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OPEN LETTER

REVISED Women migrant workers' (WMWS) deskilling

[version 2; peer review: 3 approved]

Marie Ruiz[1], Stellamarina Donato[2]

[1]Universite de Picardie Jules Verne, Amiens, Hauts-de-France, France
[2]Libera Universita Maria Santissima Assunta, Rome, Lazio, Italy

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Abstract

Women are key actresses in sending and receiving countries' developments, and their contributions includes social and financial remittances, education and the transmission of social and cultural values (United Nations, 2006). Despite, women migrants' undeniable contributions, they too often undergo deskilling, a process defined as the employment of workers in a different field or below their qualifications. The factors influencing deskilling include the lack of recognition of skills and qualifications, difficult access to information and employment opportunities, lack of support in the destination country and linguistic barriers.

Migration can impact the social mobility of women migrants, yet not always positively (Nowicka, 2012). In the labour market, women migrants are generally disadvantaged because of occupational gender segregation, the lack of network support and childcare responsibilities (EU Commission, 2022), with higher risks of deskilling and downward social mobility. The objective of the brief is to shed light on WMWs' deskilling and explore the impact of gender and ethnicity in labour segmentation, de-emancipation being a consequence of WMWs' deskilling and overrepresentation in reproductive unskilled jobs.

Keywords

migration, gender, education, skills

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1. **Maria Bastida**, University of Santiago de Compostela, Santiago de Compostela, Spain
2. **Parvati Raghuram**, The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK
3. **Sara Verderber**, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Any reports and responses or comments on the article can be found at the end of the article.



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Corresponding authors: Marie Ruiz (marie.jose.ruiz@u-picardie.fr), Stellamarina Donato (s.donato3@lumsa.it)

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REVISED **Amendments from Version 1**

The revised version of the *Deskilling* policy brief differs substantially from its initial draft through a series of conceptual clarifications, structural improvements, and deeper contextualization in response to reviewers' feedback. One of the most significant changes is the enhanced theoretical grounding: the revised brief now includes clearer definitions of key concepts such as "glass ceiling," "gender pay gap," and "Global South," addressing Sara Verderber's call for broader accessibility and precision. The statistical data, previously presented in a more isolated manner, is now directly linked to the analysis of deskilling, sectoral segmentation, and discriminatory practices, making the argument more coherent and evidence-based.

In response to Maria Bastida, the authors improved clarity around regional comparisons—particularly Portugal's relatively lower deskilling rates—and refined the explanation of employment metrics. The brief now more clearly distinguishes between roles within feminised sectors like health and care and elaborates on the systemic barriers migrant women face, including internal segmentation and credential recognition.

Parvati Raghuram's comments led to a fuller presentation of the WEMov network's scope and a sharper articulation of its original contributions to the debate, especially through the inclusion of qualitative case studies from Ireland, Sweden, and Poland. The revised text also deepens the analysis of psychological impacts such as burnout and expands the discussion on agency, acknowledging that not all career shifts post-migration are perceived negatively by women migrant workers.

Additionally, the structure of the brief has been streamlined to follow a clearer logical flow from definitions and context to challenges, case studies, and policy recommendations. Finally, the revised version reinforces distinctions between the effects of labour market conditions and immigration policy frameworks, while also improving readability and accessibility throughout. These revisions collectively enhance both the analytical depth and practical utility of the policy brief.

Any further responses from the reviewers can be found at the end of the article

Introduction

2023 was marked by the European Year of Skills meant to help "people get the right skills for quality jobs and supports" (European Year of Skills, 2024) by encouraging upskilling in order to boost sustainable growth with a competitive workforce and meet the 2030 social target of 60% EU people in training and 78% employed. Yet, this initiative to boost skills' development is challenged by underlying deskilling, which affects women migrant workers (WMWs) in greater numbers than men. Deskilling concerns the devaluation of workers' qualifications employed in occupations below their skills, training, expertise and professional experience, and it is highly relevant to gender and migration studies. Indeed, a 2020 Eurostat survey concludes that WMWs are at a higher risk of being overqualified, EU WMWs being deskilled at 6% more than men, and 6.4% for non-EU born WMWs. Quantitative data confirm that in 2019, 1/5 highly educated WMWs experienced deskilling: 40.7% for migrant women compared to 21.1% for national women in 2020. Deskilling rates are higher in Southern Member States as Greece, Italy, Spain and Cyprus, overqualified WMWs being most represented in Italy (47.8%), Cyprus (47.7%) and Spain (47.2%) (Eurostat, 2024).

The objective of this brief is to shed light on WMWs' deskilling and explore the impact of gender and ethnicity in labour segmentation, de-emancipation being a consequence of WMWs' overrepresentation in unskilled reproductive jobs. WMWs in sectors such as health, care, and education are particularly affected by deskilling. This brief draws on both fieldwork and academic research developed within the COST Action Women on the Move (WEMov), including over 20 case studies conducted across Europe.

This brief also clarifies key concepts that shape the discussion on deskilling. Terms such as *glass ceiling* refer not only to invisible barriers to career advancement faced by women, but also to the racialised and migrant-specific dynamics that constrain WMWs' upward mobility even when formal qualifications are met. The notion of *gender pay gap* signals persistent disparities in earnings between men and women, with migrant women often earning significantly less due to compounded forms of discrimination. Similarly, *linguistic barriers* are not only about fluency but about access to information, job interviews, and legal rights. These conceptual clarifications underpin our intersectional approach and help contextualise the multi-layered challenges that WMWs face within migration regimes and labour markets.

General framework

Recent academic literature has significantly contributed to the understanding of deskilling among women migrant workers (WMWs), highlighting how migration intersects with gender, ethnicity, and labour market structures to produce systemic underutilisation of skills. Kofman (2012) underscores that deskilling is not merely a labour mismatch but a structural phenomenon rooted in the gendered organisation of care and domestic work, often exacerbated by restrictive migration and credential recognition policies. Riaño (2021) provides empirical evidence from Switzerland showing how highly educated WMWs face disproportionately low income and limited upward mobility compared to both native-born and male migrant workers, even when they possess equivalent or higher qualifications. Siar (2013) further elaborates that the devaluation of foreign credentials is often a mechanism of labour market exclusion, serving to relegate highly skilled migrant women into low-status, low-paid sectors. Purkayastha *et al.* (2023) argue that conventional definitions of "skills" in migration policy are themselves exclusionary, privileging male-dominated sectors such as IT and engineering while ignoring soft skills and caregiving competencies predominantly held by women. These studies collectively call for a reconceptualisation of skills and a more inclusive, gender-aware migration framework that acknowledges WMWs' contributions beyond traditional economic metrics.

The findings presented stem from the COST Action "Women on the Move" (WEMov), a European research network spanning over 30 countries. WEMov's primary aim is to investigate the historical and contemporary trajectories of migrant women and to inform the development of gender-sensitive migration and labour policies. Its multi-disciplinary structure and cross-national collaboration provide a robust foundation for

analysing the systemic patterns of deskilling affecting women migrant workers across Europe and neighbouring regions.

Deskilling is a work-related issue that is impacted by an international and EU framework of policies on labour. Among the main policies and decisions that are meant to provide protection to women migrant workers, at **international level:**

- The 1979 **Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)** contains recommendations for the protection of WMWs, especially recommendation No. 26 (2008) aiming at protecting WMWs' rights;
- The 2011 **ILO Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189)** guarantees decent work conditions and labour rights to domestic workers and, due to their above-mentioned overrepresentation in this field, it is key to WMWs, especially General Comments No. 1 (2011) on Migrant Domestic Workers and No. 2 (2013) on the rights of migrant workers in an irregular situation. Previous ILO Conventions include: Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97); Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100); Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111); Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143); and accompanying recommendations, Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181);
- The 1990 UN **International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families (ICRMW)** was implemented in 2003 to protect migrants' rights, including women and families, and prevent discrimination against migrants in the workplace;
- The 2016 **New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants** seeks to address women migrants' vulnerabilities and underlines the need to acknowledge women migrants' skills and promote their empowerment;
- The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** provides for protection for WMWs, with such goals as Goal 4 on education, Goal 5 on gender equality, Goal 8 on decent work, Goal 10 on reducing inequality, and Goal 17 on global partnerships. For instance, goal 5.4 recognizes "the value of unpaid and domestic work through the provision of public services and social protection", which is key for WMWs in the care industry, and goal 8.8 underlines their necessary protection in precarious employment.

At **European level**, in 2011 the Council of Europe adopted

- **Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)2** of the Committee of Ministers to member states on validating migrants' skills and acknowledged "that many migrants' skills, competences and qualifications, howsoever acquired, are still not properly validated or recognised, and that as a result they cannot gain employment corresponding to their skills, competences and qualifications, and [was] concerned about the consequent waste of their human capital to society and to themselves" (Council of Europe, 2024), hence aiming at curbing deskilling in the interest of European Member States and individual migrant workers;
- Introduced in 2017, the **European Qualifications Passport for Refugees** (EQPR) was based on the Lisbon Recognition Convention and meant to identify refugees' skills to curb deskilling by easing access to higher education. Today, 22 countries are involved in the project supported by the UNHCR.

At **EU level**, the following directives and policies apply to WMWs:

- The Council of Europe's above-mentioned EQPR has been complemented by a joint EU project titled "**Supporting an efficient national mechanism of recognition of refugees' qualifications**", to assist Italy where the EQPR is most applied;
- Part of the European Pillar of Social Rights (20 key principles for social cohesion and inclusiveness introduced in 2017 at the Gothenburg Summit), the **Work-life Balance Initiative** can ease WMWs' work conditions by providing for childcare, parental leave, by combatting discrimination in the workplace, and by developing incentives for mothers to get decent employment, and fight against the "motherhood penalty" (Riaño, 2021), i.e. household and childcare family duties which affect WMWs' access to employment without a network to support them in the receiving nation.
- The 2023 **European Year of Skills** was meant to develop workers' skills and thus curb deskilling, yet it is too early to assess its effects.

Despite the above-mentioned initiatives, there is a need for further policies and directives at EU level to curb deskilling and make more efficient use of WMWs' skills. The causes of deskilling must be understood through the dual lens of labour market regulations and immigration policy. On one hand, sectoral licensing regimes can block skilled migrants from accessing professional roles; on the other, immigration policies, especially those involving tied visas, employer sponsorship, or conditional work permits, create precarity that limits bargaining power and locks migrant women into deskilled positions. Effective policy responses must therefore target both regulatory and migration policy dimensions to dismantle structural barriers to skill recognition and career progression.

Deskilling in context and practice

The definition of skills is globally shifting and fluid, depending on the level of education, training, or experience, but above all skills are defined in terms of the receiving nations' needs, which impacts WMWs' integration when receiving countries focus on IT and engineering, underrepresented by women, and neglect invisible soft skills, although they are necessary to build socially stable societies (Purkayastha *et al.*, 2023).

Skills being a fluid social construct based on stereotypes, be they gendered, ethnic or societal, it can take different definitions depending on the period, context and country. The focus on economic needs can have an impact on women who are traditionally discriminated against as pertaining to the reproduction sector (the opposition between productive and reproductive work was introduced after the Industrial Revolution and has entrenched the gender labour divide by confining women to reproductive activities and men to the production realm). A 2017 UN Women report shows that labour migration is highly gendered, based on the gendered productive/reproductive binary, with a higher representation of women in the care industry (UN Women, 2017).

Deskilling is the underemployment of migrant workers who experience downward social mobility in the receiving nation by taking up jobs with a lower social status and recognition. Over-qualified, their skills can be degraded (IOM, 2015), which impacts WMWs' emancipation and well-being. Deskilling is generally the result of administrative barriers to qualification equivalence and accreditation, gender and ethnic stereotypes on WMWs' skills, and language obstacles, which lead to an erosion of skills and underuse of competences and formal training. According to Kofman, "Deskilling […] often results in the move from one gender order to another" (Kofman, 2012).

In a briefing published in 2023 by the EU parliament, deskilling is linked to the barriers imposed through exclusionary policies that limit women migrants' access to employment and emancipation in a receiving nation. The brief reaffirms the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)'s conclusions that women migrants are at a high risk of unemployment and deskilling in the EU (Orav, 2023). Additionally in 2021, 25% of foreign-born women reported facing difficulties when trying to get a job in the EU (Orav, 2023). According to Kofman, in 2004 foreign-born women were underrepresented in highly-skilled occupations as compared to nationals except in Ireland, the UK and Hungary. She also concludes that Southern European countries, except for Portugal, tend to present higher levels of deskilling (Kofman, 2012). Portugal's comparatively lower deskilling rate may be attributed to its earlier implementation of qualification recognition measures and a more inclusive approach to migrant integration policies.

Highly-skilled women migrants are generally present in the care and education sectors, often migrating with their husband, a group referred to as "trailing" migrants. For instance, in the UK the proportion of foreign-born nurses increased by 92% between 1997 and 2004 (Kofman, 2012). In the EU in 2003–4, WMWs were mostly represented in sales (12.6% of the total employed), hospitality and education (8.1%), health (17%) and households (6.2%) (Kofman *et al.*, 2009). Between 2003 and 2004, the proportion of overqualified employed foreign-born women (i.e. deskilled) reached up to 53.4% in Greece, and 62% of non-OECD born women. Similarly, Spain reached 47.6% deskilled foreign-born women and 56.7% non-OECD born. These figures stand high as compared to Hungary or Switzerland with respectively 10.5% and 13.8% of foreign-born deskilled women for 8.9% and 19.8% of non-OECD born WMWs (Kofman, 2012). In 2007, the global proportion of highly-skilled WMWs was EU-born at 23.3%, and non-EU born at 20.7%, with a lower proportion of native-born highly skilled WMWs of 18% (Huber *et al.*, 2010). Between 1994 and 2004 the disproportion between natives and foreign-born women employed in household services was entrenched, with an increase from 27.1 to 36% for Spain, and 35% to 42.4% for Greece. Northern countries such as the UK and Denmark are marked by a higher proportion of WMWs in the health sector (Kofman *et al.*, 2009).

Factors contributing to deskilling

WMWs are more likely to be deskilled or unemployed than any other group in the EU, and this is because they can be doubly discriminated for their ethnicity and gender. Furthermore, women migrating with families have a lower employment rate: women refugees being 45% likely to be employed as compared to 62% for refugee men (EIGE, 2020). To prevent misinterpretation of key statistics, it is necessary to state that the employment rates referred to here are based on share of employed migrant women overall. Throughout the brief, quantitative data on overqualification, employment disparities, and pay gaps are explicitly tied to broader analytical claims about structural deskilling. For instance, Eurostat figures on overqualified WMWs are not presented in isolation, but linked to credential recognition issues, labour market segmentation, and EU policy shortcomings. Similarly, gender pay gap statistics are contextualised within a framework that accounts for legal status, ethnicity, and sector-specific hiring practices. This approach ensures that data interpretation is not merely descriptive but explanatory, helping illuminate how institutional and cultural factors interact to produce unequal outcomes for women migrant workers.

Racial and gender stereotypes can also contribute to assigning women to specific roles and jobs as studies show a higher proportion of deskilling or unemployment among WMWs from Africa, Latin America and Asia who are 6 times more likely to be excluded from the labour market, and this underlines the impact of geographical origins in employment in the receiving nations (Gerber & Wanner, 2019). The labour market has been seen as a "site of class reproduction" (Bauder, 2006), the native population being given the priority in employment opportunities. Hence, deskilling can act as a domination tool meant to exclude and marginalize non-nationals for instance by not recognizing their qualifications and credentials (Siar, 2013).

Facing double discrimination, WMWs can be affected by labour gender segmentation. ILO 2013 data indicates that women migrants represent 73% of domestic workers in the world (EIGE, 2020), often illegally employed, they can be the victims of exploitation and abuse. A 2024 UN Women report shows that WMWs are mostly employed in service and retail (18.8%), elementary occupations (17.3 per cent), craft and related trades (15.2 per cent), professionals (13.9 per cent) and clerks (12.3 per cent) (UN Women, February 2024).

Hence the factors contributing to WMWs' deskilling include:

- National schemes for educated migrants favouring IT, engineering and finance graduates, which is a sector less occupied by women (EIGE, 2020);
- The difficulties to get qualification and educational recognition in the EU particularly affects non-EU migrants, the country of origin being a key determinant, as global South migrants are more likely to face unrecognition of their qualifications.
- Women migrants' employability can be limited by their childcare responsibility and household duties, their caretaking duties preventing them from accessing language and training courses, a phenomenon referred to as the "motherhood penalty" (Riaño, 2021). Furthermore, they can be perceived as less competent and available than non-mother migrants, which impacts their employability and remuneration (Riaño, 2021).
- Lack of knowledge of the job market and limited access to information can prevent WMWs from accessing adequate employment. WMWs do not enjoy the support of family and social networks that nationals do and this is an impediment to their integration in the job market (IOM, 2015).
- Labour protection deficiencies affect men and women migrants alike and often forces them into precarious and unregulated employment. Scholars have shown how WMWs face "linguistic penalty" in the receiving nations' job market, discriminated against because of their language skills and "double disadvantage as foreign-born and women (IOM, 2015).
- Once the WMW has overcome the qualification recognition, she may still face discrimination in the career advancement, a problem which one of WEMov interviewees, D., calls the "migrant glass ceiling" (see below).

Within the health and care sectors, women migrant workers are often employed in lower-tier roles such as personal care aides, home helpers, or cleaning staff, while being excluded from higher-status positions like registered nurses, midwives, or medical technicians. This reflects both *horizontal segmentation*—the concentration of WMWs in specific job types within the same sector—and *vertical segmentation*, where access to senior or better-paid roles is blocked. These patterns are reinforced by institutional barriers such as the non-recognition of foreign qualifications, costly and opaque re-certification processes, and discriminatory recruitment practices. Even when WMWs possess relevant training and experience, these structural hurdles often relegate them to undervalued, precarious work that underutilises their full skillset.

All in all, women migrant workers (WMWs) and native-born women often face overlapping barriers in the labour market, such as limited access to affordable childcare, gendered expectations around unpaid domestic responsibilities, and occupational segregation that confines women to lower-paid, feminised sectors. However, WMWs encounter *compounded* forms of disadvantage due to their migration status, racialisation, and linguistic barriers. While native women may struggle with work–life balance or glass ceilings, WMWs are additionally confronted with non-recognition of qualifications, exclusion from professional networks, and discriminatory hiring practices shaped by both xenophobia and racism. Language proficiency is a further dividing line, affecting WMWs' ability to navigate legal systems, access employment information, or qualify for skilled roles. These intersecting forms of marginalisation mean that, even when WMWs possess equal or higher qualifications than native women, they are more likely to experience deskilling, underemployment, and exploitation in informal or unregulated work.

In male-dominated sectors such as IT and engineering, deskilling is not only the result of migration status or credential mismatch but also of entrenched gender biases. Migrant women in these fields often encounter exclusionary workplace cultures, lack of inclusive hiring practices, and gendered assumptions that undermine their competence. This dynamic complements the earlier analysis of feminised sectors like care and service work, showing that deskilling operates differently across professional fields, but is consistently reinforced by gendered norms and unequal power structures.

Gender pay gap

If educational and social backgrounds impact WMWs' integration, UN Women finds that "labour segregation and pay gaps are common among all skill groups" (EIGE, 2020). In 2020, the global gender pay gap was estimated at 20% (UN Women, 2020), and a 2023 UN Women report indicates that women earn 24% less than men for the same work, and that women are more represented than men in vulnerable and unprotected employment with 50.5% in 2011 (UN Women, 2023). In the EU, the gender pay gap was estimated at 13% in 2022, despite an increase in women's employment reaching 66.2% in 2020 and increased representation in higher education (EU Commission, 2022).

Riaño bases her 2021 case study of WMWs' skills on Switzerland because the country's population counts 25% of foreign-born residents, the 2nd largest foreign-born population OECD country, and a high proportion of highly skilled incomers. Interestingly, WMW have a higher level of education than Swiss-born women and come from the EU at 44%, and non-EU countries at 41%. This attractiveness can be explained by low deskilling rates and remarkable advances in gender equal education and employment opportunities, despite the remaining gender pay gap. However, closer investigation shows that WMW have the lowest income of all groups under study, followed by Swiss-born women workers, foreign-born male workers and Swiss-born men workers, which shows the extent of the gender pay gap irrespective the country of origin. Furthermore, women workers face greater deskilling and obstacles in employment, and are even more affected when coming from non-EU countries (Riaño, 2021).

WEMov's approach

WMWs' skills and resources

Half the 258 million migrants are women, who outnumber men in all regions but Africa and Asia, they thus represent a remarkable workforce (UN Women, 2024). Despite the gender pay gap and discrimination in the labour market, WMWs were responsible for half the $601 billion remittances in 2016 (UN Women, 2024). Indeed, WMWs contribute to their sending and receiving nations, notably with social and financial remittances; social remittances concerning the transfer of social capital and values. Although remittances data are not sex-disaggregated, commentators agree that women contribute more than men (UN Women, 2017).

A 2024 UN Women report states that empowering WMWs is necessary to meet the 2023 Agenda for Sustainable Development, reach gender equality (Goal 5), decent work conditions (Goal 8), end poverty (Goal 1), ensure food security (Goal 2) and health (Goal 3), and reduce inequalities (Goal 10) (UN Women, 2024). The report also shows that easing women's access to employment can boost economic development and that gender gaps cost 15% in GDP.

According to the director of the Ödos reception center interviewed by WEMov in Spain in January 2024, WMWs are highly resourceful and they can bring skills that are necessary for the development of the EU. Yet, WEMov considers that WMWs' skills are underexploited because of deskilling. They acquire soft skills through the migration process and these, beyond their initial training and backgrounds, are key to develop human capital in receiving nations. Soft skills and resourcefulness, while often used interchangeably, refer to distinct yet complementary competencies. *Soft skills* encompass interpersonal and socio-emotional abilities such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, and emotional intelligence : skills that are increasingly recognised as essential in service-oriented and care-related professions. In contrast, *resourcefulness* refers to the capacity to navigate complex or adverse situations with ingenuity and resilience. For women migrant workers, resourcefulness often manifests in their ability to adapt to unfamiliar systems, overcome bureaucratic and linguistic barriers, and secure employment despite systemic disadvantages. While soft skills can be taught and measured in professional contexts, resourcefulness is typically developed through lived experience and is especially visible in migrants' ability to survive and strategise within exclusionary labour markets. Acknowledging this distinction allows for a fuller appreciation of the multifaceted strengths WMWs bring to receiving societies.

WEMov's case studies

This brief draws on three case studies conducted by WEMov across Europe, focusing on women migrant workers who have been employed in the hospitality, tourism, education, recruitment, and factory sectors. The qualitative methodology was centred on semi-structured interviews, designed to trace labour market trajectories and capture the often-overlooked psychological dimensions of deskilling, such as burnout, frustration, and professional devaluation. While these psychological impacts were not initially the focus of our recommendations, their recurrence across cases highlights a pressing need to integrate emotional and mental well-being into policy discussions on migrant labour integration.

Unlike male migrant workers, women migrant workers often face gender-specific barriers that amplify the effects of deskilling. WMWs are disproportionately channelled into care, domestic, and service work – sectors undervalued both socially and economically – due to gendered assumptions about women's "natural" caregiving abilities. Their migration trajectories are also frequently shaped by family responsibilities or spousal dependency, limiting their autonomy in job selection and mobility. While male migrants may encounter discrimination, WMWs are more likely to experience sexual harassment, exploitation in live-in domestic work, and conditional employment tied to their roles as mothers or wives. For example, some WMWs reported being offered lower wages or denied formal contracts based on assumptions that their income was "supplementary" to a male breadwinner. Migration sponsorship regimes further entrench gendered roles by tying women's residency rights to their partners or employers, increasing their vulnerability to abuse and limiting their capacity to report exploitation. These experiences highlight that WMWs' deskilling is not simply a product of migration, but of entrenched gender norms intersecting with racial and legal inequalities.

A key issue in deskilling is the psychological impact on WMWs, which WEMov has noted in its investigations that exploitation in the workplace and deskilling were not uncommon. For instance, WMWs may be constrained to accept undervalued positions, extra work hours and lower salaries to secure a work permit and regular position in a welcoming country. Cases of employers abusing WMWs vulnerability in precarious jobs is not rare. Forced into survival jobs, educated migrants can also be affected by deskilling when their mobility grants end and they must work for a living with no possibility to transfer their academic credentials in their new environment. Traumatic experiences of lack of recognition, disrespect and inhumane treatment in the workplace may reinforce the vulnerability of incoming migrants. Additionally, the language barrier is a challenge for all WMWs, which educated migrants may nevertheless overcome with more ease than less educated ones. Daily prejudices and exclusion strategies from national-born workers are common whatever the education background.

The detrimental impact of deskilling and differential treatments affecting WMWs, as well as the missed opportunities for receiving countries, are not rare. Deskilling can often be attributed to racist and gendered practices of exclusion from the labour market and is detrimental to the migrants facing stressful integration conditions as well as the receiving nation that deprives itself from valuable skills (Siar, 2013).

While deskilling is often framed as a loss, it is essential to acknowledge that not all women migrant workers perceive career changes or temporary exits from the labour force as negative. For some, migration offers a reprieve from the double burden of professional and domestic labour in their countries of origin, and the opportunity to reorient life goals or pursue education. Recognising migrant women's agency and diverse aspirations challenges deficit-based narratives and calls for more nuanced, context-sensitive approaches to migration and employment policy.

WEMov's contribution and recommendations

WEMov offers an original contribution by documenting the gendered, historical, and spatial dynamics of deskilling across a diverse European landscape. Unlike existing literature that often remains bounded by national case studies or aggregate statistics, WEMov incorporates qualitative insights from first-hand interviews and comparative research. The brief links these findings with EU-level instruments such as the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees and the Work-life Balance Initiative, thus bridging a gap between academic discourse and policy frameworks, particularly in feminist migration scholarship where such intersections are rarely addressed.

In keeping with a 2017 UN Women report, WEMov believes that policy-makers should be better informed on gender and migration, but also that women migrants should be involved in policy making, and their contributions to sending and receiving nations' development acknowledged (UN Women, 2017).

In light of the above study, WEMov recommends the following provisions and improvements:

Highlighting women migrants' skills and contributions to the EU

1) WEMov believes that it is necessary to change the macro-narrative from burden economic trope to value the diversity of women migrants' backgrounds and skills. To impact the general narrative on WMWs and ease their integration, studies about migrants' skills should be widely released;

2) Skills and labour should be degendered;

3) Care work and "lesser-skilled" jobs should be revalued by highlighting soft/non-educational skills;

4) Defining skills in terms of receiving nations' needs should be avoided, and migrants' resources highlighted. Skills should be introduced in the interview process to avoid excluding the migrants deemed unnecessary, but rather start from the skills they have, not the receiving nation's needs in order to promote diversity of skills and inclusionary practices;

5) Women migrants' economic empowerment should be acknowledged as their increasing role as breadwinners and contribution to remittances, so global economy;

6) An intersectional approach to deskilling is necessary to understand and introduce adequate best practices, because other factors than education (gender, race, motherhood, country of origin) may impact women migrants' employability;

7) Returnees' skills should be recognised to facilitate their reintegration.

Curbing deskilling

8) WEMov believes that it is important to make information available to women migrants on training and employment;

9) Access to decent work should be guaranteed for women migrants;

10) Reskilling should be encouraged with specific trainings (language and vocational) accessible to women migrants;

11) EU protection tools against women migrants' exploitation and fair recruitment policies should be developed, and recruitment agencies monitored to avoid exploitation: deskilling and exploitation often being linked;

12) Gender segmentation at work confining women migrants to reproductive unskilled jobs should be curbed;

13) Efficient qualification and diplomas equivalence procedures for EU and non-EU in-migrants should be set up;

14) Labour marker integration practices should be harmonized across EU Member states to limit the overrepresentation of WMWs' deskilling in Southern Member States.

15) The language and motherhood penalties should be addressed with language courses and childcare provisions. Childcare should be provided for to ease women migrants' employment;

16) WMWs' access to the same career advancement opportunities as national-born women workers should be ensured;

17) Curbing the gender pay gap would benefit all women workers, but labour protection and equal pay should be guaranteed to WMWs, who should be given access to training and skills development (UN Women, 2017).

While deskilling is a widespread phenomenon, certain contexts illustrate how it can be mitigated. Portugal, for instance, presents a relative positive story, with less restrictive credential equivalency systems and strong community-based support networks, including migrant-led associations. International comparisons, such as with Canada and Australia, highlight the role of inclusive credential recognition processes and sector-specific integration pathways, which provide valuable models

for European policy design. Recognising these "positive deviance" cases is critical for identifying actionable levers to counteract systemic deskilling.

Conclusion

Deskilling translates into a devaluation of previously acquired qualifications, experience and expertise in the receiving nation when taking up lower-status jobs. It is proven that highly skilled women migrate more than men, yet non-EU born women face higher risks of unemployment, lower paid employment, exploitation and abuse (EIGE, 2020). So-called "trailer" migrants, i.e. accompanying spouses, often face deskilling because they are assigned to a dependent status with traditional gendered family responsibilities and thus see their professional qualifications devalued. Skills in the migration context is defined in terms of who is a desirable migrant and who is less desirable in the receiving country. A key element in deskilling is the devaluation of qualifications obtained in the Global South such as Africa or Asia. Hence, WMWs may be discriminated against because of their country of origin as well as linguistic barriers. They thus face discriminations that reflect global economic development, world economic dynamics and deskilling being tied (IOM, 2015).

The main issue that WEMov has identified with WMWs' deskilling is the ensuing de-emancipation of women migrants. WMWs' exclusion from quality decent and protected work conditions generates social tensions and entrenches gender labour divisions. WMWs' integration can also be constrained by the cost of their migration, which prevents them from accessing training and reskilling and rather confines them to subsistence employment. Hence, deskilled WMWs are at a higher risk of exploitation, physical and sexual violence in the workplace (UN Women, 2024).

However, migration can lead to deskilling as well as reskilling, and commentators have noticed that migration can be both empowering for women (EIGE, 2020) (upskilling) and disempowering (deskilling). Women are often greater contributors to remittances, either in financial or social terms, social remittances concerning the transmission of cultural and social values, beyond the money that women transfer back home, which underlines women migrants' constructive contribution to their departing and destination societies (UN Women, 2017). Therefore, receiving nations benefit from the arrival of educated migrants, and sending nations may also benefit from returnees' skills acquired in migration. As such, the migration process can be identified as producer of skills. Yet, although education can allow women to achieve economic empowerment, upskilling and reskilling initiatives have generally not ended gender discriminations in the labour market (UN Women, 2024).

To address the systemic nature of deskilling among women migrant workers, it is essential to implement gender-responsive, intersectional labour policies that account for the multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination they face. Such policies must move beyond one-size-fits-all approaches by recognising how gender, migration status, race, class, and caregiving responsibilities jointly shape WMWs' access to decent work. This includes ensuring equitable qualification recognition, combating occupational segregation, and providing targeted support such as accessible language training and childcare services. As this brief has demonstrated, incorporating an intersectional lens into labour market integration strategies not only enhances fairness and social cohesion but also allows receiving countries to make full use of WMWs' skills and potential. Without such a shift, current frameworks risk perpetuating inequality and missing critical opportunities for inclusive economic growth.

Ethical approval and consent

Ethical approval and consent were not required.

Data availability

No data are associated with this article.

Acknowledgements

(European Cooperation in Science and Technology). COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) is a funding agency for research and innovation networks. Our Actions help connect research initiatives across Europe and enable scientists to grow their ideas by sharing them with their peers. This boosts their research, career and innovation. http://www.cost.eu

The views expressed in this article are those of the authors. Publication in Open Research Europe does not imply endorsement by COST.

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Open Peer Review

Current Peer Review Status: ✔ ✔ ✔

Version 2

Reviewer Report 09 August 2025

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✔ **Sara Verderber**
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia

I have read the revised version of the article, which flows clearly and coherently. The theoretical part has been strengthened and clarified, the data sector has been structured, and the clarity of the reading has also improved. The authors have taken recommendations and given comments into account. I have no reservations about approving the article.
The topic is significant and underexplored, so I greatly welcome the scientific input of the authors of this article once again.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: women's migration, professional identity, highly-skilled migration, integration, and mental health.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Reviewer Report 23 July 2025

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.22037.r55687

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✔ **Parvati Raghuram**
The Open University, Milton Keynes, England, UK

I recommend that the article be indexed without any further revisions.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Reviewer Report 25 June 2025

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.22037.r55688

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Maria Bastida
University of Santiago de Compostela, Santiago de Compostela, Spain

I have read the revised version of the article and reviewed the authors' response to my comments. I believe that the new version has been considerably improved, with clearer conceptual distinctions, better contextualisation and a more coherent structure. The specific points I raised, particularly with regard to regional comparisons and employment indicators, have been addressed satisfactorily.
For my part, I consider the revised article ready for indexed.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Version 1

Reviewer Report 17 October 2024

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.19675.r44396

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Sara Verderber
[1] University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia
[2] University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia

The article "Women migrant workers' (WMWS) deskilling" focuses on the important but often

neglected topic of women's migration. It is an important academic contribution because research on women's migrant experience is still rare. Secondly, existing research usually focuses on women in the context of family reunification (so-called 'trailing migrants') or as care workers and low-skilled labour, while high-skilled women migrants rarely receive academic attention in migration studies.

This article represents a significant development in the migration academic field by exploring migration structures and realities in the post-migration phase through the prism of gender and qualification (education). It highlights the importance of a research focus on women migrant workers facing deskilling. It explores how deskilling can directly affect migrant women and what indirect implications this concept has on the host country's economy and society development. As both a personal experience and a political and economic concept, deskilling encompasses a broad spectrum of migrant labour processes and is a common challenge for highly skilled migrant women, with necessary macro-level implications, such as the potential loss of economic potential and skills/knowledge for both: the societies of arrival and for the migrant workers themselves. The authors successfully place migrant experience at the centre of the debate, which offers an understanding of the impact of deskilling on the socio-political and economic structures of arrival and departure communities. However, the article needs additional clarifications: a better explanation of used concepts is required, the academic references are often missing, and basic theoretical support is necessary to contextualise the content adequately.

If we look more closely, there are insufficient breakdowns of concepts such as "glass ceiling," "gender pay gap," and "global south" (although even people from the global north are not immune to deskilling too). There is a lack of relevant academic references to back up claims such as "affect women migrant workers in greater numbers than men," "deskilling is generally a result of administrative barriers," and "linguistic barriers." Although the article includes several data and explanations on the concept of deskilling and the current legal frameworks in European migrant labour legislation and regulation, these elements are not linked well. The shortcomings are also reflected in the lack of theoretical links and explanations that would clarify how the concepts of gender and racial discrimination and language proficiency affect deskilling. The data presented, although scattered throughout the text, is not well placed in the context of deskilling, racism, integration, and gender (including pay) discrimination, which reduces the coherence of the analysis.

To improve the article, it would be helpful to:

- Increase the coherence and systematicity of the text.
- Include academic references for the claims made.
- Interpret and relate the data more precisely to the deskilling topic.
- Add theoretical background or background to help situate the data in the discussion.

While the paper addresses a topical and important issue, it is clear that there is a binding need for additional clarity and a structured approach to linking the concepts mentioned to deskilling and the data set.

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Is the rationale for the Open Letter provided in sufficient detail? (Please consider whether existing challenges in the field are outlined clearly and whether the purpose of the letter is explained)
Yes

Does the article adequately reference differing views and opinions?
Partly

Are all factual statements correct, and are statements and arguments made adequately supported by citations?
Partly

Is the Open Letter written in accessible language? (Please consider whether all subject-specific terms, concepts and abbreviations are explained)
Yes

Where applicable, are recommendations and next steps explained clearly for others to follow? (Please consider whether others in the research community would be able to implement guidelines or recommendations and/or constructively engage in the debate)
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: women's migration, professional identity, highly-skilled migration, integration, and mental health.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 02 May 2025

Marie-José Ruiz

We thank the reviewer for their engaged and generous evaluation of our policy brief, and for recognising its contribution to the underrepresented field of highly skilled women migrant workers (WMWs). We are especially appreciative of the reviewer's acknowledgement of our effort to centre migrant women's experiences and to explore the broader socio-political and economic implications of deskilling.
1. Conceptual Clarifications We fully agree that key terms such as **"glass ceiling," "gender pay gap," "Global South,"** and "linguistic barriers" require further clarification to ensure accessibility for a broad academic and policy audience. Concepts like **gendered labour segmentation**, **intersectional discrimination**, and **migration policy restrictions** interrelate and shape WMWs' experiences of deskilling. For example, "glass ceiling"

includes gendered and racialised implications in the context of career progression, while "Global South" is qualified in relation to structural inequities and postcolonial patterns in migration systems.
2. Improved Data Interpretation and Linkages Statistical references are **contextually tied to analytical claims** about deskilling, labour market integration, or legal frameworks. Connections between **data on overqualification, gender pay gaps, and sectoral employment** and the broader issues of skill recognition, discriminatory hiring practices, and structural barriers are clear.
3. Improved Coherence and Structure We thank the reviewer for pointing out the need for greater **systematicity**. The document structure to follow a **clear progression** from definition and context → evidence and challenges → case studies → policy recommendations. **Final Remarks** We are grateful for the reviewer's thoughtful engagement and their recognition of the paper's importance in expanding the academic conversation on gender and skilled migration.
Marie Ruiz & Stellamarina Donato

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Report 04 October 2024

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.19675.r44395

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Parvati Raghuram
[1] The Open University, Milton Keynes, England, UK
[2] The Open University, Milton Keynes, England, UK

This is a concise and important article on deskilling of women migrant workers. It focuses particularly on the European case. It clearly sets out the instruments available to address the problems and has a useful list of recommendations. It is therefore a paper that will benefit the readership of this journal and I recommend that it be approved for indexing after the authors address the suggestions listed below.

I would, however, suggest a few changes to the paper. I found the second paragraph of the first section 'WEMov's approach' really useful for context. I could not see why this was not given in the beginning of the paper along with what WEMov is. The underpinning research of WEMov was not clearly set out in the beginning. What are the countries in which this network is based and what is its aim?

The section WEMov's case studies did not give me information on the specific case studies - whether they be sectors which they studied, or the countries on which they focus. This would have helped the reader to understand the project. From the paragraph it appears that the work may be

focused on psychological impact, in which case the recommendations should align with this. It currently does not focus on the psychological recommendations.

These two sections also don't make clear how the project goes beyond the existing literature and debates. What is the new value added through WEMov?

I would like to have seen some examples of countries or sectors where the deskilling is not as much as in others, why that might have been and what could have been learnt from it. There is a vast amount of data on this already. For instance, Canada and Australia vary in the extent to which ethnicity rather than country of qualification influence deskilling. There are also differences in the nature of deskilling based on the sector. In male dominated sectors such as IT and engineering, it is the limited participation of national women in these sectors that leads to a lot of difficulties for migrant women as the recruiters struggle to accept that women could be in these sectors, there is a lot of machoism and male privilege amongst workers and there are difficulties for the companies recruiting them to accommodate women. You can see more details of all this in my publication which I have provided references for below. (Ref - 1 and Ref - 2)

It would also have been useful to have a little more clarity on how far these are national problems or labour market sector problems. The relative role of immigraiton regulations compared to labour market regulations affects the nature of deskilling. For instance, some people may be able to enter the sector in which they are trained but not at the same level, while others have no access to that sector. There is also a role for employment agencies, which often assume that migrant women are looking for work in particular sectors. You may find some of these differences, as they pertain to Indian migrant women in the EU in this publication Raghuram, Parvati (2022 [Ref-1]). *Indian Women's Migration to the EU.* International Labour Office, Switzerland.

Moving forward it would be good to think about how we go beyond some tropes around deskilling and how we look at skilled migration through a wider lens. For instance, our study found that some women wanted to use the opportunity offered by migration to not work in the sector they trained in because they wanted to do other things, which they found more fulfilling. While deskilling is a pressing concern, perhaps a footnote to say that not all women who do not join the labour market are unhappy with this because, for some, the higher salaries that their partners earn in the EU, might provide a relief from the double burden that they faced as skilled women in countries with lower salaries.

On a minor note, there are a few places where the paper could do with an edit.
Here is one:
'Quantitative data confirm that in 2019, 1/5 highly educated WMWs experienced deskilling: 40.7% for migrant women compared to 21.1% for national women in 2020.'. I think there might be some errors in this statement.

Overall, an important topic and I hope the authors will consider these comments as ways in which to take this work forward in the future and to get even more readership for their paper. I wish the authors all the very best in this endeavour

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stereotypes and current tropes. *The Open University*. 2024; **13**: 25-33 Reference Source

Is the rationale for the Open Letter provided in sufficient detail? (Please consider whether existing challenges in the field are outlined clearly and whether the purpose of the letter is explained)
Yes

Does the article adequately reference differing views and opinions?
Partly

Are all factual statements correct, and are statements and arguments made adequately supported by citations?
Partly

Is the Open Letter written in accessible language? (Please consider whether all subject-specific terms, concepts and abbreviations are explained)
Yes

Where applicable, are recommendations and next steps explained clearly for others to follow? (Please consider whether others in the research community would be able to implement guidelines or recommendations and/or constructively engage in the debate)
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Gendered migration, skilled migration, IT sector, nursing and medicine, care and domestic work, EU.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 02 May 2025

Marie-José Ruiz

We are grateful for the reviewer's thoughtful engagement with our policy brief and for recognising the significance of the topic, the relevance of our recommendations, and the value of the contribution to ongoing policy debates. We appreciate the specific and constructive suggestions. **1. Clarifying WEMov's Research Foundation and Scope** We fully agree that the *WEMov* network's background and research scope needs to be integrated at the start of the brief. The **geographical scope** of WEMov spans over 30 European and neighbouring countries and the **aim** of the network is to highlight migrant women's contributions and improving gender-sensitive migration policies. **2. WEMov Case Studies – Clarification and Focus** The **locations** of the three featured cases are Ireland, Sweden, and Poland. The **sectors** are hospitality, recruitment, education, tourism, and factory work. The

approach was **qualitative, based on interviews**, with attention to both labour market trajectories and **psychological impacts**, particularly burnout, devaluation, and frustration resulting from deskilling. The psychological dimensions were not the initial focus of the recommendations, **3. WEMov's Contribution Beyond Existing Literature** WEMov adds value by documenting the **historical, geographic, and gendered dimensions** of deskilling through a multi-country lens. It contributes **original interviews and qualitative insights** to complement the large body of quantitative data already available. Our policy brief identifies **intersections between deskilling and EU-level instruments**, not often addressed in feminist migration literature. This positions WEMov explicitly within, and beyond, current academic and policy debates. **4. Positive Deviance: Where Deskilling Is Less Prevalent** There are examples of regions with **lower levels of deskilling**. The section on Portugal explores **why it performs better** than other Southern European countries, noting **less restrictive equivalency systems** and a stronger presence of migrant-led networks. Comparative references to **Canada and Australia** note how differences in credential recognition and sectoral integration models influence outcomes. **5. Sector-Specific Gender Bias and Deskilling** D**eskilling in male-dominated sectors like IT and engineering** is reinforced by gendered stereotypes among recruiters ; lack of inclusive hiring practices ; and cultural "machoism" in the workplace that can alienate migrant women. This nuance complements the earlier discussion on gender segmentation in care and service work and acknowledges different patterns of deskilling depending on the sector. **6. Distinguishing Labour Market vs. Immigration Policy Effects** S**ectoral constraints (e.g., professional licensing)** can limit access to skilled roles, while i **mmigration policies**, especially tied visas or conditional work permits, can create precarity and further reinforce deskilling. **7. Beyond the Deskilling Trope: Migrant Women's Agency** Not all WMWs view a career change or withdrawal from the labour market as negative. In some cases, migration offers a reprieve from the double burden of work and care in home countries. These choices reflect agency and **diverse aspirations**, which should be acknowledged in future work. We agree this is an important area for further research and are grateful for the reminder not to homogenise experiences of deskilling. **8. Editing and Clarification of Statistical Statements** We thank the reviewer for flagging the unclear sentences. We also completed a minor language edit throughout to enhance readability. We again thank the reviewer for the constructive feedback and collegial tone. **Marie Ruiz & Stellamarina Donato**

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Report 09 September 2024

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Maria Bastida

[1] University of Santiago de Compostela, Santiago de Compostela, Spain
[2] University of Santiago de Compostela, Santiago de Compostela, Spain

The paper examines the key role of women migrant workers in the development of both sending and receiving countries. Despite their important contributions, women migrant workers face labour de-skilling, which involves under-utilisation of their skills and lack of recognition of their qualifications. Factors such as lack of equivalence of qualifications, language barriers and ethnic and gender stereotypes exacerbate this problem. Work overload has a negative impact on the social mobility and well-being of these women, while at the same time preventing receiving countries from making full use of their skills.

The report outlines international and European policies and frameworks that seek to protect the rights of women migrant workers, while recognising the need to redouble efforts to effectively implement these policies. I found the report interesting because it addresses a current and pressing problem that disproportionately affects women.

In my opinion, the document provides a comprehensive overview of the de-skilling of women migrant workers, covering the political, social and economic factors that contribute to this situation, with a particular focus on international and EU regulations and policies. The inclusion of data and statistics, such as deskilling figures and gender pay gaps, provides a clear basis for analysis. These figures help to contextualise the extent of the problem in the different regions of Europe, providing a basis for the report's conclusions and recommendations. In addition, the value of interpersonal skills acquired through the migration process is recognised, providing an important perspective on the non-traditional contributions of women workers to the human capital of receiving countries. Finally, the report includes practical recommendations that address structural issues affecting migrant women's labour market integration.

However, the report lacks specific academic references that corroborate the current state of research. The inclusion of previous studies on the subject would help to validate the arguments presented and strengthen the theoretical basis. Some data, such as the lower incidence of the problem in Portugal, are not sufficiently explained. It would be useful to explore further the reasons for this difference compared to other southern European countries. In addition, it should be clarified whether the employment rates of immigrant women refer to the total number of employees in a sector or to the total number of immigrant women employed.

Although mention is made of sectors in which migrant women are over-represented, such as health and care, the report does not explore internal differences within these sectors. For example, working as a doctor, nurse or health assistant involves different roles, and these nuances could enrich the analysis of labour segmentation. The report also fails to adequately address the similarities between the employment sectors of home-based workers and native women. Women, in general, are highly represented in the service sector. It would be relevant to reflect on whether WMWs face additional factors that worsen their employment situation or whether they share the same challenges as non-migrant women.

The paper could also benefit from an analysis of the skills available in receiving countries. For example, if native-born women have low skill levels, WMWs could theoretically have more job opportunities. This factor could influence the degree of de-skilling experienced by migrant women workers.

The section on the 'skills and resources' of women domestic workers offers no more than a subjective view of their resourcefulness, without clearly defining what is meant by this concept or how it is measured. A more rigorous analysis of the skills these women bring and how they can be harnessed in host countries would be beneficial.

The case study section does not differentiate the situation of female migrants from that of male migrants. Everything stated in the final sections could also be applied to male migrants. The report could benefit from more specificity in identifying the unique challenges faced by migrant women in the workplace, rather than generalising problems shared with men.

Suggestions for improvement

- Expand the academic references to strengthen the state of the research and provide a stronger theoretical basis.
- Provide more detailed explanations of some data, such as the situation in Portugal, and clarify employment rates to avoid confusion.
- Include a more detailed analysis of employment sectors and internal segmentation, especially in areas such as health and care.
- Reflect on the similarities between immigrant and non-immigrant women in terms of employment and analyse whether there are additional factors that worsen the situation of immigrant women.
- Analyse the skills available in receiving countries to assess whether the skill levels of native women offer advantages or disadvantages to WMWs in labour market integration.
- Revise the section on 'skills and resources' with a more concrete and data-driven analysis.
- Differentiate the situation of female migrants from that of male migrants in the case studies to highlight the specific challenges faced by women.

Finally, the recommendations presented in the report may appear somewhat vague and generic in some respects. While they address important issues, they lack concrete details on how to implement the proposals or measure their effectiveness.

I hope this report is useful and thank you for your confidence in my judgement.

Is the rationale for the Open Letter provided in sufficient detail? (Please consider whether existing challenges in the field are outlined clearly and whether the purpose of the letter is explained)

Yes

Does the article adequately reference differing views and opinions?

No

Are all factual statements correct, and are statements and arguments made adequately supported by citations?

Partly

Is the Open Letter written in accessible language? (Please consider whether all subject-specific terms, concepts and abbreviations are explained)

Yes

Where applicable, are recommendations and next steps explained clearly for others to follow? (Please consider whether others in the research community would be able to implement guidelines or recommendations and/or constructively engage in the debate)
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: In general terms, everything to do with women's professional careers (business, entrepreneurship, social economy, expatriation).

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 02 May 2025

Marie-José Ruiz

We sincerely thank the reviewer for their detailed and thoughtful evaluation of our policy brief. We are pleased that the report is recognised as timely, relevant, and practically oriented, particularly in its emphasis on the systemic nature of deskilling and the underutilisation of women migrant workers' (WMWs) skills.

1. Academic References and Theoretical Framework We fully agree about the inclusion of **scholarly references**, our data points and conclusions are informed by both academic research and fieldwork from WEMov COST Action.

2. Clarifying Regional Discrepancies We thank the reviewer for pointing out the need to better explain the **lower deskilling rate in Portugal** compared to other Southern European countries.

3. Clarification of Employment Rate Metrics Specifying w**hat the employment rates refer to**—namely, whether they pertain to WMWs as a share of a sector or of the total employed migrant women—avoids ambiguity.

4. Internal Segmentation in Health and Care Sectors We appreciate the reviewer's suggestion to differentiate between roles within **health and care sectors**, and we note the **institutional barriers to recognition** that often prevent WMWs from practicing in line with their qualifications, which enhances the understanding of **horizontal and vertical segmentation** in feminised labour sectors.

5. Comparison with Native Women's Employment Patterns We agree that it is important to reflect on the **commonalities and differences between migrant and non-migrant women**. The **compounded challenges faced by WMWs**—language barriers, legal status, and racism—exacerbate these shared disadvantages.

6. Skills Available in Receiving Countries N**ative women's skill levels** are impacted by labour market conditions in receiving countries (e.g., skill shortages) which could mitigate deskilling for WMWs. The paradox of high-skilled migrant women is **systematically channelled into low-skill sectors**, regardless of local skill supply.

7. 'Skills and Resources' Section We appreciate the feedback on this section and the difference between "**soft skills**" and "resourcefulness".

8. Differentiating Gendered Experiences in Case Studies We **explicitly highlight how the challenges faced by WMWs differ from those of male migrants**, with emphasis on gendered labour expectations; vulnerability to exploitation in feminised jobs; discriminatory migration sponsorship tied to family roles. The case studies provide **gender-specific insight**, not just general migrant experiences. We are grateful for your thoughtful assessment and we hope to offer foundation for advancing fairer policies and practices toward women migrant workers in Europe. **Marie Ruiz & Stellamarina Donato**

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.