


SUMMARY OF ARTICLE: [HTTPS://DX.DOI.ORG/10.12795/REA.2025.I49.10](https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/rea.2025.i49.10)

Skilled migrants in Andalusia: occupational segregation and overqualification (2005-2023)

Bárbara Montero-González

barmg@ugr.es  0000-0002-1421-9279


Departamento de Economía Internacional y de España. Universidad de Granada. 18071 Granada, España.

José A. Camacho-Ballesta

jcamacho@ugr.es  0000-0002-9786-5400

Departamento de Economía Internacional y de España. Universidad de Granada. 18071 Granada, España

Francisco D. Bretones

fdiazb@ugr.es  0000-0002-4981-1790

Facultad de Relaciones Laborales y Recursos Humanos. Universidad de Granada. 18071 Granada, España.

KEYWORDS

High skilled migrants
Andalusia
Occupational segregation

INTRODUCTION

High-skilled migration, defined as the movement of individuals with advanced educational qualifications across national borders, has emerged as a significant aspect of global labour markets. This phenomenon, though historically linked to intellectual elite movements during periods of conflict, has gained new dimensions with globalisation and enhanced access to education. Our study explores the integration of highly skilled migrants into the labour market in Andalusia (Spain) providing a comprehensive analysis of their employment outcomes, the barriers they face, and the socio-economic factors that influence their trajectories.

Our study delves into the occupational segregation and overqualification of highly skilled migrants in Andalusia, Spain, over the period 2005–2023, drawing comparisons with their native counterparts and less-educated migrants. Against the backdrop of increasing global migration flows, Andalusia stands out as a key region in Spain, hosting a growing number of migrants with tertiary education. Despite their qualifications, many highly skilled migrants face significant challenges in integrating into the labour market, often experiencing employment mismatches and occupational segregation.

The research highlights the growing relevance of high-skilled migration as a global trend driven by factors such as educational improvements in developing regions and the search for better professional opportunities. While highly skilled migrants are often motivated by aspirations for improved employment conditions and socio-economic mobility, they encounter significant challenges in host countries. These challenges include occupational segregation, skill mismatches, and subtle forms of workplace discrimination. Our study underscores the paradox faced by this group: despite their high qualifications and potential contributions, they frequently struggle to secure roles that align with their skills and expertise.



METHODOLOGY

By analysing data from the Spanish Labour Force Survey (EPA) over nearly two decades, the research uncovers a persistent trend: while educational attainment substantially enhances the labour market position of skilled migrants, structural barriers and systemic inequities prevent them from fully leveraging their qualifications. Approximately 30% of skilled migrants in Andalusia are overqualified, working in roles that do not correspond to their level of education. This phenomenon underscores the region's inability to fully utilize the potential of these workers, resulting in both individual and societal losses.

RESULTS

Occupational segregation remains a critical issue. Highly skilled migrants are more concentrated in specific roles compared to their native peers with equivalent qualifications. Although more than half of these migrants work in medium- or high-skilled jobs, a significant portion remains trapped in low-skilled occupations. This segregation is especially pronounced for migrants from Spanish-speaking countries, who, paradoxically, face greater barriers to high-skilled employment compared to those from non-Spanish-speaking nations. Economic disparities between countries of origin and destination, alongside implicit biases, contribute to this trend.

The role of language proficiency emerges as a pivotal factor in shaping migrants' labour market outcomes. While linguistic similarities might intuitively seem advantageous, the findings reveal that migrants from Spanish-speaking countries often face structural hurdles that limit their upward mobility. In contrast, non-Spanish-speaking migrants are more likely to secure high-skilled roles, reflecting a complex interplay of economic, social, and professional factors that favour some groups over others.

Economic cycles further exacerbate these disparities. The financial crisis of 2008 and the COVID-19 pandemic had a disproportionately negative impact on skilled migrants, reducing their access to high-skilled jobs. Even during periods of economic recovery, their employment prospects lagged behind those of natives. Temporary contracts and part-time work, often more prevalent among migrants, also diminished their chances of obtaining roles commensurate with their qualifications. These precarious working conditions not only hinder career progression but also perpetuate systemic inequalities in the labour market.

Education, however, plays a critical role in mitigating these challenges. The study demonstrates that higher levels of educational attainment significantly reduce the likelihood of overqualification and improve labour market outcomes for migrants. Among migrants with tertiary education, those with advanced degrees are less likely to experience occupational segregation and more likely to transition into high-skilled roles. Nevertheless, the advantages of education are not uniformly distributed, as factors such as language proficiency, origin, and contract stability continue to influence outcomes.

A comparison with native workers highlights the entrenched disparities faced by skilled migrants. Natives with similar qualifications consistently enjoy better access to high-skilled jobs and are less likely to face overqualification or occupational segregation. The findings reveal a 15% lower probability for skilled migrants to access roles aligned with their qualifications compared to natives. This disparity reflects deeper structural issues within the labour market, including subtle forms of discrimination, biases in credential recognition, and limited professional networks for migrants.

CONCLUSION

The research underscores the urgent need for targeted policy interventions to address these inequities. Recognizing foreign qualifications and streamlining pathways for professional integration are critical steps in reducing overqualification and occupational segregation among skilled migrants. Programs that provide tailored support, such as language training, mentorship, and career counselling, can help bridge the gap



between migrants' potential and their labour market outcomes. Moreover, fostering diversity in occupational opportunities and promoting fair employment practices can mitigate the barriers faced by this group.

From a broader perspective, the study highlights the social and economic implications of these findings. Skilled migrants represent a valuable resource for Andalusia's economy, particularly in sectors requiring specialized knowledge and expertise. However, failing to fully integrate these workers into the labour market not only limits their individual potential but also hampers regional economic growth and innovation. Addressing these issues requires coordinated efforts from policymakers, employers, and civil society to create a more inclusive and equitable labour market.

Despite its strengths, the study acknowledges certain limitations, particularly the absence of qualitative insights. While the quantitative approach provides robust evidence of labour market trends, incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews and case studies, could offer a more nuanced understanding of the barriers faced by skilled migrants. Additionally, the lack of significant results from a Heckman selection model suggests that sample representativeness may not heavily influence the findings, but further exploration of subgroup disparities could enhance the analysis.