

Summary

Increasing employment among women born abroad is a priority issue for labour market policy, integration policy and gender equality policy. Despite this, the trend seems to be headed in the wrong direction. While the employment gap between people born in Sweden and people born abroad has narrowed, the gap between women born abroad and men born abroad has widened. Moreover, the difference in labour force participation between women and men born abroad has increased in recent years, and in 2019 nearly one in three women born outside Europe were not part of the labour force.

Purpose and method

The purpose of this report is to provide a better understanding of how and why labour market integration differs between women and men born abroad. Do women face specific obstacles that make them significantly less likely than men to be gainfully employed during their first few years in the country? Which factors correlate with faster labour market entry for women? How can policy measures be adapted to better integrate newly arrived women into the labour market? The primary focus is the employment gap between women and men born abroad.

People born abroad are a very heterogeneous group. Previous studies on labour market integration of newly arrived immigrants in Sweden have primarily concerned refugees and their relatives. However, women immigrate to a large extent as family members of someone already residing in Sweden or as accompanying family members of men immigrating to Sweden for labour market reasons. For this reason, the simplified view that immigration consists of refugees and labour immigrants overlooks a major group – predominantly made up of women.

This report therefore takes a broader approach. The empirical analysis includes women and men who immigrated from countries outside the EU/EEA based on refugee status, and for family and labour market reasons. The results presented are consistently broken down by gender and admission class. Individual data from Statistics Sweden's (SCB) longitudinal database for integration studies (STATIV) is used to track labour market entry until 2018 for people who immigrated in 2014. The analysis includes everyone who was 19–59 years of age when they immigrated and who still resided in Sweden in subsequent follow-up years. To examine labour market integration during immigrants' first few years in the country relative to long-term trends, we also tracked employment trends until 2018 for women and men who immigrated in 2003.

Three different outcome measures are used to describe entry into the labour market for women compared with men. The proportion of people having *gainful employment as their main source of income* is used in the descriptive analysis of the trends of different types of income for different admission classes. The proportion of people *employed (in gainful employment)* according to SCB's register-based labour market statistics (RAMS) and the proportion of people *neither working nor studying (risk of social exclusion)* are used in both the descriptive and in-depth analyses of labour market integration of women compared with men. In light of the criticism that the measure *employed* is too loosely related to what can be considered a 'real job', regression analyses are also used for the measure *established* to test the stability of the results.²

The labour market situation for women born abroad

The number of people in Sweden who were born abroad has increased significantly since the beginning of the 2000s, reaching more than 2 million by the end of 2019. This group accounts for 19.3 per cent of the population, an increase of 8.3 percentage points since 2000.

There is a consistent difference between women and men with respect to their admission class. Women immigrate for family

² The measure *established* is based on SCB's register-based activity statistics (RAKS). The annual income threshold for classification as *established* is higher than the threshold for *employed* (RAMS).

reasons to a far greater extent than men. In some cases, women come as relatives of refugees (family reunification) and in other cases as family members of someone born or permanently residing in Sweden (other family member immigrants). In recent years, many women have also moved to Sweden as an accompanying family member of a spouse/partner immigrating for work. During the period from 2004 to 2019, the group *other family member immigrants* was the largest category for women every year except 2016, when the number of refugees from the war in Syria also increased substantially among women. For men, the group refugees was also larger than other admission classes in 2006 and 2007, and in a number of years in the 2010s.

Many people born abroad belong to the group that can be referred to as the marginal labour force. Job prospects for this group improve when the labour market is good, but the group also runs the greatest risk of becoming unemployed in an economic downturn. Women who immigrated from countries outside the EU/EEA are especially vulnerable. Their employment rate is lower than in other groups, and their unemployment is higher. Three in ten are also completely outside the labour force. In many cases this is due to studies, but work in the home is also a common reason for not participating in the labour force. Women born abroad who have a job are predominantly employed in low-skilled and temporary jobs.

Differences between women's and men's integration patterns

For most people immigrating to a new country, it takes time to enter the labour market. However, women's labour market integration is significantly slower than men's. This is an important factor in explaining the widening gap between men and women born abroad in employment and labour force participation during the 2010s.

For the cohort that immigrated in 2014, employment among men increased rather quickly during their first few years in the country, whereas women across all admission classes were gainfully employed to a significantly lesser degree. The level of employment varies between the various admission classes, but the gender gap four years after immigration (2018) is approximately 20–25 percentage points across all groups. This pattern can also be seen for those who

immigrated in 2003. The gender gap is widest after approximately five years in the country, to then gradually decrease. After 15 years, the difference between the employment rates of women and men essentially disappears.

When also looking at the proportion of people who have gainful employment as their main source of income, the difference between women and men is between 20 and 25 percentage points after four years in the country. Women are instead more likely to receive their largest income from parental benefits and studying. The outcome measure that describes the risk of social exclusion also shows a clear gender gap. In 2018, nearly one in five women (17 per cent) did not participate in work, studies, labour market programmes or Swedish for Immigrants (SFI). The corresponding figure for men was 10 per cent.

Significant gender gap after four years in the country

In addition to the employment rate being lower for women than men, the proportion of gainfully employed people is also lower for refugees and relatives of refugees than for other admission classes, higher for those with more education and lower for the group born in Asia compared with other regions of birth. For characteristics such as family composition and age, the patterns differ between men and women. Logistic regressions are used in the in-depth analysis, wherein consideration is given to a number of underlying factors simultaneously so as to provide a clearer picture of the significance of various isolated factors.

A woman's likelihood of being gainfully employed four years after immigrating is 37 per cent less than a man's, and women's likelihood of becoming established in the labour market is 20 per cent less than men's. The models control for differences in age, level of education, family composition, admission class, type of municipality of residence and region of birth, and for registration with Arbetsförmedlingen (Swedish Public Employment Service) and enrolment in SFI shortly after immigration. Of these factors, it is primarily the combination of being a woman and having children under the age of six that clearly influences the difference between the labour market integration of women and men.

The regression analyses cannot give any indication as to the reasons for the remaining difference between women's and men's likelihood of being gainfully employed. Potential explanations could be differences in work experience between women and men or differences in motivation and self-confidence that cannot be controlled for. Previous studies have also shown that unclear management and control, in combination with stereotypical notions about women born abroad on the part of case officers at Arbetsförmedlingen and other actors providing support for labour market entry, may contribute to women being less likely to find work. On the other hand, employers seem to discriminate against women born abroad to a lesser degree than men born abroad.

Having preschool-age children appears to be the greatest obstacle to the labour market integration of newly arrived women

Women who have recently immigrated have a relatively high rate of childbirth during their first few years in the country. The proportion of women in the groups refugees, relatives of refugees and relatives of labour force immigrants who have children of preschool age when they immigrate is also high. Research shows that women's greater share of responsibility for the care of small children delays their entry into the labour market compared with men. Our separate regression models for women and men confirm this picture. Having children under the age of six is associated with women being clearly less likely (more than 50 per cent less likely) to be gainfully employed four years after immigration, and at a substantially higher risk (90 per cent higher) of belonging to the group that neither works nor studies. For men, on the other hand, having preschool-age children means a greater tendency to be gainfully employed than men who do not have children under the age of six. Being married also covaries with women being somewhat less likely to be gainfully employed, whereas for men it means a somewhat greater likelihood of being employed.

Women coming as relatives of labour force immigrants and as other family member immigrants have a high risk of social exclusion

Compared with women refugees, women who have immigrated as other family member immigrants and as relatives of labour force immigrants are somewhat more likely to be gainfully employed four years after immigration. However, there are also many women in these admission classes who are at risk of long-term social exclusion. More than 30 per cent of the women who arrived in 2014 as family members of labour force immigrants and more than one in four women who immigrated as other family member immigrants were among those in 2018 who did not participate in work, studies, SFI or labour market measures. Many of these women are outside both the labour market and the public transfer system. The year after immigration, nearly 40 per cent of the women in the group relatives of labour force immigrants were entirely without an income, whereas the corresponding proportion of women in the group other family member immigrants was almost 30 per cent. The risk of long-term social exclusion is significantly higher for these groups of women than for women who immigrated as refugees.

Other family member immigrants and relatives of labour force immigrants do not have access to the introduction programme. However, they are eligible to take part in SFI and civic orientation and, just like other jobseekers, can receive assistance and support from Arbetsförmedlingen for labour market entry. In spite of this, only around half of the women in the group other family member immigrants take part in SFI during their first few years in the country, and SFI participation is even lower among relatives of labour force immigrants, at approximately 20–30 per cent. In these admission classes, it is also unusual to register as a jobseeker with Arbetsförmedlingen.

Higher level of education is the foremost success factor for women's labour market integration

Controlled for other factors, women with upper secondary education are more than twice as likely to be employed four years after immigration than women with the least education. Women with an education equivalent to nine years of compulsory school are

also clearly more likely to be gainfully employed (more than 50 per cent more likely) than women with very little education. A higher level of education is also a success factor for men, but its significance is greater for women.

In other words, the lack of upper secondary education appears to be a greater disadvantage for newly arrived women than for newly arrived men. A contributory explanation may be that female-dominated shortage occupations generally have higher formal education requirements than male-dominated shortage occupations, and thus it is easier for men with less education to find work than women with a similar level of education. However, it may also be that employment agents do not regard women with little formal education as matching labour market needs and find it easier to identify informal competence in men than in women.

Early contact with Arbetsförmedlingen and early enrolment in SFI are success factors for women

Women often have less work experience than men, and studies indicate that women's family networks are more likely to hinder than promote entry into working life. Support through contacts and networks that may lead to work may therefore be more important for women than for men, as our regression models also confirm. The likelihood of being employed four years after immigration is more than 40 per cent higher for women who were registered as jobseekers with Arbetsförmedlingen in year 0 or 1 compared with women who had no early contact. Early enrolment in SFI is associated with a greater likelihood of being employed for both women and men.

Recommendations for accelerating the labour market integration of women born abroad

The slow labour market entry of women born abroad is a major social problem from economic, employment policy and gender perspectives. Radical changes may be necessary, and a quantified target, aimed at reducing the employment gap, could contribute to increased focus on effective activities and better adaptation of

policy. The report presents a number of proposals focusing on changes that can be implemented relatively quickly.

All newly arrived women need to be reached. To increase employment among women born abroad, activities that facilitate labour market entry need to reach all newly arrived women, regardless of their admission class. Labour market integration is a slow process for many of the women who come as other family member immigrants and as accompanying family members of labour immigrants, and the risk that many of these women find themselves in long-term social exclusion is high.

- More stringent requirements for permanent residence permits need to be counterbalanced with increased initiatives to reach out, provide information and encourage participation in available activities.
- Those immigrating as family members from countries outside the EU/EEA should be given the opportunity to take part in the introduction programme.
- Municipalities' responsibility to encourage participation in SFI and civic orientation needs to be clarified.

Parental-based compensation and access to support for women with children can be better adapted. Many women born abroad already have, or give birth to, children during their first few years in Sweden, which is when their skills and networks for integration into working and community life need to be built up. Women's slower labour market entry can largely be linked to their responsibility for the care of children.

- Parental benefit days reserved for fathers should also be introduced for the basic level of parental benefit that newly arrived parents can access.
- National guidance is needed to develop long-term measures in open preschools that strengthen the networks and Swedish language skills of women on parental leave.
- The timeframe for integration activities should be expanded so that opportunities to access the support are more gender equal. The introduction programme may also need to be more flexible

in duration, depending on individual need of support for labour market entry.

- The introduction supplement for children should be individualised to promote more gender-equal incentive to start working and take part in introduction activities.
- The introduction benefit and introduction supplement levels need to mirror price trends so that women's incentive to take part in introduction activities is not gradually undermined.

Gender-equal and equivalent support for jobs requires clear management and control. In recent years, there has been an increased focus in labour market policy on gender-equal access to practical training support activities. Despite equal conditions regarding level of education and age, women born abroad do not access the most effective activities for transitioning into jobs to the same extent as other groups. Differences in the treatment of women and men may be one explanation for the unjustified gender differences in the distribution of support.

- Arbetsförmedlingen needs to ensure an equivalent labour market policy assessment for women and men.
- Clear management and follow-up of working methods and processes are needed to ensure that women born abroad receive the support they need. When independent actors provide various activities, Arbetsförmedlingen needs to include clear gender equality requirements in tender documentation and contracts.
- Arbetsförmedlingen should present an annual in-depth analysis of participation by women born abroad in programmes and activities.
- Social services should always conduct individual meetings for planning and assessment of women's self-sufficiency so as to better identify their need of support to bring them closer to the labour market.

Expanded education and training opportunities. A relatively large group of women who recently immigrated to Sweden have very little education and need to improve their skills for long-term sustainable

labour market integration. However, it is always necessary to strike a balance between education and practical training support based on a broad inventory of the individual's skills, experience and interests.

- To enable clear management and control of Arbetsförmedlingen's inventory of jobseekers' need for upskilling, an education and training obligation should be introduced into the job and development guarantee scheme for the long-term unemployed.
- The requirement of six consecutive months of unemployment to access education entry grants should be lifted so that women in hourly paid contracts and short-term substitute positions can supplement their education and training, and improve their position in the labour market.

The National Board of Health and Welfare's General Advice on Financial Support should be supplemented with regard to education entry grant information so that supplementary income support can be granted to people who are studying on an education entry grant, provided that the studies are clearly oriented towards self-sufficiency.