

Migrant women in France

Migration has long been portrayed as a men's story. However nowadays, **women account for 51.8%¹ of people who arrived in France in 2018**. This trend is ongoing throughout Europe and is the result of a growing **individualization of women**, many arriving alone in France. **It is also due to poverty and violence to which women are exposed in greater proportions**.

If some progress has been made in the last few years, **French reception and integration policies remain to some extent, genderblind** and do not therefore meet some women's specific needs. Similarly, measures for gender equality sometimes omit migrant women, who, at the intersection of gender and origin issues, are in the blind spot of standardized support schemes.

This paper provides an overview of female migration in France (1) and sheds light on the issues encountered by women in their settlement in the country (2). It highlights good practices implemented at the local level, to fill migration policies' gaps.

1. State of play of women's migration

1.1 Semantic point: migrant, immigrant, refugee, unaccompanied minor; which differences?

"Migrant" is an umbrella term. It refers to persons who temporarily or permanently moved away from their place of usual residence. It has in France, **no administrative or legal value**. Consequently, French public authorities prefer using the word "immigrant", which refers to "people born abroad in a foreign country and currently living in France".

The notions of migrant and immigrant do not differentiate any reasons that push people to leave their country of origin. By contrast, the **refugee status refers to persons who fled their state due to humanitarian reasons** and were granted asylum under the 1951 Geneva Convention (article 1, paragraph 2) for being subject to persecution "on the basis of race, religion, nationality" or given their "belonging to any social group" in where they are from.

Additionally, **the judiciary distinguishes the "unaccompanied minor" status (MNA)**, that enables girls and boys to benefit from the Child Welfare Aid's (ASE) protection.

1.2 Portraits of migrant women

1.2.1 Growth in female migration, hiding heterogeneous situations

Since the 1970s, **the share of women migrating has been gradually growing and reached in 2008 the majority**. They now account for 51.8%² of newcomers, being 4.3 million people in France. This figure is slightly higher than the percentage across Europe (51.4%).³

Nevertheless, **the feminization of migration differs from one type of migration to another**. In 2018, women represent 40%⁴ of refugees. **Despite being in minority, they are proportionally more**

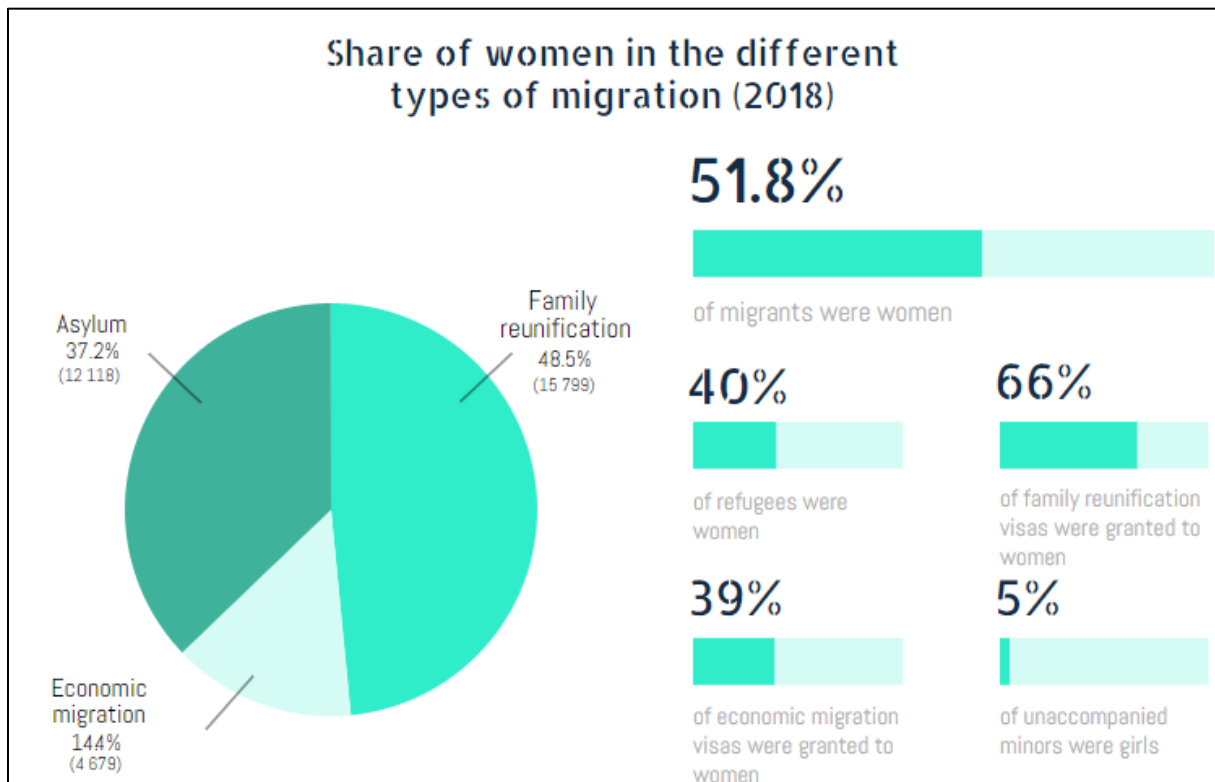
¹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019. Population Division in France (UN DES), International Migrant Stock.

² Ibid.

³ United Nations, 2019. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019. Population Division in Europe (UN DESA), International Migrant Stock.

⁴ OFPRA, 2018. Rapport d'activité, p48.

protected than men, as women account for 33.2% of asylum applications. In addition, 39%⁵ of economic residence permits, and 66%⁶ of “family visas” are issued for women in 2018.⁷



Girls are under-represented among unaccompanied minors. In 2018, underage women represent 5% of them⁸. This figure must however be considered with caution, as **it is likely to be underestimated**. Many girls are spurred by human trafficking networks to pretend to be underage, to not benefit from the Child Welfare Aid’s protection.

1.2.2 Origins and specificities of migration

Migrant women’s origins vary depending on the type of migration. Many unaccompanied minors are Chinese or Nigerian. Refugees are from around the world: 35% of them are African, 35% Asian and 27% European⁹. Russian (7.2%), Congolese (7.1%) and Sri Lankan women (7.1%)¹⁰ are the most represented nationalities among refugee women. By contrast with economic and family migrations, refugees tend to older, on average they receive asylum at the age of 42.¹¹

⁵ OFII, 2018. Rapport d’activité. Visa long séjour valant titre de séjour validés par motif et par sexe, p91

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⁷ In 2018, 15,799 women received a residence permit thanks to family reunification. 4,679 were granted an "economic" visa and 12,118 received the refugee status.

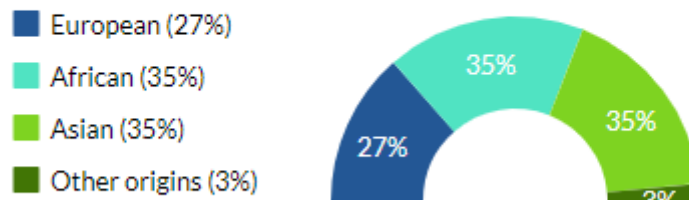
⁸ Inspection Générale des affaires sociales, 15 février 2018. Rapport de la mission bipartite de réflexion sur les mineurs non accompagnés.

⁹ OFPRA, 2018. Rapport d’activité.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

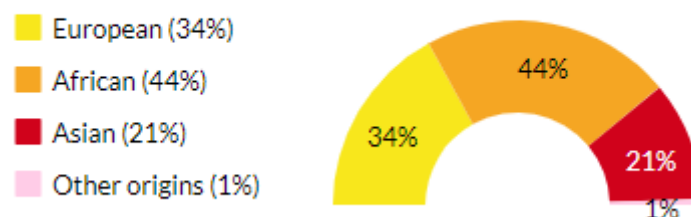
Refugee women's origins



Reference: OFPRA, 2018. Activity report.

The origin diversity remains prevalent after a decade of stay in France: European women are the most represented (34%), after African women (44%) (Appendix 1)¹².

Origins of migrant women arrived in France less than 10 years ago



Reference: INSEE, 2011. Nationwide census.

Education is unequal among migrant women. While 38% of them have a university degree compared to 35% of French women¹³ (this is mainly due to European migration); instruction tends to be lower for non-European. Excluding Old Continent's migration, 32.5% of migrant women graduated from high school. This rate reaches 58%¹⁴ in the French population. Similarly, French proficiency is uneven. While Maghrebi or Central and West African women tend to be relatively fluent in French, this proportion decreases among any other nationalities, especially amid refugees.

1.3 Legal protection of migrant women

1.3.1 Gender-based violence legal provisions

Several provisions under French Law protect migrant women against gender-based violence.

In compliance with the Istanbul Convention, **gender-based violence is recognized under French law as a form of persecution admissible to asylum** (CESADA¹⁵ L711-2 and L744-6). Therefore, 44.3%¹⁶ of

¹² INSEE, 2011. Recensement, France entière.

¹³ La Cimade, 2013. Petit guide pour conjuguer la migration au féminin.

¹⁴ INED, 2010. Enquête TEO, enquête sur la diversité des populations en France.

¹⁵ Code of Entry and Residence of Foreigner and the Right of Asylum

¹⁶ OFPRA, 2018. Rapport d'activité.

asylum applications submitted by women in 2018, claim human rights abuse, in particular gender-based violence or abuse motivated by perception of sexual orientation.

Victims of human trafficking, in majority women, are admissible to asylum. Those who get their application rejected, have **the possibility to obtain residence permits under some conditions.** If they lodge complaint and share the names of those who exploit them, they can receive a visa for the duration of criminal proceedings and a 10-year residence permit if the trafficking network is convicted (L.314-8, L.316-1). If the network is not sentenced, prefects enjoy some discretion in granting visas. Therefore, women who refuse to cooperate with law enforcement authorities can be granted a one-year humanitarian visa (L.313-14) or a six months renewable two year-visa if they accept to leave prostitution (L.316-1-1).

Finally, **victims of domestic abuse can benefit from autonomous residence permits and full renewal of their visas** (L. 313-12, 314-5-1, L.316-3, L. 431-2 of the CESEDA).

1.3.2 Lack of awareness regarding migrant women's needs given the impossibility of producing ethnic statistics.

Migrant women's needs and exposure to abuse, despite being protected by several legal provisions, remain poorly understood. **They cannot be quantified or even highlighted due to the ban on producing ethnic statistics in France.**

Ethnic statistics prohibition

Article 8-I of the French Data Protection Act of 6 January 1978 prohibits the gathering of "personal data that reveal, directly or indirectly, racial or ethnic origins, political, philosophical or religious opinions". **Publication of ethnic or racial data is prohibited by law.** Ethnic statistics are considered not to be in compliance with the French republican model, which does not distinguish individuals based on skin colors or origins.

2. Migration policies' gaps filled by local initiatives.

Public policies do not always integrate a gender approach, which can create certain problems for migrant women. Similarly, gender-based statistics are sometimes lacking in the literature produced by public authorities, which makes it difficult to highlight discriminations encountered by immigrant women.

2.1 Specific problems encountered by newcomers.

2.1.1 Gaps between practice and law

Gender-based violence provisions (aforementioned) are sometimes difficult to enforce as **abuses are not always easy to prove.** In addition, **the French judicial system is to a certain extent, reluctant to recognize women as a social group** being subject to persecution because of their gender. Similarly, it is can be difficult for victims of domestic violence to obtain a renewal of their residence permit, as some prefectures (regional administrative offices) require additional documentation, such as protection orders.

Weak rights' awareness and low language proficiency can represent an additional obstacle. Some women, afraid to lose their visa or that legal proceedings would have deleterious impacts on their asylum application, prefer not to report abuse. Undocumented women seldom seek justice, as many of them fear to be apprehended while lodging complaints.

Migrant women who actually go to police stations, are sometimes hindered in filing complaints. The organization “La Cimade” reports illegal practices in police precincts against foreign women¹⁷.

Reprisals fear and uncertain proceedings’ outcomes don’t encourage women to report networks exploiting them. As a result, only about fifty women are granted a residence permit through this procedure each year.

Algerian nationals, covered by the 27 December 1968’s agreement between Algeria and France, cannot invoke any provisions included in the CESADA, and may thus encounter difficulties in denouncing gender-based abuse.

OFPPA's¹⁸ good practices

The OFPPA, is the body responsible for handling asylum applications. **It uses gender-based procedures. Women who apply for asylum with their partner are systematically interviewed alone.** Anyone can choose officers’ and interpreters’ genders and can be helped throughout the interview by women rights’ NGO’s members. Only officers who have received a gender violence training are allowed to interview women who claim gender-based persecution. Finally, the office has a specific gender-based abuse working group and releases different statistics for men and women.

2.1.2 Administrative and economic precarity exposing women to violence and health issues.

As women asylum seekers are in minority, fewer shelters are open to them. **The shortage of places in accommodation facilities affects therefore more migrant women especially those who are alone,** and can hinder domestic abuse victims’ re-accommodation. Similarly, the lack of housing emergency facilities forces undocumented women to sleep into the street.

Housing local initiatives

In order to cope with the shortage of accommodation places for isolated migrant women, the organization Coallia opened a shelter in Nantes. The center is entirely dedicated to host alone asylum seekers. It offers 13 places to women. In the same way, in Ivry, a shelter opened rooms early 2017 to vulnerable migrants, especially mothers with children and isolated women. Gynecologic care is provided free of charge on site, by the organization Gynecology Without Borders.

Given the housing crisis, some migrant women depend on their network for accommodation. This generates situations of dependency, which can expose women to abuse. Exposure to sexist or racist harassment acts increases for any woman who lives onto the street or in informal camps. Additionally, **in exchange to money or housing, some use transactional sex, which makes them even more vulnerable to violence.**

A 2019 DSAFHIR’s survey¹⁹ reveals that nearly 75% of migrant women have been exposed to some form of serious violence in their lifetime. Among them, 46% denounce abuse that occurred in France. One fifth of migrant women who were victim of rape, experienced it in France, as a 2019’s study

¹⁷ La Cimade, 2018 rapport d’activité p15 -16.

¹⁸ French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPPA)

¹⁹ DSAFHIR, juin 2019. Parcours migratoire, violences déclarées et santé perçue des femmes migrantes hébergées en hôtel en île-de-France.

conducted by Luc Ginot and Christine Laconde reports²⁰. Migrant women's exposure to violence is not well-documented and is therefore difficult to quantify.

Organizations and counties at the frontline to prevent migrant women's exposure to violence

The organization "Libres Terres des Femmes" produced eight short information films for migrant women, translated into 11 languages. The videos deal with eight themes related to violence against women (marital rape, mental, domestic or obstetric violence) and present the assistance services available in France.

<http://www.ltdf.fr/l-association/nos-films-et-tous-nos-outils/>

Financial reliance can discourage women from seeking help. To prevent this, some counties provide women victim of domestic abuse with a welfare benefit called RSA (Revenu de Solidarité Active).

Migrant women's exposure to violence can have an impact on their health. Refugee women's psychological follow-up appears to be insufficient in light of abuse that many of them experienced in their country of origin, along the migration route or in France.

The over-representation of HIV-positive persons among immigrant women is a good example of the impacts of violence on women's health. The ANRS parcours study²¹, conducted in 2016 among sub-Saharan migrants, shows that those women have an infection rate four times higher than the rest of the French population. Among them, those who experienced violence, are four times more likely to be infected. Additionally, a third contracted the virus after her arrival in France.

Care services specifically dedicated to migrant women victim of violence

To quantify migrant women's exposure to violence, the Paris emergency services (SAMU social de Paris) uses the **screening method, which consists of systematically asking patients whether they have been victims of mistreatment or abuse.**

Both the Paris Institute of Victimology and the Saint-Denis Women's Center offer special care to victims of violence, especially migrant women. Similarly, thanks to its interpreting service, the Minkowska center provides free of charge psychological and social counselling to foreign women.

In addition to the lack of care provided to migrant women who face situations of abuse, it is sometimes difficult for the latter to have access to care. First, some of them, **are not well-aware of the operating health services** in France. For instance, **despite free of charge health coverage for foreigners, some women, especially the undocumented ones, are not covered by the social security system.** Others, given their nationality, can be denied care. A DREES' report conducted in 2008²² notes that almost a third of undocumented women covered by the AME²³ have already been refused care. Recently, in 2017, the national Ombudsman condemned situations where foreign women were denied the right to abortion.²⁴

2.2 Obstacles to the foreign women's integration

²⁰ Ginot L, Laconde C, Rousseau A, 2019. Santé des personnes migrantes, parcours d'exils, violences subies : un enjeu pour l'ensemble du système de santé. Bulletin Épidémiologique Hebdomadaire.

²¹ Pannetier, J., 2017. Prevalence and circumstances of forced sex and post-migration HIV acquisition in sub-Saharan African migrant women in France: an analysis of the ANRS-PARCOURS retrospective population-based study.

²² Boisguerin B, Haury B., 2008. Les bénéficiaires de l'AME en contact avec le système de soins. Études et résultats (Drees), (645):1-8.

²³ Aide médicale d'Etat, state health insurance for undocumented migrants.

²⁴ Haut Conseil à l'Égalité entre les femmes et les hommes, 2017. La santé et l'accès aux soins : Une urgence pour les femmes en situation de précarité.

Not only women experience reception issues, they can also be discriminated against, especially in the labor market.

2.2.1 Discriminations in the labor market

Migrant women's exposure to occupational downgrading is the consequence of all kinds of discriminations that affect female immigrants. A 2015's study by Florent Domergue conducted for the Ministry of Home Affairs, shows that 7% of French people work in a position that is lower to their qualification compared to 9% of immigrants (Appendix 2). Beyond nationalities, women are systematically more subject to professional downgrading.²⁵

It is more difficult for non-European women to get a job. In 2017, 21% of them are unemployed compared to 8.5% of French women (Appendix 3)²⁶. In addition, **foreign degrees are sometimes not recognized**, which represents an additional obstacle.

Migrant women are over-represented in care occupations. A 2013's survey led by Bressé and Puech, reported by Séverine Lemièrre in her work on women's access to employment, notes that 14% of home helpers are foreigners compared to 8% of employed people²⁷.

To tackle this issue, women are the main target of regional integration outreach programs (*regional program for the integration of immigrants*) and their county equivalents (*departmental integration plan*).

Integration workshops

To help women to learn French, **the Azmari organization provides French courses to foreign women in Paris.** A childcare service is offered at the same time, so that women can fully benefit from this program. Public transportation's fares are taken in charge.

In Strasbourg, the NGO Plurielles organizes **"feedback and advice" workshops for the first and second generations of migrant women.** Those activities aim to support linguistic and professional integration.

2.2.2 Cumulative difficulties in some territories

Integration and professional difficulties faced by migrant women are often accumulated in certain areas, especially in "priority neighborhoods" formerly known as ZUS. Foreigners are over-represented in those districts. A 2014's report published by the High Commission for Equality, reports that one woman out of five is immigrant in ZUS areas, compared to one out ten nationwide.²⁸ More than one out of two migrant women are inactive and 17% are illiterate, compared to 5% outside.²⁹

2.2.3 Inequalities that remain accurate after many years in the country: the case of elderly migrant women

²⁵ Domergue F., Février 2015. Des études aux métiers, un ajustement qui prend du temps, Infos Migrations n°75.

²⁶ INSEE, 2017. Taux de chômage selon l'origine et le sexe.

²⁷ Lemièrre, 2013. L'accès à l'emploi des femmes : Une question de politiques, Rapport d'une mission sur l'emploi des femmes réalisée à la demande du Ministère des Droits des Femmes.

²⁸ Haut Conseil à l'Égalité entre les femmes et les hommes, 2014. Rapport relatif aux inégalités territoriales en matière d'égalité femmes-hommes.

²⁹ Ibid.

Time does not seem to reduce inequalities. Migrants, who account for 9.6%³⁰ of women over 55, are in general poorer than non-immigrant people. This is the consequence of lifetimes peppered with periods of inactivity, greater exposure to precarious positions and unemployment.

Older immigrant women experience greater residential precariousness. Rémi Gallou reports that 40% of elderly migrant women live in social housing and only 20% of them possess their own house (compared to 9% and 78% of their French counterparts).³¹

They suffer more from health issues than the rest of the population. 65% of elderly African women have physical or mental problems, compared to 41% on average.³²

Unlike men, some of them didn't benefit, when they were young, from professional integration schemes and therefore have not always been able to bond outside the family which makes it more difficult for them to access assistance services. **This is even more problematic as, given the time they spent in France, they are no longer the main target of migration policies.**

³⁰ Buisson G., 2011. Enquête Famille et logements : pour mieux comprendre ce que sont le couple et la famille au recensement. INSEE.

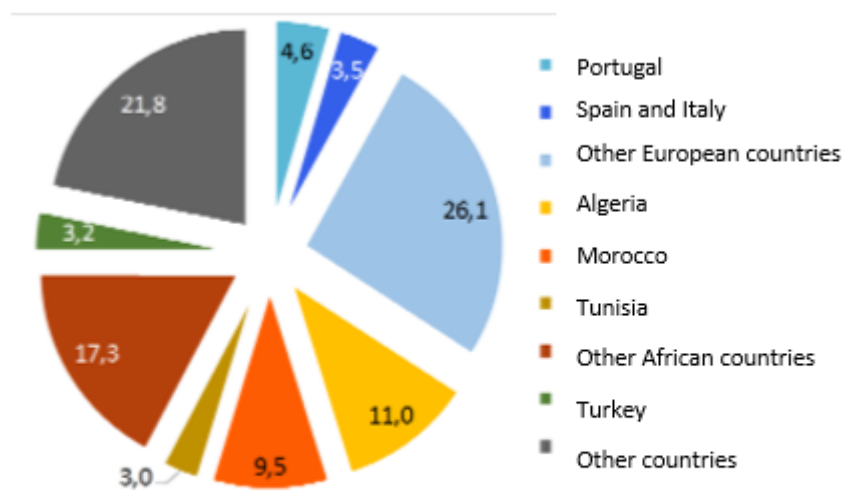
³¹ Gallou R., 2016. Vieillir sans conjoint mais vieillir entourées : un défi pour les femmes immigrées. *Gérontologie et société*. vol. 38 / n° 149.

³² Ibid.

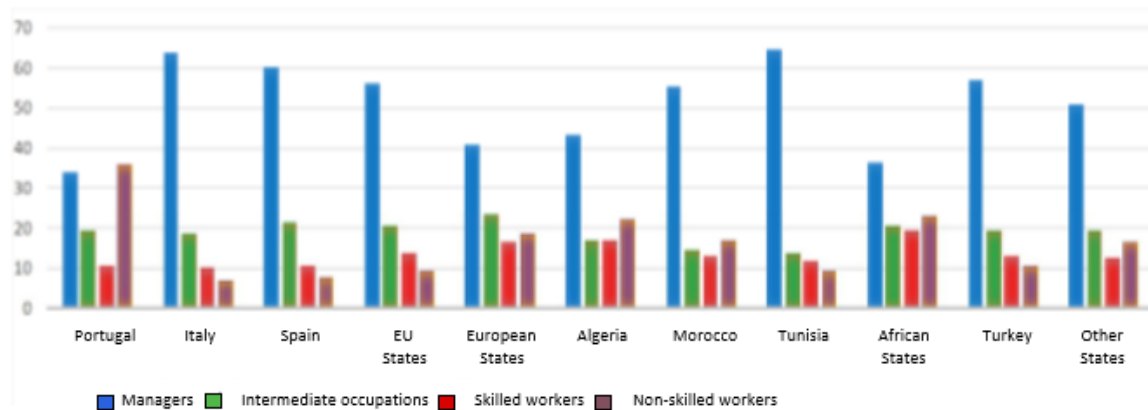
Appendices

- **AME:** Aide médicale d'Etat / State health insurance for undocumented migrants
- **ASE:** Aide sociale à l'enfance / Child welfare aid
- **CESEDA:** Code de l'entrée et du séjour des étrangers et du droit d'asile / Code of entry and residence of foreigner and the right of asylum
- **DREES:** Direction de la recherche, des études, de l'évaluation et des statistiques / Research, studies, evaluation and statistics board
- **INED:** Institut national d'études démographiques / National institute for demographic studies
- **MNA:** Mineur non accompagné / Unaccompanied minor
- **OFII:** Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration / French Office of Immigration and Integration
- **OFPRA:** Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides / French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons
- **PDI:** Plan départemental d'intégration / County integration scheme
- **PRIPi:** Programme régional d'intégration des populations immigrées / Regional program for the integration of migrants
- **RSA:** Revenu de solidarité active / French solidarity benefit
- **SAMU:** Service d'aide médicale urgente / Emergency health services
- **ZUS:** Zone urbaine sensible / Deprived urban area

Appendix 1: Distribution of immigrant women arrived in France less than 10 years ago (%)



Reference: INSEE, nationwide census, 2011.

Appendix 2: Occupational downgrading by country of origin

Immigrant women arrived in France less than 10 years ago

Reference: INSEE, nationwide census, 2011.

Appendix 3: Unemployment rate by origin and gender (%)

	Men	Women	Both
French citizens born in France	8.7	8.5	8.6
Immigrants born in the European Union	8.1	8.0	
Immigrants born outside the European Union	18.0	21.0	19.3
Immigrants	15.6	17.6	16.3
Total	9.5	9.3	9.4

Reference: INSEE, 2017.

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