

What does sociological research tell us about ethnic inequalities in European labour markets?

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An IFS initiative funded by the Nuffield Foundation







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Introduction

In the past decades, Western European societies have become increasingly diverse due to international migration. In countries such as Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands, immigrants and their children constitute around 20–30% of the current population. Their immigrant populations are highly diverse in terms of national origin, period of arrival, migration motive, schooling, religion and race. To illustrate, the Netherlands has attracted immigrants from its former colonies Indonesia, Suriname and the Dutch Antilles; low-skilled 'guest workers' from Turkey and Morocco; refugees from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Somalia and Syria; and EU labour migrants, such as from Poland and Bulgaria.

A key topic in sociology of migration is the study of the integration of immigrants and their offspring in the host country (Gordon, 1964; Alba and Nee, 2003). Sociologists treat 'integration' as a multidimensional concept, differentiating between patterns of social, cultural and structural/economic integration (Jonsson, Kalter and Van Tubergen, 2018). Social integration refers to the degree of intergroup cohesion between members of different ethnic groups and is studied empirically by looking at interethnic attitudes and prejudice (Schlueter and Scheepers, 2010), cross-ethnic friendships (Smith, Maas and Van Tubergen, 2014; Kruse and Kroneberg, 2019) and intermarriage (Kulu and González-Ferrer, 2014). Cultural integration captures the degree of similarity between ethnic minority and majority groups in their opinions, norms and corresponding practices. Research in this field focuses, for example, on language acquisition (Kosyakova, Kristen and Spörlein, 2022), religiosity (Voas and Fleischmann, 2012) and cultural values (Röder and Mühlau, 2014). Regarding structural integration – i.e. the degree of similarity between ethnic minority and majority groups in realising valued goals – sociologists investigate ethnic inequalities in education (Heath, Rothon and Kilpi, 2008), health (Huijts and Kraaykamp, 2012) and labour market outcomes.

In this contribution, I review the literature about the incorporation of immigrants and their children in the labour market. Before doing so, three remarks regarding the scope of this review are in order.

First, I focus on theories and findings from sociological work. This has several implications, not least the key outcomes that are studied. While economists typically focus on wages – both the wage gains from migration, and wage inequalities compared with settled populations in the country of destination – sociologists, by contrast, tend to focus more on employment and occupational attainment.

¹ I would like to thank Lucinda Platt for her helpful and insightful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

Second, my empirical overview covers findings on ethnic inequalities in Europe, with a particular focus on Western Europe (including the UK). Within the European context, sociologists typically study patterns of ethnic inequality by comparing the labour market outcomes of the 'ethnic majority' group or 'natives' (i.e. those without any migration background) with those of 'ethnic minority' members (i.e. those who have a migration background). Among the ethnic minority population, a distinction is then made between the first generation (i.e. 'foreign-born', 'immigrants') and the second generation (i.e. children born in the host country who have at least one foreign-born parent). Because of the rather recent history of immigration in Europe, fewer sociological studies looked at ethnic inequalities beyond the second generation, or relied on more subjective measures of migration background, such as self-assessed ancestry. In traditional immigration countries, such as the US and Canada, such social categories are more commonly used.

Third, there is a wealth of descriptive information gathered by sociologists about ethnic inequalities in labour markets across European countries, but my review focuses on broader empirical patterns rather than idiosyncratic findings or country studies.

The starting point of this review is a key stylised finding from the sociological field of research, namely that in Western European countries non-Western ethnic minority groups do less well in the labour market in comparison with Western ethnic minority origin groups, and, even more so, they do less well in comparison with the ethnic majority population (Kogan, 2006; Van Tubergen, 2006; Heath, 2008; Fleischmann and Dronkers, 2010; Spörlein and Van Tubergen, 2014; Gorodzeisky and Semyonov, 2017; Damelang, Ebensperger and Stumpf, 2021). To illustrate, Gorodzeisky and Semyonov (2017), using the EU Labour Force Survey 2008, find that in France 11.5% of the non-European male foreign-born population were unemployed. Among the foreign-born from Europe in France, 7.1% were unemployed, whereas among French natives only 4.6% were unemployed. Within the employed population in France, they also find ethnic inequalities in occupational attainment. Among those born outside Europe, 33.2% have a professional, technician or managerial job, while this figure is 34.3% among the foreign-born from Europe and 45.4% of French natives.

My review is organised in the following way. I start with a discussion of various theories that can explain these ethnic inequalities in the labour market, and I review the empirical evidence drawing on studies in Europe. Subsequently, I address heterogeneity in ethnic inequality by country of origin and immigrant generation. I end with a discussion of policy measures.

Theories and findings on ethnic inequality

Human capital

In understanding patterns of ethnic inequality, sociologists commonly look at the combined impact of various resources, including human capital, i.e. people's knowledge and skills in so far as these are relevant to the labour market. Deficiencies in human capital mostly affect the first generation. Immigrants from non-Western countries are typically lower educated than natives, which makes them more vulnerable in the labour market. However, higher-educated immigrants also face important obstacles. Scholars have argued that education diplomas from the country of origin are less valued than educational credentials obtained in the host country (Friedberg, 2000; Bratsberg and Terrell, 2002). The knowledge and skills that immigrants have acquired can be context-specific, and less useful in Western European labour markets. Additionally, employers can be reluctant to grant full recognition to foreign credentials as they are uncertain about the skills and knowledge that have been acquired.

Studies in the Netherlands (Hartog and Zorlu, 2009; Kanas and Van Tubergen, 2010), Belgium (Kanas and Van Tubergen, 2014), Italy (Fellini, Guetto and Reyneri, 2018), Sweden (Tibajev and Hellgren, 2019) and several European countries comparatively (Lancee and Bol, 2017) indeed show that the returns to origin-country schooling are (much) lower than the returns to host-country schooling. Lancee and Bol (2017) provide evidence to suggest that the disadvantage of foreign schooling is due to limited transferability of both skills and credentials. Tibajev and Hellgren (2019), using data from Sweden, estimate that official recognition of foreign credentials leads to a 4.4 percentage point higher probability of being employed and to a 13.9 log point higher wage for those in employment. Similar positive effects of recognition of foreign education have been found for Germany (Damelang, Ebensperger and Stumpf, 2020).

Another ingredient of human capital is language proficiency. An important barrier to labour market integration for the first generation is limited proficiency in the host-country language (L2). It is well known that L2 proficiency has a major impact on labour market incorporation (Dustmann and Fabbri, 2003; Damelang, Ebensperger and Stumpf, 2021). Many immigrants have limited knowledge of L2 at arrival, but improve their L2 skills with length of stay in the host country. In line with theoretical models that underscore the importance of exposure, efficiency and incentives for L2 acquisition (Chiswick and Miller, 2001), studies in Western Europe find that language learning is faster among immigrants who arrive at a younger age, those who intend to stay permanently, those who are enrolled in an integration course and those whose mother tongue is linguistically closer to L2 (Van Tubergen and Kalmijn, 2009; Van Tubergen, 2010; Van Tubergen and Wierenga, 2011; Hoehne and Michalowski, 2016; Kristen, Mühlau and Schacht, 2016; Spörlein and Kristen, 2019; Kristen and Seuring, 2021).

Social resources

Sociologists have long argued that labour market incorporation also depends on social resources, i.e. the resources embedded in people's personal network. Granovetter, in his seminal work, observed that around 50–60% of jobs in the US are found informally, such as via acquaintances, friends and family members (Granovetter, 1974). Follow-up studies find that in Europe, about 40–50% of jobs are found through informal channels as well (Granovetter, 2018). According to Granovetter (1973), 'bridging ties' are particularly useful in the job-search process. These are ties to members from other communities, which provide non-redundant, more useful information about job positions than 'bonding ties'.

Several scholars have applied these network ideas to the context of immigrant incorporation (Aguilera and Massey, 2003; Lancee, 2010; Kanas, Van Tubergen and Van der Lippe, 2011). They emphasise that same-ethnic ties are over-represented, and that these in-group ties may not always have the most useful resources to assist in the job-finding process, due to limited L2 proficiency, high levels of unemployment, and little experience with the institutions, procedures and norms of the host-country labour market. From that theoretical perspective, it is argued that bridging ties, with natives, can be helpful. Natives are better informed about the labour market, such as knowing how and where to apply for jobs, how to write a job-application letter and how to present in the job interview (Aguilera and Massey, 2003).

In line with these theoretical expectations, there is empirical evidence to suggest that having interethnic ties promotes the labour market integration of immigrants. One source of evidence comes from immigrant surveys in the Netherlands. Studies find that among immigrant groups in the Netherlands, those having more ties with Dutch natives have higher likelihood of employment and higher occupational attainment (De Vroome and Van Tubergen, 2010; Lancee, 2010). However, a key limitation of these immigrant surveys is that they are cross-sectional, which implies that they cannot rule out endogeneity issues. For example, it could be that immigrants

with certain (unobserved) personality characteristics are more likely to connect with Dutch natives and more attractive for employers. Or it could be that employed immigrants and those with higher incomes are more likely to become friends with Dutch natives.

To get a better view on the causal impact of interethnic ties on labour market outcomes, sociologists have used data from the German Socio-Economic Panel survey. An early study using these panel data is that of Kalter (2006), who showed that the disadvantage of the Turkish second generation (compared with German natives) in the labour market can be largely explained by the ethnic composition of friendship networks and German language proficiency. Both random- and fixed-effects models show that having more German friends is associated with better labour market outcomes.

Subsequent studies, using the same data and longitudinal modelling, have provided additional evidence for the key role of bridging ties for immigrants. First, research showed that, among immigrants, having more contacts with family, friends and neighbours was unrelated to employment. By contrast, personal ties to Germans were found to increase the likelihood of employment (Kanas, Van Tubergen and Van der Lippe, 2011; Lancee and Hartung, 2012). Hence, these findings suggest that it is not that having more social connections is helpful for immigrants – what matters for them are social ties outside their immigrant group, with natives. Second, follow-up research shows that these empirical patterns hold not only for the Turkish second generation, or for employment outcomes only, but also for other immigrant groups, and also for occupational attainment and earnings of immigrants (Kanas et al., 2012; Lancee, 2016).

Discrimination

A third line of sociological research on ethnic inequality considers the role of discrimination based on ethnic group affiliation (Pager and Shepherd, 2008). Ethnic discrimination refers to the unequal treatment of candidates with identical skills, based on their ethnic group membership. Several causes of discrimination have been suggested, of which two stand out. One theoretical explanation argues that discrimination results from in-group favouritism and intergroup threats and conflicts (Blumer, 1958; Blalock, 1967; Becker, 2010). Another explanation, called statistical discrimination theory, states that discrimination may arise because of employers' imperfect information about candidates, which leads them to use ethnic group characteristics to make inferences about the skills of candidates (Phelps, 1972). Discrimination in the labour market has important consequences, as it leads not only to prolonged periods of inactivity among ethnic minorities, but can also discourage ethnic minorities from making further efforts (Loury, 2009).

The most convincing evidence for ethnic discrimination comes from field experiments (Pager, 2007). In one variant of such experiments, called 'correspondence testing', the ethnicity of the applicant – signalled via name or other identifiers, such as place of birth – is randomly assigned to identical résumés and job-application letters, which are submitted to a job vacancy. In 'audit testing', trained testers with identical skills and background, but from different races or ethnicities, approach employers by phone or in person. Unequal treatment is then seen as evidence for the existence of discrimination based on race or ethnicity.

Field experiments were developed in the 1960s by British sociologists, who used the methodology to examine ethnic and racial discrimination in the housing and labour market (Daniel, 1968). In the early 1990s, the International Labour Office (ILO) developed and applied standardised field experiments of labour market discrimination across European societies, such as in France, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain (Zegers de Beijl, 1999). The ILO studies tested unequal treatment at three stages of the hiring process (Bovenkerk, 1999). In the first stage, jobseekers applied for a vacancy by showing up in person or by telephoning ('is this job still available?').

Applications may be taken into consideration, or they may be denied a chance to apply. In the second stage, applicants may be given the opportunity to submit their résumé and present their credentials. They may, or may not, be invited for a job interview. In the third stage, the interview may result in a job offer or a rejection.

The ILO found in each country substantial ethnic discrimination at the first stage of the application process (Zegers de Beijl, 1999). Ethnic minority members were more often rejected than natives when they approached the employer. Signalling their foreign name was sufficient for employers to reject them and, consequently, they were denied the opportunity to present their skills. The 'net discrimination' (i.e. % discrimination against minorities minus % discrimination against natives) in the first stage was around 15–25%. Also in the second stage, when applicants submitted their credentials and were or were not invited for a job interview, there was substantial discrimination – the ILO estimates show around 10% net discrimination rates across European societies. In several countries, there was also discrimination in the third stage.

Following in the footsteps of the ILO studies, new field experiments first emerged in the US (Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004; Pager and Quillian, 2005; Pager, Western and Bonikowski, 2009), soon to be followed by new experiments in Europe (McGinnity et al., 2009; Adida, Laitin and Valfort, 2010; Kaas and Manger, 2012; Bursell, 2014; Bursell, Bygren and Gähler, 2021). In a meta-analysis of 738 correspondence tests in 43 separate studies conducted in OECD countries between 1990 and 2015, it was found that equivalent ethnic minority candidates need to send around 50% more applications to be invited for an interview than ethnic majority candidates (Zschirnt and Ruedin, 2016). Recent experimental evidence also suggests that foreign accent and limited language proficiency are associated with ethnic discrimination (Schmaus, 2020; Schmaus and Kristen, 2022).

Several meta-analyses conclude that the magnitude of ethnic and racial discrimination has not changed over past decades (Quillian et al., 2017; Heath and Di Stasio, 2019). In another meta-analysis of field experiments, important cross-country differences were found. The study compared nine countries in Europe and North America, and found that discrimination rates were highest in France, followed by Sweden (Quillian et al., 2019). Compared with these two countries, discrimination was less common in Great Britain, Canada, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, the US and Germany.

Recently, a new sociological project was launched to study cross-national patterns of discrimination more rigorously (Lancee, 2021). This 'GEMM' project applies a 'double comparative design', which is that multiple national origin groups are studied across multiple destination countries (Van Tubergen, Maas and Flap, 2004). In the GEMM field experiments, 31 origin groups were studied across five countries: the UK, Spain, Germany, Norway and the Netherlands.

Like earlier studies, the project reveals cross-national differences in discrimination. For example, it was found that Turks were more strongly discriminated against in the Netherlands than in Germany (Thijssen et al., 2021). This mirrors findings from other field experiments, which revealed that immigrants and ethnic minorities were less discriminated against in Germany (Zschirnt and Ruedin, 2016). Why discrimination rates are lower in Germany is unknown and subject to discussion. Based on the statistical discrimination theory, one possible explanation is that in Germany applicants have to provide more, and more standardised, information in their letter and résumé when submitting a job application, thereby possibly reducing the magnitude of statistical discrimination. However, in another study it was found that adding diagnostic personal information does not reduce discrimination against ethnic minorities (Thijssen, Coenders and Lancee, 2021).

The GEMM project, as well as other field experiments, has focused on traditional channels of job matching – for example, inquiring about job positions, approaching employers and applying for a job vacancy. In modern economies, however, the internet has become a major channel through which jobseekers search for employment. Increasingly, employers make use of online résumé databases to search for candidates for job vacancies. To find out about discriminative behaviour of employers on these online platforms, one study posted fictitious profiles with résumés of Arabic ethnic minorities and native applicants on online résumé databases from the Netherlands (Blommaert, Coenders and Van Tubergen, 2014). The applicants' names (signalling their Arabic ethnic origin) were assigned randomly to the profiles.

The authors found that there was substantial discrimination in the first stage: after seeing a short profile including the candidate's name, level of education and job title (which appears on their screen after employers search for candidates in the database), many employers did not click on the link to see the applicant's complete résumé if the candidate's name signalled an Arabic origin. In addition, it was found that there was also discrimination in the second stage, albeit less strongly. If employers click on the extended résumé, they less often contact Arabic minority applicants – for example, with a request for information or an invitation for a job interview. After the two stages, Dutch-named applicants were 60% more likely to receive a positive reaction than Arabic-named applicants. A more recent study, applying the same methodology, likewise found ethnic discrimination on online recruitment websites in Switzerland (Hangartner, Kopp and Siegenthaler, 2021).

The underlying mechanisms of employment discrimination are often difficult to detect, and motives for discrimination may also differ from person to person. Elaborating on the role of ingroup favouritism and intergroup threat, scholars speculate that, in addition to explicit negative intergroup attitudes and prejudice, a key driver is implicit negative associations (Quillian, 2006). People may not be aware of the concepts, cognitions, values and emotions they have learned to associate with (ethnic) groups, yet such implicit associations can have powerful behavioural consequences. Only seeing the name of an ethnic minority candidate in a résumé can be sufficient to read no further (Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004), even when employers are not aware of their bias. Laboratory experiments show that implicit associations attached to ethnic groups, and of which people are not aware, lead to ethnic discrimination in recruitment decisions (Blommaert, Van Tubergen and Coenders, 2012).

Heterogeneity in ethnic inequality

Taken together, sociologists have explained the employment disadvantage of non-Western immigrant groups in Europe by immigrants' lower levels of human capital, lack of social ties with natives, and ethnic discrimination. However, beyond these general patterns, sociological work has paid much attention to heterogeneity in ethnic inequality. I illustrate work in this area by discussing differences across origin groups and immigrant generations.

Origin group

The trajectory of economic incorporation strongly differs across ethnic minority groups. Such origin-group differences can arise in two ways: (1) compositional skill differences upon arrival and (2) contextual effects after arrival. Some origin groups are highly skilled upon arrival, and therefore have a head start in the labour market. Not only 'observable' human capital can make a difference, such as college education and second-language proficiency, but also more 'unobservable' skills can be significant, such as differences in talents, motivation and being prepared to participate in the labour market (Van Tubergen, Maas and Flap, 2004). Research

shows that compositional differences in observed and unobserved human capital explain a substantial part of origin-group differences in social mobility and incorporation in the labour market (Van Tubergen, Maas and Flap, 2004; Spörlein and Van Tubergen, 2014; Damelang, Ebensperger and Stumpf, 2021).

To illustrate how these origin differences arise due to such composition effects, compare the group of refugees with other migrant groups. Because of their forced migration, few refugees have prepared for participating in the labour market. In addition, many refugees suffer from mental health problems, much more so than family and labour migrants. Research finds that there are strong origin-group differences in health, which is, next to language and education, another key element of human capital. People who suffer from poor mental and physical health are less productive, and less attractive for employers. There is heterogeneity within the immigrant population regarding health, and some groups have even better health than natives. But there is one group which stands out negatively with respect to health, and that is refugees. Among refugees, mental health issues are prevalent, as indicated by higher levels of posttraumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety (Gerritsen et al., 2006; Lindert et al., 2009). A sizeable group of refugees suffer from stress and trauma related to experiences in their origin country, to experiences during their migration and to loss of connections with family and close ties. Several studies show that refugees perform less well in Western European labour markets than other immigrants (Van Tubergen, Maas and Flap, 2004; Van Tubergen, 2006; Fleischmann and Dronkers, 2010; Bakker, Dagevos and Engbersen, 2017; Kanas and Steinmetz, 2021) and that their poor mental health strongly impedes their labour market integration (De Vroome and Van Tubergen, 2010).

Beyond composition effects, however, scholars argue that contextual conditions after arrival play a role.

One area of research focuses on origin differences in discrimination, which are thought to relate to the degree of sociocultural distance to the mainstream culture and perceptions of intergroup threat. To illustrate, the GEMM project detected strong national origin differences in discrimination, which were related to sociocultural distance. For example, it was found that groups from the Middle East and Africa were more discriminated against than European origin groups (Veit and Thijsen, 2021). Another GEMM study looked at the role of belonging to a Muslim minority group, finding evidence in different countries for increasing discrimination when originating from a majority Muslim country ('Muslim by default' effect) and when signalling one's personal Muslim affiliation ('disclosed Muslim' effect) (Di Stasio et al., 2021). These experimental findings are in line with results from surveys, which show that Muslim minority groups are less well incorporated in the labour markets of Western Europe than other minority groups, even after taking into account observed and unobserved human capital (Van Tubergen, Maas and Flap, 2004; Van Tubergen, 2006; Kanas and Müller, 2021).

Contextual conditions that play a role after arrival may also relate to specific groups. Take, again, refugees. Refugees face another obstacle for labour market incorporation, which is that they typically have to wait in an asylum centre during their application procedure. Scholars have argued that a lengthy procedure can negatively impact their labour market performance, a pattern that has indeed been found in the Netherlands (De Vroome and Van Tubergen, 2010), Switzerland (Hainmueller, Hangartner and Lawrence, 2016) and Germany (Kosyakova and Brenzel, 2020). Lengthy procedures may have negative consequences for various reasons. First, while being in a reception centre, asylum seekers face restrictions in acquiring host-country human capital, such as learning L2 or investing in their education. Studies in the Netherlands indeed show that long asylum procedures limit refugees' L2 acquisition (Van Tubergen, 2010;

Damen, Dagevos and Huijnk, 2021). Second, long procedures may result in negative health outcomes, such as inducing (additional) stress about the uncertainty of the outcome. Evidence for such a relationship was found in a study among Iraqi asylum seekers in the Netherlands (Laban et al., 2008) and in a 22-year longitudinal cohort study of refugees in Denmark (Hvidtfeldt, Petersen and Norredam, 2020).

Immigrant generation

Sociologists have paid attention to heterogeneity in ethnic inequalities across generations, in two ways: (1) generation differences and (2) path dependencies.

First, how the processes of economic integration unfold differently for the first and second generation has been studied. The occupational attainment of the first generation from non-Western origin countries is strongly hampered by the lower returns to education obtained in the origin country, as well as by limited language skills. Many refugees face an additional burden, because of serious mental health issues and their forced stay in a reception centre. Immigrants, including refugees, also have less resourceful networks; they lack connections with natives who can be helpful in finding jobs. And when applying for jobs, they are discriminated against by employers.

The trajectory of economic incorporation is different for the second generation. Because they are born and raised in the host society, they have obtained their education there as well. Moreover, many are fluent in the host-country language, and they have more cross-ethnic connections than their parents have. Consequently, they are better informed about the labour market, how institutions work, how and where to apply for jobs. This not only makes them better equipped for the labour market, but also reduces discrimination due to uncertainty about foreign credentials. Results from the GEMM study show that first-generation applicants faced higher levels of discrimination than the second generation (Veit and Thijsen, 2021). Because of these generational differences, the second generation has better prospects in the labour market than the first generation. This pattern of intergenerational 'assimilation' and improved 'immigrant incorporation' is found for almost all immigrant groups in European labour markets (Drouhot and Nee, 2019).

Second, sociologists argue that the (differential) experiences of economic inequalities among the first generation also have long-term consequences for subsequent generations and therefore for the endurance or dissipation of ethnic inequalities. The 'ethnic penalties' experienced by the first generation translate into 'social class' disadvantages for their children, the second generation. The higher levels of unemployment, lower income and poor housing conditions among the first generation from non-Western origins impact the education and labour market chances of their children (Platt, 2005; Heath, Cheung and Smith, 2007; Heath, Rothon and Kilpi, 2008; Heath and Brinbaum, 2014; Drouhot and Nee, 2019). However, even when taking into account these path-dependent social class effects, studies report that the second generation faces poorer labour market outcomes than natives (Heath, Rothon and Kilpi, 2008; Gracia, Vázquez-Quesada and Van de Werfhorst, 2016; Witteveen and Alba, 2018; Zuccotti and Platt, 2021). Thus, although the second generation is better incorporated in the labour market than the first generation, it is still at a disadvantage compared with natives.

Discussion

The growing share in European countries of people with a migration background has stimulated sociological work on ethnic inequalities in the labour market. Both descriptive and theoretical

knowledge has accumulated in the past decades, leading to better understanding of the magnitude and underlying processes of ethnic inequality. Although clearly much work has been done, there are also areas about which less is known. Here, I focus on one relatively understudied area, namely the effects of policy on reducing ethnic inequalities.

Before continuing, however, two remarks are important, which relate to (1) *scope* and (2) *relevance* of policy. Regarding scope, it should be emphasised that policy measures have their limitations in what they can do and which factors are beyond their control. For example, there is quite some evidence that suggests that within conservative Muslim groups, women have rather low levels of labour force participation. Scholars suspect that this is largely due to a combination of internalised conservative preferences and social control from the partner, parents, family members or other members of the ethnic community – factors which, when combined, restrict the labour force participation of women in Muslim minority groups (Van Tubergen, Maas and Flap, 2004; Polavieja, 2015; Khoudja and Fleischmann, 2017; Khoudja and Platt, 2018; Blommaert and Spierings, 2019; Arcarons, 2020). Similarly, connections to natives are important for immigrants in getting ahead in the labour market, as shown above, but it is hard to directly change such cross-group ties. Indirect policy measures, such as creating more opportunities for intergroup contact in the neighbourhood or at the workplace may nevertheless be useful, although little empirical research has been done on the potential of such policy measures.

Relevance of policy matters too, as immigrant composition is key. In many European countries, immigrants face huge barriers due to limited language skills. In these countries, policies targeting language learning may be extremely relevant. But this is clearly not the case for all countries in Europe, nor for all origin groups. In that sense, English-speaking countries, such as the UK, have a relative advantage, as many immigrants speak English upon arrival, and obviously language programmes are then less relevant for most origin groups in these countries. Similarly, some countries attract highly skilled immigrants, which makes for different policies from in countries facing mainly lower-skilled migrants. Also in that sense the UK is, again, different from most European societies, as immigrants in the UK have been consistently more highly educated, on average, than the native population (Dustmann, Kastis and Preston, 2021). Research shows that, because of their highly favourable human capital composition, immigrants in the UK are better incorporated in the labour market than immigrants in other European countries (Damelang, Ebensperger and Stumpf, 2021).

A distinction can be made between *immigration* and *integration* policies. Immigration policies relate to opportunities for and restrictions on immigration to a country, and to the conditions for (permanent) settlement. These are direct tools for policymakers to select certain origin groups and skills (for example, quotas and point systems), and countries vary in the degree they use these tools.

With respect to integration policies, several potential measures can be suggested. These policy measures are informed by sociological theories and empirical findings, discussed before. I discuss four of them here.

First, research shows that lack of recognition of foreign credentials is a major barrier for immigrants in finding adequate work. Hence, a policy implication is to facilitate immigrants in getting formal recognition of their foreign credentials. Second, because language skills are key for many immigrants, offering language courses shortly after arrival may be effective. Third, as lengthy asylum procedures limit the economic integration of refugees, from a policy perspective it is recommended to reduce the length of asylum procedures and facilitate language acquisition of asylum seekers already during their stay in a reception centre. Fourth, to combat ethnic

discrimination, one could anonymise job-application letters and résumés. This would create equal opportunities to make it to job interviews, where ethnic minority candidates may then have the opportunity to present their skills and talents.

All four policy measures seem to make intuitive sense, as they derive from sociological studies on the causes of ethnic disadvantage. To date, however, relatively few empirical studies have been done to evaluate the effectiveness, costs and possible side effects of these and other social policy measures to foster the integration of ethnic minorities in the labour market. This lack of knowledge has been addressed by scholars (Platt, Polavieja and Radl, 2022), and only recently have studies been conducted to fill this gap.

Several studies did so by comparing countries with different policy measures. Kogan (2016) analyses EU labour force surveys from 15 countries, to assess the impact of labour market training and labour market counselling. She finds that neither of the two policy measures is related to labour market outcomes of immigrants. Kanas and Steinmetz (2021), using EU labour force surveys from 17 countries, find that the economic disadvantage of family migrants and refugees, compared with labour migrants, is smaller in countries having more extensive labour market policies. Platt, Polavieja and Radl (2022), using data from the European Social Survey across 23 countries, find no effect of country-level policies regarding labour market training or policies facilitating the recognition of foreign qualifications. They do find evidence to suggest that anti-discrimination policies have a strong positive association with immigrant occupational attainment. These studies, in my view, are at the start of important and necessary research that looks at the influence of national and local policy on reducing ethnic inequalities in the labour market.

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