A case of inequality in the labour market: the situation of EU and non-EU migrants

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Recent studies have shown that the economic crisis of 2008 has heavily affected migrants, thus exacerbating a disadvantage already present in many countries and further weakening the position of migrants in the labour market. This paper focuses on two distinct groups of migrants: EU citizens and those from third, «non-EU» countries. In our opinion, the legal status of «European» should provide some advantages on the labour market, compared with the situation of non-EU citizens. In particular, we focus on the effects of the economic crisis on unemployment risk, occupational prestige and income, from the crisis up to 2014.

Key words: intra-European migration, non-EU migrants, labour market, unemployment, occupational prestige, income

Introduction

This article studies the differences between the conditions of EU internal migrants and third country nationals in the labour market. It adopts a twofold perspective. On the one side, it seeks to assess the effects of the economic crisis on the labour market and income situation of European migrant workers from the crisis until 2014, in order to see if the impact of the crisis on this group of workers has been weaker compared to third national migrants and similarly to natives. On the other side, the paper has also a methodological goal: by focusing on two distinct groups of migrants, EU citizens and third country nationals – the so-called «non-EU» – it tests the presence of significant differences between these two groups in different countries, trying to show that European Union membership is a salient divide among immigrants and that this aspect should be taken into account when studying migrants’ situation in the labour market. The article is structured as follows. Section 1 presents the general framework in which labour migration occurs and its entitlement to (some) citizenship’s rights. Section 2 reviews the literature on the consequences of the economic crisis on migrant workers, internal and external to EU. Section 3 contains an overview of data and methods used in the analysis and states the main hypotheses. Section 4 is devoted to the presentation of the main results. In the conclusion, the main findings of the study are discussed and summarized.

1. For example, in EU SILC data, the distinction between European and third national migrants is not available for some countries, most notably Germany.
1. Labour markets, immigrants’ labour and citizenship rights

International immigrants have been admitted by modern receiving societies for various reasons, but labour market needs are certainly the most important: the segmentation of labour markets remains a meaningful explanation of the relation among capitalist economy, national labour force and immigrant workers (Piore 1979). These needs were more evident in North-Western Europe in the period of industrial development after the Second World War (Castles et al. 2014), when immigrants’ labour was demanded by crucial sectors, such as public works, mines or the automobile industry. In several European countries, such as Germany or Belgium, official agreements were signed with sending countries. Thereafter, with the oil crisis of the 1970s, the labour demand became less evident and borders were officially closed to foreign workers. Needs did not diminish, however, but regarded more marginal economic sectors, such as menial urban services, construction, agriculture, domestic and care work (Baldwin-Edwards 2008; Morice and Potot 2010). Developed receiving countries became «reluctant importers» of immigrants (Hollifield et al. 2014). In particular, urban economies need flexible and cheap labour, and immigrants respond to this demand (Sassen 2001). Then the question «Who needs immigrant labour?» remains relevant (Ruhs and Anderson 2010). Whereas public policies in recent years have favoured the so-called «skilled migrants» (de Haas, Natter and Vezzoli 2016), the actual needs of labour markets regard other types of migrants as well, fostering a thriving irregular immigration (Ambrosini 2018; Martiniello and Rath 2012; Ruhs and Anderson 2010; Triandafyllidou 2010).

In Europe, a paramount way to manage the divergence among persisting economic needs, political closure to new immigration, and inequality has been the enlargement of the European Union, encompassing since the 1970s (Ferrera 2012) the free circulation of workers and the right to search for jobs in all the territory of the Union. European Union economies have tried to fill their gaps in the supply of workers, mainly at the service of the lower tiers of labour markets, by hiring workers from the newly admitted countries of the Union. At the same time, European Union citizenship grants social rights quite close to national citizens’ rights (Ferrera 2012). Ruhs (2015) has emphasized that «these policies are exceptional in global comparison as they grant EU citizens the right to move freely and take up employment in any other EU country and – as long as they qualify as ‘workers’ – the right to access that country’s welfare state on the same basis as its citizens» (31, emphasis in the text). They deeply differ from the policies enacted in the USA and other developed countries, in which a tension and a trade-off is visible between a relative freedom of immigration and access to social rights,
and from the policies that the same EU applies to workers coming from outside: «Greater openness to labour immigration is typically associated with greater restrictions on new migrants’ access to the national welfare state, and vice versa» (Ruhs 2015, 1).

From a more positive point of view, Ciupijus (2011) has claimed that the new wave of labour immigration from Central-Eastern European countries to North-Western Europe expresses a «denationalization» of the legal and political framework that regulates workers’ mobility across borders: «The denationalization derives from the shifting of controls over human mobility from nation states to the EU. Unlike the previous movement of people from this part of Europe, contemporary migration could not be categorized as an exodus caused by repressive nation states, or as a guest worker type recruitment of foreign labour. […] The post-2004 labour migration/mobility has been firmly connected to the pan-national processes of European integration» (541).

Also for this reason, i.e. the entitlement of internal migrants in the EU to a thicker package of rights, the immigrant population in the EU has shifted towards a growing segmentation in terms of legal entitlements and rights, and EU citizenship has acquired growing salience in the «civic stratification» of immigrant populations (Morris 2002). The deployment of new technologies of identification and control at the borders of European Union, in contrast to free movement within the territory for European Union citizens, is often seen as the main symbol of this stratification of mobility rights (Dijstelbloem and Broeders 2015). At the same time, a simplistic distinction between «inclusion» and «exclusion» is challenged by the variety of legal statuses and purposes that can allow border crossing. The concept of «regimes of mobility» (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013) highlights this unequal distribution of mobility rights. From this point of view, freedom of movement in the EU has created new patterns of circular mobility, influencing at the same time both the infrastructure of employment channels and the expectations of employers regarding migrant economic and social integration (Shubin and Dickey 2013).

Moreover, the labour market adds other forms of categorization and entitlement, also for people who are legally authorized to enter the European Union and to reside legally, at least for a period, on its territory. External borders are reinforced by several kinds of internal borders, among which the authorization to take part in the labour market and to enjoy welfare provisions are of particular importance. On both grounds, European Union membership is a salient factor of differentiation of migrants’ rights, even if also other factors intersect and condition the status of foreign workers: notably, the length of residence. Third-country citizens with a long residence permit enjoy rights more close, but not identical, to EU citizens.
Southern European countries have followed a distinctive trend in this general framework. At the beginning of the European integration (approximately, in the 1950s and 1960s), they were the most important providers of labour to their North-Western counterparts (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014). In the last decades of the twentieth century, they enjoyed a remarkable economic and social development and transformed themselves into dynamic importers of immigrant labour (Calavita 2005), attracting workers mainly from Central and Eastern Europe. The subsequent enlargement of the European Union’s borders facilitated the supply of these workers, from Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and other countries (Triandafyllidou and Gropas 2014).

The different age of immigration in North-Western and Southern Europe, and its insertion in different labour markets have produced dissimilar patterns of inclusion and occupational outcomes. In short, in North-Western Europe, immigrants suffer higher unemployment but experience a more diversified settlement in various types of employment. They do not enjoy the same opportunities of native citizens, but they are not concentrated only in the so-called three D jobs (dirty, dangerous and demanding) (Abella et al. 1995). In Southern Europe, employment levels are comparatively higher, but the quality of work is lower: a huge majority of immigrant workers is involved in blue collar and menial jobs (Ballarino and Panichella 2015; Fellini 2017; Fullin and Reyneri 2011, 2013). As Fullin (2016) has argued, focusing on the Italian case, race and religion have a weak impact in terms of discrimination against immigrant workers, but this depends on a general confinement of these workers in the lower ladder of the labour market. Citizenship of a EU country, however, matters little, at least in terms of employment and unemployment rates: in 2017, the employment rate for EU workers in Italy was 63.8%, compared with 59.1% for third country nationals and 57.7% for Italian citizens. In turn, the unemployment rate was 13.2% for EU citizens, 14.9% for third country nationals and 10.9% for Italian citizens (Ministero del lavoro e delle politiche sociali 2018).

The economic crisis, since 2008, has worsened the conditions of foreign workers. Studies have shown that the economic crisis has affected immigrants to a greater extent (Verick and Islam 2010), thus exacerbating a disadvantage already present in many countries (Fleischmann and Dronkers 2010) and further weakening the position of migrants in the labour markets.

Immigrants have experienced growing levels of unemployment: sectors such as construction and manufacturing where they had found jobs in the previous period have been deeply affected by the economic downturn (Papademetriou et al. 2010). In other cases, for instance for many women, employment has been preserved, but segregation in domestic and care work has increased as the search for other solutions has become harder (Ambrosini, 2015).
2. Immigrant workers and economic crisis in Europe

Summarizing a large body of literature, Tilly (2011) recalls the main historical trends in the relationship between the economic cycle and migration flows: emigration has a positive relation to unemployment in the sending country and a negative relation to unemployment in the receiving country. Moreover, when the economic situation worsens in both regions, it is the destination country’s condition that weighs more. The Great Recession of the 1930s is a well-known example. But Tilly adds that several studies have questioned this account, at least in regard to specific settings. As migration has become a complex and multifaceted social phenomenon, a more precise question could concern which migrants are more influenced by the economic situation. Irregular entries of workers appear to have decreased (Alden 2017), but refugees arrive mainly for political or war reasons (Papademetriou and Terrazas 2009), while also migrants entering for family reunifications after years of cumbersome procedures in principle appear now to have become less willing to take up their visas (Papademetriou et al. 2010).

The relationship between recession and immigration in Europe can be studied under the same light.

The economic crisis that started in 2008 has deeply affected employment, even if with different impacts (Herm and Poulain 2012): less heavy and less long-lasting in most countries of North-Western Europe and Central-Eastern Europe, and much more so in Southern Europe. In most countries, the employment gap between immigrants and the native born has widened, but huge differences between countries can be detected (Papademetriou et al. 2010). Among other consequences, the economic hardship has attracted a new interest in internal migrations within the European Union (Lafleur and Stanek 2017), and in policies against new immigration from third countries, along with measures to encourage the return of immigrants to their homeland (Kuptsch 2012).

The frame of economic crisis has interacted with competing views on both internal and external immigration in the EU. A widespread narrative has contrasted for several years «mobility» of young and educated European citizens (Recchi and Favell 2009), against «immigration» of poor workers and dependent people from outside (Faist 2013): the former considered as beneficial and in principle welcome, the latter labelled by many as «unwanted» and in various ways disputed. A nostalgic glance at the past has even depicted the old immigration from Southern Europe as a «success» in integration.

The crisis has fostered new flows of intra-EU immigrant workers, especially from Southern Europe, but at the same time it has justified a less sympathetic view of internal migrations in the EU. The UK and Belgian governments have reduced
the possibility for European Union citizens to claim social benefits, removed resident permits for unemployed EU immigrants, and repeatedly labelled them as abusers of social protection (Lafleur and Stanek 2017). The criticism against «welfare shopping» has reawakened in several countries, and in the political arena Brexit has been explained by many observers (also) as a political closure towards new arrivals of poor people from continental Europe. Doubts have been cast also on the social integration of EU internal migrants, for instance in Scotland or Ireland, where they represent the majority of foreign residents: «The question of integration also takes on a new sense of urgency in the current economic climate, as economic recession coupled with political instability may make it more difficult for newcomers to become part of a society, particularly if that society is becoming more exclusionary, protectionist or xenophobic» (Gilmartin and Migge 2015, 286). Scholars have criticized the fact that the social integration of EU internal migrants is often taken for granted, because of their EU citizenship and their entitlement to social rights: «Eastern European migrants are often assumed to be integrated from day one according to the rigid definitions of policy makers, who consider their integration as arising naturally from them being EU citizens and de jure holding equal employment and civic rights» (Shubin and Dickey 2013, 2961).

Another focus of the debate is the propensity to return to their origin country by unemployed immigrants, and the implementation of policies in this regard. Summarizing the first results of studies on this issue, Castles and Miller (2010) have pointed out that there is little evidence of return migration being a consequence of the economic crisis in developed countries. Immigrants in general fear that they will not be allowed to re-enter after having left, because of stricter immigration policies, and they often think that if the economic situation has deteriorated in receiving countries, it is even worse in their homeland. The dependence of their families and communities on their remittances is another reason for resilience (Ambrosini 2014), with other strategies being adopted to cope with the recession, such as looking for a second job, reducing consumption, or cutting savings. Paradoxically, the immigrants whose countries have registered an improvement of their economy are those more interested in returning, together with immigrants who enjoy a right to free mobility, such as the EU citizens. On the other side, the voluntary return schemes adopted by some governments, like Spain, have achieved little success. Overall, «it seems that the experience of previous recessions is being repeated: most migrants are not willing to return to poorer origin countries, due to the low incomes and the lack of work prospects there. They prefer to sit out the crisis in the destination country, even if this may mean considerable hardship. The only migrants likely to go may well be those that the destination country would prefer to retain: those with skills and prospects else-
where, and with a secure legal status that would allow them to come back again once job markets improve» (Castles and Miller 2010, 10).

Moreover, irregular migrants are particularly sensitive to the economic crisis, in the sense that they rapidly change their mind and do not come if the labour market becomes unfavourable (Castles 2009; Papademetriou et al. 2010). But if they have entered, they are the least mobile, even if their economic condition deteriorates: they fear not being allowed to cross the border again, when new opportunities become available (for a comparison with the USA on this point, see Massey et al. 2015).

As a consequence, in the broad discussion on the relations between economic crisis and migration, an important issue concerns the differences in response to the economic downturn between EU citizens and third country nationals. Herm and Poulain (2012) found for 2008 and 2009 that the former group, benefitting from the right to cross borders, settle and search for jobs in every EU country, appears more sensitive to the economic situation: more willing to return to the homeland, with a view to coming back when the labour market improves. The second group follows the same trend after a delay, more reluctantly and to a lesser extent, having often invested a substantial amount of money in migration projects, fearing that it will not be possible to re-enter, and coming from more fragile countries.

Reyneri (2009) goes in the same direction, emphasizing institutional factors: return is easier when the journey is less expensive, there is a right to move forth and back, and social benefits are transferable. All these conditions are associated with a EU citizenship, and less frequent among third country nationals.

On summarizing the findings of this literature, some questions arise: as we saw, European Union membership is a salient divide among immigrant populations. Does it affect their resilience in employment in times of crisis? In other words, are European Union immigrants better protected against unemployment in comparison with third country nationals? Or do their mobility rights make them more willing to return to their homeland in times of crisis, with the intention of moving again when the economic situation improves? And what about their income and working conditions? Is what Fleischmann and Dronkers (2010) found some years ago, at the beginning of the crisis, still true: «one of the main goals of the EU, the free movement of persons (labour) within its borders, is actually being achieved by current citizens of the EU, especially those working in neighbouring countries. However, it implies at the same time that immigrants coming from other regions will have more difficulty finding employment on European labour markets» (349)? The empirical analysis which follows seeks to cast some light on these questions.
3. Data, methods and hypothesis

This paper is the result of an original work within a larger research project on social inequalities in the labour market during and after the years of economic crisis in Europe. The data used are the cross-sectional EU-SILC data in the years 2008-2014. We have only considered respondents active in the labour market. Therefore, our analysis does not take account of migration flows directly connected to so-called «welfare shopping» (Lafleur and Stanek 2017), even if the different rules on access to unemployment benefits and also the amount of those benefits may influence the movements of intra-European workers.

We focus on six European countries: Austria, Spain, France, Italy, Sweden, United Kingdom. The selection of countries has taken account of both the quality of the available data (adequate overall number of cases and sufficient number of respondents born in other European countries or in third countries) and the intention to represent countries with different migration histories and welfare regimes. In fact, recent history shows that, while the Nordic countries are those which have more inclusive welfare systems able to curb social inequalities, immigrants find it increasingly difficult to access the same forms of social protection as guaranteed to the natives (Crouch 2015). Moreover, the outcome of the recent referendum on Brexit has highlighted how, at least in some European countries, the distinction between EU citizens and third-country nationals may be a subtle one (especially after the accession of the 8 post-communist central and Eastern European countries: see for example Bahna 2016). Thus, it appears important to understand when and where there are guarantees not only of the free movement of persons within the European Union, as required by the most important treaties that guided the path towards the progressive constitution of the Union itself (e.g. the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, the Schengen agreement since 1995, the Directive 38/2004), but also of equal treatment or equal opportunities for EU migrants.

Against these guarantees and opportunities, in 2003 the 15 «old» EU Member States signed a treaty that provided for the possibility of imposing restrictions on the free movement of new member states. Among the countries that we selected, Austria has maintained restrictions for the countries that joined EU from 2004 to 2011, while the situation is more complex for the two countries that entered EU in 2007, Bulgaria and Romania. Only Sweden has not introduced any temporary restrictions. Spain lifted restrictions in 2009, but temporarily reintroduced them for Romanians after the crisis, from 2011 to 2014. Italy lifted the restrictions in 2012, while France, Austria and the UK did so in 2014 (Ruhs 2015).

Despite these restrictions (which may account for specific country differences, to some extent), we firmly believe that it is worth investigating the effects that mem-
bership of the European Union exert on workers’ labour market conditions and job-related living conditions.

This paper examines two hypotheses:

**H1. (improvement hypothesis)** – The economic crisis has worsened the employment situations, the working conditions and the incomes of non-EU migrants, while the situations of EU-migrants has suffered less from the economic downturn, due to their higher chances of geographical mobility. In particular, their risk of unemployment should be lower and their occupational prestige and income should have remained stable or even improved over time. In fact, because the crisis has mostly hit low-qualified jobs, European workers that have remained in the hosting country should be those with better working conditions and incomes.

**H2. (country differences hypothesis)** – We believe that there are marked differences among countries: in some countries, EU migrants are more similar to natives, in others to non-EU citizens. These differences may be driven by the different migration models («old» or «new»), by different national legislation and welfare provisions, and by the different national composition of European migrants in different countries. This last issue will be further specified in the next paragraph.

EU SILC data distinguish between EU citizens and third country nationals, without specifying the exact nationality. However, the composition of EU migrants in the database has been the same since 2008 (with the exception of the inclusion of Macedonia since 2010, which has only marginally affected intra-EU migration flows). Therefore, it is possible to analyse the period 2008-2014 without incurring problems concerning the different meaning of «EU migrants».

Consequently, our independent variable is the country of birth, which distinguishes three groups: local or natives, born in EU countries, third country nationals.

The position of immigrants in the labour market has been analysed along the following dimensions, to each of which corresponds a specific dependent variable:

1. Employment situation, distinguishing between employed or unemployed. The first part of the analysis therefore focuses on the risk of unemployment, a basic but important indicator of workers’ situation in the labour market. We have used a logistic regression model, which included as control variables the following individual characteristics: gender, level of education, age. Introducing these controls into our analysis is particularly important because intra-EU migrants tend to be younger and higher educated compared to both natives and to third
national migrants (Verwiebe et al. 2014). These same control variables have been used also in the regression models concerning the other dimensions and dependent variables.

2. Working conditions, designed as the level of occupational prestige (last occupation for unemployed). The concept of occupational prestige (Treiman 1977) can be used in the analysis of the working conditions of foreign workers because we know that, generally, the intrinsic dimensions used to measure the quality of work of a specific occupation (ergonomics, complexity, autonomy, control) and the extrinsic ones (income, power, prestige) show a substantial congruence; and, usually, occupations that show a high level in one of the dimensions considered also have high levels in others (Chiesi 1997). This congruence, in negative terms, also emerges from the analysis provided by a large body of literature regarding the jobs carried out mainly by immigrants. Abella, Park and Bohning (1995) talk of «three D jobs»: dirty, dangerous and demanding (see also Ambrosini 2011; Castles 2002). This last aspect, which is closely linked to the others, suggests that measures of occupational prestige can be used in order to investigate possible differences between the working conditions of native workers and those of EU citizens and third country nationals. In this paper, we will use as occupational prestige measure the international social status scale ICAMS (Meraviglia et al. 2016). Because the scale is a continuous measure, OLS linear regression has been used to test the impact of country of birth on occupational prestige.

3. Personal income (including employees’ cash or near cash income, cash benefits or losses from self-employment and unemployment benefits). Personal income among countries has been equalized using purchase power parities measures provided by Eurostat. Personal income is a very important aspect connected to workers’ positioning in the labour market, but it is in fact often neglected. Like occupational prestige, also differences in income levels will be tested through OLS linear regression.

In order to allow a public without specific statistical competences to follow the discussion, for each of the chosen dimensions, results are presented using graphs showing the trend of predicted probabilities in the period 2008-2014.

2. This scale is built as a social distance scale using the occupational positions of couples. Despite being theoretically a continuous scale, its actual range considering ISCO88 occupational titles is between 85.29 at the top prestige level and 13.19 at the bottom (see http://www.harryganzeboom.nl/pdf/isko-icam.txt for the detailed scale).

4. EU immigrants, third country nationals and native workers in some European labour markets: how has the economic recession affected them?

Immigrants represent a growing share of the population – and of workers – in many European countries. Among the countries that we have considered, in 2014 the share of non-natives ranged from around 10% (Italy and Spain) to around 17% (Austria and Sweden). Compared to the situation in 2008, the highest growth in the share of foreigners in our data is visible in the UK (+53%), Italy (+40%) and Sweden (+23%), while Austria and Spain show substantial stability and France even a small decline.

If we focus on the share of EU migrants, we note that the countries with the highest share in 2014 are Austria, the UK and Sweden, with the UK experiencing the most significant growth in the period 2008-2014 (+68%). The main EU nationalities in the six countries considered are also quite different: while in Italy and Spain Romanians prevail; in the UK Poles outnumber any other national group; in Sweden other Scandinavians are closely followed by Poles; in Austria Germans more than double Romanians; and, finally, in France Portuguese are by far the main EU nationality, followed by Italians and Spanish. Taking these differences into account, we might expect that in Sweden, Austria and France EU migrants enjoy a better labour market situation than non-EU migrants, while in the UK, in Italy and in Spain – where the share of «new» Europeans is higher – the situation of EU and non-EU migrants should be quite similar. In the case of the UK, it might also be that the growing flow of European migrants arouses hostility by the local population, also compared to historical migration from ex-colonies (India, Pakistan, and so on), as shown by the recent events that ended up with Brexit. Moreover, in countries where the impact of the economic crisis has been hardest and longest (like Spain and Italy) the situation of EU migrants who have decided to remain in the host country may have worsened on one or more of the considered dimensions.

Considering the probability of being unemployed (fig. 1), a significant worsening of the situation of EU migrants is apparent only in Austria and Spain. In Austria, the situation of this group of migrant workers has over the years become more similar to that of non-EU migrants, while in Spain all workers have more or less equally suffered a higher probability of being unemployed. To a lesser extent, the same has happened in Italy. In Sweden, the situation is mostly stable, even if EU workers have slightly worsened their situation compared to native workers and in 2014 positioned themselves roughly half way between native and non-EU. Finally,
Figure 1 Probability of being unemployed by country of birth (predicted probabilities, EU SILC, 2008-14)
in the UK and in France the situation of EU migrants is similar to, if not better than, that of native workers. In the latter country, an evident improvement is visible especially since 2012.

In general, moreover, the risk of unemployment of non-EU migrants is higher than that of native workers in all the considered Continental, English-speaking and Nordic countries, as already found by previous studies (Ballarino and Panichella 2015; Fullin and Reyneri 2011, 2013). By contrast, the Southern-European model of immigrants’ insertion in the labour market has changed since the crisis, with Spain becoming more similar to «old» immigration countries (Fellini 2017), at least as regards the risk of unemployment, which is higher for non-EU migrants than for natives, while in Italy the two groups still experience a very similar risk level. The divergence in the Southern-European model is not confirmed by the analysis of the trend of occupational prestige (the higher the points on the scale, the higher the prestige: fig. 2), because in both the Mediterranean countries, which have experienced immigration mostly during the last two-three decades, migrant workers actually do «socially disadvantaged» jobs and the prestige gap (both for EU and non-EU immigrants) with natives is wide.

As regards the effect of the economic crisis, differences in prestige levels among the three groups show an overall stability in all the countries considered, except the UK, where the occupational prestige of EU migrants decreases over the years. In general, in most countries we note an improvement in occupational prestige levels after the crisis. This might be because the economic crisis has mostly hit low-qualified jobs (Bosch 2011; Fellini 2017; Verick and Islam 2010), sparing medium and high-qualified ones, which enjoy a higher prestige.

Occupational prestige and income should be closely correlated. In fact, indexes like ISEI (which is built by taking into account, besides occupation, income and education), and prestige scales (like SIOPS or ICAMS) have proved to be highly correlated in validation analysis (De Luca et al. 2012; Meraviglia et al. 2016). Therefore, we might expect that income situation is similar to that of occupational prestige. On the other hand, this may not always be the case, for example due to the role of unemployment benefits. In fact, different combinations of rules in countries of origin and of destination generate a sort of stratified pattern of social rights among EU citizens (Bruzelius et al. 2017).

However, the analysis of occupational prestige appears to be particularly interesting for the country differences hypothesis (H2). In fact, in the non-Mediterranean countries, prestige levels of the three groups are quite similar or – at least – more differentiated between EU and non-EU migrants. In Austria, while EU workers have an occupational prestige similar to natives, non-EU workers tend to perform less prestigious – or more socially disadvantaged – jobs. In Sweden EU workers
Figure 2  Level of occupational prestige by country of birth  
(predicted probabilities, EU SILC, 2008-14)
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Figure 3  Income levels by country of birth
(predicted probabilities, EU SILC, 2008-14)

Austria

France

Sweden

UK

Spain

Italy
occupy an intermediate position between natives and non-EU migrants, while in
the UK EU migrant workers are the group with the lowest occupational prestige
levels, especially after 2011. Finally, in France prestige levels of the three groups
tend to overlap the most.
In fact, when we look at income (fig. 3), we note that income levels of EU
migrants decrease in France, Spain and Italy. In the last two countries, there is a
general income decrease in all groups, with an almost complete overlapping of the
three groups in Italy. In France EU migrant workers, who enjoyed a better income
than the other two groups in 2008, worsen their situation and overlap with the
others in 2014. In Austria, EU and non-EU migrants have a lower income com-
pared to natives; in Sweden EU migrant workers occupy a somehow intermedi-
ate position; and in the UK they enjoy income levels similar to those of natives
and higher than those of non-EU workers. Thus, we notice that introducing in
our analysis the income dimension was not trivial, as in most countries we obtain
quite a different picture than the one observed concerning occupational prestige.
Moreover, even if in general the income trend, like that of occupational prestige,
does not show dramatic changes during the post-crisis period, when we look close-
ly at each country and at the comparison among the three groups of workers, we
detect a plurality of situations. Sweden is the only country, among those consid-
ered, where EU migrants maintain an intermediate position between natives and
third country nationals in both occupational prestige and income. Not particular-
ly different on the two dimensions is also the situation of Spain, even if the income
situation of both migrant groups, besides being similar between them, is also close
to that of natives. In Italy, instead, corresponding to an evident difference between
migrants and natives in occupational prestige is an evident overlap in income. In
the UK, rather surprisingly, the situation of EU migrants is quite the opposite in
prestige (where they score worse than the other two groups) and in income (where
they improve during time and earn on average the same – if not more – than
natives). In Austria, EU migrants are similar to natives as regards occupational
prestige and to non-EU migrants relating to income. Finally, in France the three
groups are quite close to each other on both dimensions, except that while the
occupational prestige of EU migrants improves over time, their income worsens.
This detailed picture, together with the results on unemployment risk, yields use-
ful insights into the labour market situation, working conditions and income lev-
els of migrants, distinguishing between European and third nationals, compared
to natives.
5. Discussion and conclusions

Much more than any other kind of cross-border flow, international migration poses critical challenges – but also provides opportunities – for the European Union. This has never been so evident as it was after the two enlargements towards East (in 2004 and 2007) and the subsequent economic crisis. Although the time lapse difference between the economic and the labour market recovery is considered a well-known phenomenon (Verick and Islam 2010), there is also awareness of the fragility of the recovery, the fact that the massive loss of jobs and the non-corresponding number of new ones may increase the incidence of long-term unemployment (Verick and Islam 2010). Moreover, especially in Southern Europe, the long duration of the crisis led to a significant rise in poverty and increasing inequalities already present in society and in the labour market.

In this general framework, the situation of migrants in the labour market represents a well-known inequality in European societies, albeit with distinctive differences between Southern and North-Western European countries due to their different roles as «new» and «old» receiving countries.

Even though the focus of this article is on EU migrants, the comparison among the three groups (EU, non-EU and natives) enables us to consider how the different immigrants’ receiving regions reacted to the crisis and how migrants’ position in the labour market, working conditions and income changed in the post-crisis period.

Firstly, H1 (concerning their working conditions, EU migrants suffered less from the economic crisis than third country nationals) is supported only in some national cases and only concerning some of the dimensions considered. Sweden is the only case where EU migrants have an intermediate position between natives and third country nationals in all the aspects considered: unemployment, occupational prestige and income. And we see also an improvement over time both in occupational prestige and income. Hence the situation of Sweden supports the idea of an easier mobility of EU migrants, who can move when their job conditions worsen, thus leaving in the destination country only those who are (on average) better off. The outcome for the other countries is more blurred. Focusing on the three other North-Western countries, we see that in Austria both groups of immigrants suffer a higher risk of unemployment, as to be expected, but also a lower income and, in the case of third country nationals, also a lower occupational prestige. However, EU migrants improve their prestige and income over time, thus again supporting H1 and the idea of the advantage given by their legal status. In France,

the situation of EU migrants is quite positive: they enjoy a lower (and decreasing over time) risk of unemployment, a lower prestige (but improving over time) and a higher income (but decreasing over time). In this country, the legal status of immigrants seems to discriminate mostly on the unemployment risk, while prestige and income differences among the three groups seem smaller and decreasing over time. Also in the UK, the main advantage of being a member of the European Union concerns the risk of unemployment, and to some extent income, while occupational prestige is quite low and even decreasing over time, making EU migrants the group with the lowest level of prestige at the end of the period. Turning to the two Southern European countries, on none of the dimensions does the situation of EU migrants improve over time; on the contrary, it mostly worsens. H1 is not at all valid for Spain and Italy. It may be that the huge presence of Romanians, who massively entered those countries before 2007 and before most European countries removed restrictions on their entrance, and who are aware of the still difficult economic situation of their country of origin, provides the bulk of stable EU migrants even in the post-crisis period. Moreover, it should be noted that in Spain and, even more so, in Italy the situation of both groups of migrants overlaps with or is very close to that of natives, both for risk of unemployment and income. Therefore, even if it is true that immigrant workers are segregated within «3D» jobs, their chances of keeping their jobs and their incomes are not worse than those of the local population.

This overlap between the two groups of migrants in the Mediterranean countries is consistent with what we expected in our specification of H2 (different situations of EU migrants in different countries), while in the UK it would be useful to take European membership into account. This is also true – considering the different dimension we took into account – for all the other countries that we have considered in our article. Therefore, while many studies focus on ethnic penalties or on the situation of A8 or A10 migrants it would also be important to focus on European migrants as a group, because they now all enjoy a special legal status compared to third country nationals. It is also true that the length of residence differentiates the legal status and the corresponding rights of third-country nationals, but in our study we have focused the analysis on the divide between EU and non-EU citizens.

The findings of this article open the way to further research. Firstly, the differences among countries in the situation of EU migrants should find a possible explanation by considering the distinctive structure of migration flows and the specific labour


markets, but also access to social rights and other important issues. Second, other dimensions – like the share of temporary contracts or the access to welfare provisions, or the length of residence – might provide an even more detailed picture. However, what we hope to have shown is that migrants not only are not a unique and homogeneous group but there are other features that may be important apart from their immigrant status. In conclusion, we can say that immigrants are politically and socially stratified. EU membership matters, but its impact varies according to the specific conditions of receiving countries and the composition of flows.

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