

# Educational mismatch and attitudes towards migration in Europe

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**Abstract** In this paper we focus on the relationship between educational mismatch and attitudes towards migration. Educational mismatch occurs when the required level of education for a particular job diverges from the employees' attained level of education. Overeducated individuals are those with an education higher than that needed for the job, Conversely, undereducated workers have an education level lower than required. Using data from the round 7 of the European Social Survey (ESS) this paper supports the hypothesis that overeducated individuals are more favourable toward foreign migrants than undereducated ones.

**Key words:** Attitudes towards migrants, Educational mismatch, Overeducation, Undereducation,

## 1 Introduction

Concerns about immigration can originate from economic origins as well as cultural and social reasons (Card, 2005). The main theoretical background behind economic reasons is the Group Conflict Theory defined by Blalock (1967) and Olzak (2005): negative outgroup sentiments are seen as defensive reactions to perceived intergroup competition for scarce goods. A competition that manifests itself in the labor market as a fear towards migrants with the same set of skills, and in the welfare system, as low skill (poor) immigrants can be perceived as a burden for public finance by richer natives. At the individual level, there is considerable empirical evidence about the fact that anti-immigration attitudes are more frequent among those with a lower level of education, skills and income (Coenders and Scheepers, 2003). Among the sociological and cultural theories, the most popular one is ethnocentrism, i.e. technical name for the view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it. Consequently, ethnocentric people perceive their social group as the center and judge other groups based on the different preferences with their own group. Manevska and Achterberg (2011) proved that ethnocentrism increase the sense of hostility towards migrants. In light of the results found in literature, these social and cultural factors seem to play a crucial role in explaining anti-immigration attitudes. Anyhow, the empirical analysis of these determinants is complicated, because the relationship between attitudes and these psychological characteristics can derive from reverse causality, rising problems of endogeneity. In this study, we focus on labour market competition and attitudes towards migrants. From a theoretical standpoint, standard economic models focus on the effect of immigration on the different factors of production. (Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2007). Assuming full employment, wage flexibility, a relative low skill level of immigrants compared to natives and perfect substitutability between migrants and natives in each skill category, the effect of immigrants entering the labor supply is a decrease in the wages of native low-skilled workers. This happens because low-skilled labour is applied to fixed amounts of the other factors, which implies that the real wages of the lower skilled will decline while the earnings of owners of land, capital, and skills will increase. This model is often referred to as "factor-proportions" analysis (Borjas, 1999) and it predicts that local low skilled workers are the real losers from immigration, and hence reasonably the category more threatful. Several studies have found strong evidence that concerns about labour market competition are a relevant determinant of attitudes toward immigration both in Europe and US. Most of these studies draw upon the evidence that there is a strong positive correlation between the skill levels of respondents (as measured by education levels) and their support for immigration. Hence, this may suggest that low skilled (less educated) workers are afraid of being forced to compete for jobs with immigrants, which are normally low-skilled (Scheve and Slaughter, 2001).

In this study, we propose the educational mismatch as a proxy for labor market competition. Educational mismatch occurs when the required level of education for a particular job diverges from the employee's

attained level of education. The level of attained education could be higher than needed for the job, in which case the worker is over-educated, or lower than required, in which case the worker is under-educated.

Our prediction is that - across cells of occupation and skills - overeducated workers are more supportive towards immigration with respect to matched and undereducated workers. The theoretical hypothesis behind this is that they may feel more secure and less substitutable by migrant workers due to their overqualification for that specific job. On the contrary, undereducated and matched workers should feel more in danger, particularly the former.

After this introduction the paper is organized as follows: section 2 presents the database used and the statistical model adopted in the analysis. Section 3 displays the results of the regression analysis while section 4 concludes.

## **2 Data and Methods**

We employ data from round 7 of the ESS (2015). The ESS is an academically driven cross-national survey which issues a multidimensional questionnaire across several European countries every two years. In the seventh round (the most recent released), there were 21 countries surveyed: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Round 7 includes rotating modules on “Attitudes towards immigration and their antecedents”, which we exploit. As said in the introduction, the focus of our study is on the labour market competition, thus we need a measure of the realistic threat. ESS round 7 provides three questions to measure it:

- Would you say that people who come to live here generally take jobs away from workers in [country], or generally help to create new jobs?
- Most people who come to live here work and pay taxes. They also use health and welfare services. On balance, do you think people who come here take out more than they put in or put in more than they take out?
- Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]'s economy that people come to live here from other countries?

All three questions are measured in a scale from 0 to 10. In order to measure attitudes toward migrants we build an index computing the mean between the items mentioned above (an exploratory factor analysis stated that only one latent factor explain the scores of the three items). As far as the educational mismatch is concerned, there are several methods to measure the required level of education, and thus the extent of over/under education: job analysis (Green, Kler, and Leeves, 2007), worker self-assessment (Alba-Ramirez, 1993) and realized matches (Bauer, 2002). The first is the most “objective” measure, as it is based on the information contained in occupational classification documents which can be translated directly into number of years of schooling from 0 to 18. The second is instead the most “subjective” measure, as workers are asked about the required education level of their job. The latter method entails two very similar approach: one, proposed by Verdugo and Verdugo (1989), uses the mean level of schooling of those working in the same occupations. It follows that any workers whose educational level is at least one standard deviation above the mean are deemed overeducated; those with one standard deviation below the mean are considered undereducated. In this paper we use the approach proposed by Kiker, Santos, and De Oliveira (1997), which is a variant of Verdugo and Verdugo (1989) in that it uses the mode the acquired schooling for workers in the same occupation and does not use the two standard deviations interval around the centralized measure. Workers with education level more or less than the modal value are considered over/under educated, respectively. In this framework, for every country in the dataset, we divide workers in the 9 major ISCO groups and in three main categories of education. It follows that workers with education level more or less than the

modal value of their occupation in their country are considered over (OE) / under (UE) educated, respectively. Finally, individuals with an educational level equal to the mode are defined as matched (M).

After having defined overeducated individual, we run a linear model to address whether attitudes towards migrants depend on over/undereducation.

### 3 Results

Results of the empirical analysis are presented in Table 1 in two different specification, including the effects of OE, UE and M conditions.

**Table 1:** Results for a linear regression to study the determinants of attitudes towards migrants

<i><b>Explanatory variables</b></i>	<i><b>Model 1</b></i>	<i><b>Model 2</b></i>
Age	0.004	0.004
Age <sup>2</sup>	-0.001	-0.001
<i>Gender</i>		
Males (Ref.)		
Females	-0.118***	-0.118***
<i>Born in the country</i>		
Yes (Ref.)		
No	0.449***	0.449***
<i>Size of Municipality</i>		
Big City (Ref.)		
Suburbs of big city	-0.069**	-0.069**
Town or Small city	-0.078***	-0.078***
Country Village	-0.145***	-0.145***
Home in Countryside	-0.147***	-0.147***
<i>Education</i>		
< Upper Secondary (Ref.)		
Upper Secondary	0.042	0.042
Tertiary	0.175**	0.175**
<i>Education – Job matching</i>		
Overeducated (OE)	0.187***	
Matched (M)	0.072*	-0.115***
Undereducated (UE)		-0.187***

\* significant at 10% level; \*\* significant at 5% level; \*\*\* significant at 1% level.

As expected individuals with higher level of education are more favourable towards immigrants than lower educated as showed in Models 1 and 2. The introduction of Overeducation/Undereducation dummies support the hypotheses of the contribution: overeducated individuals have more positive attitudes towards migrants than matched and undereducated ones. This finding is in line with the assumption of the presence of higher competition in the labour market for individuals with lower education. In addition, this competition has been made stronger if the individual is employed in a workplace that requires higher than those possessed by the worker. With respect of control variables results are in line with expectations: people living in big cities are less opposite to migrants than those living in suburbs or small city. In addition, individuals that were born in foreign countries are more likely to display positive attitudes towards migrations.

## 4 Conclusions

This paper implemented a linear model in order to test the hypothesis that overeducated individuals are more likely to show more favourable attitudes towards foreign immigrants. In order to test the assumption, data from the round 7 of the ESS were used. Results support the hypothesis that overeducated individuals are more likely to be positively oriented towards foreign immigrants. This is in line with the present literature which underlines as the effect of immigrants entering the labour supply increases the perception of the risk of becoming unemployed for the less skilled natives.

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