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High hopes, high disappointment?

How unmet migration expectations and perceived discrimination shape the destination attachment of immigrants

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12th International Conference of Panel Data Users in Switzerland
June 15, 2023

The gambling migrant

- Even if international migration is carefully planned, it always involves **uncertainty** and **limited personal agency**, some of which migrants may not be aware of (Collins 2018; de Haas 2021)
- Migrants as **risk-takers** and **optimistic decision-makers** (Kao & Tienda 1995; Czaika 2015)
 - The gambling metaphor (Belloni 2019)

It portrays migrants as **gamblers** who believe they can calculate the migration-related risks, although they are in fact exposed to the „migration game“

**Where there are risks and expectations, there
can also be disappointment**

Higher educated immigrants: The (overly) confident gamblers?

Theory of rising expectations

- They are particularly expectant about migration outcomes (Silberman et al. 2007; Cooney 2009)
- Highly expectant to fare well (*structural*), to fit in (*cultural*), and to be treated equally (*social*) (e.g. Verkuyten 2016; Geurts et al. 2021)
- Possible explanations of high migration expectations
 - Status-related deservingness
 - Self-confidence
 - Misconceptions about life in the foreign country

**If expectations are high,
the potential disappointment can be too**

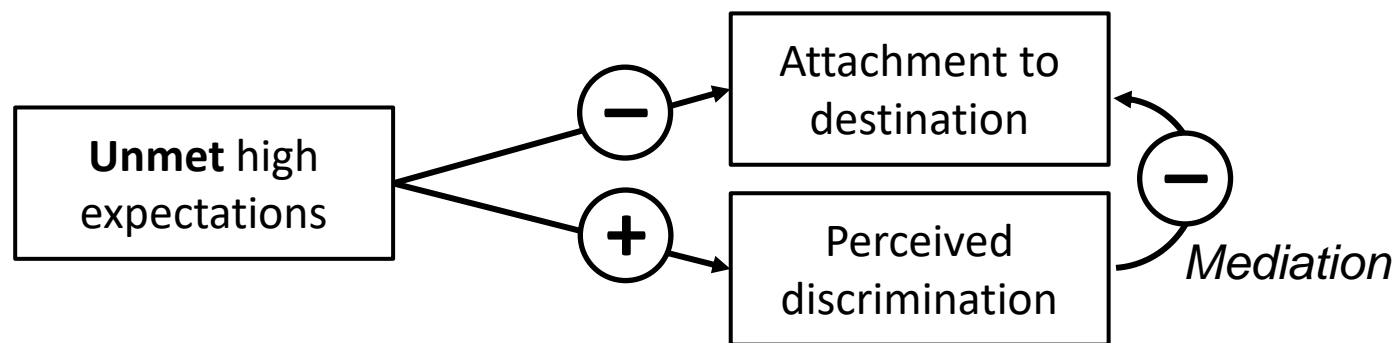
High unmet migration expectations and disappointment

Theory of rising expectations

- Increase in emotional disengagement from the destination country (e.g. Geurts et al. 2021)
- Increase in perceived discrimination (Schaeffer & Kas 2023)

The central role of perceived discrimination

- Disengagement mainly due to increased perceptions of discrimination (e.g. Verkuyten 2016)



The Integration Paradox

(struggles despite integration advantages / better integration)

Existing research

- **Unmet migration expectations:** Role is unclear (but see Geurts et al. 2021)
 - **Some address the theory but do not have the panel data**
 - Mostly cross-sectional studies
 - E.g. unmet structural expectations proxied over international or intergenerational social downward mobility (Silberman et al. 2007; Schaeffer 2019) – no robust evidence (Schaeffer & Kas 2023)
 - **Few have the panel data but do not address the theory**
 - The few panel studies: Cast doubt on increasing discrimination and decreasing attachment over time (Careja & Schmidt-Catran 2018; Diehl et al. 2021; Geurts et al. 2020)
- **Mediation through discrimination:** No compelling evidence (Careja & Schmidt-Catran 2018; Geurts et al. 2020; Geurts & Phalet 2021)

An open empirical question: High hopes, high disappointment?

1) **If supported.** Higher educated immigrants struggle with unmet migration expectations.

More to worry about?

Feelings of social exclusion; mental health issues; brain drain.

Some of these issues may not be noticed: Higher educated immigrants may fall through the cracks since they might still be better off in terms of more „objective“ integration indicators (e.g. job position, income, language skills).

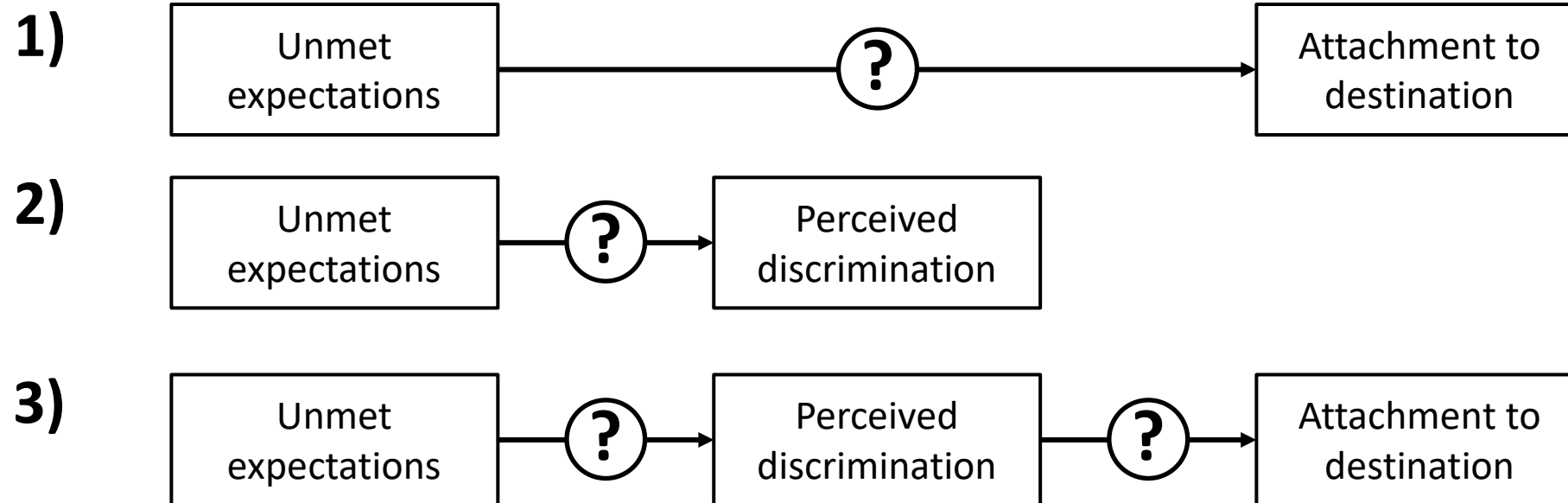
2) **If unsupported.** Higher educated immigrants are not more disappointed.

Less to worry about? (regarding educational differences at least!)

Potential for resilience (self-regulation, self-control), which could be leveraged to enhance integration experiences.

Our aim

*to investigate **the role of unmet migration expectations** for the lives of lower and higher educated immigrants using panel data*



Hypotheses

- H1** Unmet migration expectations decrease the destination attachment of higher educated immigrants comparably stronger than of their lower-educated counterparts (**attachment hypothesis**)
- H2** Unmet migration expectations increase perceived discrimination of higher educated immigrants comparably stronger than of their lower-educated counterparts (**discrimination hypothesis**)
- H3** The stronger effect of unmet migration expectations on destination attachment is mediated by perceived discrimination (**mediation hypothesis**)

Data, Methods & Variables

The Migration-Mobility Survey (MMS) (Steiner & Wanner 2019; Wanner et al. 2023)

- **Panel study:** 4-waves (2016/18/20/22), new samplings in each wave
- **High quality data:** Register-based, stratified random sampling, all nationalities
- **Recent immigrants:** Arrived after 2006, on average 4 years of stay
- **Adults:** Min. 18 years at immigration and 24-64 years old at survey time
- **Voluntary immigrants:** exclusion of asylum seekers & temporary admittees

- **Analytical sample:** $N = 5.240$, 13.885 observations (unbalanced, 2 obs. min., no re-entries)

- **Method:** Fixed Effects (linear and logit)

Model variables

Dependent variables

- Attachment to Switzerland (0-7)
- Experiences of prejudice or discrimination in Switzerland the past 24 months (no/yes)

Explanatory/interaction variables

- Migration expectations: proxied by dissatisfaction with decision to move to Switzerland (0-10)
- Highest educational qualification (non-tertiary/tertiary)
- Experienced discrimination (see above)

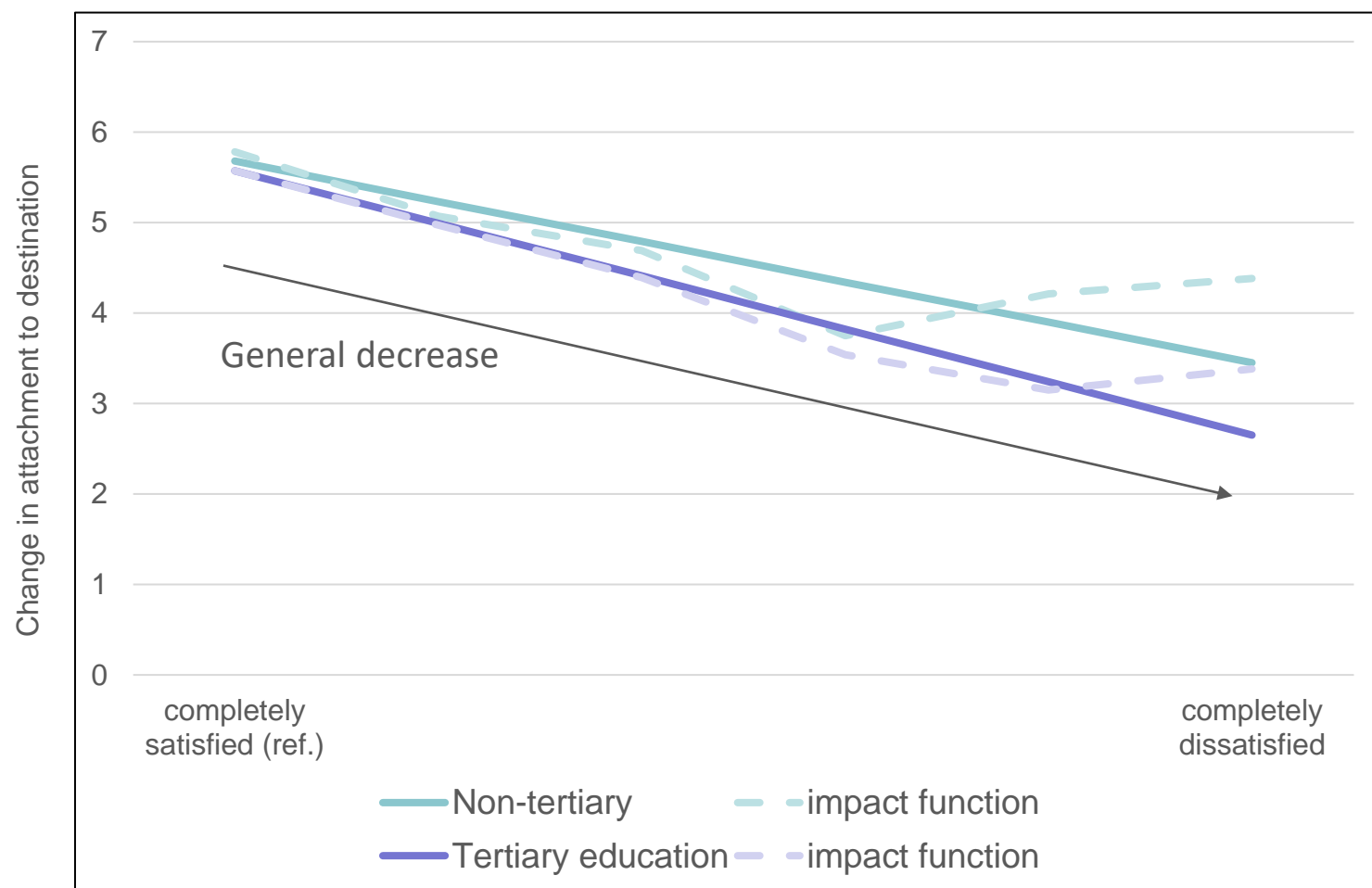
Covariates

- Age (categorised), residence duration, permit C holders, local language comprehension, pandemic year 2020

Findings

Do unmet migration expectations affect the destination attachment of higher educated immigrants comparably stronger? (H1)

Unmet migration expectations and destination attachment



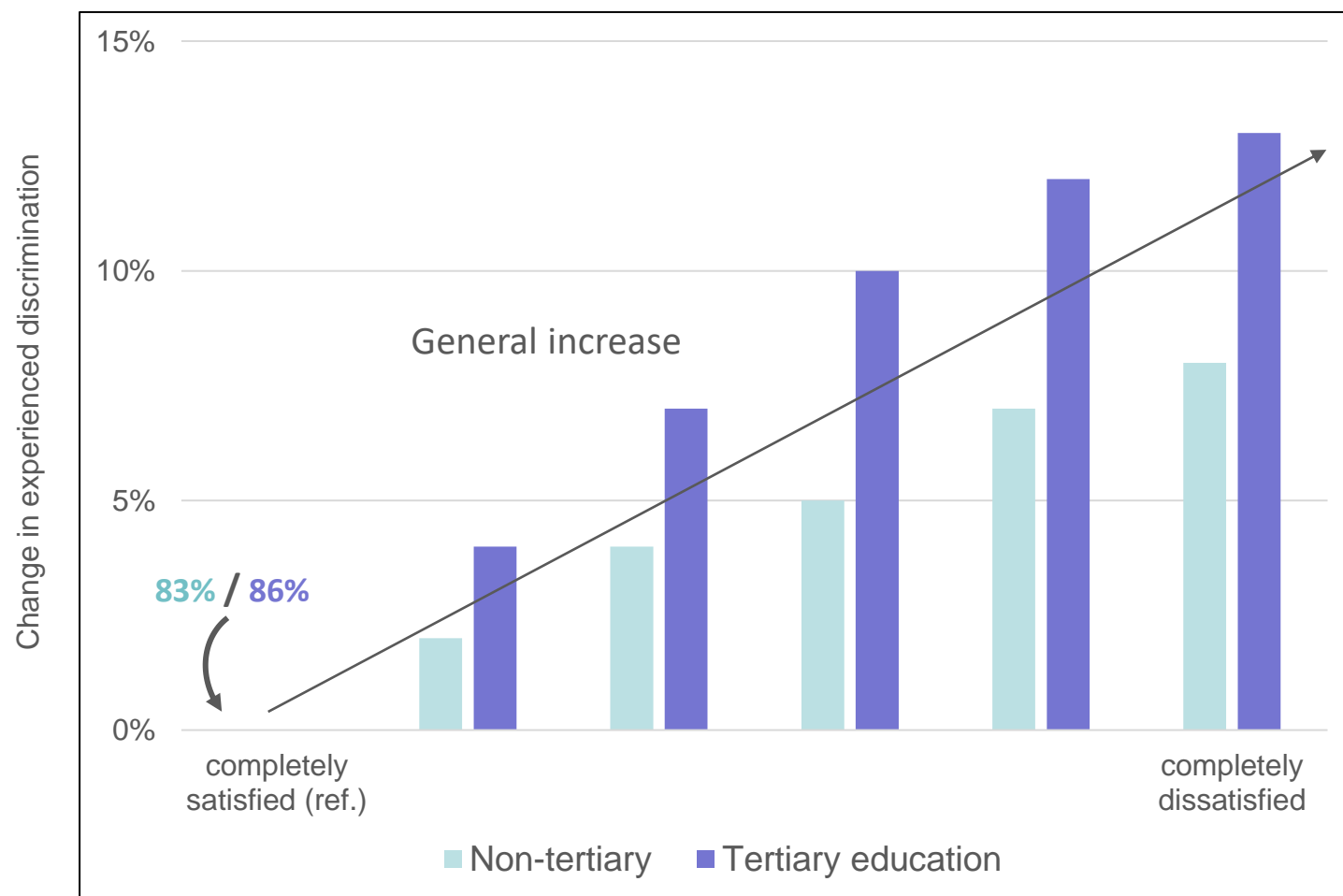
Significant and systematic difference in decrease between education levels:

An **increase in dissatisfaction** with the migration decision **decreases destination attachment** of tertiary educated immigrants **comparably stronger**.

Note. Separate FE models, waves 1-4.

Do unmet migration expectations affect perceived discrimination of higher educated immigrants comparably stronger? (H2)

Unmet migration expectations and experienced discrimination



No significant but **systematic difference** in increase between education levels:

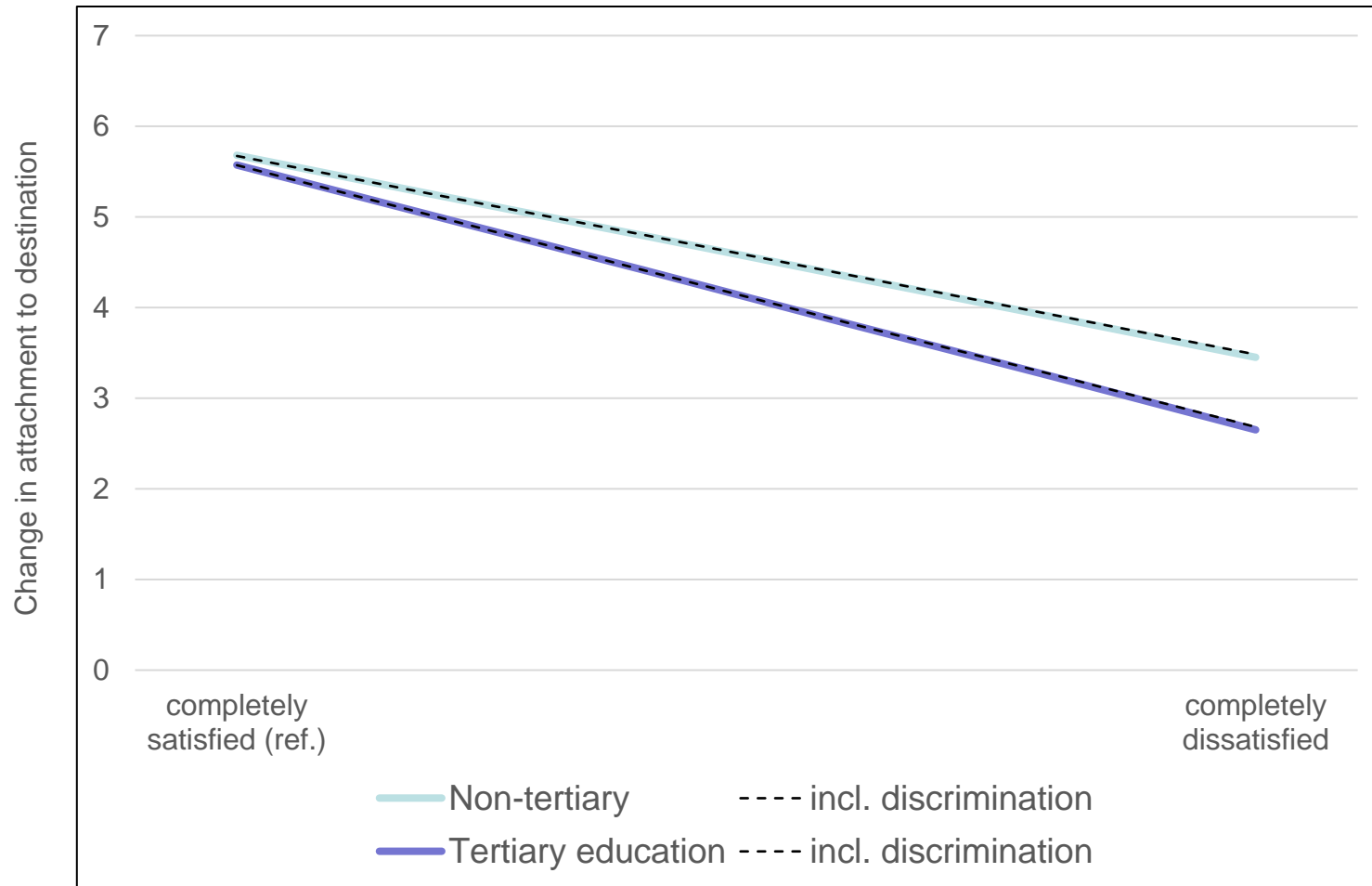
An **increase in dissatisfaction** with the migration decision **increases experienced discrimination somewhat stronger** for tertiary educated immigrants.

- 1) **Very high base level**, i.e. not much room to move up
- 2) **Nearly 40% of observations dropped** because experienced discrimination of immigrants did not change over time.

Note. Separate FE logit models, waves 1-4.

Is the stronger impact of unmet migration expectations on destination attachment due to stronger perceptions of discrimination? (H3)

Experienced discrimination does not explain the education gap



Differences between education levels **still significant and substantial.**

Additional mediation analyses only based on participants who reported changes in experienced discrimination: **No mediation effect**

Note. Separate FE models, waves 1-4.

Conclusion

Main findings & things to discuss

- Higher educated immigrants **are more affected** if migration expectations are unmet
 - Lower destination attachment (H1) & indication for increased perceptions of discrimination (H2)
 - Supports theory of rising expectations
 - Despite better integration (conditions), their feelings of connectedness may be lower, which can impede social participation, well-being & productivity, or even make them leave the country
 - Future avenues: What migration expectations matter?
- Unmet expectations lower destination attachment of higher educated immigrants in particular **but not because of increased perceived discrimination**
 - *Although* unmet expectations seem to increase perceived discrimination more often
 - Frustration about opportunities and living conditions specific to this group? What about lower educated immigrants?
 - Future avenues: What expectations matter? Immigrant optimism? Use less crude discrimination measures, conduct experimental studies



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Questions? Remarks?

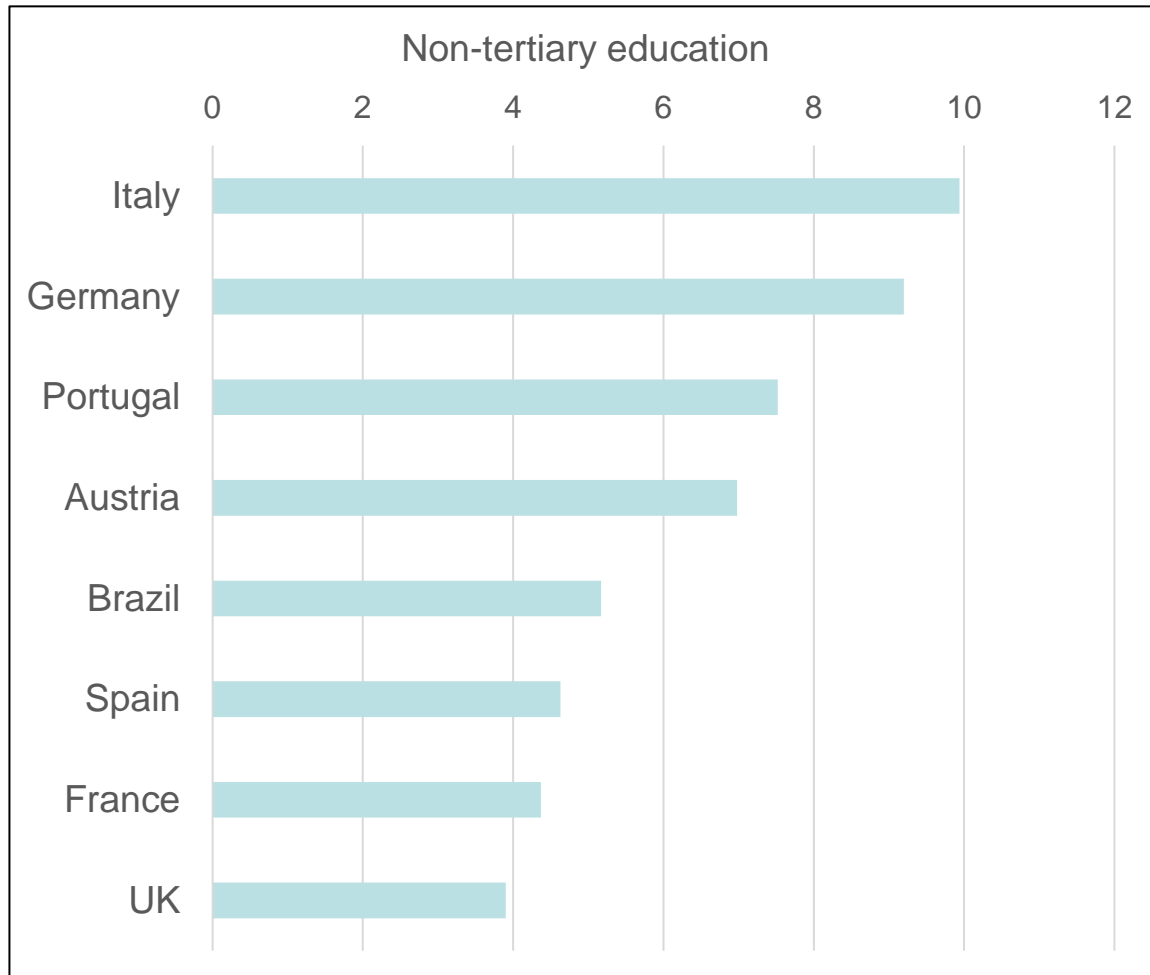
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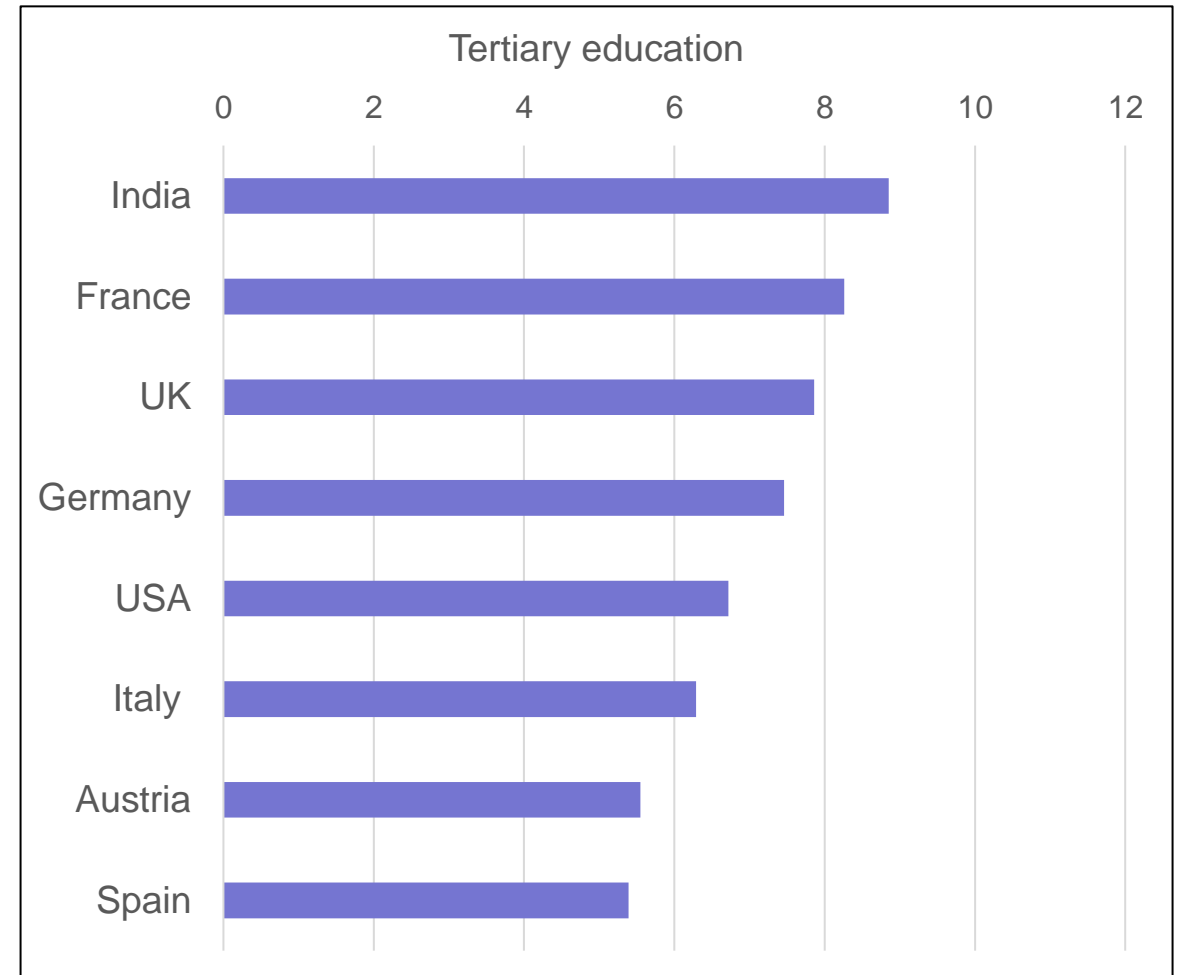
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Top 8 origin countries for each education group



N = 1,489 immigrants with non-tertiary education




N = 3,751 immigrants with tertiary education

Dissatisfaction with the decision of moving to Switzerland

Distribution of observations:

Non-tertiary	1.964	614	485	255	128	163	53	37	23	17	38
Tertiary education	4.900	2.002	1.495	814	352	299	90	60	43	27	26

Completely satisfied  *Completely dissatisfied*

Percentage of immigrants whose dissatisfaction increased at least once:

Non-tertiary: ~36 %

Tertiary education: ~36%