



Women, older people, migrants and persons with disabilities are key to tackling EU skills and labour shortages

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Better integrating underrepresented groups — such as women, older people, migrants and persons with disabilities — into the job market can help to mitigate skills and labour shortages and offset the demographic changes that risk shrinking the EU's workforce by up to 18 million by 2050.

The [Commission's 2025 Employment and Social Developments in Europe \(ESDE\)](#) report highlights that one-fifth of the working-age population, around 51 million people, are currently outside the EU labour market, with women, people aged 55–64, migrants, and persons with disabilities making up the vast majority. Facilitating access to the labour market would also contribute to reaching the EU's 78% employment rate target for 2030. At the same time, it would improve social cohesion and support the EU's 2030 poverty-reduction target.

Key findings from the 2025 ESDE report

In 2024, the EU created 1.8 million more jobs compared to the previous year, bringing the employment rate up to 75.8%, while the unemployment rate fell to a new historic low of 5.9%.

Women: breaking barriers to boost equality and growth

- Women's labour participation in the EU remains 10 percentage points below men's, with 32 million women outside the workforce, primarily due to unpaid care responsibilities, limited availability of childcare, and disincentives in tax-benefit systems. Around 75% of mothers of young children outside the labour force point to care duties as the main reason, compared to just 13% of fathers.
- The report shows that expanding childcare could raise women's employment rate in some Member States by up to 30% and boost EU GDP by up to 1.7%.

People aged 55 and over: enabling longer and healthier working lives

- Despite progress, nearly 20 million people aged 55–64 are not part of the EU's labour market, often due to retirement rules, health issues, or insufficient flexibility at work.
- The report points out that pension reforms, phased retirement, expanded long-term care, training and career guidance can help keep more older workers active.

Migrants: recognising skills to drive integration

- Over seven million migrants in the EU are currently out of the workforce for multiple reasons, including language difficulties, non-recognition of qualifications, discrimination, and administrative hurdles. Migrants face the highest risk of poverty of any workforce demographic (38%). Yet, they bring essential skills that can help address labour shortages in sectors with acute needs.
- The report shows that well-designed tax incentives, along with job search support, language training and simpler work permits, especially when combined, can increase migrants' participation in the labour force.

Persons with disabilities: overcoming stereotypes and accessibility challenges

- Of the 44 million working-age persons with disabilities, 56,4% worked in 2024 -from 55,6 in 2022- compared to 84% of people without disabilities. The report finds that quota schemes, anti-discrimination measures and targeted job placement are effective tools for their integration.
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[EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030](#) is promoting inclusive work environments, while the [Union of Skills](#) can support inclusive skills pathways to help tap the potential of persons with disabilities.

Background

The [Employment and Social Developments in Europe](#) is the Commission's flagship annual report on employment and social affairs. To make the labour market more inclusive and tackle labour shortages, the Commission is pursuing a wide range of initiatives. These include the [2023 Council Recommendation on adequate minimum income](#), the 2024 EU Action Plan on labour and skills shortages, the [2023 Communication on Harnessing Talent in Europe's Regions](#) and the upcoming initiative to ensure fair, transparent, and effective labour mobility. The [upcoming Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights](#) and the Quality Jobs Roadmap will strengthen these efforts and contribute to EU competitiveness.

For More Information

[Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2025 \(ESDE\)](#)

[Employment and Social Analysis](#)

[Previous ESDE reports](#)

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Quote(s):

"The 2025 ESDE report shows that the EU's labour market remains remarkably strong, with employment rising, largely thanks to more women, older people and migrants entering work. This is encouraging, but we need to do more to ensure everyone can contribute their skills and talents. By removing obstacles, challenging stereotypes, and advancing gender equality, we can tackle labour shortages, boost our competitiveness and build a fairer, more inclusive society."

Roxana Mînzatu, Executive Vice-President for Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness - 16/09/2025

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