

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY, ADDRESSING THE THEME "INVISIBLE WORK AND VISIBLE IMPACT."

European Economic and Social Committee

March 2026

Good evening

Thank you for inviting me to speak at this panel.

Today's event is in recognition of International Women's Day on Sunday— a day to recognise the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women, and to honour the ongoing fight of women for equality, right to work, right to vote, right to access to education, right to political participation and many more.

But despite this progress, we must ask ourselves — have we truly moved far enough? from a feminist, women right activist working on women issues, the answer is no, not really. In fact, on some issues we are going backwards.

Women are disappearing from policy discussions and documents.

Women are being silenced when they speak about their rights or about spaces that belong to them.

In many parts of the world, women and girls are losing their most basic rights — including access to education.

However, my focus will be on the title of the event 'invisible work and the visible impact', concentrating on migrant women in Europe.

Across Europe, migrant women contribute as workers, caregivers, entrepreneurs, and community builders.

And yet — in labour market participation, in policy design, and often in public discourse — they remain disproportionately invisible.

According to Eurostat, only **65% of foreign-born women aged 25–54 was employed**, compared to **83% of foreign-born men**¹.

Migrant women lag nearly **16% behind native-born women**², whose employment averages 80–81%.

Migrant women also experience a slower transition rate in obtaining their first employment compared to migrant men. Data from the International Labour Organization revealed that 22% of migrant men secured their first job after 24 months of entry into an EU country, in contrast to only 6% of women³.

Even when employed, migrant women are more likely to work **part-time or in unstable roles**. Eurostat shows **36.8% of non-EU migrant women work part-time**, compared to **11.8% of migrant men**⁴. Constraints such as childcare, language barriers, and unrecognised qualifications contribute to this underemployment.



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¹ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20250527-1?utm_source=chatgpt.com

² Ibid

³ <https://doi.org/10.3390/world3040054>

⁴ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/migrants-still-more-likely-work-part-time-eu-closing-gap-2025-11-04_en?utm_source=chatgpt.com

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Migrant women often face double discriminations – for being a woman and a migrant. But not only discrimination at the individual level. there is a **structural blind spot in policy design**.

- Migration policies are often gender-neutral and overlook the specific needs of migrant women and girls.
- Gender equality policy often concern a native-born woman.
- Labour market policy concerns full-time, continuous participation.

Migrant women do not fit neatly into any single category, as they are not a homogeneous group. Factors such as race, ethnicity, disability, refugee status, single parenthood, or the circumstances of their migration journey can create additional barriers to employment.

For **undocumented migrant women**, the gap is even more, they often fall entirely outside these policies. Highly skilled women often **cannot access employment** due to legal barriers. Their skills remain **under recognized**, and their contributions invisible – yet their potentials are enormous.

National policies can deepen these gaps. Across the EU, policy choices can unintentionally make migrant women's work less visible.

In Belgium, for example, **nearly one in four women aged 15–64 is inactive due to family caregiving responsibilities** (indicators.be), a job that is not recognised as work. At the same time, debates over **reductions or changes in social benefits** can shrink the financial support that carers – many of whom are women and migrant women – rely on. (brusselstimes.com)

These examples show how economic and social policies influence **visibility, recognition, and labour market participation**.

When migrant women are employed below their qualification level, or cannot work at all, Europe loses skills. When care responsibilities or legal barriers prevent labour participation, Europe loses productivity. Invisible work may still produce visible impact – but invisible barriers produce invisible losses.

So what would a more coherent and forward-looking approach look like? I would like to suggest three priorities:

First: women-sensitive integration policies. Childcare access, flexible language training, and targeted employment pathways for women must become standard. Without childcare, labour market integration remains theoretical.

Second: Recognition of qualifications must be accelerated. For undocumented women, temporary work permits and pathways to legalisation could unlock untapped potential.

Third: Data is important in shaping policy and providing the right services. Labour, poverty, and integration statistics should be disaggregated by **sex, migrant status, and legal status** – and should be used to evaluate and adjust EU and national programmes.

The European Economic and Social Committee has a crucial role to play. As a bridge between institutions and civil society, the EESC can ensure migrant women's perspectives are heard.

Inclusion is not only a social goal – it is an economic necessity. Europe cannot afford inefficiency rooted in structural exclusion.