

# The position of migrants on the labour market in Europe: Unpacking labour fragmentation and integration for effective union strategies

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# Overview

1. Key figures on migration in the EU
2. Migration and the European integration project
3. The superdiversity behind migration
4. Three simplified approaches to migration
5. Migration as the integration and fragmentation of labour under global capitalism
6. The difficult role of trade unions
7. 5 avenues for an inclusive trade union

# Migrants in the EU

2019: **446.8 Mio** inhabitants living in the EU28

2019	2017
<b>4.7% non-EU28</b> citizens	<b>3.3% foreign EU28</b> citizens
<b>7.7% born outside</b> the EU28	<b>3.9% born in other EU28</b> country

Largest groups of migrants, in absolute terms:

Germany (13 million), UK (10 million), France (8 million) and Italy (6 million).

# Labour migrants in the EU

According to ILO statistics:

- ~ **33 Mio** labour migrants currently working in the EU
- **17%** of the entire EU labour force → **20%** increase in the last **five** years.
- About **half** of them are **free movement temporary migrants within the EU** working outside their country of usual residence.

[https://www.ilo.org/budapest/whats-new/WCMS\\_757579/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/budapest/whats-new/WCMS_757579/lang--en/index.htm)

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# Migration is at the core of the European integration project

The EU as an economic project to foster the free circulation of capital, commodities, ideas, and... **labour**.



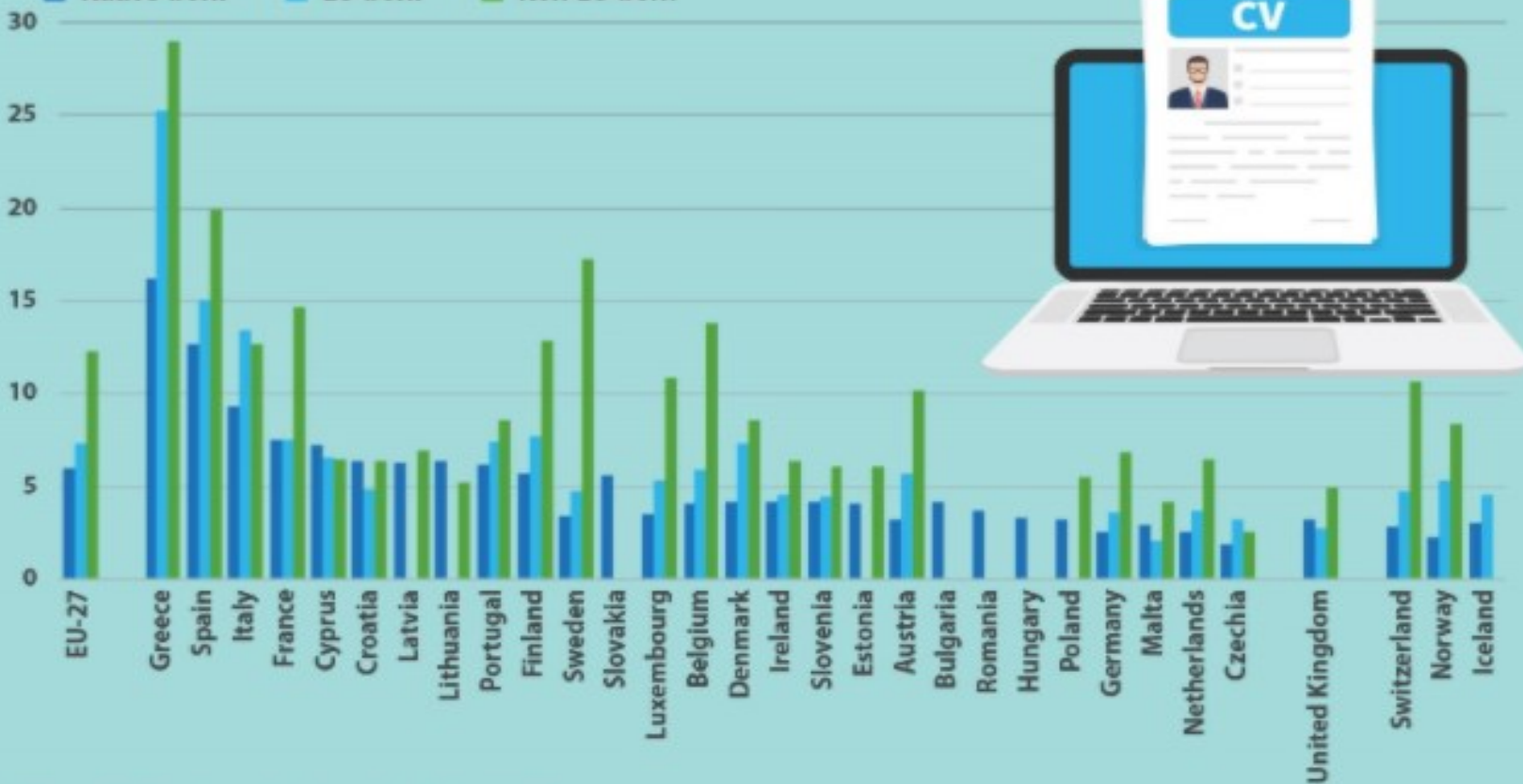
# Migration is synonym of disadvantage and inequality

- Lack of access to work
- Discrimination
- Exploitation
- Over-qualification
- Health hazards
- Illegal working conditions
- Lack of social insurance and protection
- Lack of worker representation...

# Unemployment rates by country of birth, 2019

(% of the population aged 20-64 years)

■ Native-born ■ EU-born ■ Non-EU-born



EU-born: Other than in the reporting Member State.

Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia: EU-born and non-EU-born not available.

Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland: EU-born not available. Iceland: non-EU born not available.

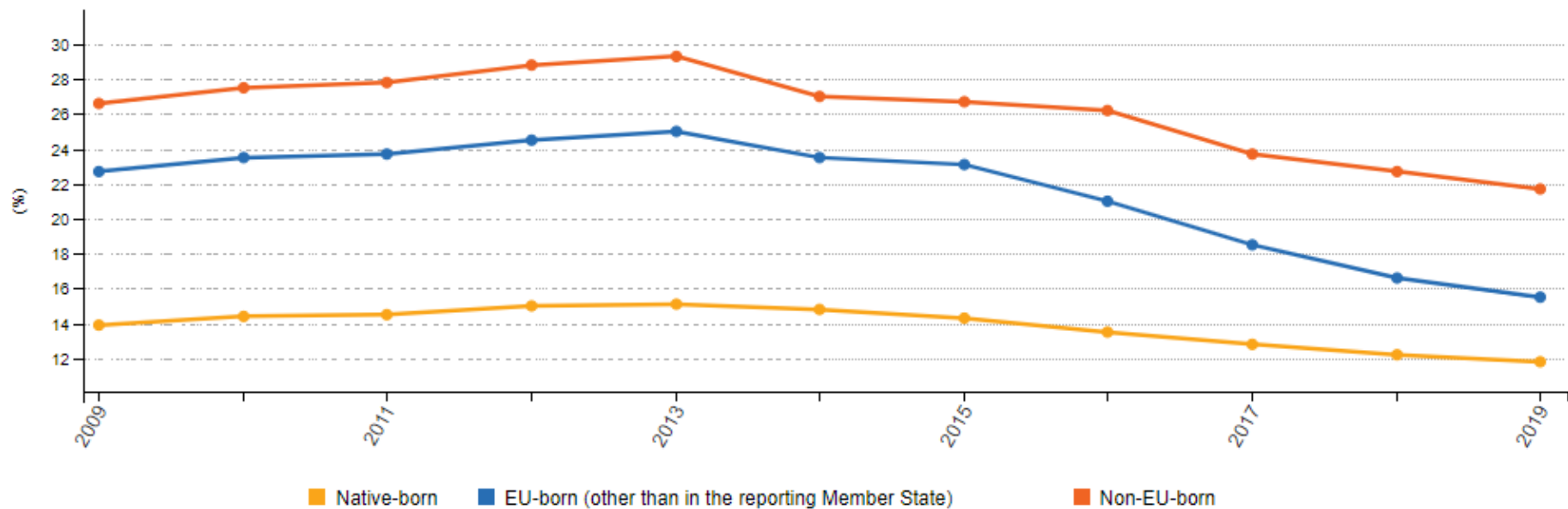
Croatia, Malta, Slovenia: EU-born low reliability.

Czechia, Croatia, Lithuania, Poland: non-EU-born low reliability.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ifsa\_urgacob)



## Development of the share of young people aged 15-29 neither in employment nor in education and training, EU-27, 2009-2019



Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat\_ifse\_28)

eurostat

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migrant\\_integration\\_statistics\\_-\\_at\\_risk\\_of\\_poverty\\_and\\_social\\_exclusion](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migrant_integration_statistics_-_at_risk_of_poverty_and_social_exclusion)

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# Persistent inequalities in working conditions

In 2019, in the EU-27:

- **Temporary work**

- 21.8% of employees born outside the EU
- 15.2% for employees born in a different EU Member State
- 13.0% for native-born employees.

- **Part-time work**

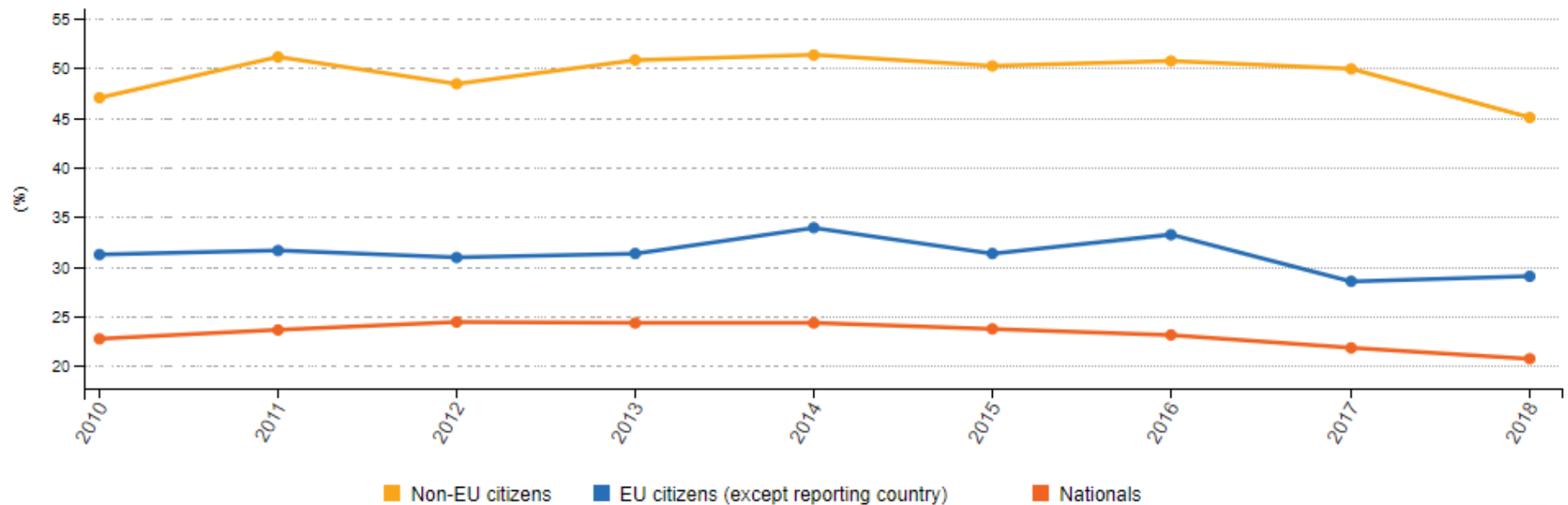
- 24.6% of persons employed born outside the EU
- 22.4% for persons employed born in a different EU Member State
- 16.9% for native-born persons in employment and.

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migrant\\_integration\\_statistics\\_-\\_employment\\_conditions#Self-employment](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migrant_integration_statistics_-_employment_conditions#Self-employment)

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*People aged 20-64 at risk of poverty or social exclusion, by citizenship, EU-27, 2010-2018*



eurostat

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migrant\\_integration\\_statistics\\_-\\_at\\_risk\\_of\\_poverty\\_and\\_social\\_exclusion](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migrant_integration_statistics_-_at_risk_of_poverty_and_social_exclusion)

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# The superdiversity behind migration (1)

Multiple **institutional 'categories' of migrants, along:**

- Country of origin (EU28 or outside)
- Reason for migration (economic, political, family)
- Duration (temporary/circular/permanent)
- Naturalized versus foreign

For instance:

1. Citizens with a migration background ('ethnic minorities')
2. (Individual) labour migrants from within EU28
3. Posted workers
4. (Seasonal) economic workers from outside the EU
5. Asylum seekers

# The superdiversity behind migration (2)

These categories **intersect** with their **socio-demographic profile**:

- class,
- gender,
- age,
- 'race'/ethnicity,
- language,
- religion,
- education,
- nationality...

# The superdiversity behind migration (3)

These categories intersect with:

- **Institutional characteristics** of the host context: e.g. welfare state, presence of migrant communities, etc.
- **Work-related characteristics**: e.g. work contract, sector of employment, labour market characteristics, trade union activity and coverage

→ **Degrees and modalities of labour precarity and more general vulnerability**

# The migrants



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# **Simplified approaches to the migrant (worker)**

Three dominant paradigms to discuss migrants and migration:

## **1. Cultural difference**

- between the local population and the migrants
- between different groups of migrants (model migrant).

## **2. Individual discrimination**

- (un)conscious behaviour that disadvantages migrants due to individual stereotypes and prejudice.

## **3. Economic instrumentality**

- Does migration pay back?



# Embedding the migrant worker in capitalism

**Migration is produced by capitalism**, it does not precede it.

It itself reflects a **contradiction** inherent in the global capitalist economy, between the necessity to:

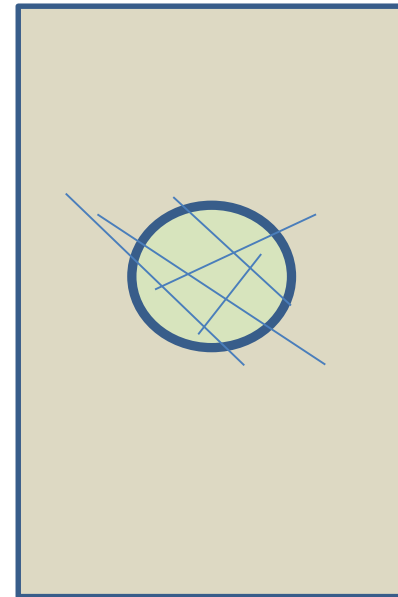
- **integrate** an ever increasing amount of labour into the process of capital valorisation
- **fragment** labour, in order to increase exploitation of various groups of workers, in more or less legal ways.

Employers [...] think and act in accordance with a [...] logic [...] of **locating, constructing and consolidating a multiplicity of 'normalities'**.

The goal of the management of these 'normalities' does not seek conformity to one model, but to maintain them in a state of **'equal inequality', of competition**, to encourage differentials and perpetuate a **'mobilizing' uncertainty**.

**Inclusion and exclusion, the normal and the abnormal**, do not determine a 'great division'; they are instead variables of governmental action that tends, anyway, to multiply cases, situations or statuses.

**Government** acts less through a divide than **through the modulation of divisions and of differences** (Lazzarato, 2009: 119).



# Governance through the fragmentation of labour

The governance of labour, and the flow of it across space and time, is enacted through multiple institutions including:

- Migration policies
- Labour market policies
- Educational systems
- Welfare systems
- Nationalist ideologies
- ...

They continuously reproduce fragmentation and integration on unequal terms.

# The migrant embodies the tensions characterizing the European project

- The increasing mobility of workers is a sign of the success of the **European neoliberal economic project** → increasing **competition** by removing boundaries.
- It does open up, for many, novel opportunities to be integrated into capitalism on relatively better terms, allowing for **individual social mobility**.
- At the same time, migration broadens the **reserve army of labour**, weakening labour's bargaining power in its relation to capital.

# The national reactions to the negative effects of global capitalism

- Neoliberal EU politics feed conservative, nationalist politics in various parts of Europe
  - Brexit
  - Current conflict between the EU and Poland and Hungary
  - Conflict between Northern and Southern Europe
  - Extreme-right in various EU countries
- New divides:
  - Migrants/locals
  - Cities/countryside
  - Elderly/youth
  - ...

**In this type of political context, migrants and ethnic minorities become particularly vulnerable.**

# The difficult role of trade unions in global capitalism

The integration of more (vulnerable) workers – such as migrants – is at once:

- a **threat** to the workers and the working conditions negotiated with capital for the existing workers

AND

**What are the boundaries of solidarity?**

- a **necessity** to:
  - protect the new, more vulnerable workers
  - keep protecting the existing workers
  - allow for the valorisation of capital to occur, as waged work depends on it.

**As the pandemic has shown us,  
the capitalistic economy cannot do without migrants!  
We are deeply interdependent...**



European Migration Network

## **INFORM # 3 – MAINTAINING LABOUR MIGRATION IN ESSENTIAL SECTORS IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC**

SERIES OF EMN-OECD INFORMS ON THE IMPACT  
OF COVID-19 IN THE MIGRATION AREA

2020

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The mobilization of migrants has been at the heart of debates on **trade union renewal**.

What is relevant and effective to mobilize a specific group of migrant (background) workers is an **empirical matter!**

# 5 avenues for an inclusive trade union

1. De-centering the 'ideal worker'
2. Expanding trade union grassroots practices
3. Leveraging communication and new media
4. Political work on inclusive host country institutions
5. Expanding trade unions' strategic (global) alliances

# 1. De-centering the 'ideal worker'

- Most trade unions have historically been exclusive, privileging what they considered 'core workers'.
- Often they have protected more vulnerable groups of workers in so far their protection was needed to protect the core group.
- Radical de-centering the 'ideal worker' → along the multiple categories introduced earlier (e.g. illegal migrants, self-employed workers, posted workers).

**Embracing diversity within the trade union, both in numbers and in the narrative is essential.**

## 2. Expanding trade union grassroots practices

- Activist organizations (churches, cultural organizations, migrant workers' organizations, neighbourhood organizations, service providers...
- New, emergent workers' grassroots organizations (the self-employed)
- Workers' cooperative movements (alternative economies)
- Advocacy groups (human rights, asylum seekers)

**'Outsourcing' some of the political work in the field?**

### **3. Leveraging communication and new media**

- Integrating key members of workers' communities building trust
- Developing diverse, attractive 'moods' narratives fostering identification
- Adopting workers' own communication channels and forms (e.g. art)

**Social media are playing a key role in activist organizing!**

## 4. Political work on inclusive host country institutions

- Education
- Politics
- Access to welfare services
- Housing
- Access to civil society
- Anti-discrimination by employers, police, justice...

**Broader integration and citizenship reduces vulnerability, empowering workers.**

## 5. Expanding trade unions' strategic (global) alliances

- International trade union structures
- Political actors (national, EU and international)
- International fair work labelling organizations
- International advocacy groups (human rights, asylum seekers)
- Consumer organizations

**In global capitalism, the support of workers and trade unions in countries of origin is core business, not just PR.**



**The workplace-centred 'representative' model of strategic trade unionism needs to be balanced by a more universalistic logic of advocacy of all workers (as the labour class) as citizens of society (see Hyman, 2011).**

Under globalized capitalism, diversity is not an option.

If capital integrates, trade unionism cannot afford to exclude.

Trade unions will be diverse or will not be.

# Thank you!

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