and highly heterogeneous across Europe.

- In EU14 countries, the share of tertiary-educated migrants increased from around 26% in 2015 to 32% in 2024. However, educational attainment among natives rose even more rapidly over the same period, implying that the relative education gap widened over time.
- Educational upgrading was uneven across EU countries. Some countries, such as Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, and Sweden, experienced substantial increases in the share of tertiary-educated migrants, while in others progress was limited. In most EU14 countries, the rise in tertiary education attainment among natives matched or exceeded that of migrants, indicating that educational upgrading largely reflects broader structural trends in European societies rather than migrant-specific convergence.

EMPLOYMENT

BOTTOMLINE: Between 2015 and 2024, employment increased substantially for both migrants and natives. As a result, the aggregate migrant-native employment gap remained broadly stable. Behind this stability lie divergent country trends and offsetting compositional effects.

- Across EU14 countries, native employment increased by more than six percentage points over the decade. Migrants' employment also increased. As a result, the migrant-native employment gap remained close to ten percentage points in both 2015 and 2024.
- Adjusting for differences in age, gender and education reduces the employment gap only moderately, indicating that demographic and educational composition explains only part of migrants' disadvantage.

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- Country trajectories diverged. Denmark, Sweden, and Slovenia recorded reductions in the employment gap. In contrast, Greece, Cyprus, Italy, and Portugal experienced widening gaps, largely due to exceptionally strong employment growth among natives rather than declining outcomes for migrants.
- Origin differences remain central. In 2015, non-EU migrants in EU14 countries faced an employment gap of about -13 percentage points relative to natives, compared with around -3 percentage points for EU-born migrants. By 2024, the gap for non-EU migrants narrowed slightly, while the EU-born gap remained broadly unchanged.
- Over the same period, the share of non-EU migrants increased. Given their initially larger disadvantage, this shift in composition would have exerted upward pressure on the aggregate employment gap. Instead, improvements among nonEU migrants partly counterbalanced this demographic effect.
- Duration of residence continues to matter. In 2015, recent migrants faced an employment gap of about -18 percentage points, compared with roughly -7 percentage points among those resident for more than five years. By 2024, the gap for earlier migrants narrowed slightly, while the gap for recent migrants widened, largely reflecting the increased presence of non-EU migrants among new arrivals.

OCCUPATIONAL STATUS

BOTTOMLINE: Migrants' occupational positioning improved moderately over the decade, reflecting both structural upgrading of European labour markets and some degree of relative advancement. Nonetheless, substantial occupational quality gaps persist, particularly for non-EU migrants.

- In EU14 countries, the average occupational-status gap between immigrants and natives (measured by ISEI) declined from -0.42 standard deviations in 2015 to -0.40 in 2024, corresponding to a reduction of about 5%.
- When comparing migrants and natives with similar age, gender, and education profiles, the occupational gap declined more strongly, although it remained sizeable. This

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suggests some improvement in relative occupational allocation, even as educational differences evolved.

- The share of migrants employed in elementary occupations decreased from almost 21.5% in 2015 to around 18% in 2024. Among natives, the corresponding decline was from 7.3% to 6%. Although the migrant-native gap narrowed, migrants remain disproportionately concentrated in low-status occupations.
- At the upper end of the occupational distribution, migrants' presence expanded. The share employed in highly skilled occupations increased from 29% to 34%, while among natives it rose from 46% to 50%. Despite somewhat faster growth among migrants, they remain underrepresented in the highest-status jobs.
- Progress was uneven across countries. In some EU countries the occupational status gap narrowed significantly, while in others it widened or remained stable.
- Origin differences remain pronounced. Although occupational gaps declined for both EU and non-EU migrants, non-EU migrants continue to face larger disadvantages.
- Duration patterns reveal a distinct dynamic: recent migrants are more likely than earlier migrants to hold high-skilled jobs yet also face higher employment gaps. This suggests that employment access and job quality do not move in parallel and that occupational allocation remains segmented across migrant groups.

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