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# **Gender and ethnic minority exclusion from skilled occupations in construction: a Western European comparison<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

**Women and ethnic minorities remain seriously underrepresented in skilled construction occupations despite European Union policy to overcome labour market segregation and despite their increasing participation in the economy-wide labour market. The paper seeks to account for differences in female and ethnic minority/migrant participation in both the deregulated, craft-based construction industries of Italy and Spain and to an extent Britain and in the regulated industrial and training-based industries of Denmark and the Netherlands. We found that the only entry route for women is to obtain formal qualifications, with the Dutch and Danish education and training systems being especially pivotal to inclusion. Those from ethnic minorities and recent migrants, whilst proportionately overrepresented in Italy and Spain, face more vertical segregation in being largely confined to the bottom of the job ladder. Key obstacles confronted by both groups are the opportunity to undertake work-based training, output-based wage systems, informal methods of recruitment and lack of proactive implementation of equal opportunities policies. The conclusion drawn is that European and national authorities and social partners need to address equality of access and of employment conditions to ensure that regulation overcomes exclusion.**

## **Introduction**

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In all west-European countries the participation of women and ethnic minorities and/or more recent immigrants in the labour market has increased. This increase has not overcome, however, enduring patterns of labour market segregation, whereby women and ethnic minorities/immigrants are confined to particular segments of the labour market. Too often, this means their exclusion from or under representation in the most attractive jobs and occupations. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the construction sector.

Both at the national and European level, overcoming labour market segregation has been established as a core principle of social and economic policies. These have been driven by two complementary concerns: equality of opportunities and economic considerations. Labour market segregation is responsible for labour market inefficiencies, reducing the ability to adapt to changes in supply and demand and excluding many of the best suited and most skilled people from those occupations where they would be the most productive. Hence, reducing segregation plays a major role in policies aimed at favouring job matching, averting bottlenecks in labour supply, and ensuring the competitiveness of the European economies (EC 2001).

This article seeks to account for differences in the nature and extent of female and ethnic minority and/or immigrant participation in the construction industry in five European countries: Britain, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain. It draws on a European Community-funded project entitled 'Overcoming Marginalisation: structural obstacles and openings to integration in strongly segregated sectors'. Combining both quantitative and qualitative research techniques, including in-depth, structured interviews with companies, social partners and government, this project focused on the structural obstacles to inclusion of both groups in three other sectors (information, health, printing) as well as construction (Marginalisation group 2003). As in the project, here we are essentially concerned with manual occupations and with demand-side, structural obstacles to inclusion relating to training, the wage structure, and recruitment.

This cross-national comparison is of particular interest due to the existence of very different systems of national and sectoral regulation in these five countries (Boyer and Gaillard 2002). Construction industries in the advanced capitalist economies have

taken divergent paths in response to the common challenges of turbulence, intensified competition, ageing labour forces, and the industry's continued association with '3D' (dirty, dangerous, and degrading) jobs (Bosch and Phillips 2003). Two models of development can be distinguished: first, the more regulated or coordinated construction industries, which tend to be 'capital-intensive, human-capital intensive, and technologically dynamic' and characterised by intense state and and/or sectoral involvement in training and labour market coordination; and second, the low-wage, low-skill, low-tech construction industries on a 'low track' path of development characterised by extensive subcontracting, 'atypical' forms of employment (temporary and/or agency workers, self-employment, and an often substantial informal labour market), and high labour turnover. The customs, institutions and the regulatory framework existing in different sectors and countries determine the path taken by the industry.

A further distinction can be made between the different labour processes associated with 'low' and 'high track' approaches. The 'low track' path of Italy, Spain and, to an extent, Britain, exhibits strong craft characteristics whereby emphasis is laid on selling the product of labour associated with a particular trade (Clarke and Wall 2000). As a result, the traditional apprenticeship and learning on the job survive as the main means of training, wages tend to be output-based and labour employed casually from one project to another rather than by firm, firms are small and self-employment high. In contrast, in the more 'high track' construction sectors of Denmark and the Netherlands qualifications and formal training are essential, wages are set on the basis of collective agreements, employment is generally by firm and direct. Our choice of countries is intended to identify and distinguish between the exclusionary and inclusionary mechanisms that persist in both the more and the less coordinated and regulated – the craft and the industrial – settings, as well as policies that may be effective in overcoming them.

### **Patterns of horizontal and vertical segregation**

In our analysis we distinguish between two dimensions of segregation: horizontal, referring to the exclusion of women and/or ethnic minorities and immigrants from

particular sectors and/or occupations; and vertical, that is the exclusion of both groups from particular positions in the job hierarchy.

As has historically been the case almost everywhere in Europe, the construction industry remains highly segregated by gender. While women are strongly under-represented in all five countries (Table.1), the level of horizontal gender segregation varies considerably, and is particularly pronounced in Italy and Spain. These two south-European and less regulated countries have generally low levels of female participation in the labour market, 37% compared with 45% in Britain, 44% in the Netherlands and 47% in Denmark (EC 2002). In all five countries, moreover, women working in construction are found above all in administrative jobs and, increasingly, in technical and managerial positions; in fact, there is some evidence of the emergence of female niches in these more qualified positions such as, for example, in health and safety, HRM, environmental control and restoration work. In contrast, all the available evidence points to a negligible female presence among manual, site workers in all five countries, broken only by very particular exceptions such as the painting trade in Denmark, where women accounted for some 25% of the workforce in 2001 (Frydendal Pedersen 2004: 143-44); in the rest of the industry in Denmark women make up only 0.7% of the manual workforce, a little higher than the 0.3% of tradespersons in Britain, or the 0.2% in the Netherlands. Unfortunately, the numbers in particular trades are generally too low to be statistically significant in Labour Force Surveys, the only comparable source of data. This extremely intense horizontal gender segregation, which results in the virtual total exclusion of women from manual occupations in construction, itself almost dictates the incidence of vertical gender segregation.

The picture with respect to ethnic minorities and immigrants is more complex, revealing the need to distinguish clearly between the more established groups found in the three Northern European countries, and more recent immigrants both in these countries and above all in Italy and Spain .

In northern Europe the construction industry is clearly segregated. Members of the established minorities in Britain and in the Netherlands account for only 2.3% and 2.2% respectively of the workforce in construction, compared with 6.9% and 8.9%

respectively of the workforce in the economy as a whole. Turks form the largest ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands, followed by Moroccans, whilst Surinamese, Antilleans and Arubans constitute the smallest group; the remaining category consists of employees from different EU countries, above all the UK and Germany. In the UK, the main ethnic groups are of African, Afro-Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian and Pakistani descent. In Denmark, Turks form the main ethnic minority group, followed by workers from Iraq, Lebanon, Somalia, Iran and Pakistan.

In contrast, in Italy and in Spain, where immigration (above all from North Africa, Latin America and eastern Europe) is a more recent phenomenon, we find not only a significantly higher proportion of immigrants working in construction than in the northern countries but that they are over-represented in the industry compared with the economy as a whole. In Spain for example, while immigrants account for some 5% of the total economy-wide workforce, they represent some 9% of the legally employed workforce in construction. Imprecise evidence on the extent of irregular employment in Spain suggests that, in total, migrants could now account for as much as 12-15% of the industry's workforce (Byrne 2004: 22-23). In terms of horizontal segregation, therefore, while ethnic minorities appear to be excluded in both the more and less regulated construction industries in the Netherlands, Denmark and Britain, immigrants are over-represented in the unregulated construction industries in Spain and Italy.

In terms of vertical segregation ethnic minorities in Britain, the Netherlands and Denmark and immigrants in Italy and Spain are in an especially vulnerable position, concentrated at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy in construction, in the least skilled, less secure, and worst paid positions. Nonetheless, the largely qualitative evidence we uncovered also suggests more intense segregation in Italy and Spain, where immigrants are systematically found in the worst jobs, and more particularly in the worst companies, and find it particularly difficult to move from these into more skilled, better paid, and safer jobs in the industry. Equally, in all our countries, immigrants are over-represented in the informal economy, working illegally, usually in sub-standard conditions and with no job or social protection.

To conclude, all the available statistical and qualitative information reveals intense horizontal and vertical gender and ethnic segregation in all the countries studied here. We also found significant differences in the patterns of segregation between the different countries, and between women, ethnic minorities and immigrants. The presence of women among site operatives is minimal in all five countries. With respect to ethnic minorities, the construction industry in the more coordinated economies of Netherlands and Denmark, as well as in deregulated Britain, is exclusive, and characterised by both horizontal and vertical segregation. In contrast, in the deregulated construction industries of Spain and Italy immigrants are over-represented among the workforce. In all five countries, moreover, we find particularly intense vertical segmentation with respect to newer immigrants, largely confined to the lower ranks of the occupational hierarchy when not actually to a 'tertiary' labour market existing on the fringes of legality. How do we explain such segregation?

### **Craft production versus industrial training approaches**

In many north European countries, including Denmark and the Netherlands, vocational training for construction is partially organised by associations of employers and employees in addition to the state-led vocational education programmes. In southern Europe training is largely on-the-job, whilst in Britain it relies both on this and on college-based training whether full- or part-time under a Modern Apprenticeship. Vocational training systems thus divide sharply between, on the one hand, those based on what Marsden has termed the 'production approach', where any training is dependent on the individual employer, and, on the other hand, those where investment in training is provided by collective industry-related associations of employers and employees together with the state, termed by Marsden the 'training approach' (Marsden 1999). The 'production' and 'training' approaches, imply a different means of entry for workers – including women and ethnic minorities - into

the labour market. In our research we sought to discover which approach is more inclusive by investigating whether women and ethnic minorities are more dependent on formal training and qualifications to prove their ability than men and what problems they face in acquiring the necessary qualifications.

Italy and Spain exemplify the 'production approach', where training is provided on the job and according to craft, whilst the vocational training system is relatively underdeveloped and alternance structures (between college and firm) are rarely in place. In Italy, vocational schools exist to a limited extent though the training provided is not a universal requirement as it is in the north European systems of the Netherlands and Denmark (Birindelli and Sordini 2003). Spain, too, has attempted to improve its training, in particular through the establishment, in 1992, of the national bipartite institute for the construction sector, though, this has had only a very limited impact. Operative skills still depend almost entirely on on-the-job training (Byrne and Van der Meer 2003).

The vocational training system in Britain is similar to Italy and Spain in its trade-based nature and its dependence on individual employers' 'goodwill' to take on trainees but is more extensive and developed. The construction industry is the only sector that continues to have a statutory training levy, run by the Construction Industry Training Board, a largely employer-based body though with some trade union involvement. As in Italy and Spain, a sharp class divide exists between the manual and non-manual workforce, and there is a high proportion of untrained workers, either labourers or those who have picked up sufficient skills to be accepted



as 'semi-skilled' or 'skilled'. On average the industry is trapped in a low-skills equilibrium with low levels of productivity (Ive et al 2003; DTI 1999).

Denmark and the Netherlands, by contrast, follow a 'training approach', having strongly established systems of vocational training for each industry through which a large proportion of entrants into the labour market are siphoned. The industrial social partners play a substantial role in the development of the curricula and standards, and in the organisation and running of industrial training centres. Both countries are regarded as high-skill economies to which, in spite of problems of measurement, their higher productivity record in many sectors is attributed (Brown *et al.*, 2001; Lubanski 2003; Van der Meer 2003). We describe these as 'qualification-based' systems in the sense that entry for construction is dependent to a large extent on training and qualifications, unlike the situation in Italy, Spain and Britain.

The training structure in north-European countries is closely related to the scope and depth of collective bargaining, which in some countries has sector-wide coverage due to high trade union and employers association membership (as in Denmark) and to the general extension clauses of collective agreements, which 'take wages out of competition' (in the Netherlands). Collective agreements define occupational classifications, job characteristics and the nature of wage-setting rather strictly and workers are classified and paid according to their occupational level and years of experience. In the internal labour markets of Dutch and Danish construction firms, workers can enjoy substantial security and climb the hierarchical job ladder. In contrast, in countries with a production approach, while official collectively bargained

wage rates do exist, in practice earnings tend to be related to output rather than skills and qualifications, and the internal organisation of the company is relatively flat.

The production system of the construction industry, is characterised by ‘flexible specialisation’ (Piore and Sabel 1984), though the extent of subcontracting and outsourcing varies. In the craft-based systems of Italy and Spain, with its extended use of chains of small subcontractors, recruitment, selection and job allocation tend to be entirely flexible in nature. This is the case too in Britain, with its high rate of so-called ‘self-employment’ (38% of the construction workforce) and labour-only subcontracting (DTI 2003). In contrast, in the industrial-based systems of Denmark and the Netherlands, where the size of enterprises is on average larger, the internal labour market is more extended and tenure patterns longer. Here, job ladders and recruitment patterns are relatively more formal than those found in craft based systems. In our analysis of recruitment issues, we focused on the prevalence of formal versus informal methods and their impact on the integration of women and ethnic minorities. In line with the literature on social networks, we suggest that trade, familial and social ties determine the preferences of recruiters in informal networks, where white men select white men in order to ‘share the wealth’ of employment (Portes 1995).

## **Women**

In all our countries we found that the route of entry for women into construction is obtaining the training and work experience necessary. Only rarely are they found employed in labouring occupations and those who succeed invariably have formal

qualifications. A key stumbling block in all our countries to their obtaining skilled status is however having the opportunity to undertake and complete practical, work-based training. There are clear differences in the way this obstacle is posed between the regulated and unregulated systems.

### *Training*

In Italy, Spain and Britain previous work and practical know-how are more important for entry into the construction labour market than are formal qualifications. This means that even if women are able to obtain qualifications through college training, these may count for little. The very low proportion of female trainees in these three countries, but in particular in Italy and Spain, reflects this situation. Where access to training is through employment and work experience, women experience great difficulty in entry (Birindelli and Sordini 2003).

This difficulty in obtaining both employer-based training and employment subsequent to formal college training is apparent in Britain. Here the majority of trainees (62%) are in full-time further education (FE) colleges, whilst the remainder are Modern Apprentices based with an employer (CITB 2002). Women represent 3% of all trainees but of these the vast majority are in FE colleges (7% of all trainees) rather than apprentices. The proportion of women in training is far higher than those in employment, at 0.3%, indicating that many with a formal training are unable to obtain the work experience with an employer necessary to enter the labour market. It is for this reason that efforts to bring women into construction have tended to concentrate on improving their access to work experience and employment, (Beck et al 2003). Colleges appear particularly accessible compared with apprenticeships, including

offering women-only courses in a number of trades. Those women who do succeed in finding employment will as a result generally have a higher level of theoretical knowledge and formal qualification than their male counterparts. (Wall and Clarke 1996).

In the more regulated construction sectors of the Netherlands and Denmark, where formal qualifications are a requirement of entry into construction, the situation is different. Here the emphasis is on the way in which the education and training system itself may act as a force of exclusion. In the Netherlands, the sectoral representatives established a special training programme for women in the 1980s (*Bouw-vak-vrouw*). However, female participation in construction training in the Netherlands remains especially low, a factor that has been attributed to the failure of the education system to integrate changing concepts and methods of organisation of work (Westerhuis 2004). In Denmark, as in Britain, a disproportionate number of women trainees are found on the school-based as opposed to the employer-based route; altogether 18% of trainees are unable to find places in firms and rely on this school-based route, many ending up unemployed (Colclough and Mailand 2003).

Those women who do succeed in entering the labour market may also experience problems in obtaining further training, especially when this is organized outside working hours and interferes with their family responsibilities.

In general, therefore, the low female participation rates in training in the more regulated sectors of Denmark and the Netherlands are important in explaining the poor participation of women in the construction labour force.

#### *Employment conditions*

While education and training are vital for women's entry into construction, employment conditions are critical to their retention. Foremost in these is the wage structure and there were indications in our research that output-related wages tend to exclude women, not only because they are relatively indifferent to qualifications but because of the flexibility and time availability they demand. In this respect it is no coincidence that where the wage is output based, as in Spain and Italy, few if any women are to be found. In Denmark women are generally found employed on fixed hourly wages rather than under the output-based gang '*Akkord*' system. It is even disparagingly claimed here that 'real painters do piecework' (Thrane 2004). In part this situation is due to the fear that women will pull the rates down. Indeed Oloffson (2004) has pointed to the 'incongruity in having strong working teams that provide social security but that also make for strict social control'. In Britain, too, building tradeswomen are more likely to be employed under the collectively agreed wage structures found in the local authorities than under performance-, task- or price-based systems. Few too succeed as self-employed.

The method of recruitment may also couple with the wage structure and type of employment contract to act as an important deterrent to women's entry. Informal, word-of-mouth selection – whether by gangs in Denmark or labour-only subcontractors in Britain – encourages the recruitment of 'likes'. We found few firms that conducted formal equal-opportunity selection interviews. The attachment to

traditional roles and strong social networks found in all our construction sectors also themselves act as forces of self-exclusion, deterring women from applying (Clarke and Herrmann 2005). Indeed, women only tend to be found where their entry has been positively encouraged, as through the proactive recruitment campaigns in Britain with their positive images of tradeswomen and through active enforcement of equal opportunity policies in the local authority Direct Labour Organisations (Michielsens *et al.* 1997).

The mechanisms of gender exclusion will therefore differ according to the nature and approach of the construction sector. In general it appears easier for women to access construction employment and to be promoted where formal qualifications are a requisite, conditions of employment are regulated and proactive equal opportunity recruitment methods and policies are in place.

### **Ethnic minorities and immigrants**

The construction labour market worldwide offers niches for ethnic workers to find jobs (Waldinger and Bailey 1991; ILO 2003). In northern Europe, however, ethnic minorities face barriers when entering into the primary segments of the construction labour market. At the same time recent migrants are largely confined to the bottom of the labour market where insecure labour contracts and informal circuits prevail – a phenomenon that is also omnipresent in Spain and Italy.

#### *Italy and Spain*

In both Italy and Spain, countries in which the non-citizen is categorised and generally also legally defined as ‘immigrant’, there is no evidence of horizontal segregation in the sense of exclusion. Rather, in comparison with the economy as whole, extra-Community migrants are over-represented in the construction industry. The problem, therefore, is not horizontal but vertical segregation. All the evidence suggests that the latter is particularly intense, with migrants confined to the lowest rungs of the labour market, working in the worst conditions in the worst companies in

the construction industry. Our research confirmed the importance of a number of key structural mechanisms operating to exclude migrant workers from more secure, skilled and better paid work.

The production-based approach to training in Italy and Spain, where skills in construction are acquired almost entirely through informal, on-the-job training, and workers promoted on the basis of their work experience and demonstrable practical know-how, stands out as a key exclusionary mechanism in these two countries. This is largely due to the importance of personal contacts and social networks in both recruitment and training. The problem for immigrants, as for women, centres around their exclusion from the social networks which give access to jobs offering opportunities to pick up skills. While immigrants certainly have and use their own nationally- and kin-based social networks when seeking work, in most cases these enable them to follow their family and compatriots into low-skilled positions, mainly as labourers. Most do not have the contacts needed to enter into and obtain training in 'good jobs'. Indigenous workers have no interest in opening up access to these desirable posts to immigrants who would then compete with them for work, especially when, as in Spain, the growing presence of immigrants is often regarded with reticence if not hostility both in and beyond the workplace (FECOMA 2003).

Part- and- parcel of the informal network recruiting is the almost total absence of any kind of formalised, objective selection and promotion procedures or criteria in construction. As a result, both processes are subject to the decisions of individual foremen or employers and hence to their personal attitudes. Previous Spanish research carried out in the 1990s indicated less overt discrimination in recruitment in construction than in other industries (Cachón 1999: 93). Nonetheless, the lack of objective recruitment criteria would appear to operate against the employment and promotion of immigrants given the pervasive, if often contradictory, cultural/ethnic stereotyping found in the sector, and society at large. In Spain, overt discrimination does appear to operate in hiring and promotion processes in the case of Moroccan workers. Employers explain or justify this by referring to the real or alleged opposition of private clients, main contractors or fellow workers. Nonetheless, more rational calculations might also explain employers reluctance to higher Moroccans. As the longest-standing national group of labour migrants, Moroccans have longer

work and residency permits and are more aware of their rights, and therefore may prove less compliant than more recent arrivals (Colectivo Ioe, 2001; Byrne *et al* 2003).

The intense competitive pressures felt by all companies in the sector, transmitted to workers via output-related wages, may help account for the reluctance to employ or work with immigrants. Employers or gang members may be concerned at immigrants' ability to match the output of indigenous workers (whether due to lack of experience, skill or even the alleged cultural disposition of particular ethnic groups). At the same time, however, production-based wage systems, with their output-related bonuses, mean that official, collectively-bargained, hourly pay rates bear little relation to workers' actual earnings whether on or off the books. Such wage structures enable employers to employ immigrants legally at the relatively low official wage rates. These are well below the 'level of acceptance' of the established workforce, which receives significantly higher output-related wages. The flexibility inherent in wage systems operates, therefore, to include immigrants, at least insofar as these - as often appears to be the case - are prepared to perform tasks under conditions unacceptable to indigenous workers. This horizontal inclusion operates, however, exclusively on the margins, in the secondary, when not tertiary construction labour market where most immigrants are confined.

#### *Britain, Denmark and the Netherlands*

Compared with Italy and Spain, the situation in Britain, Denmark and the Netherlands differs not least because the reference group is ethnic minorities rather than immigrants, though each country has its own definition of these. In all three countries though ethnic minorities account for only some 2% of the official construction workforce, the numbers actually working in the sector are very much higher, especially in south-east Britain where many workers from eastern Europe are found on construction sites. In Denmark, as in the Netherlands, the construction sector is highly regulated, with formal qualifications the key to entry into the workplace. However, to obtain these a three-and-a-half year training programme needs to be



completed, consisting of both school-based and practical training in a company, a so-called 'practical training place'. In both countries, the sectoral training schools complain of the very low entry qualification levels of ethnic students and in the Netherlands the experience is that ethnic minorities suffer on theoretical courses although enjoying the two to four years of practical instruction. In response, in Amsterdam (but not in Rotterdam) a formal entry programme to construction training has been developed where (ethnic) students are guided on financial, social, legal and psychological factors. The approach has been successful, given the relatively low drop-out rate of 25% instead of the average 50%. In Denmark, too, drop-out rates for ethnic minorities in Danish technical schools are 70%, compared with an average rate of 40% ([www.tib.dk](http://www.tib.dk)). There is also a shortage of practical training places and 15% of applications for these are from ethnic minorities, though only 5% obtain agreements (Colclough and Mailand 2003).

In British vocational training, ethnic minorities, like women, are far more likely to enter the college-based than the apprenticeship route where entry resides with the individual employer. There is also a far higher proportion of ethnic minorities in construction training in Britain than in employment, indicating perhaps their difficulties in obtaining the necessary work experience as this depends on individual employers taking them on (Royal Holloway 1999). Overall, the evidence indicates that in Britain, similar to Denmark and the Netherlands, drop-out rates from formal college education and difficulties in obtaining a position as apprentice are critical to understanding the difficulties in acquiring the necessary qualifications.

Those from ethnic minorities face many other problems on top of the training regime itself, above all discrimination and harassment. They have to accustom themselves to the working rhythm, work ethos, and the particular technical and working language of tradespersons. The mobility of workers to rotate across sites in the formal labour market is no advantage in this respect, since ethnic employees often feel rejected by colleagues and clients and many quit the industry at an early stage. In interviews a number claimed that they needed some protection from a tutor or trustee in order to be accepted; perhaps significantly, however, they complain that site managers did not even know their names (Van der Meer and Roosblad 2004).

In both Denmark and the Netherlands the broad agenda of collective bargaining has enabled trade unions to address the issue of active labour market policy and equal opportunities for target groups such as women, the unemployed and those from ethnic minorities (Lubanski 2004). In the Dutch collective agreement a substantial annex has been written prescribing a 10% recruitment target in training for disadvantaged groups. In Dutch public tendering too, contract compliance has sought to increase ethnic minority participation on public works, though the results have been meagre as only a few candidates applied.

In all three northern countries, policies for further training were found to exist (though less so in the UK), but it was considered that ethnic minorities were benefiting to a less extent than the indigenous workforce (Royal Holloway 2002). Many ethnic minority workers also lack the language skills facilitating further training, and hence promotion.

As evident from Italy and Spain, wage systems are core to understanding labour market integration. In Denmark and the Netherlands, where wage levels are relatively high, new entrants into the labour market face problems in meeting the productivity requirements that correspond with the established wage standards. The few ethnic minorities that have sufficient qualifications to reach a higher position in the ranks of the formal labour market, will be paid according to the stipulations in the collective agreement, which compensate both the qualification level and the years of experience. In Dutch interviews, however, doubt was expressed as to whether ethnic minorities are 'productive' enough to earn, on top of the official wage scales, bonuses which reach on average about 16% of earnings. But this is admittedly not an exclusionary factor for getting a job. In Denmark, however, it appeared that the working gangs who negotiate the terms of agreement for the entire group fear that any 'outsider' might contribute to a lowering of the wage.

In informal parts of the industry in both Denmark and the Netherlands ethnic migrants have been accused of working at wage levels below the collective agreement and self-employed persons of watering down common standards. Dutch trade unions, for example, complain that over the last two to three years many foreigners – above all Poles – have been working illegally on a self-employed basis, at longer working hours than legally and conventionally allowed and without paying tax and social security contributions – therewith undermining the Dutch social security system.<sup>2</sup> This is similar not only to the situation in Italy and Spain but also in Britain: in the London area in particular, long hours of work and poor working conditions are often found on sites with a high proportion of those from ethnic minorities employed.

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<sup>2</sup> Oral communication, Utrecht, September 29<sup>th</sup> 2004.

The industries of Britain, Denmark and the Netherlands also share other employment characteristics with those of the south-European countries. Recruitment is invariably informal, by 'word of mouth' and informal social networks are mediated through gangs and subcontractors. Access is relatively easy for white males and often even, depending on the situation, for ethnic minorities in unskilled jobs, for instance from pick-up points in commuting routes. These are procedures in place for hundreds of years. In all our countries advertisements and state employment agencies are rarely used, except perhaps in periods of heightened activity.

In spite of this, in Denmark and the Netherlands qualifications are important to selection and remain the key means for employers to validate the reliability of candidates. Moreover, those ethnic minorities who obtain a qualification in the formal training system have built their own network of relatives and contacts to companies other than the traditional white male circuit (EIB 2003).

## **Conclusions**

Regulation and integration are paradoxical concepts. On the one hand, the suggestion is that those countries with an industrial, regulated and training approach are potentially more inclusive than those with a craft, unregulated and production approach. Thus in Denmark and the Netherlands women and ethnic minorities depend more on qualifications for entry, so that the education and training system plays a pivotal role in inclusion. However, in spite of this, only a tiny proportion of women and ethnic minorities are to be found in construction in these countries, as well as in Britain, though the proportion in training, especially on college-based routes, is higher than those in employment.

On the other hand, however, we found that in the deregulated settings of Italy and Spain there are proportionately more ethnic minorities to be found, but these are

trapped in the lowest segments of the construction labour market. What is significant here is that in these countries these segments are considerably more extended than in the northern countries of Denmark and the Netherlands, given their 'low track' path of development. Therefore the implication is that ethnic minorities are able to acquire training and jobs but only of the worst kind. For women this is not the case: in these southern countries they are almost totally absent.

The indication is that in both the more and less regulated countries the key moment of exclusion comes when both groups try to enter the labour market, whether for training and work experience in Britain, the Netherlands, and Denmark, or for jobs in Spain and Italy. Our research identified various exclusionary mechanisms. It indicated, first, that many ethnic minorities drop-out from official training programmes. Second, output-based wage structures act as a deterrent to women's entry and as a means of vertical segregation for ethnic minorities. Third, the informal methods of recruitment and selection in all countries and the reliance on established white male social networks reinforce the exclusion of both groups.

This highlights the importance of other supply- and demand-side factors in excluding women and ethnic minorities from construction. These include the relatively low status of the industry with hard working conditions and strictly defined working hours, the persistence of a 'macho' work culture, discrimination and harassment, and lack of work and family policies, realities which might well explain why so few women or ethnic minorities pursue the status of a career in the industry. In the case of many more recent arrivals, current restrictive immigration regimes represent a form of "institutional discrimination" confining them to the 'bad jobs' of construction (Solé 2001:13).

It is their failure to overcome these obstacles that explain the meagre results of the few existing active labour market policies aimed at women and ethnic minorities. Much can be done through encouraging both groups to enter the industry through targeted and special training provision, which has at least enabled small groups of women and ethnic minorities to acquire a position in the 'primary' segments of the labour market in Denmark and the Netherlands. But, as the example of local authority Direct Labour Organizations in the UK highlights, the commitment of employers is

essential, as it is they who are responsible for implementing equal opportunities policies in recruitment, pay and working conditions. Equal opportunity policies have been shown to play an important role in developing a productive system of construction in the UK (Rubery *et al* 2003). Vital too is the commitment of the trade unions who play key roles in the training system - especially in Denmark and the Netherlands where it is critical for entry, in upholding often exclusive wage systems, in improving employment conditions, and in representing the interests of employees above all those who are disadvantaged. A recent survey has indicated the general reluctance by the social partners in construction throughout Europe to address obstacles to inclusion such as discriminatory recruitment processes in a proactive way (Clarke *et al* 2005). Perhaps the greatest challenge facing the national and European authorities and the social partners in construction is to overcome this reluctance and to ensure that regulation does not mean exclusion of those whose participation in the labour market is extending but equality of access and of employment conditions. The reasons for doing so are not just social, but also economic, as the future competitiveness of the European construction industry may well depend on its ability to make effective use of the labour of those groups currently excluded from full and equitable participation in the industry.

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**Table 1. Proportion of female and ethnic minority employment in the economy and in the construction industry (%)**

	Economy as a whole		Construction		
	Women	Ethnic minorities	Women		Ethnic minorities
			All	Trades	
Britain	45.4	6.9	9.2	0.3	2.3
Denmark	47.0	5.6	10.0	0.7	2.2
Italy	37.0	NA	6.3	NA	NA
Netherlands	43.6	8.9	9.5	0.2	2.2
Spain	36.6	3.4	5.0	NA	9%

Source: National Labour Force Surveys 2002; \*\* Social Security data (2002)