

# Triple disadvantage? The integration of refugee women

## Summary of findings



## **TRIPLE DISADVANTAGE? THE INTEGRATION OF REFUGEE WOMEN**

This note has been prepared for the Nordic Conference on Integration of Immigrant women into the Labour Market (Stockholm, 13 April 2018). It summarises key findings of a forthcoming OECD report on the labour market integration of refugee women, funded by the Swedish Ministry of Employment, with a special focus on the Nordic countries. Some overall contextual information on foreign-born women is also included.<sup>1</sup>

### *Presence and outcomes of immigrant women*

- In Scandinavian countries, the share of immigrant women in the total female population aged 15-64 ranges from 6 percent in Finland to 22 percent in Sweden (Annex Figure 1).
- Iceland has the highest employment rates of immigrant women in the OECD overall (but nevertheless a gap of 9 percentage points between native-born women and those from non-EU countries). The gap is around 20 percentage points in all other Nordic countries. It is greatest in Finland where it is 25 percentage points. In general, whereas immigrant women from EU-countries<sup>2</sup> have similar labour market outcomes to those of their native-born peers, women from non-EU countries have lower employment rates than their native-born peers – 10 percentage points on average in Europe (Annex Figure 2).<sup>3</sup>
- While the gaps in Nordic countries are large, especially when compared to other countries, they reflect the high employment of women in Nordic countries. Indeed, apart from Finland (45% of non-EU women employed) and Iceland (75%, associated with significant rather recent migration for employment), the employment rate of non-EU women is around 55%, above the average for the European OECD countries which is 50%.
- Immigrant women from non-EU countries tend to have lower education levels compared with both other immigrant women and their native-born peers (Annex Figure 3).

### *Characteristics of refugee women*

- Within the group of non-EU immigrants, refugee women are a group that is particularly vulnerable, and the available evidence clearly shows that outcomes are below those of other groups such as other migrant women or refugee men in many of the countries for which data are available (Annex Figure 4).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The report has been prepared by Kristian Rose Tronstad (Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research, at the time of writing on secondment to the OECD) and Thomas Liebig (OECD).

<sup>2</sup> EU includes the EFTA countries; the expression EU/non-EU is used for the sake of simplicity.

<sup>3</sup> The forthcoming joint OECD and EU publication *Settling In – Indicators of immigrant integration* (OECD and EU, forthcoming) includes a special chapter on gender differences in integration.

<sup>4</sup> Data and research on refugee women in the OECD are scarce, and the large majority of the evidence stems from three Nordic countries which have register data and host significant refugee populations: Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The statistical offices of these three countries kindly provided comparable data for the report. Evidence for other European countries largely stems from a 2014 special module of the EU Labour Force Survey on migration (see Dumont, Liebig, Peschner, Tanay and Xenogiani, *How are refugees faring on the labour market in Europe?* EC Employment Working Paper 1/2016). In addition, recent specific surveys on refugee integration have been conducted in Austria, Australia, Germany and Norway that are used in the report.

- While women account for only 30 percent of asylum seekers across Europe, about 45 percent of refugees are women (Annex Figure 5). Data from Norway show that whereas almost two out of three refugee men came through the asylum channel, this has been the case for only 38% of refugee women. The remainder came through subsequent family migration, or through the resettlement channel.
- As refugee women primarily come through family migration or resettlement, waiting periods abroad could be used for pre-departure integration measures (for example, by engaging in language education), but this is rarely done.
- Compared with both other migrant women and with native-born, refugee women have lower education levels (Annex Figure 6).

#### *Labour market outcomes of refugee women*

- Refugee women take longer time to get established into the labour market compared with refugee men. Whereas the latter experience relatively steep gains in employment rates during the first 5-9 years after arrival which then taper off, the integration path of refugee women is characterised by modest but steady increases that continue for at least 10-15 years (Annex Figure 7). This finding also holds following the same cohorts over time.
- Evidence from several countries suggests that refugee women have much lower levels of host-country language skills compared to men in the first 2-3 years after arrival. While the gap gradually closes over time, language proficiency remains at lower levels.
- Refugee women with intermediate or advanced levels of proficiency in the host-country language have 40 percentage points higher employment rates than those with little or no language skills (Annex Figure 8). Once accounting for differences in socio-demographic characteristics, the difference is halved but remains much stronger than for other migrant women.
- Compared with both refugee men and other migrant women, refugee women experience a stronger increase in their employment rate when they have higher qualifications. However, 40% of those with tertiary education who found a job were over-qualified – twice the figure of their native-born peers.
- When employed, refugee women are frequently in part-time employment. In OECD-Europe, more than 4 out of 10 employed refugee women have a part-time job – almost twice the level among native-born women, and also 6 percentage points more than among other immigrant women.

#### *Specific factors driving labour market outcomes for refugee women*

- Evidence from Norway suggests that refugee women are quite likely to get pregnant the year after arrival (Figure 10). This seems to be due to the fact that the uncertainty and insecurity refugees experience during the process of flight makes them more reluctant to have children during this period. Possible waiting periods for family reunification may further add to a build-up in unfulfilled desire to have children. What is more, refugee women – in particular

those from African countries – tend to have high overall fertility, well above those of other migrant groups and above the native-born.

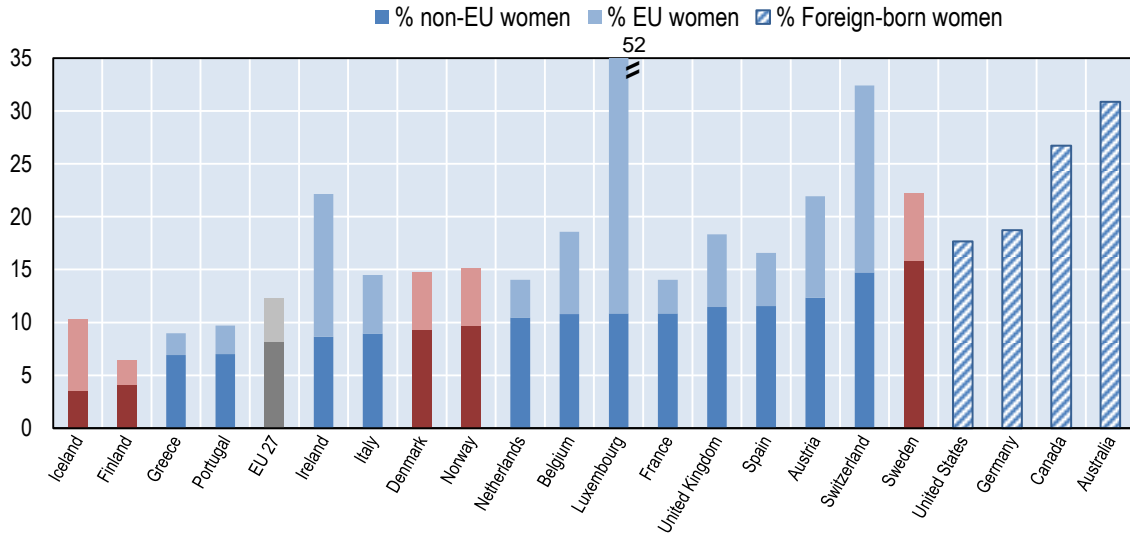
- The tentative evidence of a peak in fertility the year after arrival contributes to the slower integration of some refugee women. There is a need for more flexible arrangements regarding the timing and organisation of introduction activities which accounts for the specific needs of women with small children – otherwise support will be given when it is less likely to have an effect on outcomes.
- Refugee women often come from countries with poor education systems that are characterised by very low employment of women and high gender inequality and indeed, by both accounts their performance in the host country tends to be better than that of their peers in the origin countries. Those from countries with more gender equality tend to fare better in their new host countries.
- In practice, because of the strong correlation between refugee status and certain origin countries, it is difficult to disentangle country-of-origin effects from refugee status effects. However, there is significant disparity in outcomes among refugee women, with those from countries with more gender equality also faring better in the host countries.
- That notwithstanding, data from Norway suggests that at the individual level there is no correlation between previous employment in the origin country and employment in the host country. This seems due to the fact that in origin countries characterised by low overall employment of women and high gender inequality, it is often in the poorest households that the women work - because of necessity.
- In both Norway and Austria, about one in 5 refugee women characterised their general health situation as bad or very bad. The corresponding figure for men was about one in eight. Poor health leads to poor employment outcomes.
- Employment of immigrant mothers is associated with much better labour market outcomes for their children, especially for girls. Together with the above findings on the high return for language and education of refugee women, this provides a strong case for investing into their integration.
- Data from several countries – including Austria, Germany and Norway – suggest a strong link between refugees' employment and their social network, especially contacts with native-born. At the same time, women have far fewer networks than men. Mentorship programmes can help to create such networks, and one of the largest of such programmes is the Kvinno mentorship programme in Denmark which is also one of the few longstanding examples of programmes specifically targeted at refugee women.
- Compared with refugee men, refugee women frequently receive less integration support, both in terms of hours of language training and active labour market measures. However, with the refugee crisis and the expected increase in family migration to refugees, several OECD countries – including Canada, Germany, and Sweden – have recently announced or implemented specific targeted measures for refugee women, including targeted language training, second chance programmes, and outreach activities.

- Evidence from Sweden suggests that specific attention to refugee women in introduction activities entails a positive effect on employment, although this is less evident for those with small children and/or low skills.
- The high gender inequalities in most key origin countries of refugees have prompted several OECD countries to include, generally as part of civic integration modules in introduction courses, specific information about the importance of gender equality.

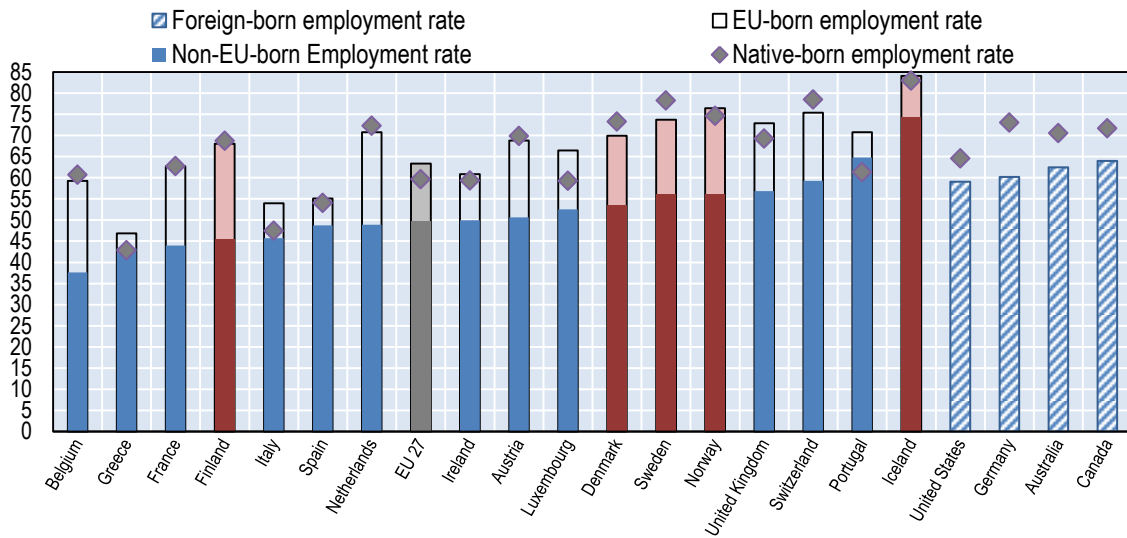
In summary, refugee women face multiple disadvantages, which makes it particularly important to give them access to well-targeted skills-building and other supporting measures to promote their labour market integration. But in spite of improvement in some countries, this is still too rarely done.

## ANNEX

**Figure 1: Share (in percentages) immigrant women among all women age 15-64, 2015/16**



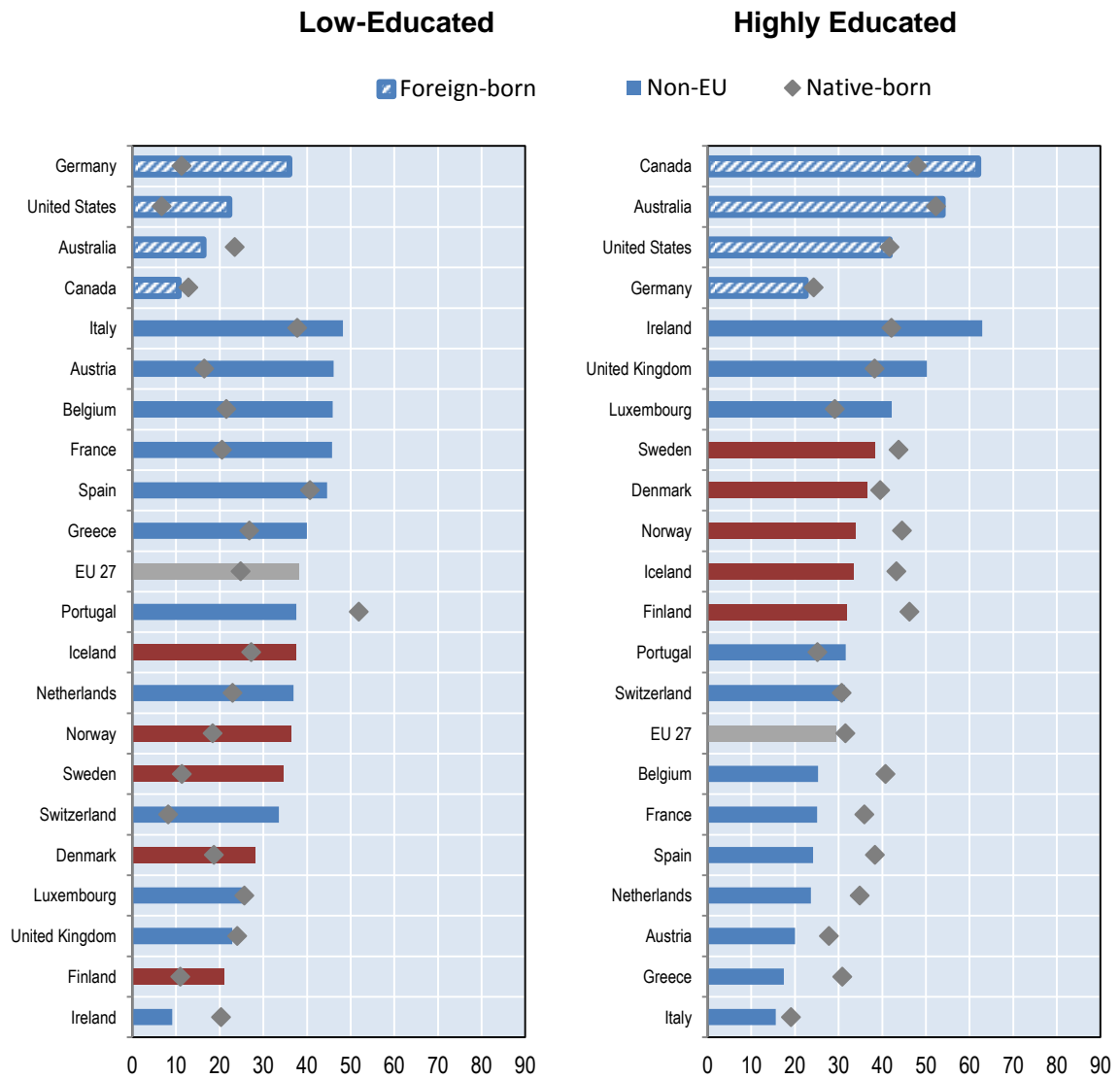
**Figure 2: Employment rate (in percent) of women, 15-64, 2015/16**



Source: OECD and EU (forthcoming).

Note: EU-27 refers to all EU countries except Germany.

**Figure 3: Education level of women, 15-64, 2015/16**

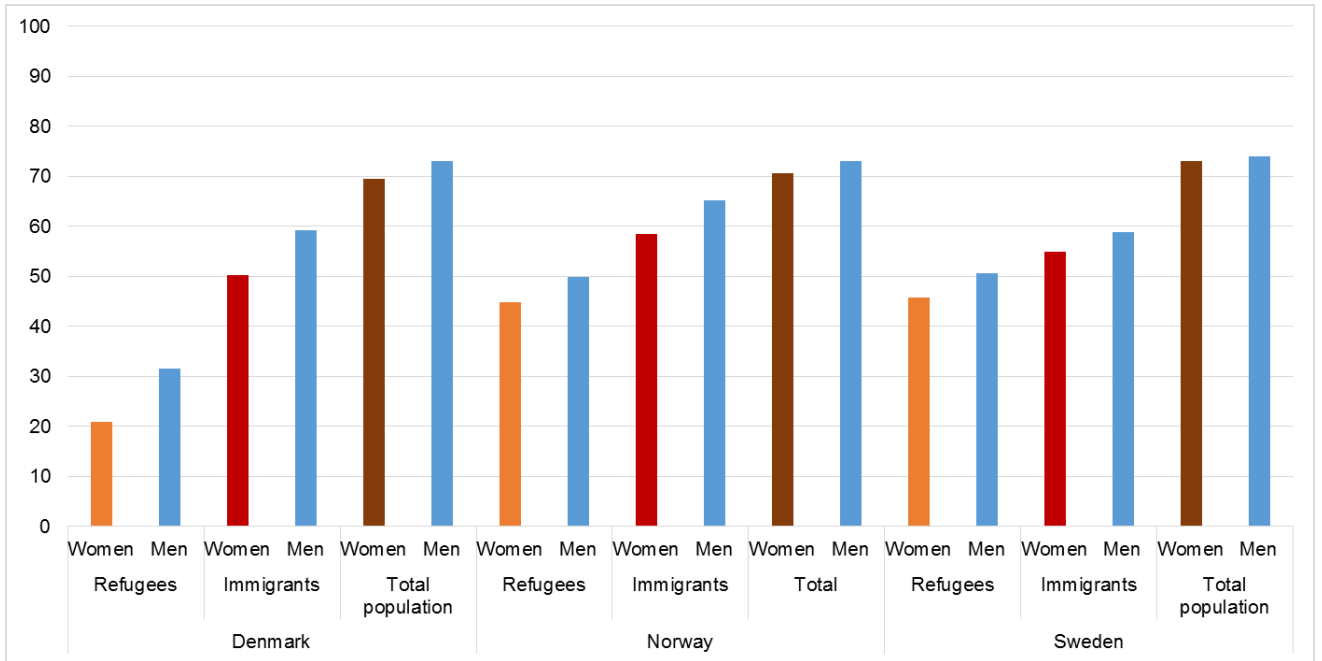


Source: OECD and EU (forthcoming).

Note: EU-27 refers to all EU countries except Germany. High-educated people are defined as those having the highest level of qualification equal or above tertiary education level (ISCED 5–6) and low-educated are defined as those who at most completed lower secondary school level (ISCED 0-2).

**Figure 4: Employment rates of refugee women aged 15-64 in comparison with other groups**

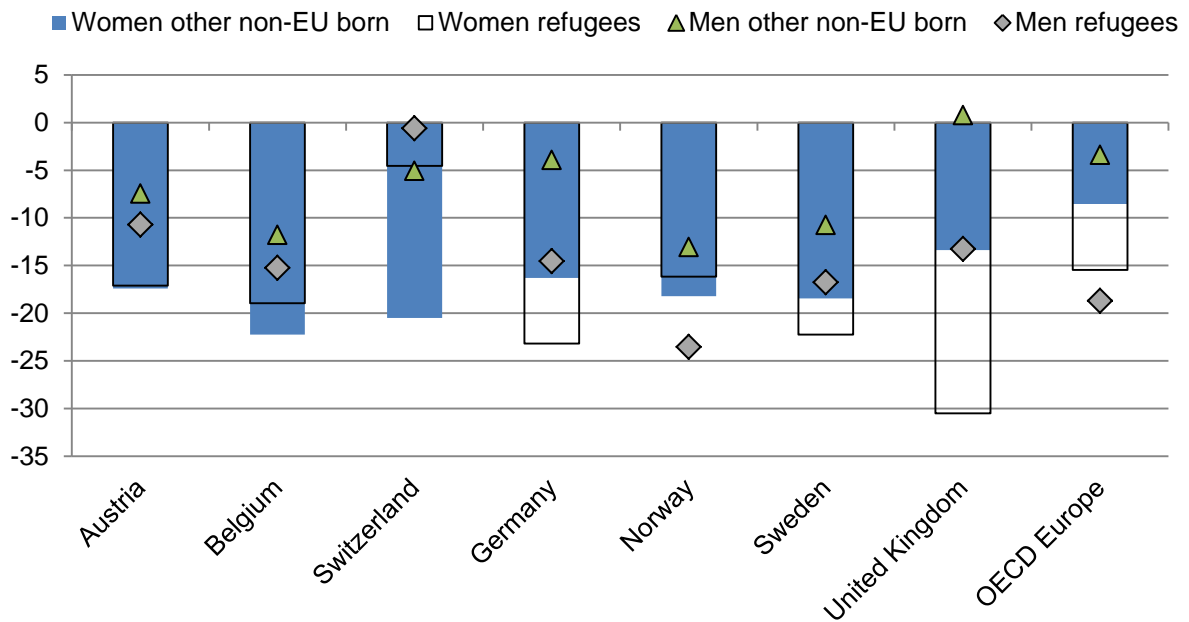
**a) Nordic countries, 2016**



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

**b) Selected European OECD countries, 2014**

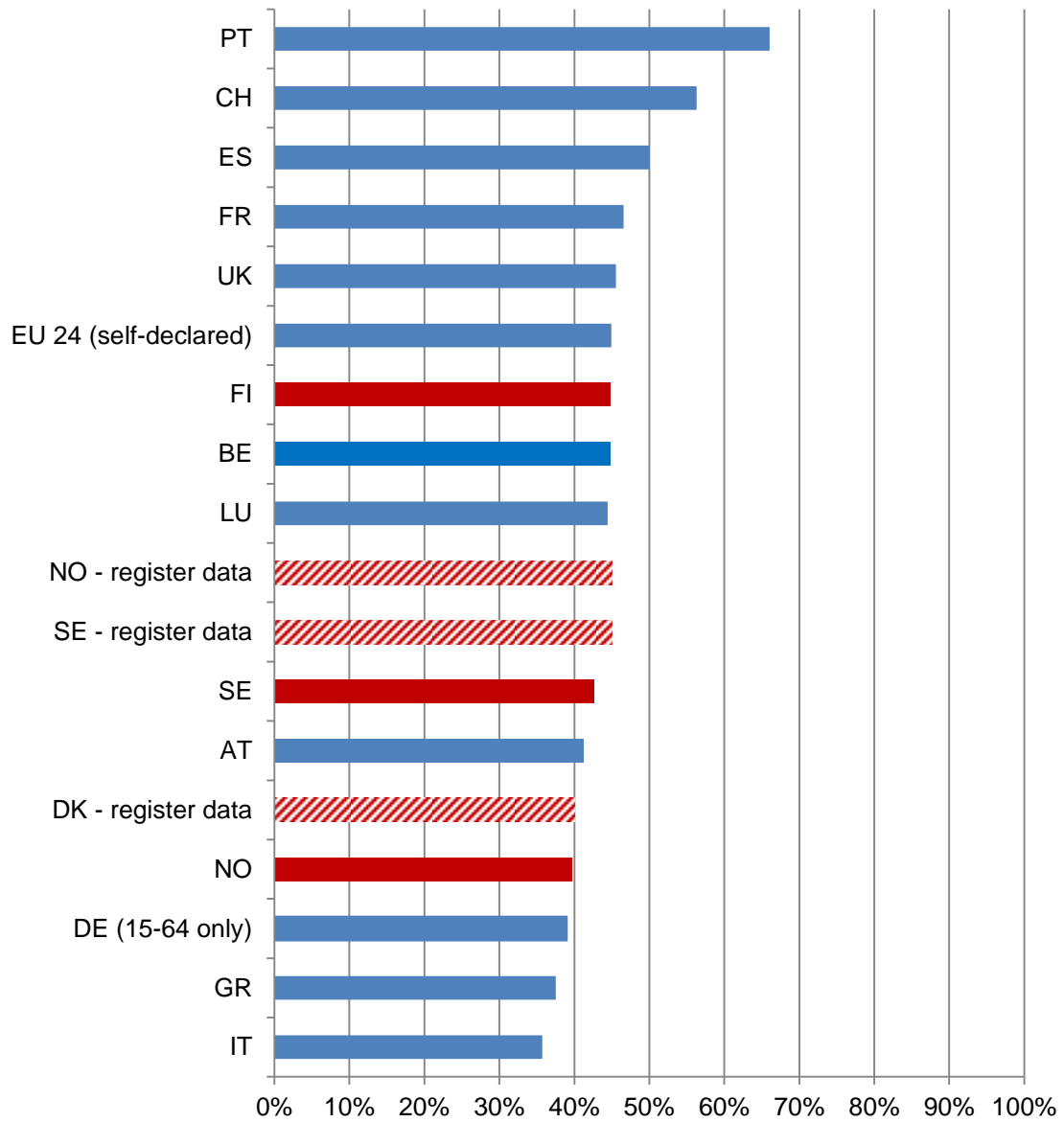
Percentage points differences in employment rates with native-born of the same gender



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



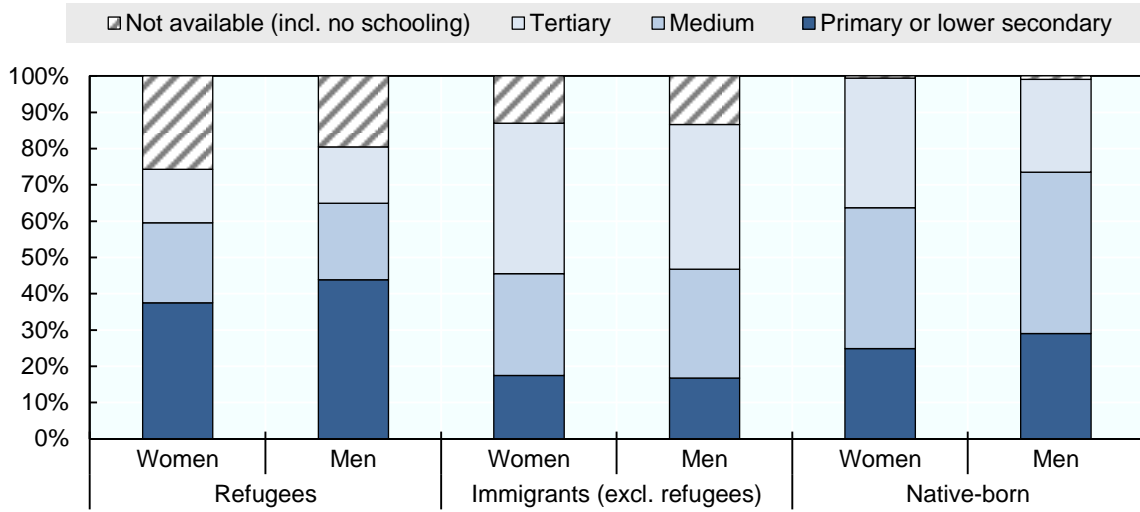
**Figure 5: Share of women among refugees in selected European OECD countries, around 2014**



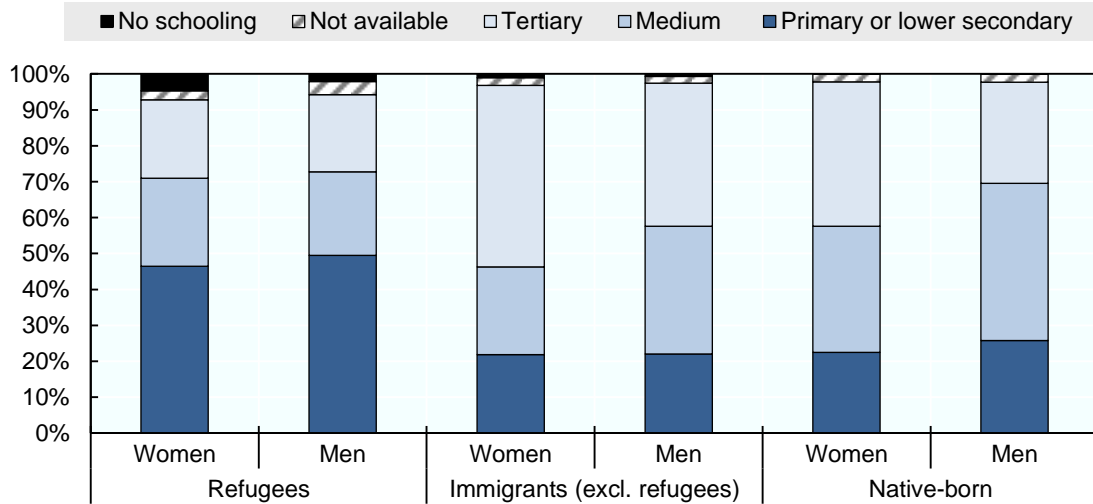
Source and Note: Register data refer to 2016; all other data refer to self-declared refugees from the 2014 EU Labour Force Survey.

**Figure 6: Educational attainment levels 15-64**

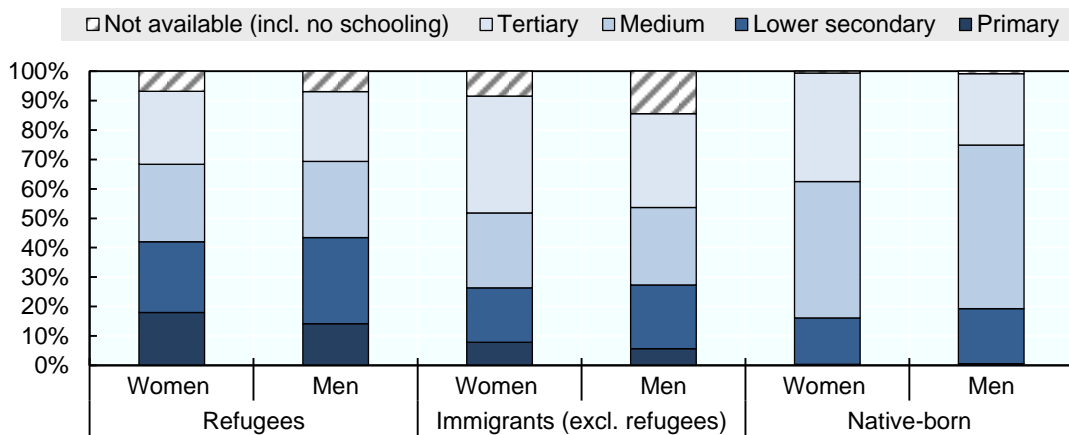
**A. Denmark, 2016**



**B. Norway, 2016**



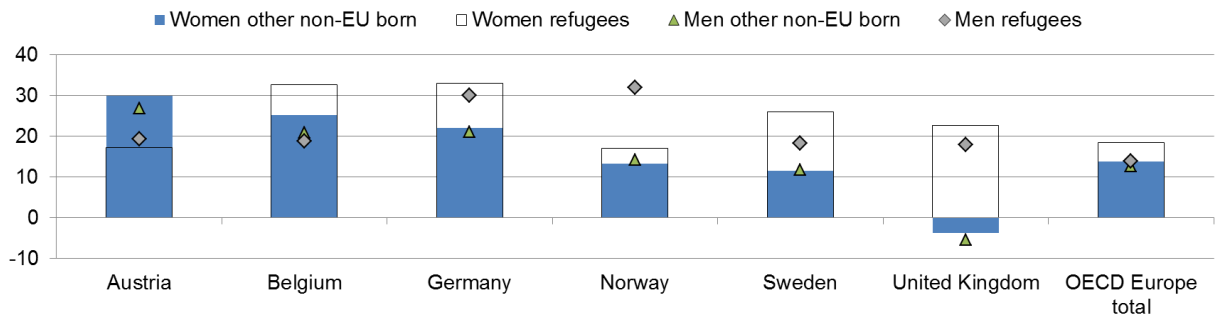
**C. Sweden, 2016**



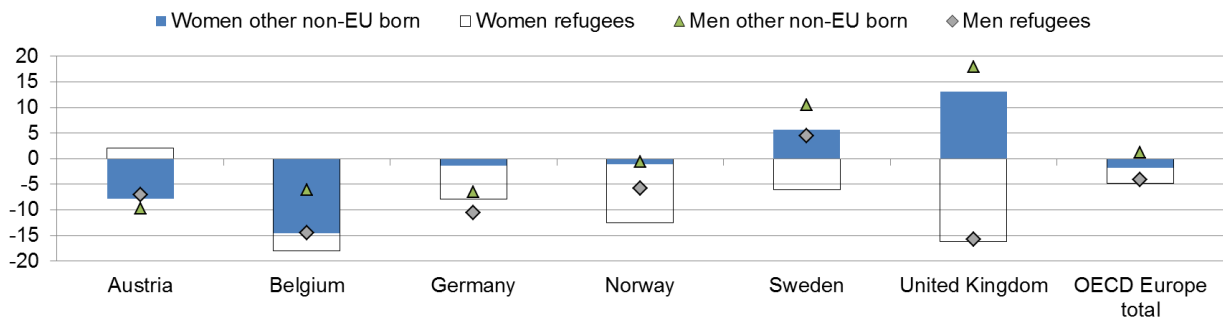
Source: Register data (data provided by National Statistical Offices).

## D. Selected European OECD countries, 2014

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

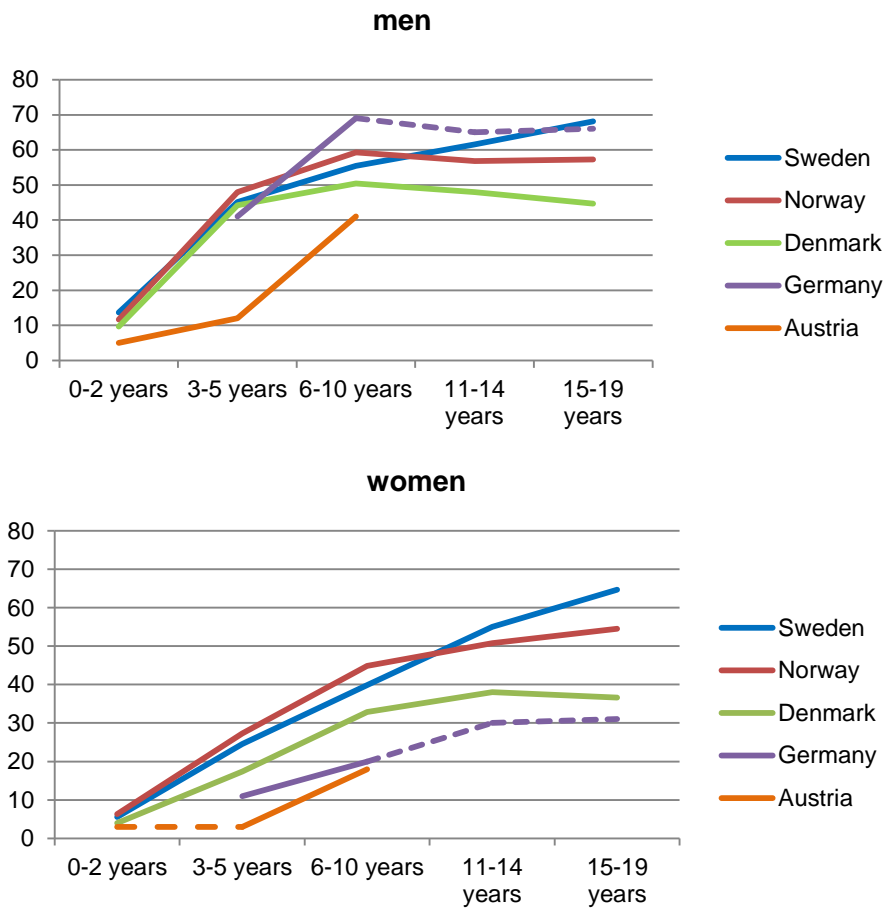


### b) Difference in percentage points with the share of highly educated among the native-born



Source and note: EU-LFS AHM 20414. OECD-Europe includes all European OECD countries apart from DE, DK, NL and IR. High-educated people are defined as those having the highest level of qualification equal or above tertiary education level (ISCED 5–6) and low-educated are defined as those who at most completed lower secondary school level (ISCED 0-2).

**Figure 7: Evolution of employment rates of refugees with duration of residence, by gender, around 2016, persons aged 15-64, selected European OECD countries**

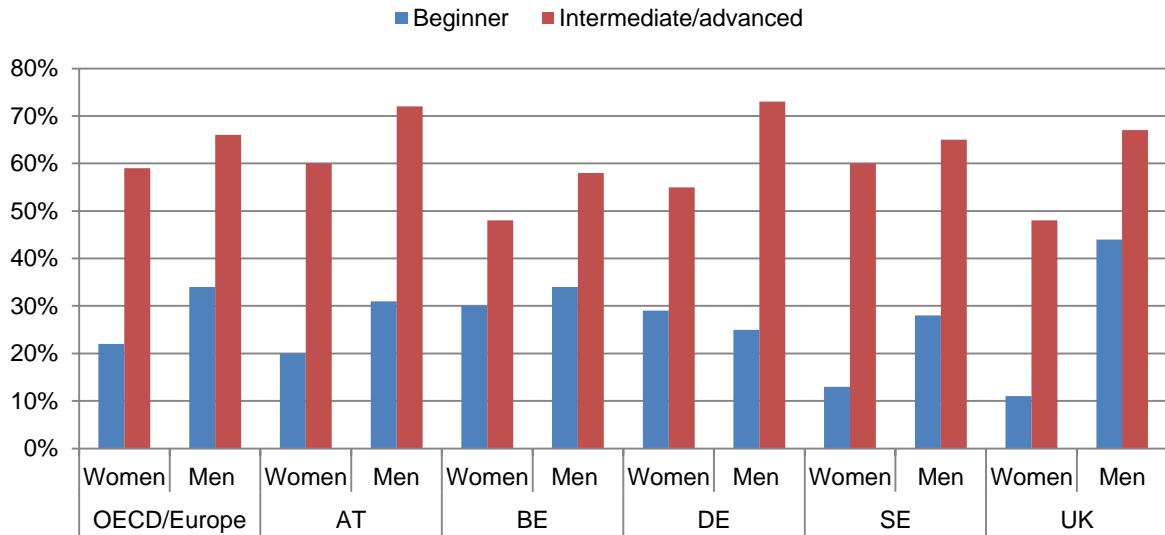


Note: Dashed lines are of limited reliability dues to small sample sizes.

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

**Figure 8: Association between self-declared language knowledge and employment rates, 15-64, 2014**

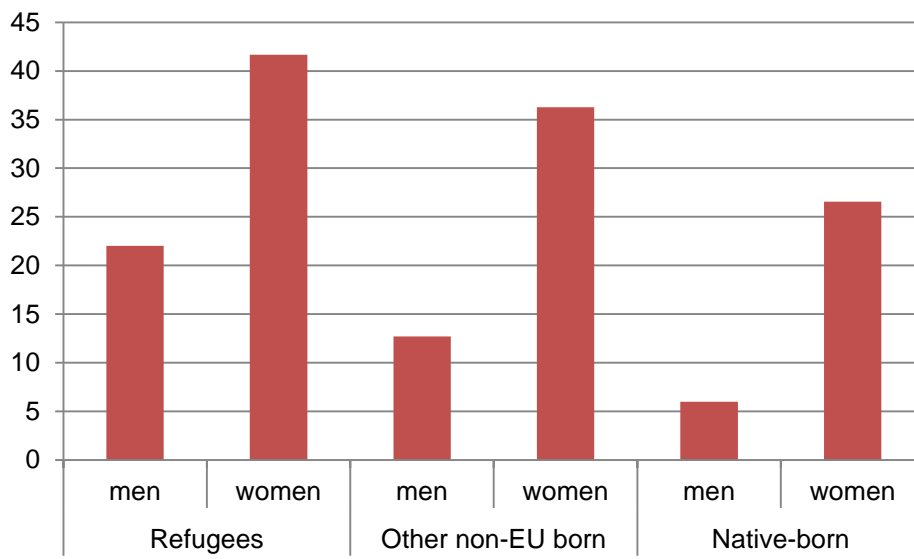
**Employment rates by level of knowledge of the host-country language**



Source: European Union Labour Force Survey Ad-hoc module 2014.

Note: OECD-Europe includes all European OECD countries apart from DE, DK, NL and IR.

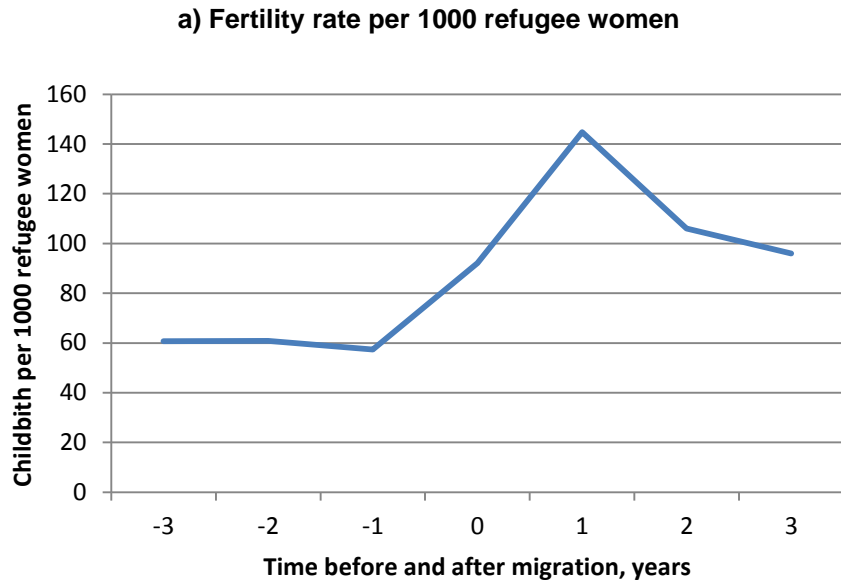
**Figure 9: Incidence of part-time employment among employed persons aged 15-64, OECD-Europe, 2014**



Source: European Union Labour Force Survey Ad-hoc module 2014.

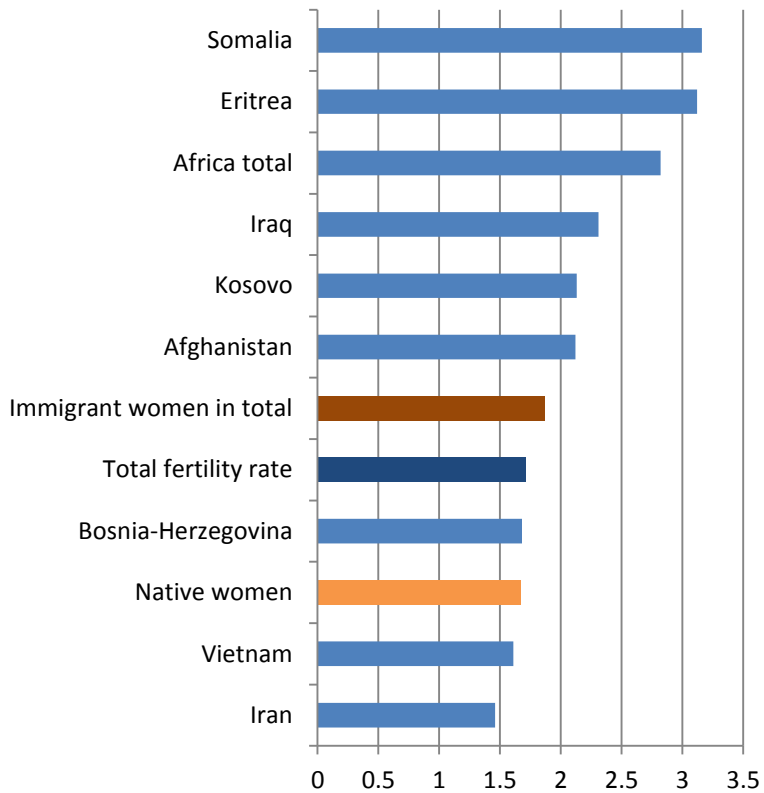
Note: OECD-Europe includes all European OECD countries apart from DE, DK, NL and IR.

**Figure 10. Evidence on fertility of refugee women from Norway**



Source: *The demographic characteristics of the immigrant population in Norway 2002*, by Lars Ostby.

**b) Total fertility rate by country of origin for key refugee sending country, 2016**



Source: Statistics Norway.