Trade unions and migrant workers in Western Europe

Anastasia Gorodzeisky

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel

Andrew Richards

Juan March Institute, Madrid, Spain

Abstract

The paper examines the gap between the unionization rate of local and migrant workers in 14 Western European countries and delineates the role of labor market segregation and organizational security of trade unions in accounting for this gap. The analysis reveals that the unionization rate of migrant workers in Europe is lower than that of locals and this can be attributed only in part to the impact of labor market segregation. Moreover, the gap between the unionization rate of local and migrant workers varies substantially across countries. We find that this gap is larger in those countries in which unions enjoy organizational security either in the form of state financing or a single dominant confederation.

Keywords

trade unions, migrant workers, unionization, organizational security, Europe

Introduction

Migrant workers have always presented union movements with a series of challenges and dilemmas. Above all, unions have been wary of their potential threat as a source of cheap labour, able to undercut existing pay levels and working conditions (Bonacich, 1972). The massive waves of immigration into the countries of Western Europe over the last twenty-five years have served to accentuate these longstanding dilemmas. With migrants now forming ever-increasing proportions of national workforces, 'trade unions have a direct stake in the foreign labour issue' (Avci and McDonald, 2000: 197). This has led to growing scholarly focus on the whole question of how unions relate to immigration policy in general and migrant workers in particular. Yet, as McGovern (2007) points out, systematic cross-national research on unions and migrant workers is relatively rare. While many valuable studies have recently emerged of unions' changing stances on immigration policy, and of the problems unions face in engaging with migrant workers, these have tended to be either single case studies or small-n comparisons (see, for example, Hassel, 2007; Haus, 2002; Holgate, 2005; Kahmann, 2006; Marino and Roosblad, 2008; Penninx and Roosblad, 2000; Richards, 2008, 2011; Watts, 2002).

In this study, we seek to explain, by means of a systematic cross-national comparison of fourteen West European countries, why migrant workers are consistently less unionized than native workers. For the purposes of our research, we define migrants as non-citizens. This definition is based on the idea that the distinction between citizens and non-citizens is best able to capture the incorporation (or not) of migrant workers into host societies on the basis of equal rights. At the same time, we acknowledge that it is an imperfect definition, given that citizenship rules do vary across countries.[1]

It is also important to note that we focus on the relations between unions and migrants who have already entered the host country. Following Bonacich's (1972) theory of ethnic antagonism, two forms of union strategies towards migrants may be distinguished. The first pertains to their support for either exclusionary or inclusionary immigration policies and, by extension, for potential migrants. The second pertains to their stance regarding migrant workers who have already entered the host country, namely, attempting to either incorporate them into, or exclude them from, their own ranks. This study focuses exclusively on the latter.

Research on trade unions in Western European countries has long suggested that the degree of unionization of migrant workers is lower than local workers. However, throughout the last two decades no systematic cross national examination of the current rate of migrant workers´ unionization has been undertaken, despite the fact that less systematic evidence suggests that this varies across countries. This neglect is surprising since the question of migrant workers' unionization has become even more important, yet at the same time even more complicated, in the light of overall declining unionization rates in Western economies in recent

decades. The present study thus aims to bridge this gap in the literature. First, we examine the rate of migrants' unionization compared to that of local workers in 14 Western European countries, using data from four rounds of the European Social Survey (ESS). Second, we assess the extent to which the relatively low rate of foreign workers' unionization can be attributed to labor market segregation between foreigners and locals, as previous research has suggested. Third, we explore the degree to which the institutional position of trade unions in a given society is a possible determinant of the differences in the rate of migrants' unionization relative to that of local workers, across countries. By doing so, we aim to contribute not only to debates on the contemporary trajectory of trade unionism but also to the literature on migrants' incorporation into host societies. Since union membership is, potentially, a critical means for migrant workers to exercise an important range of social rights, such as protection of working conditions, safety, and income, we argue that it should be viewed as one of the most important indicators of migrant workers' incorporation into host societies.

Theoretical considerations and previous research

Theoretically, unions should have every incentive to organize migrant workers and affiliate them into their ranks. The decline of organized labour in the advanced capitalist democracies during the last twenty-five years now forms the focus for a huge body of literature. In general, unionization rates and the absolute number of union members have tended to fall everywhere. At the same time, migrant workers represent an increasing proportion of national workforces across the advanced economies. Indeed, in most countries, immigration has contributed significantly to the expansion of the working population and to increasing rates of labour market participation. Yet migrant workers tend invariably to occupy the most precarious, unstable, and marginalized sectors of the labour market (Holgate, 2005; King, 2002; Richards, 2011; Stalker, 1994; TUC, 2003; Wrench, Rea and Ouali, 1999).[2] Moreover, many tend to lack the same employment rights as native workers. According to the Migrants' Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) (Niessen et al, 2007), in all the countries we consider here, with the exception of Sweden, third country nationals are not eligible for equal access to employment in any sector as European Union (EU) nationals. In several countries – for example, Germany and the Netherlands – migrants face limitations on their right to change jobs. Overall, therefore, they are, ostensibly, in greatest need of union representation and protection at the same time as forming a potentially critical and expanding constituency for union movements eager for new recruits after a long period of membership decline.[3] We should *expect,* therefore, unionization rates amongst migrant workers to be at least at the same levels as those for native workers.

In fact, unionization rates for migrant workers across the advanced economies lag consistently behind those for local workers, though the *extent* to which they do so varies considerably cross-nationally. These two phenomena merit explanation.

Trends in overall unionization rates

There is a general downward trend in unionization rates for the fourteen countries analyzed in the current research, though with some cross-national variation. According to Visser's database on the *Institutional Characteristics of Trade Unions, Wage Setting, State Intervention and Social Pacts in 34 countries between 1960 and 2007* (ICTWSS, Version 3 - May 2011)*,* unionization rates declined from 1980 to 2008 in all countries. For the most recent period, 2000-2008, in thirteen countries the rate of unionization fell, and in only one (Belgium) did it slightly increase.

In accounting for this general downward pressure on union density and membership levels, much research has emphasized the adverse effects of ongoing structural changes in the economies of the advanced capitalist democracies. Such changes have undermined the traditional foundations of union strength while promoting the expansion of sectors of the economy where the presence of unions has traditionally been either weak or non-existent. Thus the historic constituency of trade unionism, composed of skilled and semi-skilled workers employed on a permanent or relatively secure basis in traditional heavy industries and manufacturing sectors, is a shrinking one. In contrast, the traditionally less-unionized service sector has expanded significantly, as has, in many (though not all) cases the largely unregulated informal economy (Richards, 2001; Visser, 2002). Such structural economic changes have been accompanied by changes in the very profile of employment. In particular, temporary and part-time forms of employment – which have expanded considerably – are correlated strongly with lower unionization rates, while unskilled, precariously or under-employed workers in the informal economy are difficult to organize and consequently remain largely beyond the ambit of trade unionism (Charlwood, 2002; Francesconi and García-Serrano, 2004; Heery, 1998; Sverke and Goslinga, 2003; Waddington and Whitson, 1997).

Nonetheless, the rate and extent of union decline has varied across the advanced capitalist democracies. While global economic pressures and structural economic change may have been broadly similar cross-nationally, their effects on national union movements have been mediated by the institutional and political contexts in which they are located. Such contexts affect the unions' ability and willingness to organize new members; some unions may have stronger incentives than others to recruit the non-unionized as a means of halting their own decline.

The factors making for either a positive or negative institutional and political context are, of course, multiple. At the country level, involvement in the Ghent system, whereby unions are involved in the administration of important social benefits, has been shown to be a powerful explanation for consistently higher rates of unionization (Western, 1997). Additionally, some union movements enjoy certain institutional supports, such as works councils or union elections, which help them retain influence and membership in the workplace, while others do not. In some countries, the legal obstacles to establishing and joining a union have been traditionally severe or have become increasingly so, in comparison to other countries, thereby increasing the costs for unions of attempting to expand membership through campaigns to organize the non-unionized. Some union movements have also had to endure politically hostile governments and anti-union legislation (above all, Britain in the 1980s), thereby reducing their mobilizational capacity and, consequently, their ability to retain existing members and gain new ones. A given institutional and political context therefore either ameliorates or exacerbates the adverse effects of structural economic change.

Nonetheless, while such factors may help explain cross-national variation in unionization rates and trends in general, it tells us little about why unionization rates for *migrant* workers should consistently lag behind those for local workers. Although reliable data on national (let alone cross-national) unionization rates for migrants are scarce, there is a strong consensus that across the advanced capitalist economies unionization rates for migrant workers are disproportionately low compared to their overall presence in the workforce. In the following sections, we discuss two sets of explanations for the relatively low rate of unionization amongst migrant workers and its variation across countries.

The labour market position of migrant workers

There is a general consensus that a heavy degree of segregation exists in European labor markets between local and migrant workers. The latter are disproportionately concentrated in the least favourable sectors of the labour market, either in the unregulated informal economy itself, or in those occupations characterized by longer working hours, lower pay, less employment stability, higher accident rates, and fewer (if any) opportunities for acquiring skills and gaining promotion (Castles and Kosach, 1985; Holgate, 2005; Kogan, 2006; Stalker, 1994). These are precisely the labour market sectors where unions are least likely to be present. Thus while numerous studies have demonstrated the positive impact of a union presence on the recruitment of new union members, migrants, in comparison to other workers, are much more likely to be working in those sectors where such a union presence is either weak or non-existent (Badigannavar and Kelly, 2005; Charlwood, 2002, 2004; D'Art and Turner, 2002; Richards,

2011; Stirling, 2005; Waddington and Whitson, 1997). Yet ironically, migrants would presumably gain the most from union protection and representation. What Waddington and Whitson (1997: 518) concluded about precariously situated workers in general may be applied in particular to migrants:

> …a key explanation of non-membership appears to be the inability of unions to make contact with, or provide sufficient support to, potential members, rather than a principled opposition to unionism. Workers in expanding areas of employment are not individually more predisposed to non-unionism, but they are less likely to have a union available.

The institutional position of unions

While unionization rates for migrants lag consistently behind those for native workers, there is nonetheless considerable cross-national variation in the extent to which they do so. This could be due partly to cross-national variation in the distribution of industrial sectors. (For example, the construction industry everywhere is notable for its extensive use of migrant labour, yet the industry itself is much more prominent in Spain than elsewhere). Yet we contend that the institutional position of unions also shapes both their willingness and ability to gain a greater presence amongst migrant workers, thereby affecting the latter's unionization rate.

In our study, we attempt to discern the possible effect of what we term "organizational security" as one of the aspects of the institutional position of trade unions. Organizational security may, of course, be attained in several ways. Visser's excellent database incorporates a series of factors, such as the right to strike, the structure and scope of wage bargaining, or the degree of involvement in government decisions on social and economic policy, all of which shape the degree of security enjoyed (or not) by a given union movement. Here, we present two alternative factors which we claim provide it and which, for the purposes of our core argument, affect the incentives that union movements will or will not have to affiliate migrant workers into their ranks. First, we contend that the *state financing* of unions, either directly or indirectly, may constitute a crucial source of organizational security for the union movement, as is the case in Greece and Spain. In these countries, membership per se may not be the most important basis of union security, and therefore not the principal concern of union movements. Thus we would expect that state financing, by guaranteeing organizational survival, would diminish the unions' interest in recruiting nonunionized migrant workers, especially given that the latter represent the

least accessible and hence the most costly potential constituency. Second, we argue that the *organizational configuration* of unions is also an important component of their security. A single dominant union confederation (the cases, for example, of Austria, Ireland and Britain), holding a monopoly position, enjoys greater organizational security and therefore may have fewer incentives to organize migrant workers. In contrast, in a situation where there is no single dominant organization, multiple competing union confederations may be more willing to recruit migrant workers as a means of gaining organizational strength at their rivals' expense. To reiterate, our objective is not to provide a comprehensive explanation for the gap between local workers' unionization rates and those of migrants, but merely the role played by organizational security.

As a systematic large-scale comparison, we focus on the union confederation, rather than individual affiliated unions, in order to facilitate and simplify the analysis. In doing so, we acknowledge that we lose information regarding individual unions' propensity to organize migrant workers, especially given the fact that there is considerable cross-national variation in the degree of authority that union confederations exert over their affiliates (ranging, for example, from very high in the case of Austria to low or non-existent in the case of Britain[4]). Certainly, future research undertaken at the level of individual affiliate unions would be extremely valuable. Nonetheless, two important qualifications are needed here. First, we make no assumption regarding any possible correlation between the number of confederations and the degree of confederal authority over affiliated unions. In fact, empirically it is totally random. Thus Austria and Britain are cases of single dominant confederations, yet with sharply contrasting degrees of authority over their affiliates. Switzerland, meanwhile, is a case of multiple competing union confederations with low authority over their affiliates, yet unions have less organizational security than in the British case of a single dominant confederation with no authority over its affiliates. Second, if we draw again on the ICTWSS database and compare and contrast the values of the "external demarcation between union confederations" (*DEME*) with those of the "internal demarcations within union confederations" (*DEMI*) for each of the fourteen countries under consideration, there is no significant difference between the degree of competition at the confederal and individual union levels. In fact, in general, the DEME value is somewhat *higher* than the DEMI value.[5]

Finally, in analytical terms, there is an important distinction to be made between the organizational security of a union movement, and its strength (or weakness) measured in terms of its influence in the workplace and in the legislative and political arenas (and captured in the ICTWSS database with respect to, for example, the status of works councils or social pacts, or the degree of union involvement in government decisions on economic and social policy). In general, across Western Europe, unions have lost such influence over the last twenty-five years, or at least seen it severely weakened. Krings (2009), for example, links the declining power and

influence of the British TUC to its recent and growing support for more inclusionary policies of immigration and its commitment to actively organizing migrant workers, given the latter's huge potential as a growing constituency for union membership. His account is plausible, but begs the question of why the British union movement took so long to renew its commitment to recruiting new members, given the long-term nature of its own decline (trade union density peaked in Britain as long ago as 1978). We argue that while the British TUC is indeed weak in industrial and political terms, it is nonetheless more organizationally secure than confederations elsewhere that have to compete with rivals for membership and workers' loyalties.[6] This has diminished its incentives to actually organize migrant workers or, at a minimum, explains its extreme tardiness in developing and adopting measures to do so as a means of responding to long-term membership decline.

In short, our basic argument is that a union confederation enjoying organizational security will have fewer incentives to organize a costly constituency such as migrant workers. In contrast, unions which are organizationally less secure will have greater incentives to attempt to recruit migrant workers as a means of compensating for membership loss. In the following analysis, we examine systematically: 1) the unionization rate of migrant workers compared to that of local workers across fourteen European countries; 2) the extent to which the gap between the unionization rate of locals and migrants can be explained by socio-demographic characteristics and labour market segregation; and 3) to what extent the organizational security of trade unions explains the *variation* across countries in the gap between local and migrant workers' unionization rates.

Analysis and Findings

Data and Variables

The data for the present analysis were obtained from the four rounds (2002, 2004, 2006 and 2008) of the ESS. In each country that participated in the survey, information was gathered from a random probability national sample of the eligible resident populations aged 15 and over. The analysis reported here was restricted to the currently employed working population of fourteen Western European countries which participated in *at least* three rounds of the ESS (with the majority of them in all four rounds).[7] The fourteen countries include twelve members of the EU and two non-members (Norway and Switzerland).[8] Again, we define migrant workers as non citizens. In order to increase the number of cases, especially the number of non citizens, to reach more reliable statistical estimates we pool all four rounds into one sample, controlling for year of survey in the analysis. ESS data provide us with information with which to construct a series

of key individual-level variables of the study. They are: migrant worker (non citizen=1), being a union member (union member=1), type of work contract (unlimited contract=1), part-time/full time job (less than 30 weekly work hours=1), plus a series of dummy variables representing classification of the economic activities of respondents. The series of dummy variables were constructed by merging two-digit items of NACE 1.1 (Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community) into 6 categories: manufacturing and agriculture (hereafter MA); retail, hotels, restaurants and domestic services (RHRD); transport and utilities (TU); financial and business services (FB); public administration, education, health (PAEH) and construction (C). In addition, we use several socio-demographic control variables: age (in years), gender (male=1), education (in terms of formal years of schooling), rural versus urban residence (rural=1) and living in a country for only one year.

We also incorporate in our analysis two country level dummy variables: the presence/absence of one of the two factors (either state financing of trade unions or a single dominant union confederation)[9] that provides organizational security to trade unions (organizational security =1) and a country belonging/not belonging to the Ghent system (Ghent system=1). The Ghent system is introduced into the models mostly as a control variable. As mentioned above, when studying possible explanations for unionization rates, one must consider the impact of a country belonging to the Ghent system, since this may increase substantially the incentives to join a union.

Descriptive Overview

In Table 1, we present the rates of unionization among locals and migrants (in other words, among citizens and non citizens), migrants' unionization rates as a proportion of those of locals, plus two country-level characteristics: belonging or not to the Ghent system and the presence or absence of factors that provide organizational security to trade unions.

The data reveal that the average unionization rate of locals in Europe (29.5%) is considerably higher than that of migrants (16.1%). Although the rate of unionization of both locals and migrants varies considerably across European countries[10], the unionization rate of migrants is strongly correlated with that of locals. The higher the unionization rate of local workers in a country, the higher is that of migrant workers, as presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The data also show that the unionization rate of migrants is lower than that of locals in each of the 14 European countries presented in the study. At the same time there is meaningful

variation in the differences between the unionization rate of citizens and non citizens across countries. In the highly unionized Scandinavian countries, the unionization rate of migrant workers almost reaches that of the local population, comprising about 79 per cent in Denmark, 72 per cent in Finland and 70 per cent in Sweden. In contrast, in the poorly unionized South European countries, namely Spain and Portugal, the unionization rate of migrants, at 6 per cent, is more than twice lower than that of local workers. In addition, a very low relative unionization rate of migrants (in comparison to citizens) is found in Austria, where one third of the local population but only 13 per cent of the migrant population are union members.

In Ireland and the Netherlands, where the unionization rate of local workers stands at 41 and 29 per cent respectively, the unionization rate of migrants is 18 and 13 per cent. The unionization rates of migrant workers in Norway (39 per cent), Switzerland (13 per cent) and Belgium (33 per cent) are about two thirds the unionization rates of local workers in these countries. While the absolute unionization rate of migrant workers in Germany is quite low (18 per cent), the rate in relative terms is very close to those of local workers (20 per cent).

As we mentioned in our theoretical discussion, differences between migrant and local workers within the industrially divided labor market (in other words, labor market sector segregation) are often viewed as a key explanation for the differences in their unionization rates. Table 2 displays the distributions of two sub-population groups, local workers and migrants, across six industries and the overall rate of unionization in these industrial sectors.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

The data reveal that migrant workers tend to be less concentrated in comparison to locals in the public, education and health sectors (PEAH) and in the transport and utilities industries (TU). In contrast, they are overrepresented in retail, hotel, restaurants, and domestic services (RHRD) and in the construction industry (C). There are no considerable differences between the proportions of locals and migrants working in manufacturing and agriculture (MA), and even fewer differences between the two groups in financial and business services (FB). The data also reveal considerable variation in the rates of unionization across different industries. Specifically, the TU and PEAH sectors have the highest rates of unionization (39.9 and 38.8 per cent respectively) while C, FB, and RHRD sectors have the lowest rates of unionization (21.1, 20 and 14.2 per cent respectively). Thus migrant workers are heavily concentrated in poorly unionized sectors (namely, retail, restaurants, hotel and domestic services; and the construction sector), while locals are overrepresented in more unionized sectors (namely, public sector, education and health sectors; and the transport and utilities industries)[11]. These findings are in line with previous research suggesting that migrant workers are often overrepresented in poorly unionized industrial sectors (Vranken 1990).

As for the country level variables, the data reveal that unions in five of the fourteen countries included in the study enjoy organizational security (see Table 1). In Spain and Greece, unions enjoy state financing, and in Austria, Ireland and Britain a single union confederation predominates. The descriptive findings also reveal that all these five cases display *below average* relative rates of unionization for migrant workers. (Although the relative rates of migrants' unionization in Portugal and Netherlands - where union movements do not enjoy organizational security - are also below average).

Multivariate analysis

Although the data provided in the descriptive overview are interesting and meaningful, they do not provide accurate estimates as to what extent migrant status affects the relative possibility of the individual becoming a union member and to what extent this effect can be attributed to the differences in the distributions of migrant and local workers across industrial sectors. Since the sub-groups (migrants and locals) are characterized by different socio-demographic characteristics and by a different distribution across labor market sectors, it is not clear from the descriptive data whether the unionization rate of migrants fits the unionization rate to be expected on the basis of their characteristics. Thus in the analyses that follow we estimate, first, the effects of migrant status on the odds of being a union member (versus not being a union member) net of the individual level attributes. We then examine the effect that country-level characteristics, namely the Ghent system and the organizational security of unions, exert on the slope of migrant status.

Since in our sample individuals are nested in 14 countries and since we assume that the effect of migrant status on the relative odds of being a union member may vary across countries and can be explained by country-level attributes, we use hierarchical models using HLM software. This is a statistical procedure that allows the estimation of country-level effects while variations in individual level characteristics are controlled and vice versa (Bryk and Raudenbush, 1992).

To examine the relative odds of migrants as compared to local workers of being a union member, we estimate four bi-level logistic regression equations. In all equations, the intercept and slope of migrant status are allowed to vary across countries. The first equation predicts the odds of being a union member (versus not being a union member) as a function of socio-demographic characteristics and migrant status. The values of the estimated coefficients for migrant status serve as indicators of the net effect of migrant status on the odds of being a union member in comparison to similar odds of local workers. To the second equation we add a series of dummy variables representing the industrial sectors in which individuals work

(manufacturing and agriculture is the omitted category). To the third equation we add two variables capturing job stability, namely, having an unlimited contract and working in a part time job. The fourth equation includes, in addition to the individual level attributes, country-level variables (the Ghent system and organizational security) and interaction terms between organizational security and migrant status. In other words, in the fourth equation, the slope of migrant status also becomes a dependent variable that is predicted by country-level characteristic. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

The data presented in equation 1 reveal that the odds of being a union member tend to increase with age and education. Net of socio-demographic characteristics (included in the model) the relative odds of being a union member tend to be lower among migrant workers than among locals. More specifically, the odds of being a union member for migrant workers are 0.60 times the odds of those for local workers, as demonstrated by the negative and significant coefficient: $b = -0.51$ (exp $(-0.51) = 0.60$).

The effect of labor market sectors on the odds of being a union member is examined in equation 2. The results show rather clearly that the industry in which individuals are employed exerts a considerable effect on the odds of being a union member. All else equal, people working in retail, hotels, restaurants and domestic services have the lowest odds of being a union member, while those in the public sector, education and health sectors, as well as in the transportation and utilities industries, have the highest odds of being a union member. At the same time, the inclusion of six industrial sectors in equation 2 has changed only slightly the effect of migrant status on the relative odds of becoming a union member. The absolute value of the migrant status coefficient has decreased from $b=0.51$ in equation 1 to $b=0.42$ in equation 2, but has remained highly significant. This finding implies that the gap between migrants' odds of being a union member and citizens' odds of being a union member can be attributed only in part to the differences in the industrial sector distributions between these two groups.

In equation 3 we include two additional variables (having an unlimited contract and working in a part time job) that may explain not only the odds of being a union member but also the differences in such odds between migrants and locals. The results presented in equation 3 show that the relative odds of being a union member tend to be higher among workers with an unlimited labour contract and a full time job. The inclusion of the last two variables in the equation has slightly reduced the value of the coefficient of migrant status; however, the effect of migrant status still remains significant, negative and substantial ($b=-0.34$). Thus controlling for socio-demographic characteristics, education, industrial sectors, work contract and part time employment, the relative odds of migrants being union members are still lower than those of

locals: the odds of migrants being union members are 0.71 times (exp (−0.34) = 0.71) the odds for local workers.

The findings presented until now show us that individual level characteristics (included in the study) cannot explain fully the differences in the rate of unionization between migrant and local workers. Moreover, the effect of migrant status on the odds of being a union member (in comparison to local workers) varies across countries in all three models discussed, as implied by the statistically significant variance of the slope.

In order to examine whether the effect of migrant status varies by the presence/absence of organizational security of trade unions, we estimate equation 4. This equation incorporates (in addition to individual level variables) two country level variables - the Ghent system and the organizational security of trade unions - and interaction terms between the organizational security of trade unions and migrant status.

In line with theoretical expectations, the results reveal that, in general, the odds of being a union member are much higher in Ghent system countries, as implied by the statistically significant coefficient (b =2.18)[12]. However, our main theoretical interest here is the interaction term between organizational security and migrant status. The coefficient of interaction terms between organizational security and migrant status is statistically significant and negative (b=-0.37). It implies that the net relative odds of migrants being union members in countries in which trade unions enjoy organizational security are lower than those in countries in which trade unions do not enjoy such security. These findings support our theoretical expectations that the organizational security of unions tends to reduce their incentives to unionize migrant workers. Indeed, we have shown that the presence of factors providing organizational security to trade unions (either state financing or a single dominant confederation) is associated with a bigger gap in the unionization rate between migrants and local workers than in countries where such factors are absent[13].

Conclusions

This paper represents a first attempt to analyze in a systematic comparative and cross national manner the gap between the unionization rate of local and foreign workers in 14 Western European countries. We examined the role of labour market segregation and the organizational security of trade unions in accounting for this gap. Our results show that the unionization rate of migrant workers in Europe is lower than that of locals, and this can be attributed only in part to the impact of labor market segregation. Even when migrants work in the same industrial sectors as locals, they fail to reach the same level of unionization. Thus migrant workers who may be in greatest need of union representation due to their vulnerable status lag behind local workers in

their rate of unionization. The gap between the unionization rates of locals and migrants is one reflection of the extent to which the incorporation of migrant workers into the labour market, and their acquisition and exercising of certain economic and social rights, remain problematic. The research presented here is in keeping with the general finding that migrant workers are far less likely to acquire, and be able to exercise, such rights in the labour market (Castles and Davidson, 2000).

Nonetheless, while the findings here are in line with the well established argument that migrant workers are less likely to come into contact with unions in the workplace, our research also suggests strongly that the institutional position of *unions* affects the rates of migrant workers' unionization relative to those of local workers. We have shown that organizational security, either in the form of state financing or a single dominant union confederation, is associated with lower relative rates of migrant workers' unionization (in comparison to locals); conversely, the absence of state funding and competition between union confederations are associated with higher relative rates of migrant workers' unionization. We argue that the absence (presence) of organizational security increases (diminishes) the unions' incentives to organize migrant workers, thus affecting the latter's unionization rates accordingly.

Future research should include the use of more comprehensive data on migrants' unionization rates across countries. Ideally, this would generate more precise information on, for example, migrant workers' positions in the labour market, or their previous experience of, and contact with, trade unions in their countries of origin. We have presented here a first attempt to examine existing comparable cross-national data on this issue. Likewise, the analysis of the institutional position of unions should be expanded to incorporate additional aspects which may also affect the unionization rate of migrant workers.

Nonetheless, our findings still have important implications for the relationship between union movements and migrant workers. The latter represent, across Western Europe, a growing section of the national workforce and, potentially at least, an increasingly important constituency for unions. However, as we have shown, the extent to which migrant workers are unionized varies substantially across countries and this variation cannot be fully attributed to labor market structure. Instead, the institutional context in which unions operate is likely to affect their recruitment of migrant workers. As such, we find a role for union agency, not just in terms of determining their own strategies for renewal and revival but also in terms of fulfilling their potential as critical actors in the integration of migrant workers into host societies.

Funding

Endnotes

1. Any definition of the "migrant worker" is problematic. Different ways of defining migrants could include distinctions made on the basis of generation, citizenship status and country, or continent of origin, as well as different combinations of these criteria. We use here a straightforward citizen / non-citizen distinction, as we consider it the simplest and least controversial definition of the migrant worker. As such, the terms "migrant" and "non-citizen" are used interchangeably throughout the text.

2. Migrants workers in Western Europe obviously form a diverse foreign population, coming from different countries of origin within and beyond the European Union. Yet despite such variation, from a theoretical point of view, non-citizens are perceived as out-group populations and as such they often become a target for discriminatory attitudes and practices (e.g. Pettigrew, 1998; Semyonov et al., 2006).

3. This logic has been developed most notably in the British case, where union membership and density levels have fallen precipitously since reaching a postwar peak in 1979. For example, Wrench (2004: 20 cited in Krings, 2009: 61) notes that "as membership and power declined, it was increasingly recognized that the future of trade unionism [was] dependent on a more inclusive strategy which took seriously the problems and interests of previously marginalized groups".

4. Indeed, in the British case, several studies have focused precisely on the issue of the extent to which individual unions have been able and willing to comply with the goals and priorities of the TUC's Organising Academy. See, for example, Charlwood (2004) and Heery et al (2000).

5. The average DEME value for the 14 countries we analyze over the 2002-2008 period is actually *higher*, at 1.46, than the average DEMI value (1.36). This is clearly a rough measure, but it indicates, at a minimum, that there is a case for restricting our analysis to the confederal level, at least in this initial cross-national comparison.

6. It is notable that in the USA, the drive for organizing migrant workers, which has achieved notable successes, has taken place in the context of a split between the previously dominant AFL-CIO and the breakaway Change to Win, thereby breaking the organizational monopoly of the former. While this "turn to organizing" preceded the split itself, this still begs the question of why the AFL-CIO took even longer than its British counterpart to respond in this way to long-term decline (union density in the USA peaked in the mid-1950s). Moreover, this new organizational rivalry has undoubtedly accentuated the trend towards aggressively seeking new members.

7. Thus Italy, for example, was excluded because it features only in the first two rounds of the ESS. France is also excluded from our analysis for two principal reasons. First, as Visser (2000: 253) notes, "membership data of French unions are hard to come by and contrasting claims and uncertainty surround published statistics. Data are not regularly published if at all". Possibly precisely as a result of this "deplorable state of union statistics in France", we noted a significant discrepancy in relative terms between the unionization rate for France generated by the ESS data and that presented by the OECD; thus, we did not have sources with which to verify the data generated by the ESS. Second, at the time of the data analysis, certain key variables for France were omitted from the international file of the ESS, indicating possible deviations (from other countries' data) or problems during the data collection process.

8. Arguably, migrants from other EU countries, given that they benefit from the free movement of labour, may be more likely to be short-term migrants and hence less likely to seek union membership in the host country. In our multivariate models, we do include the variable of staying "only one year in a country", thereby controlling for the tendency of any migrant (EU

or otherwise) to stay a short time in the host country and hence being less likely to be interested in joining a union.

9. We have checked our own empirical analysis (see Table 1) with that of the ICTWSS database which presents both the number and effective number of union confederations (*NUCfs* and *ENUCfs* respectively) in each country. The latter, in fact, provides us with a sterner test, yet our analysis of the fourteen countries under consideration is consistently in line with that of the ICTWSS database. There is a slight discrepancy with respect to the British case for which the effective number of union confederations in the ICTWSS database increases from 1.3 to 1.5 over the 2002-2008 period yet which for us is a case of a single dominant confederation.

10. We are well aware of the problem that might arise in the estimation of the unionization rate of non citizens from a relatively small sample size of the non citizen population in our research and from under-representation of non citizens in the surveys. However, in addition to the fact that the ESS is a highly reliable data source, we find two justifications for using this sample: First, the overall rates of unionization obtained from other sources (such as the ICTWSS database) are in line with the results obtained from the ESS pooled data.

Second, we argue that the unionization rate of non citizens is lower than citizens and try to explain this difference. The survey data sample under-represents in particular undocumented immigrants and non citizens who do not speak the host country language; in general, these non citizens have an even lower chance of becoming a union member. Thus it is reasonable to suggest that the real differences between the unionization rate of citizens and that of non citizens will only be higher than those which we find using the ESS data.

11. Examining the unionization rates in each sector separately for migrants and locals (results are not presented here) also reveal that although there are some differences between the unionization rate of migrants and that of locals in each sector, the TU and PEAH sectors still have the highest unionization rates for both migrants and locals, while the RHRD sector has the lowest unionization rates for both.

12. Organizational security by itself (that is, without the interaction term between organizational security and migrant status) also exerts a statistically significant negative effect on the general rate of unionization - but only if introduced into the model separately without the Ghent system (the model is not presented).

13. To take a closer look at the countries and to check the robustness of our results (taking into account that we deal with a small number of countries), we complemented the HLM analysis presented with a combination of separate logistic regressions for each country and a crosstab procedure. As a first step we estimated a full individual level model (model 3 in Table 3) separately for each country and for Western Europe (our entire sample) using SPSS. Based on the regression results, we divided countries into two groups: 1) countries in which the net relative odds (based on the regression coefficient) of a migrant being a union member (in comparison to a local worker) is below the European average; and 2) countries in which the net relative odds of a migrant being a union member (in comparison to a local worker) is at or above the average in Europe. We then estimated crosstabs for two dummy variables: the net relative odds of being a union member for migrants (below or above average) and organizational security (presence or absence). The findings showed that in all five countries characterized by the organizational security of trade unions, the net relative odds of a migrant being a union member (in comparison to a local worker) is below the average in Western Europe; while in 6 of the 9 countries not characterized by the organizational security of unions, the net relatives odds of a migrant being a union member is above the average. These results are in line with the results of the HLM models. Excluding the four Ghent countries from the robustness check led to the same main conclusions.

Acknowledgements

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Table 1: Rate of unionization among locals and migrants, in 14 European countries (currently employed working population, 44408 locals and 2429 migrants) and country-level variables

	Locals (%)	Migrants (%)	Unionization rate of migrants as proportion of that of locals	Ghent system	Organizational security factors	
					State financing	Dominant confederation
Austria	34	13	0.38	No	No	Yes
Belgium	51	33	0.65	Yes	No	No
Denmark	86	79	0.92	Yes	No	No
Finland	78	72	0.92	Yes	No	No
Germany	20	18	0.90	No	No	No
Greece	19	8	0.42	No	Yes	No
Ireland	41	18	0.44	No	No	Yes
Netherlands	29	13	0.45	No	No	No
Norway	61	39	0.64	No	No	No
Portugal	15	6	0.40	No	No	No
Spain	16	6	0.38	No	Yes	No
Sweden	78	70	0.90	Yes	No	No
Switzerland	19	13	0.68	No	No	No
UK	29	16	0.55	No	No	Yes
Total	29.5	16.1	0.55			

Source: European Social Survey, authors' own elaboration; TUW (2005)

Table 2: Occupational (economic activities) distributions among migrant and local workers, and overall rate of unionization by economic activity in 14 European countries

	Transport and utilities	Public administration, education, health and etc.	Manufacturing and agriculture	Construction	Financial and business services	Retail, hotel, restaurants and domestic services
Locals (%)	7.2	35.8	19.7	6.7	14.2	16.5
Migrants (%)	4.4	22.2	22.7	12.4	12.7	25.6
Unionization rate (%)	39.9	38.8	29.8	21.1	20	14.2

Source: European Social Survey, authors' own elaboration; TUW (2005)

Table 3: Logistic Regressions Coefficients (Standard Errors) from HLM Predicting Odds of being union member (versus not being union member) for employees who are currently in active labor force[1]

	1	2	3	4
Intercept	-1.12**	-1.06**	-1.53**	-1.89**
Individual-level variable and Interaction terms				
Being migrant	-0.51**	-0.42**	-0.34**	-0.17
	(0.15)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.11)
*Being migrant*Organizational Security*				-0.37*
				(0.17)
Men	0.19	0.30**	0.20**	0.20**
	(0.18)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Age	0.03**	0.03**	0.03**	0.02**
	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Rural	-0.03	-0.06*	-0.05*	-0.05*
	(0.05)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Education	0.04*	0.03**	0.02**	0.02**
	(0.019)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Only one year in a country	-2.43**	-2.41**	-2.32**	-2.28**
	(0.89)	(0.87)	(0.87)	(0.87)
Labor Market Position (agriculture &manufacturing)				
Public sector, education and health	---	0.32**	0.38**	0.38**
		(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Transportation and utilities	---	0.37**	0.38**	0.38**
		(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Construction	---	-0.50**	-0.46**	-0.46**
		(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Financial and business services	---	-0.72**	-0.71**	-0.71**
		(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Retail, hotels, restaurants and domestic services	---	-0.91**	-0.85**	-0.85**
		(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Unlimited contract	---	---	0.65**	0.65**
			(0.04)	(0.04)
Less than 30 weekly work hours	---	---	-0.36**	-0.36**
			(0.03)	(0.03)
Country Level Variables				
Strong Organizational Security	---	---	---	0.17
				(0.30)
Ghent system	---	---	---	2.18**
				(0.44)
Country level variance component for intercept	0.80**	0.83**	0.84**	0.27**
Country level variance component for being migrant	0.09**	0.08**	0.06**	0.04

1. Intercept and slope of being migrant varies across 14 countries. The slopes of all other variables are constrained to be identical across countries. Continuous variable have been centered around their grand means. Dummy variables are uncentered. The models includes also survey year as control variables (the coefficients are not presented)
** $p<0.01$; *$p<0.05$