

**DIRECTORATE FOR EMPLOYMENT, LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
EMPLOYMENT, LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE****Triple Disadvantage? A first overview of the integration of refugee women****JEL Classification:****F22, J15, J16****Keywords:****Integration, Refugees, Immigrants, Women, Gender****Authorised for publication by Stefano Scarpetta, Director, Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs**

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Executive summary

45% of refugees in Europe are women, yet little is known on their integration outcomes and the specific challenges they face. This report summarises prior research on the integration of refugee women, both compared with refugee men and other immigrant women. It also provides new comparative evidence from selected European and non-European OECD countries. Refugee women face a number of particular integration challenges associated with poorer health and lower education and labour market outcomes compared to refugee men, who are already disadvantaged in comparison with other migrant groups. They also show a peak in fertility in the year after arrival. A large fraction has come from countries where gender inequality is high and employment of women tends to be low. However, there is little correlation between indicators such as gender differences in participation and employment in the origin and in the host country, suggesting that the integration issues can be addressed by host-country employment and education policy instruments. The report also finds that building basic skills in terms of educational attainment and host-country language training bears a high return in terms of improving labour market outcomes. It also provides intergenerational pay-off for their children. Against this backdrop, structured integration programmes such as the ones in the Scandinavian countries seem to be a worthwhile investment.

Résumé

45% des réfugiés en Europe sont des femmes, mais leur situation en matière d'intégration et les défis spécifiques auxquels elles sont confrontées restent largement méconnus. Ce rapport résume les recherches menées précédemment sur l'intégration des femmes réfugiées, à la fois comparée avec celle des hommes réfugiés et celles des autres femmes immigrées. Il apporte également de nouveaux éléments comparatifs en provenance de pays européens et non européens de l'OCDE. En raison de leur état de santé moins bon et de leurs niveaux d'éducation et situation sur le marché du travail relativement défavorables, les femmes réfugiées sont confrontées à des défis spécifiques en matière d'intégration comparés aux hommes réfugiés, qui sont eux-mêmes déjà désavantagés comparés aux autres groupes de migrants. Elles connaissent également un pic de fécondité dans l'année suivant l'arrivée. Elles viennent dans une large proportion de pays où les inégalités de genre sont élevées et le taux d'emploi des femmes est plutôt faible. Cependant, la corrélation est faible entre des indicateurs tels que les inégalités de genre dans la participation et l'emploi dans le pays d'origine et le pays de destination, ce qui amène à penser que la problématique de l'intégration peut être résolue par des politiques d'emploi et éducatives menées dans le pays d'accueil. Le rapport constate également que l'acquisition de compétences élémentaires (niveaux d'éducation, maîtrise de la langue du pays d'accueil) contribue largement à améliorer la situation sur le marché du travail. Cela s'avère bénéfique non seulement pour la génération directement concernée par les mesures mais également pour leurs enfants. D'après ces observations, les programmes structurés d'intégration tels que ceux qui existent dans les pays scandinaves apparaissent comme des investissements rentables.

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1. Introduction

1. The integration of the record numbers of refugees¹ who recently arrived in OECD countries is high on the policy agenda in many OECD countries. Within the group of refugees, the integration of refugee women is getting increasing attention, for a number of reasons.

2. First, refugee women are a sizeable and growing group. According to data from Eurostat, about half a million women obtained international protection in Europe since 2015, of which 300 000 in Germany. Data on the stock of refugee women are not consistently available, but according to a special module in the 2014 EU Labour Force Survey, about 45% of immigrants declaring to have arrived for reasons of international protection in the EU were women, i.e. more than 800 000 persons. Whereas the early flows of asylum seekers in Europe during the 2015-16 crisis were predominantly men, the share of women has risen over time. Globally, the share of women among those who obtain asylum is also larger than their share among asylum seekers and indeed, the share of women among those obtaining international protection status has increased from 29% in 2015 to 38% in 2017. The presence of refugee women is expected to rise further through family reunification, as the majority of spouses concerned are women.

3. Second, refugee women are a particularly vulnerable migrant group. Previous OECD work (OECD 2005) has shown that immigrant women face a “double disadvantage” – that is, they have lower outcomes compared to both immigrant men and native-born women. What is more, in over two thirds of OECD and EU countries, immigrant women have larger gaps with respect to employment vis-à-vis their native-born peers than immigrant men. Immigrants tend to be disadvantaged due to the fact that they have generally been raised and educated in a very different environment and often language. Within the group of immigrants, refugees face additional challenges related to the nature of their forced migration such as health issues, weak prior links with the host country and often also lack of documentation of their education or work experience (OECD 2016a). Refugee women are thus a priori at a particular disadvantage, as they have to tackle the specific obstacles facing immigrants, refugees, and women at the same time. This raises the question of whether there is a “triple disadvantage”, i.e. whether the challenges related to gender, immigrant status and forced migration add up, or even mutually reinforce each other.

4. Third, the integration of refugee women tends to be crucial for the integration of refugees’ children. New OECD research (OECD 2017a) has shown that the integration of immigrant women is decisive for the integration outcomes of their children, over and above what is observed for native-born mothers and children. In particular, the labour market

¹ When this report refers to “refugees”, it includes all beneficiaries of international protection, i.e. both those who obtained formal refugee status and those who received other forms of protection, notably subsidiary protection. When reference is made to survey data, it generally relates to those who self-declare having migrated for purposes of international protection. It does not consider asylum seekers, however, who are candidates for international protection status.

status of the immigrant mother seems to have a strong impact on the employment of their daughters.²

5. Against this backdrop, this report, prepared with the support of the Swedish Ministry of Employment in the context of the Swedish presidency of the Nordic Council in 2018, provides an overview of the outcomes of refugee women in select EU and OECD countries and discusses some key issues with respect to the integration of refugee women, building on evidence from a number of OECD countries with large refugee intakes. It uses a variety of different data sources (Box 1).

6. The remainder of this report is structured as follows: Section II presents an overview of the presence and characteristics of refugee women. Section III shows initial evidence on the labour market outcomes of refugee women, in comparison to both native-born men and women, and with respect to other migrant groups. Section IV then analyses some selected key challenges with respect to labour market integration of refugee women, and Section V concludes with some lessons for policy.

7. Key findings are:

- In the EU, there were more than 800 000 refugee women in 2014, and a further 500 000 women obtained international protection between 2015 and 2017, of which 300 000 in Germany alone.
- Refugee women are a group that is particularly vulnerable, and their outcomes tend to be below those of other immigrant women and of refugee men.
- While women account for only 30 percent of asylum seekers across Europe, about 45 percent of refugees are women. In contrast to refugee men, refugee women often come through family migration or resettlement. Waiting periods abroad could be used for pre-departure integration measures (for example, by engaging in language education), but this is rarely done.
- Compared with both other migrant women and refugee men, refugee women have lower education levels and are overrepresented among those lacking basic qualifications.
- Refugee women take longer time to get established into the labour market compared with refugee men. Whereas the latter experience relatively steep gains in employment rates during the first 5-9 years after arrival which then taper off, the integration path of refugee women is characterised by modest but steady increases that continue for at least 10-15 years.
- Refugee women have lower levels of host-country language skills compared to men in the first 2-3 years after arrival. While the gap gradually closes over time, language proficiency remains at lower levels.
- Refugee women with intermediate or advanced levels of proficiency in the host-country language have 40 percentage points higher employment rates than those with little or no language skills. Once accounting for differences in socio-demographic characteristics, the difference is halved but remains much stronger than for other migrant women.

² Interestingly, the evidence for the native-born children of refugees in Sweden show rather good outcomes compared with other groups of native-born children of immigrants elsewhere in Europe (OECD 2018). This might suggest that the longstanding and comparatively strong integration efforts for refugee women in that country also provide an intergenerational return.

- Compared with both refugee men and other migrant women, refugee women experience a stronger increase in their employment rate when they have higher qualifications. However, 40% of those with tertiary education who found a job were over-qualified – twice the figure of their native-born peers.
- When employed, refugee women are frequently in part-time employment. In OECD-Europe, more than 4 out of 10 employed refugee women have a part-time job – almost twice the level among native-born women, and also 6 percentage points more than among other immigrant women.
- Refugee women are quite likely to get pregnant the year after arrival, as the uncertainty and insecurity refugees experience prior and during the process of flight makes them more reluctant to have children during this period. Possible waiting periods for family reunification may further add to a build-up in unfulfilled desire to have children.
- The peak in fertility shortly after arrival contributes to slower integration of some refugee women. There is a need for more flexible arrangements regarding the timing and organisation of introduction activities which accounts for the specific needs of women with small children – otherwise support will be given when it is less likely to have an effect on outcomes. Flexible language course arrangements for mothers also seem to provide good results in terms of outcomes.
- Refugee women often come from countries with poor education systems that are characterised by very low employment of women and high gender inequality in labour market participation and indeed, by both accounts their performance in the host country tends to be better than that of their peers in the origin countries.
- Poor health leads to poor employment outcomes, and refugee women are more likely to suffer from health problems.
- There is a strong link between refugees' employment and their social network, especially contacts with the native-born, but women have far fewer networks than men. Mentorship programmes can help to create such networks.
- Compared with refugee men, refugee women frequently receive less integration support, both in terms of hours of language training and active labour market measures.
- Evidence from Sweden suggests that specific attention to refugee women in introduction activities entails a positive effect on employment.
- Employment of immigrant mothers is associated with much better labour market outcomes for their children, especially for girls. Given the high return for language and education of refugee women, there is thus a strong case for investing into their integration.

Box 1. Data on refugee women used in the report

Register data. The Scandinavian countries – Denmark, Norway and Sweden – have particularly rich and comprehensive data on refugee women, through a link between population registers and permit data from the immigration authorities. The register data covers people who are settled (not asylum seekers) and who are either granted refugee status, resettled or other humanitarian reason in addition to family migration to one of these categories. Through a special request to the national statistical offices, this report includes comparative evidence on refugee women in these three countries.

European Labour Force Survey 2014 ad hoc module on the Labour market situation of and their immediate descendants. Following a first migration module in 2008, the 2014 EU Labour Force survey (LFS) included 11 additional variables on migrants and their immediate descendants to supplement the information already contained in the core EU-LFS. This additional information allows for identifying migrants based on different grounds for migration. Although this information is not based on permits, but is self-declared, it enables to analyse the labour market outcomes for refugees compared to other immigrant groups. In this report people who have declared migrating for international protection purposes are referred to as refugees (see Dumont et al. 2016 for details). Like other surveys, sample size limits the level of detail that can be analysed.

Country-specific surveys. A growing number of OECD countries have specific surveys for refugees, both cross-sectional and longitudinal.

a) Germany: BAMF – Flüchtlingsstudie. The German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees surveyed, in 2014, more than 2 800 persons who had obtained a refugee status between 2008 and 2012. The survey covered topics such as living situation (housing), family situation and social contact outside of family, religion, language skills, education, professional training, employment and earnings, work experience from before migration, integration programs/courses, language training, migration history, and personal background (demographics). For this report, students and people who reported to be pensioners or above 54 years of age were excluded from the analysis. In 2016, the BAMF started, in co-operation with the Institute for Labour Research (IAB) and the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), a new longitudinal survey of 4500 persons who sought asylum in Germany (IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey).

b) Austria: FIMAS - Integration measures and labour market success of refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection in Austria. In 2016, the ICMPD - International Centre for Migration Policy Development - surveyed 1 200 recognised refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection of working age who had arrived mostly since 2006. Interviews were conducted by native speaker interviewers face-to-face with persons from Syria, Afghanistan, the Russian Federation and Iraq in nine Austrian cities. The survey covers topic such as educational background from sending country, education from Austria, work experience from home country, work experience in Austria, earnings, unpaid work, language proficiency in German, other language skills, social network, housing, health and socio-demographics.

c) Norway: Living Condition Survey among Immigrants. This survey, conducted in 2015-2016 by Statistics Norway includes 4 435 immigrants, originating from 12 different countries. Data on admission class is based on permit data and linked to

individual respondents. About 1900 of the respondents were refugees, and 750 of these (40%) were women. Respondents were interviewed about housing and neighbourhood, employment and working environment, unpaid work and volunteering, education, Norwegian language skills, religion, family and social contact besides family, background from country of origin, transnational ties, economy, health, victimization and insecurity, discrimination, attitudes and values, trust, belonging and citizenship.

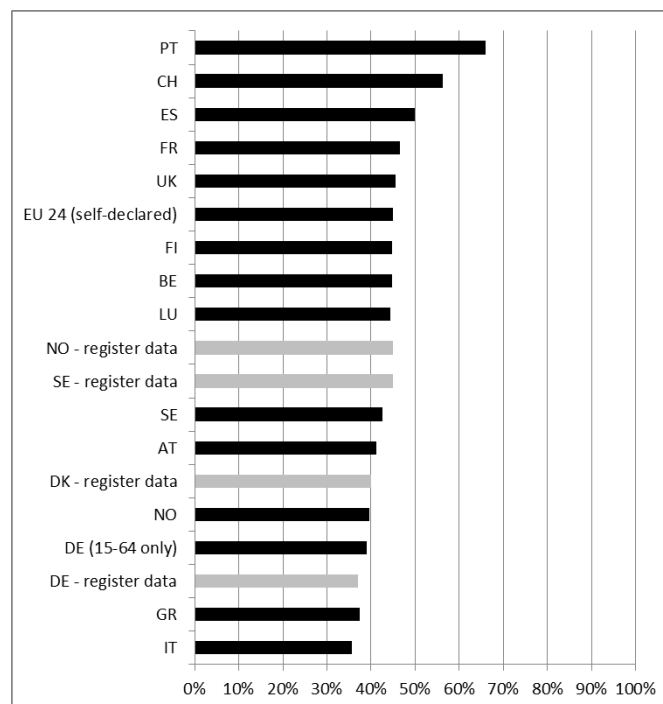
d) Australia: Building a New Life in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants (BNLA) is following a large cohort (1 104 women out of a total of 2 399) of recently arrived humanitarian migrants as they settle into life Australia. BNLA was established to understand the factors that aid or hinder successful settlement of humanitarian migrants during their first five years in Australia. Questionnaires are translated into a large number of languages enabling most participants to complete the survey in their native language. The questionnaire covers a broad range of settlement related issues including personal backgrounds, migration pathways, housing, language, employment, education and related social and economic issues.

2. The presence and characteristics of refugee women

Refugee women – a sizeable and growing group

8. Worldwide, 49% of persons of concern as defined by the UNHCR are women. In OECD countries, available data suggests slightly lower shares. Data from European OECD countries in 2014 based on self-declarations show that about 45% of all persons who said that they arrived for reasons of international protection are women (Figure 1), which amounts to more than 800 000 persons. There are no strong differences between the share of women among self-declarations and the share of women within the register data in Germany and in the Scandinavian countries.³

Figure 1. Share of women among refugees, European OECD countries, around 2015



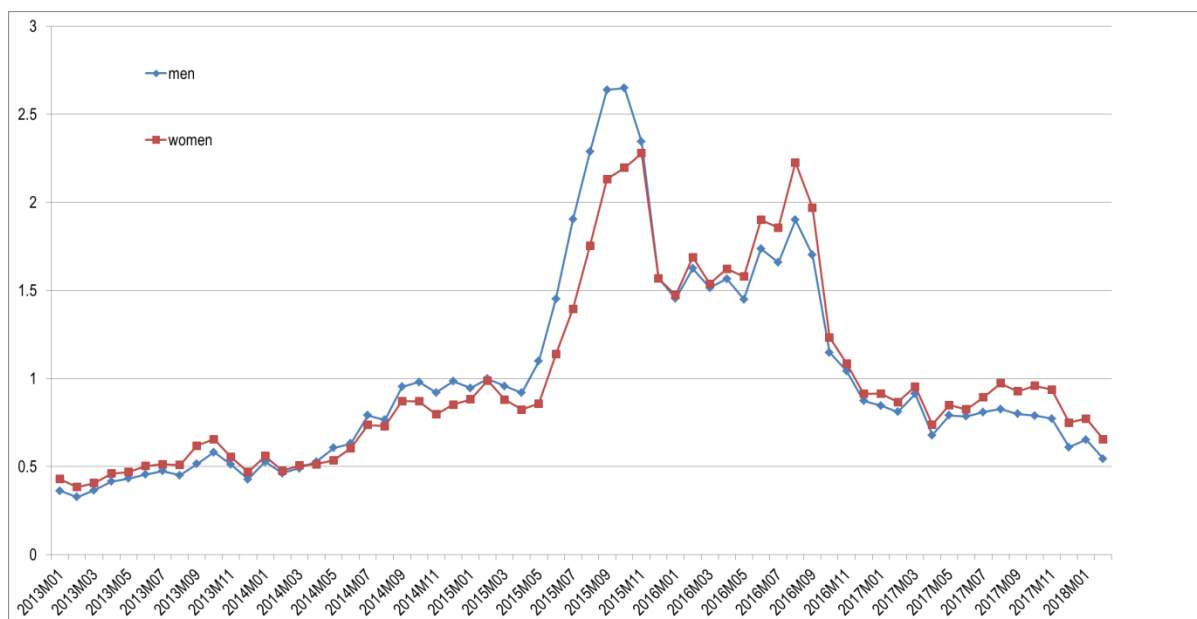
Source and Note: Grey bars refer to register data refer to end-2016; black bars refer to self-declared refugees from the 2014 EU Labour Force Survey. In Germany, register data refer to all persons who have a permit on humanitarian grounds.

9. However, there are large differences in the share of women across different categories of refugees. In particular, refugee women are less likely to have come through the asylum channel. Among the asylum claims that were filed in Europe since 2014, only 30% were women. In the early days of the crisis of the European asylum system, flows were largely dominated by men. In July 2015, more than 3 in 4 first-time asylum applicants

³ This is noteworthy since the register data in the Scandinavian countries include those who entered through family migration to refugees, which predominantly consists of women. In other words, it seems that women who joined their refugee spouses through the family migration channel do indeed consider themselves as refugees.

in the European Union were men. The relative importance of women has risen since and in February 2018, the last month for which data is available, 65% of first-time asylum applicants were men and 35% women. Figure 2 illustrates this by showing the inflows by gender and month, relative to the gender-specific 5-year average.

Figure 2. Ratio of first-time asylum applicants by gender, relative to gender-specific five-year average, 2013-2018



Source: OECD secretariat calculations with data from Eurostat.

10. In contrast, resettled refugees tend to be more gender-balanced than those coming through the asylum system; and among family migrants to refugees, the majority are women. For example, of the about 100 000 refugees resettled in Canada between 2015 and March 2018, more than 48% were women.⁴

11. Data from Norway illustrate the different compositions: While 60% of refugee men entered through the asylum channel, only 38% of refugee women entered through this channel (Table 1). Indeed, refugee women are just as likely to have come through the family migration channel. Data from Norway also shed some light on the issue of family migration to refugees, a topic that is under much policy debate in many countries. In the past, for every three refugees there was on average one additional family member who later joined through family migration (Dzarmarjia and Sandnes 2016).

⁴ Canada also has a number of specific resettlement programmes for refugee women. The 2017 budget included funding of CAD 27.7 million over three years, beginning in 2017-18, to resettle Yazidi women and girls who were being targeted for abduction and enslavement by Daesh fighters in northern Iraq and Syria. Building on these efforts, the Government in 2018 committed to further increase the number of vulnerable refugee women and girls to be resettled in Canada as government-assisted refugees. The 2018 budget proposes further funding of CAD 20.3 million over five years, beginning in 2018-19, to welcome an additional 1 000 refugee women and girls from various conflict zones around the world.

Table 1. Composition of refugee men and women by category in Norway, 2017

	Total	Men	Women
Total	100%	100%	100%
Primary refugee, of	74%	82%	64%
-Resettled	15%	15%	16%
-Asylum	50%	60%	38%
-Other	8%	8%	9%
Family to refugee,	26%	18%	36%
- Reunification	19%	15%	24%
- Formation	8%	3%	13%
N=	217,241	118,874	98,367

Source: Statistics Norway; OECD Secretariat calculations.

12. The origin of refugee women varies significantly across the four countries for which data on the stock of refugee women is available (Table 2). Whereas Syrians account for almost half (42%) of all refugee women in Denmark, they account for less than one in thirteen refugee women in Norway.

Table 2. Origin of refugee women in Denmark, Germany, Norway and Sweden, 2016

Sweden		Norway		Denmark		Germany	
Syria	19%	Somalia	13%	Syria	42%	Syria	35%
Iraq	17%	Iraq	9%	Iraq	8%	Iraq	10%
Somalia	10%	Syria	7%	Afghanistan	8%	Afghanistan	6%
Bosnia-Herzeg.	8%	Eritrea	8%	Somalia	8%	Russia	6%
Iran	7%	Iran	7%	Iran	5%	Kosovo	5%
Else	39%	Else	55%	Else	29%	Else	37%
Total	100%	Total	100%	Total	100%	Total	100%
N=	286,847		98,367		31,130		328,600

Source and Note: Denmark, Norway and Sweden: Register data on 31 December 2016 (data provided by National Statistical Offices). Germany: Data provided by the Federal Statistical Office on the basis of data from Central foreigners register on persons with international protection status, 30 June 2016.

13. There is also some discrepancy in the share of women across the origin of refugees, although the differences are not large (Table 3). In all four countries with the exception of Denmark, the share of women is rather low among refugees from Syria.⁵ This seems to be related to the fact that Syrians are a relatively recent group, and – as mentioned above – the share of women tends to rise over time. Within the largest origin groups in these countries, the share of women is largest for refugees from Somalia – except for Germany.⁶

⁵ The high share of women among Syrians in Denmark is noteworthy, since the share of women is comparatively low for the other main refugee groups in Denmark.

⁶ The likely reason for the high share of women among refugees from Somalia in the Scandinavian countries is the fact that many of the former have arrived through resettlement programmes rather than the asylum channel.

Table 3. Share of women among main refugee groups in Denmark, Germany, Norway and Sweden, 2016

	Denmark	Germany	Norway	Sweden	Total
Syria	42%	33%	37%	41%	35%
Iraq	30%	40%	44%	45%	42%
Afghanistan	34%	41%	*	*	40%
Somalia	46%	38%	47%	50%	48%
Iran	35%	37%	46%	44%	43%
Total (all origins)	40%	39%	45%	45%	42%

Source and Note: Denmark, Norway and Sweden: Register data on 31 December 2016 (data provided by National Statistical Offices). Germany: Data provided by the Federal Statistical Office on the basis of data from Central foreigners register on persons with international protection status, 30 June 2016. *Afghanistan is not among the top ten sources for refugees in Norway and Sweden.

Refugee women are overrepresented among the lowest-qualified

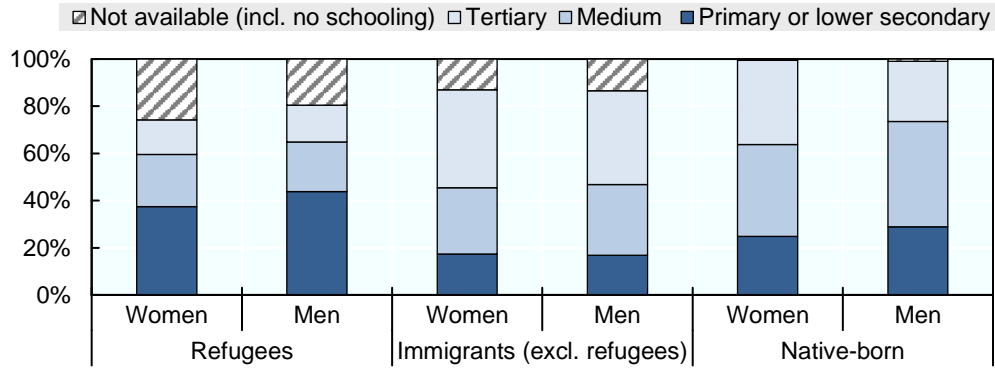
14. In terms of educational attainment, the available information points to lower levels of education among refugee women, whatever the comparison group (refugee men, other immigrant women, native-born women). As refugees tend to have lower education than other migrant groups, and these tend in turn to have lower education levels than the native-born, there is thus evidence of a “triple disadvantage” with respect to education. This is surprising, since among both the native-born and among migrants in general, women tend to have somewhat higher education levels than men (OECD and EU, forthcoming).

15. The difference appears to be largest at the lowest levels of education (no school or only primary education, Figure 3a-c). However, data on educational attainment is limited, especially at the lowest levels. For example, among the Scandinavian countries only Norway has a separate category for “no schooling”, and only Sweden differentiates between primary and lower secondary schooling.

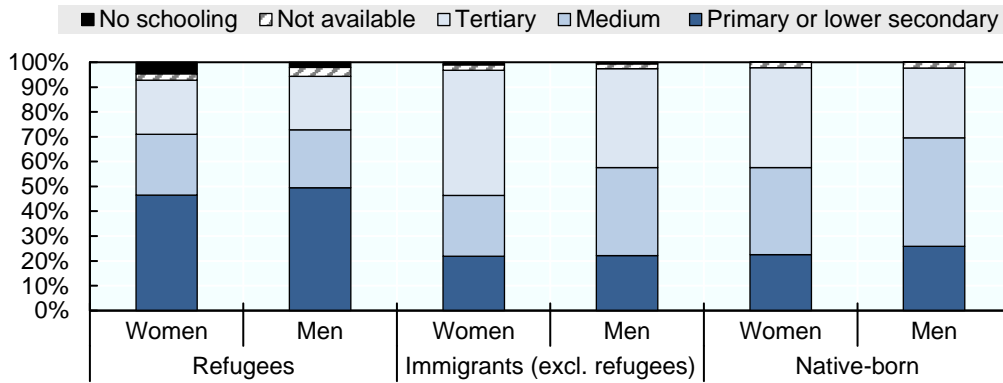
16. The finding that refugee women have lower education levels than refugee men is confirmed by data from Germany from about 200 000 adults who filed an asylum request in the first half of 2016. More than 16% of women had no formal schooling, compared with 7% of men (Neske and Rich 2016). Data from the 2014 European Union Labour Force Survey ad-hoc module on migration (EU-LFS AHM) also show an overrepresentation of refugee women among the low-educated, and the differences compared with their native-born peers of the same gender are larger than for other migrant groups – with the exception of refugee men in Norway and all non-EU male groups in Austria (Figure 3D).

Figure 3. Educational attainment levels in Scandinavian countries, 15-64

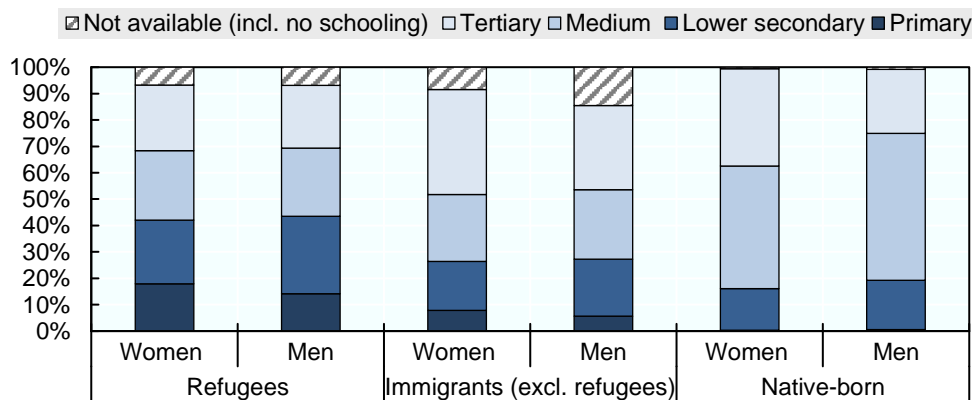
A. Denmark, 2016



B. Norway, 2016

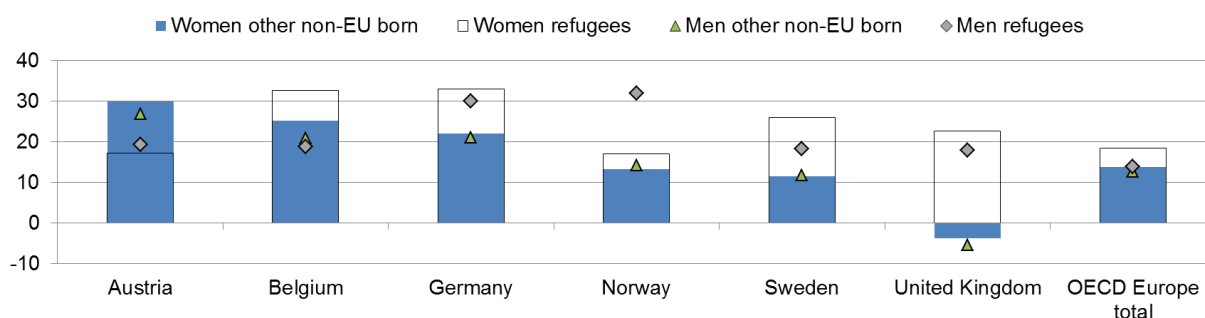


C. Sweden, 2016

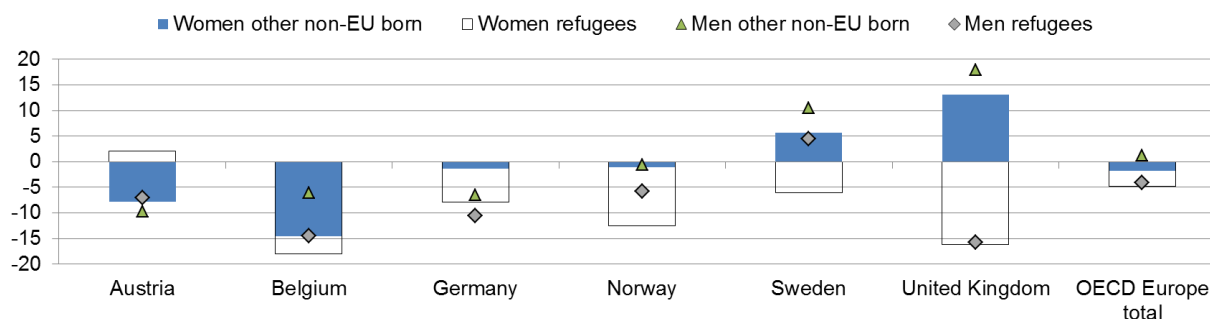


D. Selected European OECD countries, 2014

a) Difference in percentage points with the share of low-educated among the native-born



b) Difference in percentage points with the share of highly educated among the native-born



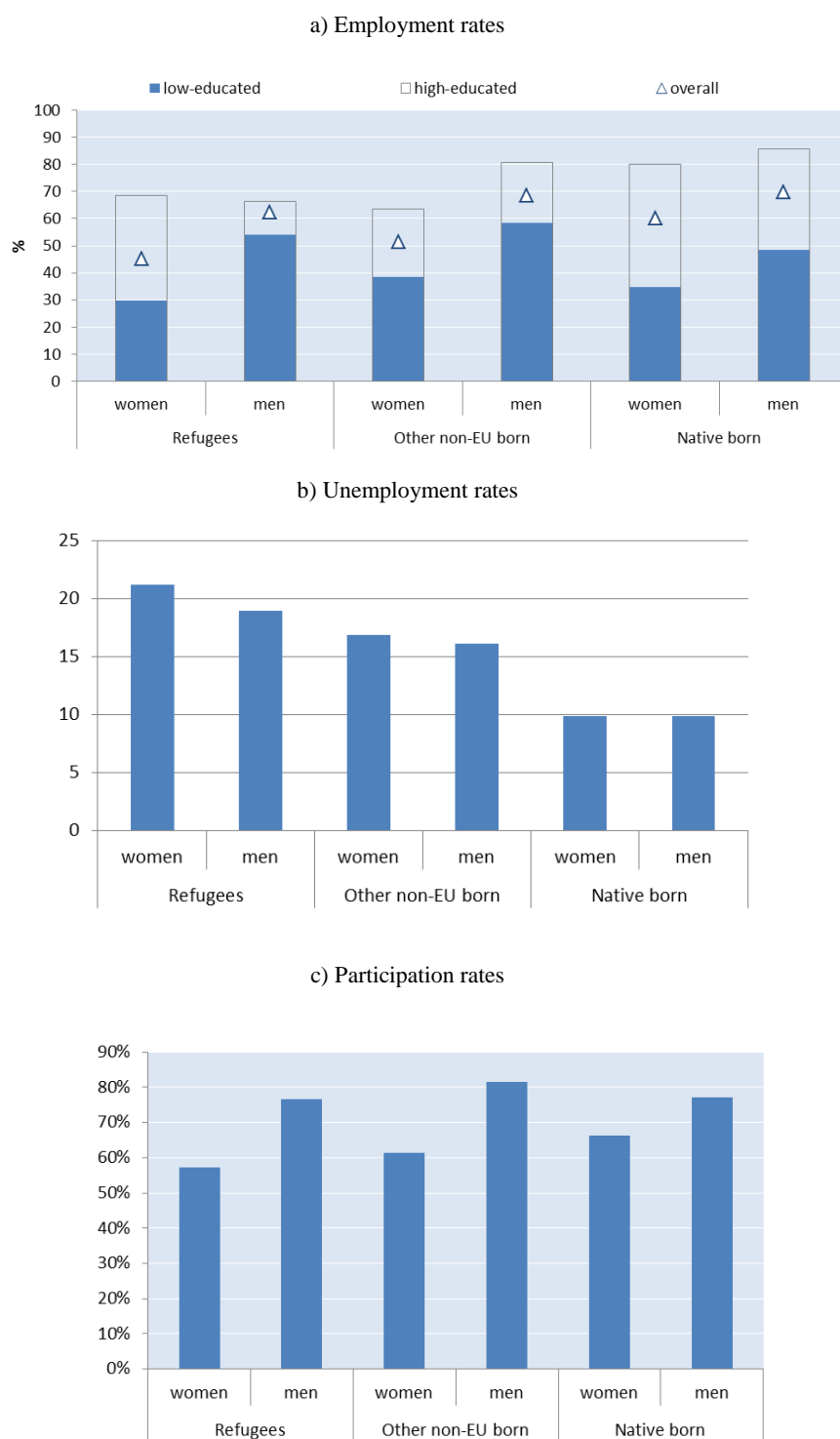
Source and Note: Panels A-C: Register data (data provided by National Statistical Offices). Panel D: EU-LFS ad-hoc module 2014. OECD-Europe includes all European OECD countries apart from DE, DK, NL and IR. High-educated people are defined as those having the highest level of qualification equal or above tertiary education level (ISCED 5–6) and low-educated are defined as those who at most completed lower secondary school level (ISCED 0-2). “Other non-EU born” refers to all foreign-born from non-EU countries that are not refugees (e.g. persons who declared to be family or labour migrants).

3. Labour market outcomes of refugee women

Refugee women have particularly low employment rates

17. Recent joint OECD and EU work (Dumont et al. 2016) has shown that the labour market outcomes of refugee women are well below those of both refugee men and other migrant women (Figure 4). Across the EU, in 2014, only 45% of refugee women were in employment, well below the outcomes of both other immigrant women and refugee men. Indeed, the gap vis-à-vis their native-born peers is twice as large as the one observed for refugee men, pointing to a “triple disadvantage” on the labour market. Other labour market indicators are also unfavourable, with an unemployment rate above 20% – more than twice the rate for native-born women – and a participation rate below 60%. Both country-specific LFS data and more recent register data from the Scandinavian countries confirm this picture (Figure A A.1).

Figure 4. Labour market outcomes of refugees and other non-EU born by gender, EU countries, 15-64, 2014



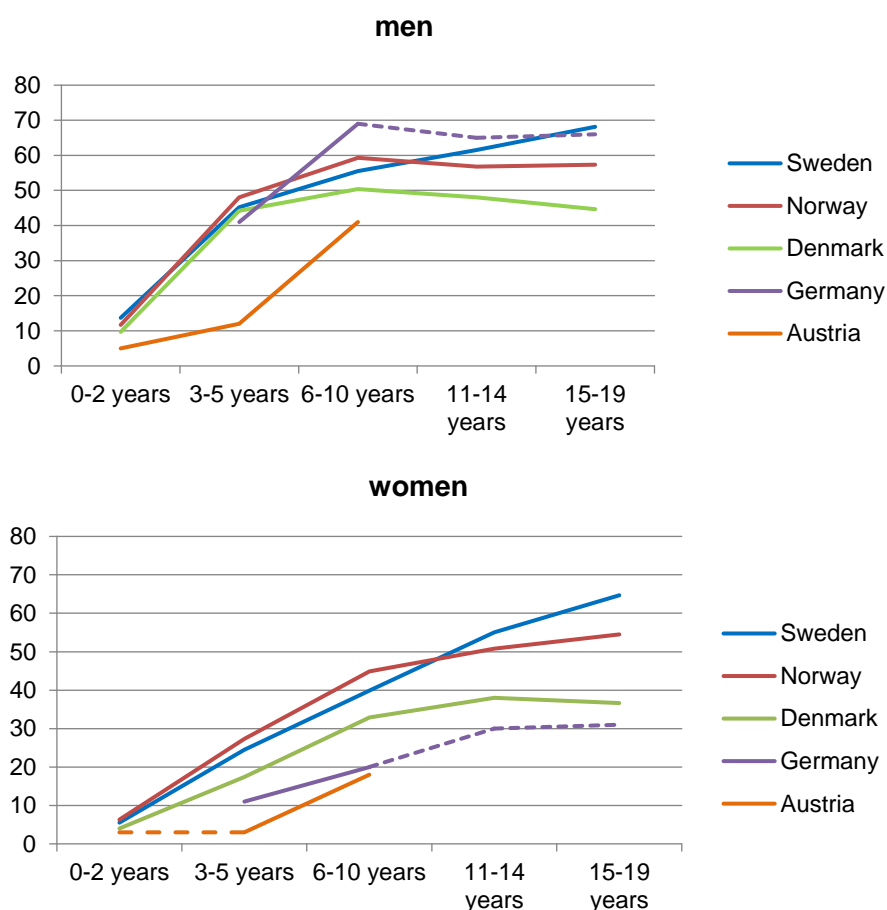
Source: Adapted from Dumont et al. (2016). Calculations based on EU LFS 2014 AHM. Data cover 25 countries of the European Union.

Note: See Figure 3 above.

The convergence process is slow, but goes on for many years

18. The gaps in employment rates vis-à-vis other groups are particularly pronounced in the early years after arrival. Figure 5 shows the integration pathway of refugee men and women in different countries by duration of residence. Note that this is based on cross-sectional data, rather than following the same people over time. Therefore, in particular those with very long duration of residence may have come from different countries. Nevertheless, the picture in the few countries for which longitudinal analysis has been undertaken, such as Bratsberg et al. (2017) for Norway and OECD (2016b) for Sweden, shows a remarkably consistent picture that is also evident in Figure 4. That is, refugee women have a lower starting point in terms of employment rates, and their initial progress in terms of improvements in employment rates is slower. At the same time, whereas for men – at least in the Nordic countries – the progress seems to halt (and even sometimes reverse) after 6-10 years, for women it is ongoing for at least 10-15 years.

Figure 5. Evolution of employment rates of refugees with duration of residence, by gender, around 2016, persons aged 15-64, selected European OECD countries



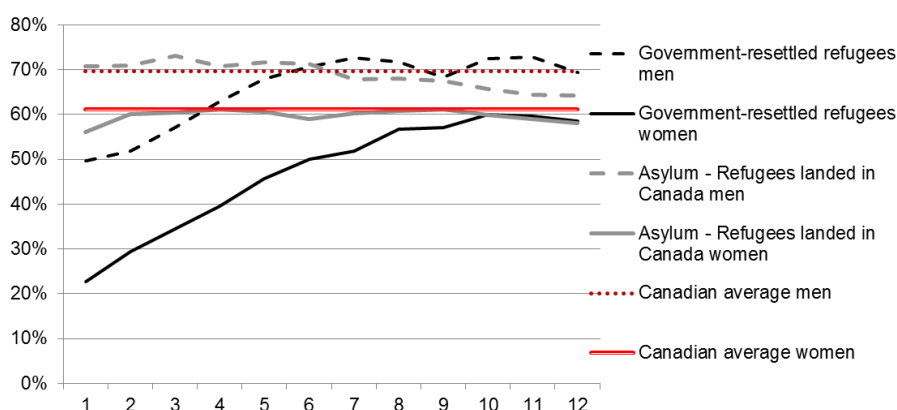
Source: Denmark, Norway, Sweden: 2016 Register data; Austria: 2016 Survey on Integration measures and labour market success of refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection in Austria (FIMAS); Germany: 2014 Survey on Integration of Persons Granted Asylum and Recognised Refugees (*Flüchtlingsstudie*).

Note: Dashed lines are of limited reliability due to small sample sizes.

19. A final observation from Figure 5 is that whereas Scandinavian countries do not seem to perform better than Germany⁷ in the integration of men, this does seem to be the case for women – notably in Sweden and Norway.⁸ This is interesting, as it provides tentative evidence that the introduction programme (which Germany does not have, in contrast to the Scandinavian countries) may have specific value for refugee women. One reason for this may be that refugee women may otherwise not necessarily be in touch with integration support. This is notably the case for those who joined an already resident and working spouse through family migration. Since the family is not dependent on social assistance, contact with mainstream integration services is often limited. In the case of the Scandinavian countries, however, family migrants joining refugees are covered by the introduction programmes, regardless of the financial situation of the spouse.

20. Due to a different composition of the refugee intake and definitions of employment in the underlying data, it is not possible to compare these data directly with those from the OECD countries settled by migration, such as Canada (Figure 6). In contrast to Europe, the refugees – both men and women – primarily arrive through resettlement rather than the asylum channel. However, as far as resettled refugee women are concerned, the pattern is similar in terms of very low initial employment incidence and a rather slow but long-lasting convergence towards the outcomes of native-born women.

Figure 6. Incidence of employment earnings of various refugee groups compared with the Canadian average, by duration of residence and gender, 2014, Canada



Source: Data on the basis of linked tax registers provided by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

Note: The value of 70% for the Canadian average men implies that 70% of Canadian men reported at least some earnings from employment in 2014.

⁷ The Austrian survey includes few recent arrivals, and the employment of women is very low so the figures are of limited reliability. However, the respondents were asked after how much time in Austria they had found a first employment. For refugee men, the average duration was 2 years and 8 months, while it was 4 years and three months for women (Hosner et al. 2017).

⁸ Note, however, that in Scandinavian countries many refugees are in subsidised employment, especially in the early years after arrival. This is less the case in Denmark, however, which focuses on unsubsidised employment. Indeed, whereas in Sweden three years after arrival only a minority of refugees in employment are in unsubsidised jobs, this is the case for 90% of employed refugees in Denmark – both men and women.

When employed, the qualifications of refugee women are often underused

21. Finally, when employed, refugee women are more likely to work part-time. According to data from the 2014 EU-LFS AHM, 42% of the employed refugee women in OECD-Europe are working part-time,⁹ compared with 36% of other non-EU immigrant women in employment and less than 27% of the native-born women. Employed refugee women with tertiary education also have a high incidence of over-qualification – that is, they are working in jobs that would only require a lower level of qualifications. In OECD-Europe in 2014, 40% of those refugee women with tertiary education who found a job were over-qualified – twice the figure of their native-born peers.

⁹ Data for Germany, Ireland, Denmark and the Netherlands were not available.

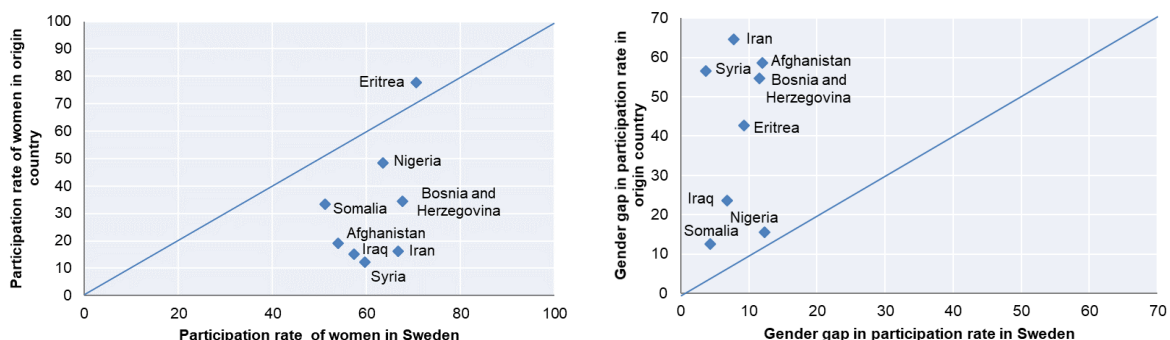
4. Selected key challenges for the integration of refugee women

Country of origin effects

22. A key challenge for labour market integration is the fact that many refugee women come from countries with high gender inequality and where the employment of women is low. Indeed, given the high correlation between refugee status and origin countries, it is often difficult to disentangle country-of-origin effects from refugee-specific effects. What is more, the few non-refugees from countries such as Somalia or Afghanistan are likely to be very different from the refugees on many accounts. Within the group of refugees, however, Bevelander (2011) finds for Sweden significant country-of-origin effects for both refugee men and women even after controlling for a broad range of characteristics such as age, education, years since arrival, family situation, and refugee admission category (resettled, asylum claimant and family reunion). Likewise, Picot, Zhang and Hou (2018), in their analysis of the labour market outcomes of refugees from different origin countries in Canada, find large origin-country effects for both men and women – both regarding initial outcomes and with respect to progress over time. Groups with low employment rates tended to have low earnings levels among the employed. Furthermore, groups with low (high) employment rates and earnings among refugee men also tended to have low (high) rates among refugee women.¹⁰

23. Figure 7 sheds some further light on this issue by comparing the labour market participation of women from key origin countries of refugees in Sweden compared to the participation rates in origin countries. Three findings stick out. First, apart from Eritrea, women from all key origin countries have higher participation rates in Sweden than in their country of origin. Second, the gender gap in the origin country is larger everywhere than in Sweden. Third, there is little correlation between overall labour market participation of women in the origin country and the respective participation in Sweden. The same holds for the gender gaps.

Figure 7. Labour market participation of women from key refugee origin countries in Sweden compared to the origin countries, 2015/16



Source: Database of Immigrants in OECD countries 2015-16 (forthcoming a) and UNDP Gender Inequality Index 2015.

¹⁰ For a comprehensive discussion of country-of-origin effects and other related factors in the labour market integration of immigrant women, see Khoudja (2018).

24. At the same time, analysis with the Living Conditions Survey from Norway, which includes variables on employment in the origin country, show no correlation between refugee women's labour market status in the country of origin and their labour market status in Norway. The reason for this somewhat surprising finding seems to be that employment of women in origin countries tends to be most pronounced among the poorest households, i.e. is out of economic necessity. Indeed, there is evidence of a U-shaped relationship between employment of women and GDP per capita (Verick 2014).

25. In surveys, refugee women frequently state that both husband and wife should be economically active. In the 2016 Norwegian living conditions survey, respondents were asked whether or not they agree that both husband and wife should contribute economically to the income of the household, and share domestic tasks between one another. A large majority (around 80%) of refugee women and men, from key refugee origin countries like Somalia, Eritrea, Afghanistan, agreed that both husband and wife should contribute economically in the household, and that men and women should have the same duty to take care of the household and children. Refugee women are somewhat more inclined to agree (87%) to the statement about shared responsibility to contribute economically compared to men (79%).¹¹

26. Likewise, in the 2016 IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey among asylum seekers and refugees in Germany, less than 30% of surveyed men and women stated that it would be problematic if the wife earns more than the husband, and more than 80% favoured equal education opportunities for sons and daughters. What is more, 60% of surveyed women stated that they "certainly" want to work in Germany, and a further 25% stated that this is "likely" (BAMF 2016). There were no strong differences by origin country with regards to these questions.

Low education

27. One key challenge for integration – both with respect to the labour market and regarding the host society – is the low educational attainment of many refugee women. Indeed, as seen in Figure 3 above, the overall educational attainment of refugee women is below that of refugee men, and refugee women are especially overrepresented among those with very little or no formal schooling. At the same time, regression analysis using both national microdata from Germany and Norway and the European Labour Force Survey consistently shows that upper secondary and tertiary education is associated with a larger increase in the employment probabilities for refugee women compared with refugee men.¹²

28. Part of the effect stems from the fact that fertility tends to be highest among the lowest-educated women (see e.g. Stichnoth and Yeter 2016), and having children is associated with a much lower employment probability for women while it is associated with a higher employment probability among men. What is more, some data suggest that the gender gap in educational attainment is largest among those with children. For Germany, data from the IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey show that refugee women without children have slightly higher educational attainment levels than men without children, while the opposite is the case for those with children (BAMF 2016).

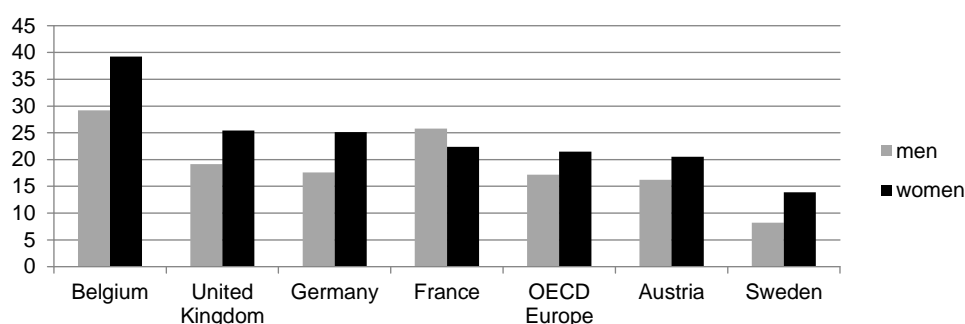
¹¹ Note that the question did not specify how much women should contribute, e.g. whether they should contribute equally to men, but rather that both men and women should contribute economically.

¹² Along the same lines, Bratsberg, Raaum and Røed (2017) find for Norway that host-country education entails large pay-offs, and these are especially pronounced for refugee women.

Lack of language knowledge

29. Speaking the host-country language is arguably the single most important skill that refugees need to build for successful integration into the host society and labour market (see e.g. OECD 2017c). Here, the available evidence suggests a disadvantage for refugee women, compared both with other migrant women and also compared with refugee men. Figure 8 shows that – apart from France – in all European countries for which data are available, the share of refugee women who only have basic or no knowledge of the host-country language is larger than among refugee men. Interestingly as well, the share is smallest in Sweden, which – through the introduction programme and its strong language component - has the most advanced policies for supporting refugee women’s integration among the countries included in the figure.

Figure 8. Share of refugees who report at most “beginner” level of host-country language knowledge, by gender, 15-64, 2014



Source and Note: EU-LFS AHM 20414. OECD-Europe includes all European OECD countries apart from DK, NL and IR.

30. Refugee women tend to have poorer skills of the host-country language upon arrival¹³ and remain at a disadvantage, as data from the Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants in Australia (BNLA) show. Upon arrival, 43% of refugee women responded that they could not understand any English, compared with 31% of refugee men. Over time, the ability to understand English clearly improved for both refugee women and men. Three years after arrival, 16% of refugee women still did not understand any spoken English, while the corresponding figure for men was 7% (Department of Social Services 2017).

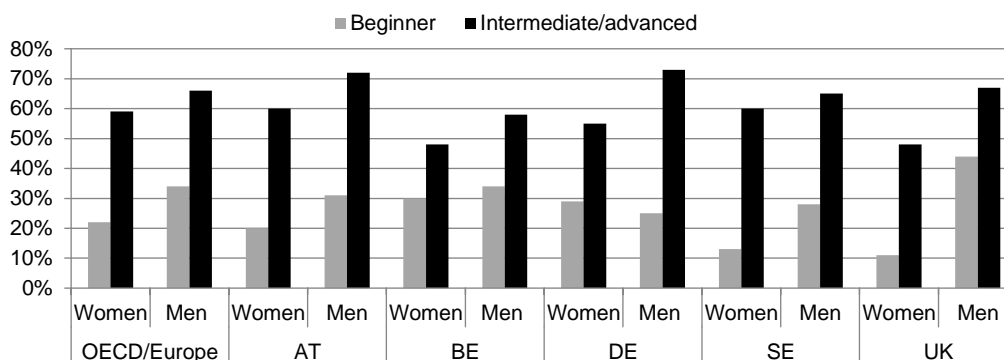
31. Cross sectional data from Austria, Germany and Norway show a similar pattern of language proficiency for refugee women compared to refugee men. Hardly anyone knows German or Norwegian upon arrival, but gradually language proficiency improves. For women, however, the process of acquiring the necessary language skills often takes more time compared with men. For example in Germany, data from the IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey (BAMF 2016) show that refugee women have, after controlling for a broad range of socio-demographic characteristics, a ten percentage points lower probability to have participated in the introduction courses than their male peers. Their self-assessed improvement in German language mastery since arrival has also been lower. At the same

¹³ Where this is an issue, since virtually all refugees in countries whose language is not widely spread – such as German or the Nordic countries – will have no knowledge of the host-country language upon arrival.

time, administrative data from the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees show that women from the main origin countries of refugee migration to Germany who take the final test after the introduction courses – which mainly consist of German language training – have better results than men (more than 49% of women achieving level B1 in the European reference framework for languages vs. less than 45% of men).¹⁴ Unfortunately, it is not possible to discern whether language courses are particularly effective for refugee women, or whether there is selective take-up and conclusion – i.e. that refugee women with lower skills either do not participate in the course or drop out.¹⁵

32. Having good host-country language skills is a key determinant for labour market integration, and this is particularly true for refugee women. Those refugee women with intermediate or advanced levels of proficiency in the host-country language have a full 40 percentage points higher employment rate than those with little or no language skills (Figure 9). Once accounting for observable differences in socio-demographic characteristics, the difference is halved but still remains much stronger than for other migrant women.

Figure 9. Employment rates of refugees and self-declared knowledge of the host-country language, European OECD countries, 2014



Source and Note: EU-LFS AHM 2014. OECD-Europe includes all European OECD countries apart from DE, DK, NL and IR. Data refer to all self-declared refugees in the survey, regardless of their duration of residence.

Family obligations and childbearing

33. In Europe, according to data from the 2014 EU Labour Force Survey, about one in three adult refugee women are singles, which is about the same share as among other migrant women and among the native-born. In the 2014 *Flüchtlingsstudie* for Germany, for all nationalities apart from Eritreans and Iranians, about two in three refugee women

¹⁴ Germany has also specific courses for “parents and women”. Here the results are even better, with 53% of those who took the final test passing with the level B1 in the European reference framework for languages. However, there are only few such courses, and their share among all courses has been declining further with the refugee crisis.

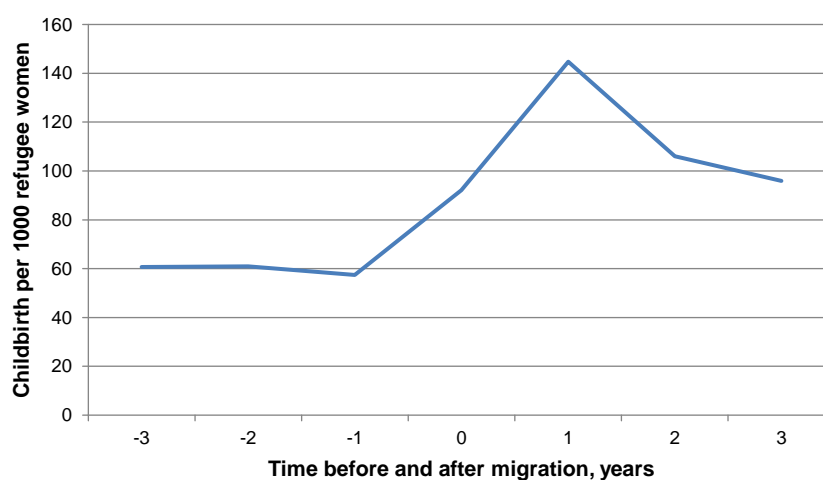
¹⁵ There is no data available with respect to take-up and drop-out rates for integration courses in Germany.

were married, with the husband living in Germany in the overwhelming majority of cases (see Worbs et al. 2016).

34. Refugee women are quite likely to get pregnant the year after arrival, which seems linked to the fact that the uncertainty and insecurity refugees experience during and prior to flight makes them more reluctant to have children during this period. Figure 10 illustrates this with data from Norway; Andersson (2004) provides similar evidence for Sweden.

35. What is more, refugee women – in particular those from African countries – tend to have high overall fertility, well above those of other migrant groups and above the native-born.

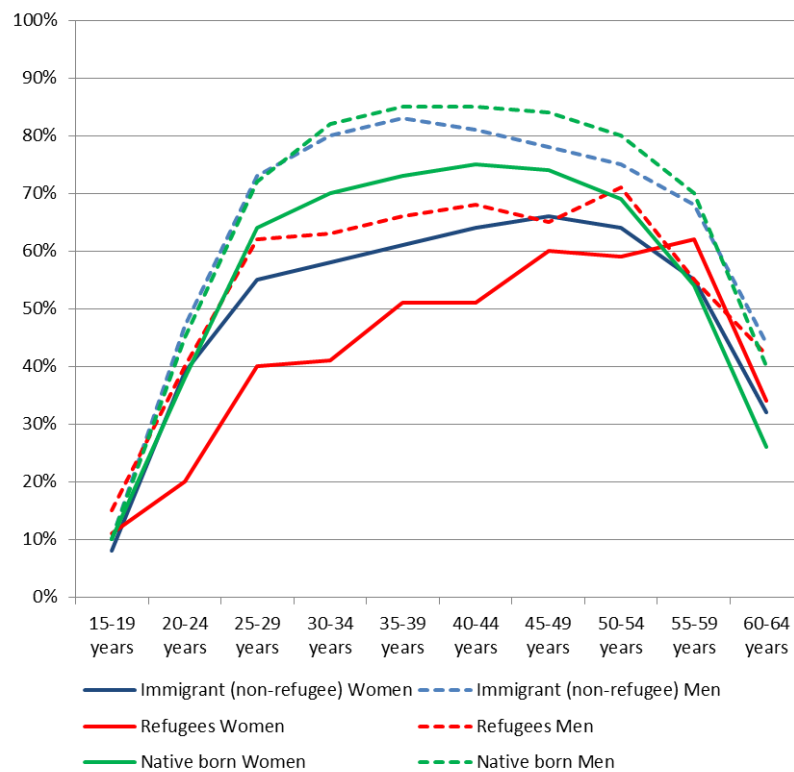
Figure 10. Fertility per 1000 refugee women in Norway



Source: Ostby (2002).

36. This is also confirmed by the fact that the gender gap for refugees in employment is largest in the key childbearing age, i.e. between the age of 25 and 35 (see Figure 11). In this age-range, refugee women in Europe had in 2014 an employment rate that was around 22 percentage point lower than that of refugee men. Interestingly, the peak in the employment rate for refugee women is much later than for native-born women.¹⁶ Employment statistics based on register data from the Scandinavian countries show similar results. The employment level for refugee women increases with age and peaks at the age 40-54. Likewise, the gap in the employment rate compared with refugee men, but also migrant and native women is largest in the age group 25-39 years.

¹⁶ Note, however, that part of this may be due to cohort effects, that is, refugee women who are older tend to come from different origin countries than younger refugee women, notably the former Yugoslavia and its successor countries.

Figure 11. Employment rates of refugees and other immigrants by age and gender, 2014

Source and Note: Data from the EU-LFS AHM 2014. Data refer to the EU-25 plus Norway and Switzerland.

Lack of networks

37. A large part of jobs in OECD countries are filled through networks or informal contacts. Social contacts with the host-country population are also a prerequisite for social integration at large. Recently-arrived refugees have a very limited social network in the host country. Data from Germany show that refugee women are again at a disadvantage in this respect. Among the participants in the *Flüchtlingsstudie* 2014, 27% of refugee men stated that they meet German within their circle of friends on a daily basis, compared with only 12% of refugee women.

38. At the same time, it appears that social contacts with native-born greatly increase refugee women's chances to find a job. Worbs and Baraulina (2017) find, with data from the *Flüchtlingsstudie* 2014, that weekly personal contact with Germans is associated with a 12 percentage points higher employment probability among refugee women. Interestingly, no such association was found for refugee men.

39. Refugee women do not only have fewer relevant contacts with Germans, but also with other migrants. In the Austrian survey, refugees were asked whether they have found new friends who helped them make contact with a potential employer. Among those with more than five years of residence, this was the case for 37% of men, but only for 14% of women.

Health issues

40. Refugees are more prone to health problems than the general population and other immigrant groups, and a considerable share suffer from the traumatic and often violent experience related to their forced migration (OECD 2016a). The available evidence consistently shows that refugee women have more health issues than their male counterparts. In Austria, refugees were asked to subjectively evaluate their health situation in general. Among refugee women, approximately about 22% characterised their general health situation as bad or very bad. The corresponding figure for men was 14%. In the Australian survey, about 23 and 24% of refugee women reported serious mental health problems shortly after arrival and two years later, respectively, compared with 14 and 15% of men. Post-traumatic stress (PTSD) incidence was also higher for refugee women, at 37% in both survey waves, compared with 32% and 29% among men. In both cases, women remained overrepresented even after controlling for a range of socio-demographic other health characteristics.

41. The Norwegian living condition survey shows a similar picture. In this survey, there are also questions about symptoms of anxiety and depression, based on the Hopkins Symptoms Checklist (HSCL). 20% of refugee women reported symptoms of anxiety and depression. For refugee men, the corresponding figure was slightly lower, with 15% reporting symptoms of anxiety and depression¹⁷. Both refugee women and refugee men who report symptoms of anxiety and depression have considerably lower employment rates, compared with refugees and other migrants without such symptoms. However, such symptoms seem to affect the employment probability of both groups by roughly the same magnitude.

Less integration support

42. Refugee women frequently receive less integration support than their male counterparts; especially with respect to employment-related measures (see e.g. Cheung and Rödin 2018; Tronstad and Hernes 2014). There are a number of reasons for this. First, women who do not have formal refugee status but arrived at a later stage as family migrants to a refugee spouse already resident may not have the same access to introductory measures (see also OECD 2017b). This is especially the case for those whose admission has been subject to a means test, as is often the case for those whose spouse had only subsidiary protection – 35% of all positive asylum decisions in Europe in 2017. Second, and closely related to the arrival status, more efforts tend to be taken to integrate those refugees who receive social benefits. But as seen, this is often not the case for women joining a refugee spouse. Third, the fact that refugee women frequently get pregnant soon after arrival often hampers their attendance of introduction activities.

43. For example in Germany, data from the Federal Employment Office shows that women accounted at the end of 2017 for almost one in three unemployed from the key refugee origin countries, but only for one in six participants from these countries who benefited from active labour market policy instruments. Interestingly, the underrepresentation is particularly pronounced among refugee-specific measures, where women account for less than one in seven participants. Likewise, refugee women have a 10 percentage point lower probability to participate in the introduction course than their

¹⁷ The Hopkins Symptoms Checklist (HSCL) is a widely used screening instrument for anxiety and depression.

male peers, even after controlling for a broad range of socio-demographic characteristics (BAMF 2016).

44. Countries with strong introduction programmes, such as the Nordic countries, do not a priori face this issue to the same degree, as both men and women are expected and incentivised to participate, so participation of refugee women is high. However, interruption due to childbirth is also frequent. One solution has been to allow for more time for women with small children to complete the programmes. That notwithstanding, participating women may not benefit from the same labour-market oriented support. In Finland, for example, refugee women are usually referred to an integration track that is not targeted at labour market integration – in contrast to refugee men (OECD forthcoming b).

45. Sweden provides an interesting example in this respect. In 2010, a reform of the Swedish introduction programme took place (*Etableringsreformen*). In 2010 a new introduction programme was introduced. One of the main aims of the reform was to strengthen the labour-market focus of both refugee men and women. Early contact with the public employment service, with close follow-ups and mentoring was some of the measures in the new programme that intended to provide equal access to tailored labour market measures for refugee women and men. Secondly, the reform provided individualised allowance for participation. This gave women their own income from participation in the programme.

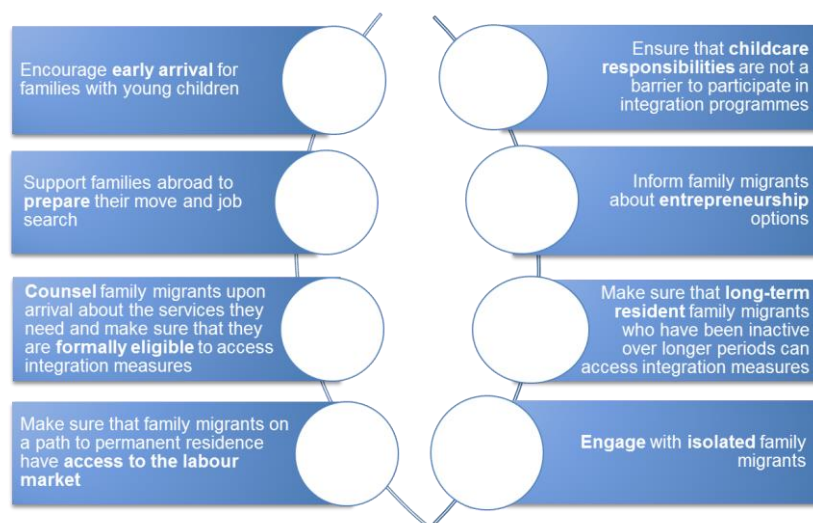
46. Refugee women who participated in the programme prior to 2010 were offered fewer hours of language training, they participated in fewer follow-ups and got less labour market training compared to refugee men (Anderson et al. 2016, see also Swedish Integration Board, 2002). Poor health and childcare were the main reasons for women's non-participation (Swedish Integration Board, 2005). The evaluation of the reform concluded that earlier contact with the public employment service, the labour market, and a closer follow-up had a positive effect on the probability to be employed two and three years after the programme for both refugee men and women (Andersson et al. 2016). Nevertheless, there was no significant positive 'reform' effect regarding the employment rates of refugee women with small kids and refugee women with low skills (Wennemo Lanninger 2016).

47. For 2017-18, the Swedish Public Employment Service launched an Action Plan aimed at increasing the employment of refugee and other foreign-born women, including through more information and follow-up measures (Arbetsförmedlingen 2017). Indeed, more recent figures, show a continuous increase in the early labour market outcomes after the end of the introduction programme in each year of recent cohorts. Most recently, according to data provided by the Swedish Ministry of Finance based on information from the Swedish Employment Service on those who left the programme in 2017, the increase has been particularly pronounced among low-educated women.

5. Policy considerations

48. The overwhelming majority of refugee women have arrived in a context of family migration – either accompanying their refugee husband or joining him later. This implies that their integration bears similar challenges and policy responses as that of family migrants. The OECD recently published a summary of good practices with respect to the integration of family migrants, which are depicted in Figure 12.

Figure 12. Lessons from integration reviews in OECD countries regarding integration of family migrants



49. Most of these lessons are just as valid for refugee women as they are for any family migrant. Indeed, some issues are of particular relevance for refugee women. For example, outreach is particularly important given that they lack contact with the host society and that such contact is associated with a strong improvement in their labour market outcomes. Mentorship can be a good way to provide such contacts (see e.g. Månsson and Delander 2015), and indeed one of the largest mentorship programmes in the OECD – the *Kvinfo* in Denmark – is specifically targeted at refugee women (see OECD 2017b for more details).¹⁸ Such programmes need to be more widely used, as they are a particularly cost-effective means of integration which have the additional benefit of involving the host society.

50. As seen, the issue of childcare is also of particular relevance for refugee women, given their relatively high fertility soon after arrival. Here, specific “mother and child” language courses seem to be a promising venue, especially since the limited evidence suggests that they also produce good results.

51. Since a large part of refugee women do not arrive through the asylum channel, waiting periods abroad could be used for pre-integration measures such as training with

¹⁸ For an overview of good practices for labour market integration of refugee women from an employer perspective, see DIHK and BMFSFJ (2017) and OECD and UNHCR (2018).

respect to the host-country language and norms. However, this is currently rarely done, and stepping up efforts in this respect would be important.

52. The fact that most refugee women are keen to work and that the labour market outcomes are largely unrelated to women's outcomes in the origin countries suggests poor integration of refugee women is not a fate and is largely involuntary. This implies that many of the obstacles to full labour market integration of refugee women can be removed with the appropriate education and labour market policies. In this context, there is a strong case for building basic skills in terms of qualifications and host-country language, as the return with respect to better labour market outcomes is particularly high for refugee women.¹⁹ What is more, this also entails additional intergenerational pay-off for their children.

53. It seems from the limited comparative evidence that refugee women in Scandinavian countries tend to have better outcomes than their peers elsewhere where they get less support. Given the context (no refugee women speak the language upon arrival and they settle with often very low skills in a high-skilled labour market), this is rather remarkable. What is more, the comparatively positive assessment appears to hold not only regarding the integration outcomes of refugee women themselves, but also with respect to the integration of the children of refugees. This suggests that paying specific attention to refugee women through tailor-made multi-year integration programmes is bearing some fruits. At the same time, there remains a lot more potential in refugee women. Using this better will not only require more integration offers for recent arrivals, but also more and stronger second chance programmes for the many refugee women who may not be in a position for immediate labour market integration, be it due to health issues or family obligations.

¹⁹ As for mentorship, it appears that building basic skills helps to overcome the so-called "stereotype threat", i.e. that women generally act as the stereotype expects (see Cheung 2018 for a discussion).

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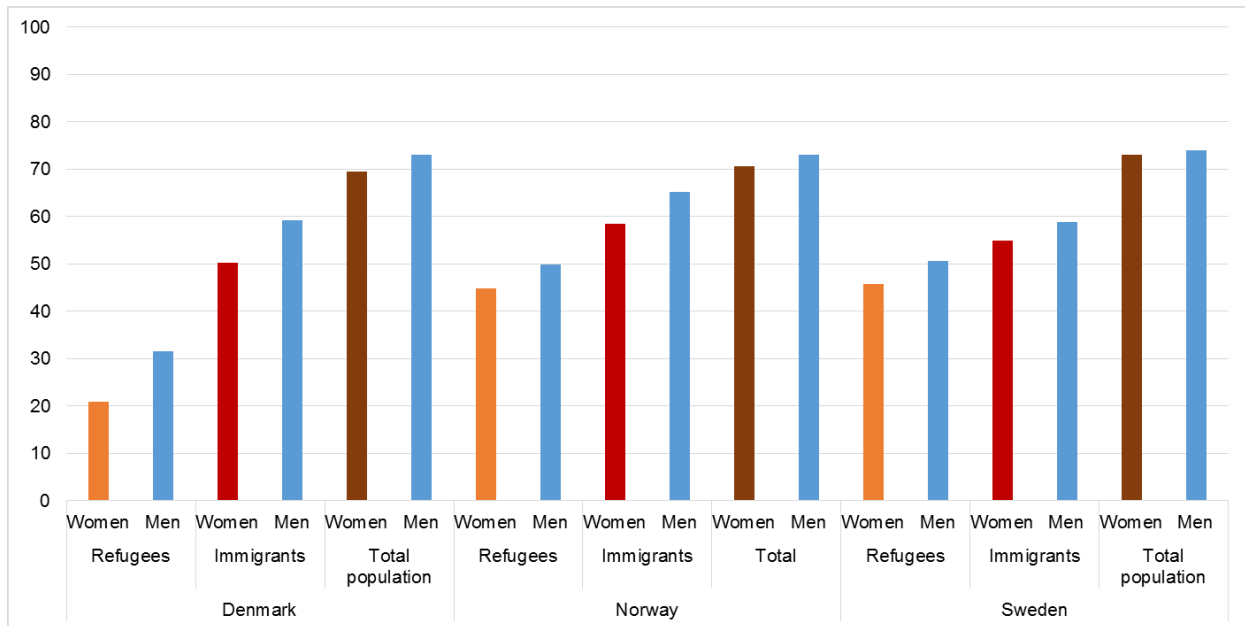
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Annex A.

Figure A A.1. Employment rates of refugee women aged 15-64 in comparison with other groups in selected OECD countries

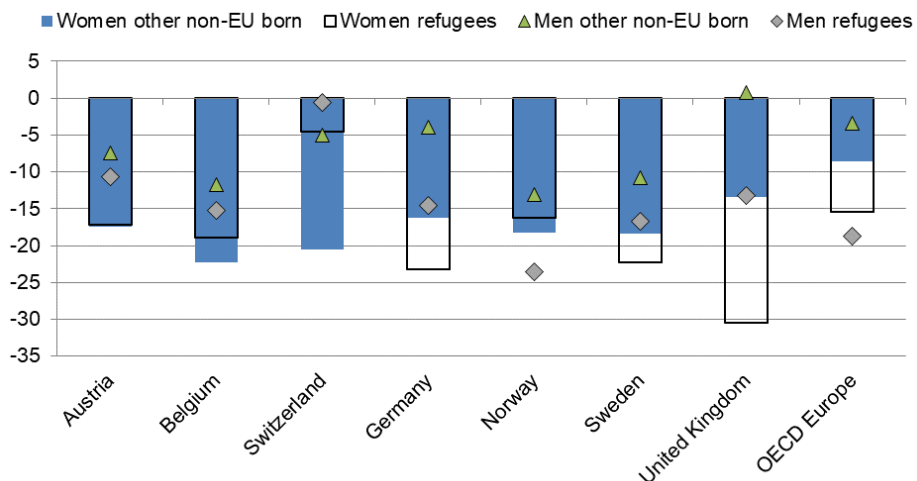
a) Nordic countries, 2016



Source: Denmark, Norway and Sweden: Register data from the National Statistical Offices.

b) Selected European OECD countries, 2014

Percentage points differences in employment rates with native-born of the same gender



Source and Note: EU-LFS AHM 20414. OECD-Europe includes all European OECD countries apart from DK, NL and IR.