INTERSECTING IDENTITIES AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES FOR INEQUALITY STRUCTURES IN THE LABOUR MARKET IN EUROPE

SYNTHESIS REPORT OF RESEARCH CONDUCTED WITHIN WP3 OF RAISE

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The RAISE project (Recognition and Acknowledgement of Injustice to Strengthen Equality) is a research initiative funded under the Horizon Europe framework. It aims to investigate structural racism and xenophobia in contemporary European societies, focusing on how social boundaries are created and maintained across different institutional and social contexts. By employing an interdisciplinary, multi-method approach, RAISE seeks to enhance public and policy awareness of racial, ethnic, and religious inequalities, ultimately contributing to more inclusive and equitable societies.

Work package 3 (WP3) examined the role of intersectional identities in labour market inequalities. It explored how ethnic, racial, religious, and gender identities interact to shape employment outcomes, emphasising structural discrimination rather than isolated individual experiences. Using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, WP3 highlights the systemic barriers that contribute to differential access to employment opportunities.

This synthesis report brings together findings from two sources: analyses of large-scale cross-national European surveys about the labour market opportunities of immigrants and minorities, and qualitative research conducted in four countries with immigrant, refugee, and minority participants. Although the scope and methods of these two research components differ significantly, their findings align in several respects. Examining them together provides an understanding of the focus of WP3 research: how multiple identities intersect and contribute to labour-market disadvantages faced by racialised and/or minoritised groups in Europe.

The statistical analysis draws on large-scale European survey data to uncover patterns of inequality and demonstrate how intersecting identities shape socioeconomic opportunities across European contexts. (Hajdu and Messing, 2025) Due to the limitations of existing datasets for studying the intersections of racial, ethnic, religious and gender identities and inequalities in the labour market (Hajdu & Messing, 2024), we analyse intersectional disadvantages for immigrants and minorities using the six most recent waves of the European Social Survey (ESS), which is complemented by the analysis of data from the 2021 Roma Survey of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and the EU Labour Force Survey (LFS), focusing specifically on the labour market disadvantages faced by Roma people. The quantitative analysis is then complemented by the results of qualitative research (Messing & Kende, 2025), in the scope of which focus group discussions with members of minoritised communities in Belgium, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Poland were conducted.

IMMIGRANTS' LABOUR MARKET POSITION

Using the compiled dataset of the European Social Survey's six waves (from 2012 to 2023), we see significant disparities between the size and composition of immigrant populations in the two parts of Europe: in Western Europe, 13%, and in Eastern Europe, 2.3% of respondents were born outside the country[1]; also, while in Eastern Europe dominant share of immigrants came from European countries, in Western Europe the majority (55%) came from outside the continent (Hajdu and Messing 2025, RAISE D3.3, Table 1 and 2). Thus, we look at results that distinguish between Western and Eastern Europe, which division is also substantiated by WP4 research within the RAISE project that found very significant differences in the patterns of perceptions of immigrants and interethnic relations (Saczuk and Brunarska 2024, RAISE D4.1).

The data support the claim that, after controlling for basic socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, educational qualifications and residence, immigrants are significantly more likely to be (or have been) unemployed[2] than natives (Table 1).

Table 1: Unemployment and immigrant status controlled for socio-demographic characteristics

	Western Europe	*Eastern Europe*
Born in the country	31.1%	29.1%
Immigrant	37.5%	34.3%
Difference between the two groups	**6.4%**	**5.2%**

This disadvantage holds across Europe, but it is more pronounced in Western Europe than in the Eastern part of the continent.

The qualitative research provides insight into how this disadvantage manifests in the everyday contexts of work and job-seeking. Immigrants identified the following characteristics in all four countries that constitute genuine barriers to employment.

Limited proficiency in the local language, which significantly restricts access to substantial parts of the labour market – even in countries known for their international character, such as Belgium and the Netherlands. This was interpreted by some as a form of nationalism, while others, especially in Eastern European countries, saw it as a legitimate requirement of employers. It is important to note that immigrants' opportunities to learn the local language vary significantly across the country contexts. Language learning tends to be easier when the

[2] These shares are somewhat lower than those reported by EUROSTAT, likely because non-native speakers tend to be underrepresented in surveys. Nevertheless, the difference between Eastern and Western Europe as well as the overall composition appear to be appropriate.

local language shares structural similarities with the immigrant's native language – for example, Polish for Ukrainian speakers or Dutch for German or English speakers. In contrast, learning languages with little resemblance to widely known ones, such as Hungarian, poses a greater challenge. Access to language courses – particularly public ones – also plays a crucial role. In general, countries that are less open to immigration tend to offer fewer or no such courses, whereas more diverse societies provide better access to language-learning opportunities. A paradox emerges: the greater the need for proficiency in the local language, the fewer opportunities there are to learn it. This is especially evident in rural areas of Hungary and Poland, where access is most limited, compared to urban centres in the Netherlands and Belgium, where language learning resources are more readily available.

Another key challenge for immigrants seeking employment is the difficulty of having foreign qualifications recognised, including the lengthy and complex procedures for naturalising diplomas. In all four countries, this issue was mentioned as a significant barrier to accessing jobs, especially for highly qualified immigrants. Several interviewees shared stories illustrating that recognition of foreign qualifications often involves a multi-year bureaucratic process, requiring substantial financial investment with no guarantee of success. This aspect of the immigration system is not only painful for individuals but inefficient at the macro level: as also shown in the next section (Table 2), highly educated professionals are frequently relegated to low-skilled jobs in the service sector simply because their diplomas are not recognised. Several immigrants with higher educational qualifications reported choosing to restart their university education locally, finding this a faster and more straightforward path to the labour market than navigating the bureaucracy of having their original diplomas recognised.

Visa-, work- and residence permit-related issues pose another significant barrier to accessing and staying in the labour market for immigrants across Europe. While the specific regulations and their consequences vary across countries and depend on the type of residence permit – whether work, family-reunification, student, refugee, or asylum seeker – immigrants consistently emphasised the complexity of these processes and the difficulties concerning changing their status (for example, from student to work visa). Across all contexts, the procedures were described as opaque, time-consuming, and resource-intensive.

We found that the situation for immigrants engaged in employment is most problematic in the two Eastern European countries – Poland and Hungary – where visas and related residence permits for immigrants are tied to work permits sponsored by specific employers. This arrangement has two key consequences: (1) immigrants are excluded from a large segment of the labour market, as employers often prefer hiring local candidates to avoid administrative hassle; and (2) immigrants are more dependent on their sponsoring employers, heightening the risk of exploitation.

Lack of personal networks is a critical disadvantage for immigrants, especially in labour markets that rely heavily on referrals and informal connections. Immigrants are naturally less connected than natives, which excludes them from a large segment of the labour market. This is again a more pronounced phenomenon in Eastern than in Western Europe.

The research allowed to focus not only on employment but the quality of jobs, immigrants and ethnic minorities are engaged with. Data shows unequivocally that

Immigrants are not only more likely to be unemployed but, once employed, also tend to occupy lower-quality jobs. (Table 2)

These phenomena can be explained by the very same factors as unemployment patterns: the lack of personal support networks and the highly restrictive residence permit system may more strongly compel immigrants to accept jobs and secure incomes (even if low) than native workers.

Table 2: Occupational status and immigrant status (adjusted means)

	Western Europe	Eastern Europe
Born in the country	47.23	44.85
Immigrant	41.36	41.26
Difference between the two groups	***-5.87***	***-3.60***

The qualitative research component confirms these dynamics. According to our interviewees, barriers to accessing jobs matching their qualifications and professional experience often lead to **downward occupational mobility**. During focus group discussions, we encountered numerous examples of such decisions across all countries: former teachers, lawyers, and managers in their home countries were forced to take on blue-collar jobs in factories or the service sector. Such jobs often create a vicious cycle, trapping individuals in low-ranking positions because they are typically low-paid, physically demanding, and time-consuming, leaving little opportunity to address the source of the disadvantages, such as learning the local language or building professionally meaningful networks.

'I was a teacher in my own country, but here I work in a factory as a worker.' (Hungarian asylum-seeker)

Focus group discussions, especially with asylum seekers, highlight that such situations may also hinder immigrants' ability to process and recover from the trauma of (forced) migration. While the limited space in this report does not permit a description of the many individual work histories – each unique and nuanced – the overall pattern was strikingly clear.

While the qualitative part of our research focused on first-generation immigrants and ethnic minorities, the quantitative data enabled us to examine the labour-market position of second-generation immigrants[2] as well.

Second-generation immigrants experience higher unemployment risk than individuals with native-born parents, though the penalties are substantially smaller than for first-generation immigrants.

Table 3: Unemployment and second-generation immigrant status (controlled for socio-demographic characteristics)

	Western Europe	Eastern Europe
Individuals with native-born parents	30.4%	28.7%
Second-generation immigrant	34.3%	34.0%
Difference between the two groups	***3.9%***	***5.3%***

However, second-generation status does not appear to be associated with occupational status. This suggests that **while second-generation immigrants may face barriers to employment, those who are employed may achieve high-status positions**. The data also show that while second-generation immigrants who adhere to a religion may face additional barriers to employment, those who do find work often hold high-status positions. This may reflect selective labour market participation or compensatory strategies – such as investing more in education or aiming for higher-status occupations – to overcome these barriers. These findings underscore the importance of considering intersectionality – particularly the combined effects of generational status and religious identity.

[2] We define second-generation immigrants as people who live in their own country of birth but have at least one parent who was born in another country

ETHNIC MINORITIES' LABOUR MARKET POSITIONS

Members of ethnic minority groups (who identify as such) in Eastern Europe have an 11.2% and in Western Europe a 7.4% greater likelihood of having been unemployed for more than 3 months than ethnic majorities. After controlling for socio-demographic characteristics (which are likely to influence employment chances), the difference declines slightly but remains statistically significant.

Table 4 Unemployment and minority identification (controlled for socio-demographic characteristics)

	Western Europe	Eastern Europe
Difference between the two groups	***7.4%***	***11.2%***
Non-minority	31.3%	28.7%
Minority	37.1%	38.1%
Difference between the two groups	***5.7%***	***9.4%***

The quality of jobs (ISEI indicator for occupational status) shows a very similar pattern: people identifying as belonging to ethnic minorities hold jobs with lower occupational status, even after controlling for socio-demographic characteristics. **While both immigrants and ethnic minorities face a higher risk of unemployment across Europe, there is a notable East–West divide**. Immigrants tend to experience greater labour market penalties in Western Europe compared to Eastern Europe, whereas ethnic minorities are more vulnerable in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe.

Importantly, the unemployment penalty for ethnic minorities in Eastern Europe is even more severe than that faced by immigrants in Western Europe

Using a special set of data – a merged dataset that includes the FRA Roma Survey 2021 and the EU Labour Force Survey – we were able to **zoom in on the largest ethnic minority group in Europe, the Roma.** The relevance of this focus is that the Roma are the most vulnerable minority group in Europe, who experience historic exclusion and racialisation.

The analysis of the data reveals the extremely high level of exclusion of Roma from the labour market across Europe.

Table 5: Share of Roma and non-Roma respondents in employment by gender, country

	CZ	EL	ES	HR	HU	IT	PT	RO
EMPLOYMENT								
(C) Total								
Total population (LFS)	73.3%	60.0%	64.0%	63.3%	72.1%	59.6%	70.4%	63.4%
Roma survey	39.6%	30.2%	16.2%	22.4%	51.5%	36.6%	29.2%	29.5%
Difference (LFS - Roma survey)	***33.7%***	***29.8%***	***47.8%***	***40.9%***	***20.6%***	***23.0%***	***41.2%***	***33.9%***
Difference (Roma men – Roma women)	22.0%	25.6%	12.8%	22.2%	30.3%	31.1%	30.0%	31.4%

OCCUPATIONAL STATUS								
(A)	CZ	EL	ES	HR	HU	IT	PT	RO
(C) Total								
Total population (LFS)	44.12	43.71	44.55	43.71	42.95	44.29	45.11	39.24
Roma survey	22.95	26.55	22.39	23.47	23.14	24.99	28.86	22.76
Difference (LFS - Roma survey)	***21.17***	***17.16***	***22.16***	***20.24***	***19.81***	***19.3***	***16.25***	***16.48***
Difference (Roma men – Roma women)	0.7	-2.1	2.2	-2.5	-0.9	2.3	-0.9	-1.4

CZ = Czech Republic; EL = Greece; ES = Spain; HR = Croatia; HU = Hungary; IT = Italy; PT = Portugal; RO = Romania

The data show important patterns:

- There are significant differences between countries in both employment rates and occupational status, with Hungarian Roma having the highest levels of employment (51.5%) and the smallest gap in Roma-non-Roma employment rates (20.1%), while in the majority of countries less than a third of the Roma population is in employment (Greece, Spain, Croatia, Portugal and Romania).
- In all countries, Roma occupy the lowest segments of the labour market; their occupational status is below 30 (on a 10-90 scale) everywhere, and the ethnic gap approaches 15-20 in all countries.
- Gender matters greatly: the gender gap for Roma's employment is over 20% in all countries (with the exclusion of Greece, where employment rates are extremely low), indicating an intersectional disadvantage for Roma women. However, there is practically no gender gap in terms of occupational status, meaning that Roma women and men – when employed – occupy similar(ly low) quality jobs.

The analysis shows that while a substantial proportion of the barriers Roma people face in accessing employment can be explained by disadvantages in educational and health outcomes, as well as differences in settlement patterns, family structure, and living arrangements, the

difference unexplained by sociodemographic variables remains statistically significant and thus likely to indicate the level of discrimination (structural and individual).

Focus group discussions conducted in Hungary revealed some of the everyday practices of the exclusion of Roma from local labour markets. Participants shared how, despite persistent and often overt discrimination, even those who do manage to find employment are forced to make significant compromises. Each personal account shared by Roma participants speaks directly to the normalisation of racial discrimination and its deeply embedded presence in everyday life.

In a rural town, all discussion participants agreed that anti-Roma discrimination was entirely overt. Regardless of qualifications, Roma individuals were effectively barred from employment, except for physically demanding labour. Only two options remain for those who work: jobs in local factories or agricultural day-labour, both of which require extreme flexibility, such as 12-hour shifts including nights, and often result in serious health consequences, or alternatively, engaging in a weekly or monthly commute.

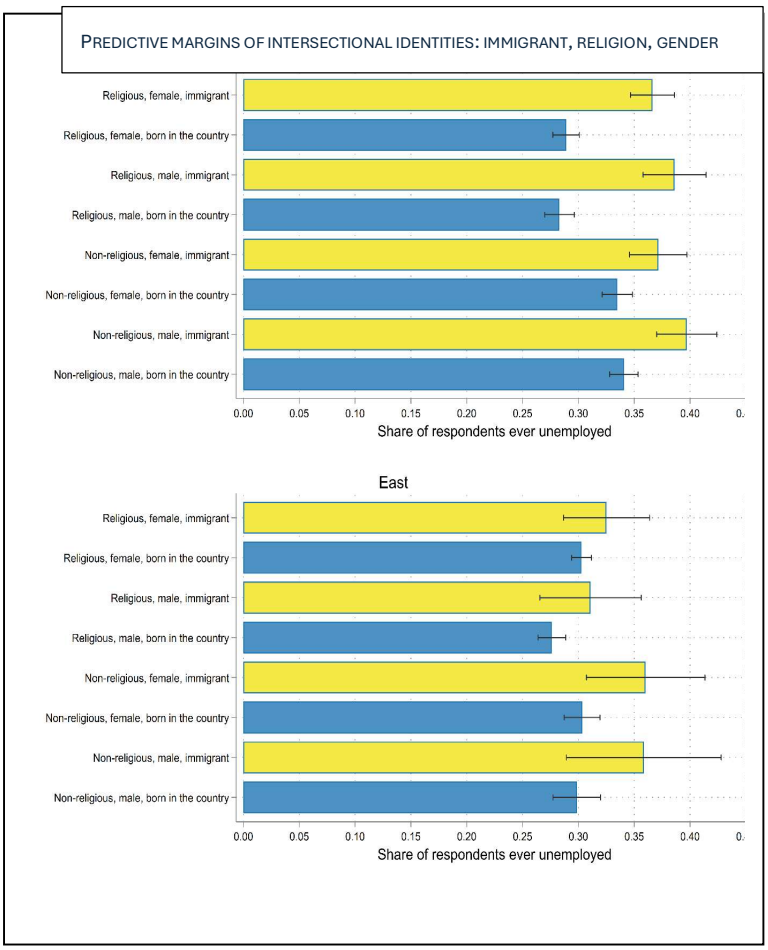
The following quote by a Roma woman refers to the normalised nature of discrimination against Roma, even in public offices: *'As soon as I graduated from secondary school and passed the matricula, I studied in K. to become a legal assistant. This is quite a complex thing. I was told to apply to the court in K. for an internship because they accept students from this school as interns. So, I submitted my application, my school records, and everything they asked for. My name is not a traditional Gypsy name, so, during the application process, this was not a problem for them. Only after everyone in the applicant group had been called in for an interview did I realise that I was still sitting in the waiting room and waiting to be called, even though I had been the first to arrive. They didn't even come to call me, so after waiting for a very long time, I knocked on the door and told them that I was still waiting for the interview. And then, I was told: "You are a Gypsy, aren't you?" "Yes, I am" [I replied]. "Then, you won't get in here, you can't be an intern at the court". Wow, this was such a shock that I became a [manual labourer] afterwards. They were very rude to me, telling me that Gypsies should not work in an office, and stuff like that'. (Roma woman in HU)*

Roma men, who face even greater levels of prejudice locally, are forced to seek work abroad in countries such as Austria, Germany, or the UK. This migration frequently results in long periods of separation from their families, leaving their partners behind with the full burden of childcare and household responsibilities – often in addition to their own paid work. This dynamic places significant emotional and practical strain on families and reinforces the gendered division of labour within already marginalised communities.

Intersecting Identities and Their Cumulative Impact on Immigrants' Employment Opportunities

The novelty of the multi-method analysis lies in its focus on intersectionalities – that is, understanding how the combination of certain identity components creates additional (dis)advantages in the labour market. The ESS data were suitable for detecting intersectionalities related to migration status, second-generation migration status, minority affiliation, gender, religion (including religious denomination), and country of origin. The combination of the Labour Force Survey and the FRA Roma survey enabled the identification of the intersectional impact of the Roma minority and gender. At the same time, the qualitative research also spoke to experiences of intersectional identities and their impact on employment opportunities.

According to ESS data, the **intersection of immigrant status and religion** represents a significant source of labour market disadvantage. While religion is generally associated with a lower probability of unemployment – by 5.2 percentage points across the full sample – it becomes a significant barrier when combined with immigrant status, raising the likelihood of unemployment for religious immigrant men by 9.8% compared to religious men born in the country.



The chart demonstrates that immigrant status (yellow bars) has the largest impact on employment opportunities, with the effect being more pronounced in Western than in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, in Western Europe, while religion serves as a protective factor against unemployment among natives (they face a lower risk of unemployment), this protective effect disappears for immigrants, as there is no significant difference in unemployment risk between religious and non-religious immigrants). In Eastern Europe, however, the protective effect of religion persists: religious immigrants face a lower risk of

unemployment than non-religious immigrants. These findings are likely attributable to the differing composition of immigrant populations in Western and Eastern Europe: in the latter, the majority of immigrants have European origins.

The intersectional impact of religion and immigrant status is even more pronounced when examining occupational status (as measured by the ISEI index), an indicator of job quality. Among those in employment, immigrants consistently occupy lower-quality jobs regardless of religion, and the protective effect of religion observed among natives does not extend to immigrants. The disparities are more pronounced in Western Europe than in Eastern Europe, particularly those among religious immigrants.

The analysis also reveals a counterintuitive finding regarding intersectionalities: **gender does not exacerbate the disadvantage associated with immigrant status.** In Western Europe, immigrant men and women exhibit similar employment prospects. Notably, gender becomes a statistically significant factor when examining job quality in Eastern Europe. Immigrant non-religious women occupy positions with occupational status scores four points lower than those held by immigrant religious men. In contrast, in Western Europe, religious immigrant status is associated with lower job quality regardless of gender.

The qualitative research refines and deepens most of these findings. During focus group discussions with members of religious communities – both Christian and Muslim – contrasting patterns emerged. Immigrants of Christian faith in Poland and Belgium reported that their religious affiliation could be an advantage in securing employment in certain professions, such as education (religious schools) or social care institutions. Belonging to a non-stigmatised religious community offered connections that facilitated integration into the labour market.

'*I am not wearing a hijab right now, because I think I will face less discrimination this way*'. (Muslim immigrant women in Belgium)

'*The women stressed that their hijab is the most significant aspect of [reason for] their exclusion. The women explained that [they are excluded from different sectors] (such as education, hospitals, and the administrative counters of local governments) because they won't hire people who wear a hijab.*' (excerpt from notes from focus groups in Belgium)

In contrast, Muslim immigrants reported that their faith added an extra layer of difficulty in accessing employment. This was especially true for women who wore the hijab, many of whom experienced rejection from most types of jobs. Anti-Muslim discrimination was perceived as normalised by most of our discussion partners, particularly in public sector jobs in Belgium and the Netherlands, where women wearing hijabs shared recurring experiences of exclusion from jobs. Interestingly, in Hungary – where a decade-long, government-led anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim campaign has shaped public discourse – Muslim women with refugee status were told

that their challenges as refugees, especially the lack of language skills, were a more significant barrier to finding employment than those related to their religious identity. Due to these obstacles, many may never reach the open job market.

The patterns observed in the survey data regarding the decline in job quality among immigrants can be explained by a widespread strategy among focus group members to adjust their career paths to the hostile environment and aspire to employment in roles with lower occupational status than their previous positions or qualifications.

> *'Some friends advised me: "Don't do that [job]" or "don't take it, because you have studied this much, why would you do that?" They could not comprehend it, but [it was OK] for me… they give me good pay'.* (Immigrant in Belgium)

While the survey data does not directly address the role of race, the qualitative research revealed that African and Asian immigrants face significant barriers in the labour market due to **racism** in Eastern Europe, regardless of their educational background, age, or gender. In Poland, particular focus was paid to the experiences of highly educated immigrants from African countries. Despite holding advanced degrees, they consistently encountered obstacles to entering the labour market. Being perceived as 'different' or 'other' was a recurring theme in their narratives, often described as a painful and frustrating aspect of their lived experience (Kubin 2025).

> *'You know, I already know that as a Black man you have to prove […] that you are worthy of something…So I push myself to do extra*' (Poland)
>
> *'One day I found a job, but the place was very far from me. If I want to go to that place, I take three buses. It is very difficult for me. Three buses, yeah. Yes. I spend like six hours [travelling]. After that, I work like eight hours, this is fourteen hours'* (asylum seeker in NL)

The qualitative research provided plenty of evidence concerning the challenges of **immigrant mothers with young children**; namely, about how caregiving responsibilities further compound their already disadvantaged position. The qualitative research provided substantial evidence of the difficulties these mothers encounter, particularly how caregiving responsibilities compound their already vulnerable position in the labour market. Employers often perceive them as unreliable due to their potential absence from work, which further limits their employment

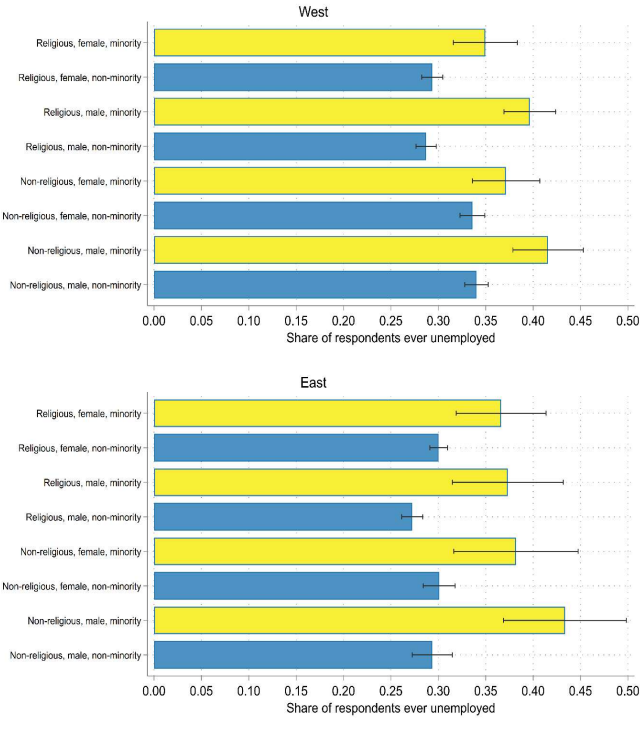
> '*But a woman with a child also needs work and to make money. The mom won't always have a husband who she can count on, or she may not have a grandma. She also would like to have a job, but they'll say, "Oh, you have a 1.5-year-old child, no, we can't take you because you'll always be on medical leave". What is she supposed to do? She also needs a job, to have a life, buy food, pay for rent.''* (Ukrainian refugee in Poland)

opportunities. A key issue is the lack of extended family support – such as grandparents or other relatives – to assist with childcare. Additionally, they must navigate their children's education and integration into the school system while simultaneously learning a new language themselves. This adds another layer of responsibility, for which they receive little to no support. Many feel isolated and overwhelmed, especially as they see their children's successful inclusion into the host society as their most important task. Although some self-help groups and grassroots organisations offer support, such initiatives remain rare.

Intersecting Identities and Their Cumulative Impact on Ethnic minorities' Employment Opportunities

Ethnic minorities face significant disadvantages in both accessing employment and occupational status, a penalty **significantly more severe in Eastern Europe** than in Western Europe. **Gender adds another layer of disadvantage for ethnic minorities.** While minority women face slightly fewer barriers to entering employment than minority men, additional identity factors contribute only marginally to these disadvantages. In Western Europe, the **combination of minority status and religious affiliation** slightly increases the risk of unemployment, while in Eastern Europe, **non-religious minority men** encounter the greatest risk of unemployment.

PREDICTIVE MARGINS OF INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES: ETHNIC MINORITIES



In terms of **job quality**, minority women in Eastern Europe experience significantly lower occupational status – even after controlling for factors such as education, place of residence, and age. In Western Europe, the intersection of minority identity and religion contributes to the disproportionately lower job quality.

The focus on Roma ethnicity revealed that Roma women face heightened intersectional disadvantages, reflecting a **'double penalty'** applicable to both access to employment and job quality. Data show (Table 5) that Roma women have hardly any access to employment in most

countries. Results also suggest that, **in particular, Roma mothers with young children face heightened vulnerability on the labour market**.

These results are only partly consistent with the qualitative research conducted for this project and by others (Messing and Kende 2025). During the focus group discussions with Roma in the urban and rural context of Hungary, it became clear that the **intersections of gender** were a particularly significant source of discrimination not only for Roma women but also for Roma men. According to the Roma female focus group discussion partners, Roma men face a greater level of racialised discrimination in the local labour market in rural areas than women because "they are perceived as threatening" by non-Roma. This discrimination is so overt that they are forced to look for jobs outside their localities, often abroad.

> *'People still see Roma men as aggressive. They don't see the lawyer – they see the threat. My brother is well-educated [lawyer] and kind, but because of his dark skin and beard people treat him like he's a criminal'* (Roma women in HU)

The rationale for discrimination against women is somewhat different: on the one hand, mothers with school-aged children were discriminated against in employment because it was often assumed that they were unreliable employees, likely to stay home if their child fell ill. On the other hand, stereotypes about Roma women's presumed high fertility further contributed to young single Roma women's rejection by employers. These gendered and racialised assumptions created what some participants described as a '**concrete ceiling**' to entering the labour market and advancing their careers.

> *'They didn't even look at my experience or qualifications. As soon as I said I had three kids, I was out….'* (Roma woman in Hungary)
>
> *'The guy at the interview looked at me and said, 'Three kids? So that's ten years gone, right?' And I had to justify how long I had breastfed for. If a man has two kids, it's seen as a plus—he must be reliable, he has a family.'* (Roma woman in Hungary)

One of the rural focus group discussions, held with Roma women of various ages, revealed the profound impact of anti-Roma prejudice and discrimination on their daily lives.

'If you're a woman and Roma, you start a hundred steps behind.'

When asked to describe a typical workday, participants shared that – despite having solid educational qualifications – they were routinely rejected from local job opportunities. With only one exception, they were forced to accept jobs that required long daily commutes to factories or warehouses in the wider area, and those that involved alternating shifts (including nights). Many also had to take on additional weekend or part-time jobs to secure a basic livelihood. Alongside their work-related responsibilities, they also cared for their children, engaged in **local civic activism** and managed household duties, leaving them with **very few hours for rest**. Unsurprisingly, these conditions often took a serious toll on their health. Several participants reported suffering from **chronic physical and mental health issues**, which they directly linked to the stress and exhaustion caused by their precarious working and living conditions. These examples of self-exploitation are direct consequences of the multiple intersecting inequalities that women of racialised minorities endure.

COPING STRATEGIES: NAVIGATING THE LABOUR MARKET

The qualitative research revealed coping strategies for navigating the labour market amid everyday experiences of discrimination and compounded disadvantages. The most important of these was **the downgrading of career expectations**. However, other coping strategies are worth highlighting.

Restarting higher education was another coping strategy for responding to barriers related to multiple difficulties, including the naturalisation of diplomas, language barriers and visa issues.

> *'When I came to Poland, I was forced to (re)do my master's here to access the labour market […] Polish people […] can access the labour market, but not foreigners. So you are forced to do more stuff. Once you graduate and hold a Polish diploma, then you can access the labour market as well.'* (Immigrant in Poland)

Re-entering higher education was a strategic response to visa-related challenges in Poland and Hungary. Since obtaining a work visa in Poland and Hungary is often difficult and comes with significant restrictions, enrolling in a higher education program and securing a student visa presented a more feasible alternative.

Self-exploitation was another frequently identified coping mechanism pursued by ethnic minority Roma women and immigrants equally. African immigrants in Poland, Ukrainian women in Poland, refugees in Hungary and in the Netherlands all emphasised that they 'do whatever it takes' to rebuild their lives.

Such experiences were replicated in most focus groups in different forms. This need for such overperformance often manifests in long working hours, multiple jobs, and a lack of work-life

balance. While some viewed this as a resilience strategy, others highlighted it as a source of vulnerability and exploitation.

Ukrainian women in Poland were especially vocal about the need to restart their lives following forced displacement caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. They engaged in any available jobs, irrespective of their educational qualifications, and ‘grew a thick skin’ to recover quickly from any rejection they encountered, whether in the labour market or in social interactions. Despite facing numerous challenges in an unfamiliar country – including the emotional toll of being separated from their husbands and families, and the trauma they had endured – they expressed a strong sense of responsibility to remain resilient. Their primary motivation was to support their children’s integration into Polish society and secure a livelihood for themselves.

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