

As France moves to limit the rights of migrants, research reveals just how reliant on them it is

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Once again, France finds itself in the grip of a political crisis. After the pension reform of June, which prompted more than one million people

to take to the streets, president Emmanuel Macron's framework immigration bill passed on Tuesday December 19. It will now be sent to be reviewed by [the constitutional council](#), a body tasked with verifying legislation's compatibility with the country's constitution, in a move that could see some of its measures cancelled.

Voted through the national assembly with the support of the far-right and conservatives, the [legislation tightens the screws on the rights of foreigners and of French citizens of migrant descent](#) across an unprecedented number of areas. Among the most emblematic measures features the end of the sacrosanct principle of Jus soli, whereby any child born on French soil is granted French nationality regardless of their parents' origins.

Instead, the child will now be able to benefit from citizenship rights until their 18th birthday, upon which they will need to officially demonstrate their will to become French. Welfare benefits also now depend on a 5-year stay in the country, while undocumented migrants stand to lose free transport and automatic residency permits when working in low-wage, understaffed sectors.

According to the [latest text](#), local prefects would have discretion as to whether or not to grant the permits.

The latter move comes three years after the COVID pandemic revealed the importance of [immigrant workers](#) in "[critical sectors](#)", including health, transport and agriculture.

In the wake of the bill, our latest research helps us reflect on the reasons behind the numbers of immigrants in such sectors. According to a study by the (CEPII), a research center focused on the world economy, [immigrant](#) workers in France feature heavily among cleaners and home helps, but also hospital doctors.

But France is hardly an exception. A year before the start of the COVID crisis, foreign-born workers, and in particular non-EU immigrants, were proportionally [more likely to work in critical sectors](#) than native-born workers in most EU countries.

France is no exception

Our research began by comparing the probability of native and immigrant workers being employed in essential sectors, taking into account a number of characteristics such as age, gender, professional experience, education levels and marital status. Can these factors explain the differences observed?

Our results show that, for an equivalent profile, the disparities between immigrants and native-born people are still largely visible. In almost two-thirds of EU countries, the probability of working in essential sectors is higher for immigrants than for natives. This is particularly true of Italy, the United Kingdom (included in our study along with Switzerland and Norway) and the Nordic countries. This probability is 5% higher for an immigrant worker in France, and rises to 12% in Sweden. The exception is Luxembourg, where the difference is negative.

When we look at low-skilled jobs in key sectors ([as defined by the OECD](#)), the [gap is even more marked](#). Immigrants, for example, are over-represented in the cleaning sector in three quarters of the countries surveyed. In other key sectors such as transport or health, the difference is less marked, but immigrants remain over-represented in half the countries surveyed, particularly in the UK, Denmark, Germany, Italy and Sweden.

If individual characteristics are not enough to explain this over-representation, then what are the reasons that lead immigrants to hold low-skilled jobs in key sectors? One plausible explanation lies in the

structural disadvantage of immigrants on the labor market due to the institutional, linguistic, legal or discriminatory obstacles they may encounter.

Those who emigrated as adults

Our study thus analyzes the way in which the over-representation of foreign-born workers evolves as a function of characteristics specific to immigrants and likely to influence their economic integration.

On the one hand, [the age at which foreign-born workers emigrated](#) is largely correlated with their employment rate. Immigrants who emigrate at a younger age to their host country benefit for the most part from a comparative advantage in learning the language of the host country and a [cultural and educational background better suited](#) to their integration into the labor market.

With the exception of Denmark, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, our results indicate that the over-representation of immigrants in essential sectors thus exclusively affects immigrants who emigrated to their host country after the age of 15.

Place of birth and place of graduation

We also know that education and professional experience acquired abroad remain [less valued than those obtained in the host country](#). Immigrants trained abroad are therefore [more likely](#) to find themselves unemployed or in jobs for which they are overqualified than immigrants with qualifications obtained in their host country.

For an equivalent profile, there is no difference between foreign-born workers with qualifications obtained in Belgium, France, Spain, Austria

and Switzerland compared with workers born in these countries, unlike their counterparts with foreign qualifications. The latter are much more likely to work in essential sectors.

Finally, in the EU, immigrants from other EU member countries occupy jobs on the labor market that are fairly similar to those of natives for the same profile, while the employment prospects of non-EU immigrants appear to be [significantly lower](#). This is due in particular to the [racial and ethnic discrimination](#) they suffer.

Place of birth seems to matter as much as place of graduation: the probability of an immigrant born in an EU country working in a key sector is identical to that of a native of Belgium, Spain, Ireland and Norway. In the UK, Sweden, Denmark and Germany, it is higher but still significantly lower than that of non-EU immigrants.

Where does the bill stand in all this?

Additional analyses support the hypothesis that the over-representation of immigrants in key sectors is due to their less favorable position on the labor market.

This over-representation is more likely to be observed in countries where the core sectors are distinguished from the rest of the national economy by a greater demand for labor, a significant number of part-time employees, active job-seeking, a high degree of over-qualification and low professional status. The proportion of employees earning less than the median of the income distribution is particularly high.

Given the pitfalls we have identified, which penalize both the host countries, which deprive themselves of the real skills of the immigrants present on their territory, and the immigrant workers themselves, the regularization of illegal foreign workers envisaged in the first draft of

the government's bill would have had little chance of changing the situation.

Conversely, opening up the status of civil servant to non-Europeans—as proposed by the [civil servants' collective Le Sens du service public](#)—could, for example, improve the professional mobility of non-EU workers and their integration into the labor market, with economic benefits for all concerned.

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