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AI-Motivated Skilled Migration from Overseas in the European Union: Skill Recognition, Satisfaction, and Labour Market Integration

Abstract

This article introduces the concept of AI-motivated migrants to examine how artificial intelligence shapes skilled migration and post-migration incorporation in the European Union (EU). We define AI-motivated migrants as non-EU skilled migrants whose mobility decisions are shaped by AI-linked opportunity structures, including expectations of access to AI-related work, technologically advanced workplaces, and future-oriented career trajectories. Building on scholarship on migration drivers, aspirations, and incorporation, we argue that AI should be understood not only as a workplace technology but also as an emerging migration driver that influences both migrant selectivity and incorporation outcomes. Empirically, the study draws on survey data from the Horizon Europe Link4Skills project collected among post-secondary and tertiary educated non-EU migrants in selected destination countries of the EU: Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and Poland. We compare AI-motivated and non-AI-motivated migrants across key dimensions of incorporation and estimate multivariate models for skill recognition, job quality, AI-related workplace satisfaction, economic satisfaction, and social integration. The findings show that AI-oriented migration motivation is positively associated with all five outcomes, net of demographic, migration-related, and labour market controls. The article contributes to migration research by conceptualizing AI-motivated migration as a distinct form of skilled mobility and by linking pre-migration motivations to post-migration incorporation in a regulated digital labour market.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; skilled migration; migrant incorporation; labour market integration; skill recognition; migration drivers; European Union; non-EU migrants

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping how skills are valued, matched, and managed across labour markets, and the European Union (EU) has emerged as a particularly important setting in which these transformations unfold. As a large integrated labour market with an increasingly dense digital governance architecture, the EU offers not only expanding opportunities in AI-related sectors, but also a distinctive institutional environment in which recruitment, workplace monitoring, credential recognition, and career progression are increasingly mediated by digital technologies (European Commission, 2020, 2021; European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2016, 2024). For skilled migrants arriving from outside the EU, access to opportunity is therefore shaped not only by labour demand, but also by how their qualifications,

experience, and future potential are assessed within technologically mediated and highly regulated labour markets.

These developments raise an important question for migration research: how does AI enter into migrants' decisions to move, and does this shape their incorporation after arrival? Existing scholarship on skilled migration has shown that migration decisions are rarely reducible to wage maximization alone, but instead reflect a broader set of aspirations, constraints, and perceived opportunity structures shaped by labour market conditions, career prospects, education, and social context (Polavieja et al., 2018; Czaika & Reinprecht, 2022; de Haas, 2021). At the same time, research on highly skilled and technology-driven mobility suggests that technological change can generate distinctive migration pathways by altering labour demand, structuring access to transnational careers, and creating new imaginaries of professional advancement (Ong, 2003; Basso et al., 2020; Beerli et al., 2023; Giesing, 2023). Yet migration scholarship has only begun to examine how AI-linked opportunity structures may themselves become a distinct driver of skilled mobility.

This article develops the concept of AI-motivated migration to capture this emerging form of skilled mobility. We define AI-motivated migrants as skilled migrants whose mobility decisions are shaped by AI-linked opportunity structures, including expectations of access to AI-related work, technologically advanced workplaces, AI-relevant training, and future-oriented career trajectories, rather than only by wages or general professional advancement. In this sense, AI is not simply a sectoral niche or technological backdrop, but part of the opportunity structure through which migrants imagine, pursue, and evaluate mobility projects (Appadurai, 2007; de Haas, 2021). This approach also directs attention to the unequal capacity of migrants to convert such aspirations into realized outcomes, given that post-migration trajectories remain mediated by recognition regimes, institutional gatekeeping, and migrants' own perceived agency (Appadurai, 2004; Cerdin et al., 2014).

The article contributes to migration research in three ways. First, it conceptualizes AI-motivated migrants as a distinct category of skilled migrants whose mobility decisions are shaped by AI-linked opportunity structures rather than only wages or general professional advancement. Second, it links pre-migration motivations to post-migration incorporation by showing that AI-oriented motives are associated with more positive labour market experiences after arrival. Third, it situates migrant incorporation within the institutional context of a highly regulated digital labour market, showing how technological change and governance together shape migrants' trajectories.

Empirically, the article draws on unique survey data on non-EU skilled migrants in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and Poland collected within the Horizon Europe Link4Skills project (Reinold et al., 2025; Reinold & Engbersen, 2025). Focusing on migrants with post-secondary and tertiary education, we examine whether AI-oriented migration motivation is associated with stronger perceived skill recognition, better job quality, and more positive experiences of AI and automation at work. This focus is timely because AI adoption is increasing across EU labour markets, while worker- and establishment-level evidence suggests that algorithmic management, automated task allocation, and digital monitoring are already becoming embedded in everyday work organization (Eurofound, 2025; European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2024; Eurostat, 2025). We therefore position AI-motivated migration as a new form of skilled migration and analyse its relationship to labour market incorporation in contemporary Europe.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. The next section develops the theoretical framework by linking research on migration drivers, aspirations, and opportunity structures to scholarship on technology-driven labour market change. The following section introduces the data, variables, and empirical strategy. We then present descriptive and multivariate findings on the relationship between AI-oriented migration motives and post-

migration outcomes. The final section discusses the implications for theories of skilled migration and migrant incorporation in increasingly digitalized labour markets.

Theory. Towards a Conceptualization of AI-Motivated Labour Migrants

This article advances migration theory by introducing AI-motivated labour migrants as a distinct category of skilled migrants whose mobility projects are shaped by AI-linked opportunity structures. In doing so, it connects two strands of scholarship that have rarely been brought together directly: research on migration drivers, aspirations, and incorporation, and research on how technological change restructures labour markets and cross-border mobility. The central claim is that AI should not be understood merely as a sectoral characteristic or workplace technology, but as an opportunity structure in itself, thereby influencing migration decisions and destination choice. This provides a new lens for debates on how migrants are selected, how incorporation unfolds, and how changing institutional contexts reshape migration trajectories.

Migration scholarship has long shown that migration decisions are not driven by a single factor, but by configurations of aspirations, capabilities, and constraints operating across individual, household, labour market, and state levels (de Haas, 2021; Czaika & Reinprecht, 2022). Migration drivers include, for example, economic conditions, education and training opportunities, labour market demand, social ties, and institutional arrangements, and their influence depends not only on objective conditions but also on how individuals perceive and interpret available opportunities (Czaika & Reinprecht, 2022). This perspective has been especially important for research on skilled migration, where mobility decisions are rarely reducible to wage differentials alone. Instead, they reflect overlapping professional ambitions, expectations of career mobility, risk management strategies, and assessments of how well a destination will reward existing and future skills (Polavieja et al., 2018; Reinold & Czaika, 2026). In that sense, migration is not simply a response to inequality between places, but a forward-looking project shaped by perceived opportunity structures and the capacity to act upon them.

This insight has important implications for the study of migrant incorporation. Research has shown that migrants' motivations prior to migration matter for what happens after arrival, because they shape expectations, strategies of adaptation, and the willingness to invest in integration (Cerdin et al., 2014). At the same time, post-migration trajectories depend on whether destination contexts recognize migrants' qualifications, experience, and aspirations. The ability to convert migration projects into desirable outcomes is therefore unevenly distributed and mediated by institutional gatekeepers, labour market sorting mechanisms, and migrants' own resources and sense of agency (Appadurai, 2007; Hooijen et al., 2020). Therefore, migration motives should not be treated only as pre-migration variables, but as analytically linked to post-migration incorporation. This article builds on that insight by asking whether experiences of different forms of incorporation vary depending on whether or not migrants' mobility projects are shaped by AI-related opportunities .

A second body of literature helps specify what is distinctive about AI-motivated migration. Ong's (2003) notion of the 'techno-migrant' showed that highly skilled mobility increasingly occurs through transnational circuits of knowledge, capital, and corporate coordination. This literature opened an important line of inquiry into how technological change reorganizes mobility, but it stopped short of theorizing AI as a specific migration driver. More recent research suggests that such a move is now needed. Technological change has been shown to increase demand for highly skilled workers, including migrants, in contexts such as the United States and Switzerland (Basso et al., 2020; Beerli et al., 2023). In Germany, local labour market demand for AI-related skills is positively associated with migration across skill groups, suggesting that AI-linked labour demand already shapes mobility patterns (Giesing, 2023).

These findings indicate that AI-related opportunities are not simply a subset of general professional opportunities, but an emerging driver in their own right.

The theoretical contribution of this article is to bring these two literatures together and show that AI-linked opportunity structures matter not only for where labour demand emerges, but also for how migrants imagine and organize mobility projects. We define AI-motivated labour migrants as migrants whose decision to move, choice of destination, and/or post-migration strategies are shaped by expectations surrounding AI-related work, AI-enabled career progression, technologically advanced workplaces, AI-relevant training, and/or digitalized labour market environments. This conceptualization allows for new interpretations of migration in at least two ways. First, it identifies a new form of selectivity within skilled migration: migrants are selected not only by education, occupation, or wages, but also by orientation toward specific technological futures. Second, it links this selectivity to incorporation by arguing that AI-oriented motivations may be associated with more positive labour market outcomes where migrants find the recognition, job match, and technological environment they anticipated.

This perspective also helps move beyond a simple celebratory account of skilled or tech-oriented migration. AI-related opportunities may create attractive futures for some migrants, but they do not guarantee successful incorporation. Appadurai's (2004) concept of the capacity to aspire is useful here because it highlights that aspirations are culturally and socially produced, and that the ability to realize them depends on unequal access to resources, information, and institutional know-how. Applied to AI-motivated migration, this means that some migrants are better positioned than others to interpret AI-related opportunity structures, to navigate recruitment and credentialing systems, and to convert anticipated technological advantage into concrete labour market gains. In turn, destination-country recognition regimes and employment practices determine whose AI-oriented projects become actionable and whose remain blocked. AI-motivated migration should therefore be understood as a relational and conditional process, not as a guaranteed pathway to upward mobility.

This argument is particularly relevant in the EU, where skilled migration unfolds within a distinctive institutional context shaped by both labour market integration and dense digital governance. In such a setting, migrants encounter not only demand for advanced skills but also regulatory and organizational environments that shape how AI is deployed in recruitment, task allocation, performance evaluation, and access to opportunity. The contribution here is therefore not simply to add AI as another migration driver, but to show how technological change and institutional context jointly structure migrant incorporation.

Building on these literatures, this article proposes that AI-oriented migration motivation is associated with distinctive post-migration outcomes because it is tied to expectations of skill utilization, career advancement, and technologically advanced work environments. However, these associations are expected to remain conditional on recognition regimes, employment conditions, and migrants' perceived agency in shaping their trajectories. The concept of AI-motivated migration thus offers a way to conceptualize a new form of skilled migration while preserving a core insight of migration scholarship: that mobility outcomes are produced through the interaction of aspirations, agency, structures, and institutions.

Accordingly, this study asks whether AI-oriented migration motivation is associated with stronger skill recognition, better job quality, and more positive labour market incorporation among non-EU skilled migrants in the EU. It further examines whether these relationships vary by migrants' perceived agency and other contextual characteristics. In doing so, the article brings pre-migration motivation into direct conversation with post-migration incorporation and advances a migration-centred framework for understanding how AI is reshaping skilled mobility.

Against that backdrop of the theoretical formulation and literature review we make the following assumptions:
H1: AI-motivation is positively associated with perceived skill recognition.
H2: AI-motivation is positively associated with job quality and workplace satisfaction.
H3: These associations are stronger where migrants report greater agency.

Data and Methodology
This article presents an analysis of the Link4Skills survey dataset (Reinold et al., 2025), focusing specifically on post-secondary and tertiary educated migrants who moved to Austria, Poland, Germany, and the Netherlands, from non-EU countries, mostly from Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe. The analysis explores the influence of AI and automation on migration decisions, satisfaction with AI-related conditions in the destination, and future mobility intentions. The dataset contains an initial sample of 2,317 respondents. The analytical sample was restricted by excluding observations from Canada (resulting in n=1,869), and further reduced by dropping cases with missing values on the main explanatory variable (AI motivation index) and non-response categories in gender (e.g., "prefer not to say"), yielding a final estimation sample of n=1,280, spread across Austria (n=108), Germany (n=295), Poland (n=482) and the Netherlands (n=395). Collectively, the sample provides a reasonable representation of non-EU skilled migrants in these countries, given their relatively small populations compared to EU nationals.

Survey design and implementation
The Link4Skills Migrant Survey was implemented between January and June 2025 (Reinold et al., 2025).[1] It covered questions around five topics, namely education and labour market aspects, migration to and experiences in the destination country, future migration aspirations and socio-demographics and was available in six languages (Arabic, English, French, German, Russian and Ukrainian) (Reinold & Engbersen, 2025). The target group included post-secondary (i.e., medium skilled) and tertiary educated (i.e., highly skilled) migrants from non-European countries who moved to the destination countries (i.e., Austria, Germany, Poland and the Netherlands) as adults. During field work, the target group was expanded to post-secondary educated individuals as these could be in the process of studying or training for post-secondary and tertiary degrees (i.e., semi-finished skilled migrants). Given the focus of the Link4Skills project, the survey targeted migrants from seven origin countries (India, Indonesia, Morocco, the Philippines, and Ukraine) and three sectors (healthcare, STEM and construction), while also remaining open to migrants from other origins and sectors. The target group can be characterised as hard-to-reach, among other things because reliable sampling frames are not available, for example because administrative data of destination countries (e.g., the Netherlands) do not always record migrants' educational level (Laursen et al., 2020).

Accordingly, recruitment followed a purposive, non-probability sampling strategy to capture the average experiences and perceptions of our target group. To maximise reach and diversity of the sample and to minimise concerns about selectivity, recruitment combined multiple approaches, including a meta-campaign (in Austria and the Netherlands), recruitment via the online research platform Prolific, social media recruitment (e.g., calls for participation in dedicated Facebook groups), sharing through multipliers (e.g., stakeholders, employers, universities, media outlets, language and vocational schools), using the researchers' own networks, etc. Considering the many channels used to spread the survey, it is not possible to

[1] The survey was approved by Erasmus University Rotterdam's DPAS Research Ethics Review Committee (approval numbers ETH2324-0932). While not using the data here, the survey was furthermore implemented in Canada, where it received ethical appraisal from Toronto Metropolitan University's Research ethics board (approval number REB 2025-044).

calculate the response rate as we could not see how many individuals were reached via the different recruitment channels in the first place. Of those who started the survey, almost 70 per cent completed it.[2] We are aware that our non-probability sampling technique comes with certain limitations. One important pitfall is the use of online platforms, social media and online media outlets which may have introduced biases related to digital literacy and technology access. Nevertheless, we consider the data an appropriate source for our exploratory research about ai-motivated migrants. We do not claim causality, but uncover associations between the dependent and independent variables, which are relevant for uncovering initial patterns within this newly emerging research topic.

The Link4Skills Survey Handbook provides in-depth information about survey design (including a blank questionnaire), implementation, and data cleaning (Reinold & Engbersen, 2025). For ethical reasons, we did not force respondents to provide answers to survey questions, which is why for most variables some observations are missing.

Variables

The main explanatory variable, *AI motivation index*, is constructed as the unweighted mean of four 0-100 slider-scale items capturing the importance of AI-related work and training opportunities as both push (origin) and pull (destination) factors in migration decision-making. In addition, a binary version of this variable is defined using a threshold of 50 to distinguish AI-motivated migrants for descriptive and robustness analyses.

Outcome variables are measured as composite indices (0-100) capturing key dimensions of migrant experience, including skill recognition, job quality, AI-related workplace satisfaction, economic satisfaction, and social integration. Each index is constructed as the mean of multiple survey items and validated using internal consistency checks (Cronbach's alpha). Control variables include demographic characteristics, migration-related attributes, and labour market status. Years since arrival is derived as the difference between the survey year (2025) and reported year of arrival, while current employment status is constructed from detailed job-status indicators.

Table 1. Description of variables

Variable	Type	Scale / Coding	Description / Construction
Dependent Variables			
skill_recognition	Continuous index	0-100 (mean index)	Composite index capturing perceived skill recognition in the host labour market. Constructed as the mean of three survey items measuring satisfaction with (i) skill utilization, (ii) recognition of diplomas/qualifications/skills, and (iii) returns to education. All items are measured on 0–100 scales and combined as an unweighted average.
job_quality_index	Continuous index	0-100 (mean index)	Composite measure of overall job quality. Constructed as the mean of eleven survey items covering job opportunities, professional development, training, working conditions, job security, career prospects, work environment, workplace relations (local and international), work–life balance, and wages.
AI_sat_index	Continuous index	0-100 (mean index)	Composite index capturing satisfaction with AI-related workplace conditions. Constructed as the mean of six items measuring satisfaction with AI integration at work, AI training availability, wage

[2] This completion rate is based on the European sample. Completion rates were higher in Canada (90.1%), where we relied predominantly on Prolific for recruitment.

			differentials, job security in AI-transformed sectors, recognition of AI-related skills, and competition for AI-related jobs.
economic_index	Continuous index	0-100 (mean index)	Composite index of economic satisfaction. Constructed as the means of five items measuring satisfaction with standard of living, economic stability, opportunities for advancement, cost of living, and income equality.
social_integration_index	Continuous index	0-100 (mean index)	Composite index measuring perceived social integration. Constructed as the means of seven items capturing tolerance, diversity, ease of forming connections, integration, welcoming attitudes, freedom to practice culture/religion, and general social norms.
Key Independent Variable			
AI_mot_index	Continuous index	0-100 (mean index)	Main explanatory variable capturing the importance of AI-related factors in migration decision-making. Constructed as the means of four survey items: *imp_push_AIwork*, *imp_push_AItrain*, *imp_pull_AIwork*, and *imp_pull_AItrain*. These items measure the importance of AI-related work opportunities and AI-related training both as push factors (in the origin country) and pull factors (in the destination country). Each item is collected using a 0–100 slider scale (numerical response), and the index is computed as their unweighted average.
AI_mot_dummy	Binary	0 = AI_mot_index < 50; 1 = AI_mot_index ≥ 50	Alternative operationalization of AI motivation used for descriptive comparisons and robustness checks. Classifies respondents into AI-motivated and non-AI-motivated migrants based on the midpoint of the 0–100 scale.
Control Variables			
country	Categorical	Austria; Germany; Poland; Netherlands (reference)	Country of residence. Canada was excluded from the analytical sample prior to estimation. Included as a factor variable with the Netherlands as the reference category.
skill	Categorical	Semi-skilled; Medium-skilled; Highly skilled (reference)	Skill level classification based on survey coding (derived from education and/or occupation). Included as a categorical control in the regression models.
field	Categorical	Health; Construction; STEM (reference); Other	Field of education. Included as a categorical control variable.
gender	Binary	1 = Male; 2 = Female (reference)	Cleaned variable retaining only male and female respondents; other categories (including “prefer not to say”) were excluded.
age	Continuous	Years	Respondent’s age in years. Included as a continuous covariate.
yrs_since_arrival	Continuous	Years (≥0)	Number of years since arrival in the destination country. Constructed as: 2025 − year of arrival, where 2025 corresponds to the survey year.
employed_now	Binary	0 = Not employed; 1 = Employed	Constructed from multiple employment status indicators. Respondents were coded as employed if working full-time, part-time, or self-employed; all other statuses (unemployed, student, inactive, etc.) were coded as not employed.

agency_ind	Continuous	1-5 (Likert scale)	Measure of perceived agency in migration decision-making (freedom to choose where to live). Originally collected on a 5-point Likert scale and treated as a continuous variable in the regression models.

Source: own elaboration.

Econometric model

To assess the relationship between AI-oriented migration motivation and migrants' outcomes, we estimate a series of linear regression models of the following general form:

$$Yi=\alpha+\beta\ AI\_moti+\gamma'Xi+\varepsilon i, \quad Yi=\alpha+\beta\, AI\_moti+\gamma' Xi+\varepsilon i,$$

where Yi denotes the outcome variable for individual i, including skill recognition, job quality, AI-related workplace satisfaction, economic satisfaction, and social integration. The key explanatory variable, *AI_moti*, captures the extent to which migration decisions are shaped by AI-related opportunity structures. In the main specification, this variable is measured as a continuous index (0-100), while in alternative specifications it is operationalized as a binary indicator, distinguishing AI-motivated migrants.

The vector *Xi* includes a set of individual and migration-related controls, namely age, years since arrival, employment status, and perceived agency in migration decision-making, as well as categorical indicators for country of residence, skill level, field of education, and gender. All models are estimated using ordinary least squares (OLS) with heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. Given the relatively small sample sizes for some countries, particularly Austria, separate country-level analyses are not feasible. To address this issue, we pool the data and control for destination country effects, allowing for more precise and robust analysis, while acknowledging the possible limitations of losing country-specific information.The empirical strategy focuses on estimating conditional associations rather than causal effects. To assess robustness, we estimate alternative specifications using the binary measure of AI motivation and conduct additional diagnostic checks such as tests for multicollinearity.

Limitations

Given the sampling design, the data is unlikely representative of the skilled migrant population in the four destination countries. Hence, we cannot make causal claims in this article. In addition, we are aware that the data may suffer from selection bias, omitted variable bias, common response bias, and/or recall bias. Findings should therefore be seen as indicative and interpreted with care.

Findings

The findings section examines whether AI-motivated migrants differ from other migrants in their post-migration experiences and in what aspects. Building on research that links migration motives to migrant selectivity, incorporation, and the unequal capacity to realize mobility projects (de Haas, 2021; Polavieja et al., 2018; Cerdin et al., 2014; Appadurai, 2007), we proceed in three steps. First, we present a descriptive overview of the analytical sample. Second, we compare AI-motivated and non-AI-motivated migrants across key dimensions of labour market and social incorporation. Third, we estimate multivariate regression models to assess whether these differences remain after adjusting for demographic, migration-related, and labour market characteristics. This stepwise strategy allows us to evaluate whether AI-oriented migration motivation is associated with a distinctive incorporation profile among non-EU skilled migrants in the EU.

Tables 2-3 provide an overview of the analytical sample and the main variables used in the study. Overall, respondents report moderately positive post-migration experiences, although there is meaningful variation across dimensions. Average scores are highest for job quality (62.4) and skill recognition (61.7), suggesting that many migrants perceive relatively favourable labour market conditions and some degree of recognition of their qualifications and skills. Economic satisfaction (59.4) and social integration (57.7) are slightly lower but remain above the midpoint of the scale, indicating moderately positive assessments of broader incorporation. By contrast, AI-related workplace satisfaction is substantially lower, with a mean of 46.0, making it the least positively evaluated dimension in the sample. This suggests that migrants may assess their general labour market incorporation more positively than the specific role of AI and automation in shaping their working conditions.

The descriptive profile also shows that the sample is composed largely of relatively young and economically active migrants. Respondents are, on average, 35 years old and have spent about 5.6 years in the destination country, pointing to a population that is neither newly arrived nor long-settled on average. A large majority are currently employed (84 percent), which is important for interpreting outcomes related to job quality and skill use. The average level of perceived agency is 3.6 on a five-point scale, indicating a moderately strong sense of control over migration-related decision-making. Around 22 percent of respondents are classified as AI-motivated migrants, showing that this is a substantial minority within the broader sample rather than a marginal subgroup.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Skill recognition index	1264	61.68	24.17	0.00	100.00
Job quality index	1277	62.40	19.53	0.00	100.00
AI workplace satisfaction index	1280	46.04	27.58	0.00	100.00
Economic satisfaction index	1271	59.42	20.65	0.00	100.00
Social integration index	1274	57.65	21.44	0.00	100.00
AI-motivated migrant (1=yes)	1280	0.22	0.42	0.00	1.00
Age (years)	1164	35.11	8.79	17.00	66.00
Years since arrival	1270	5.59	4.91	0.00	41.00
Currently employed (1=yes)	1277	0.84	0.37	0.00	1.00
Agency index	1276	3.60	1.08	1.00	5.00

Source: own elaboration.

The categorical distributions further clarify the composition of the sample. Respondents are concentrated in Poland (37.7 percent) and the Netherlands (30.9 percent), with smaller shares in Germany (23.1 percent) and Austria (8.4 percent). The sample is strongly skewed toward highly skilled migrants, who make up more than three-quarters of respondents (77.4 percent), while medium-skilled and semi-skilled migrants constitute much smaller shares. In terms of educational field, STEM and other fields each account for roughly 40 percent of the sample, whereas health and construction are less represented. Gender is almost evenly balanced. Taken together, these figures suggest that the analysis primarily captures the experiences of highly skilled, economically active migrants, which is consistent with the article's focus on AI-motivated skilled migration (see Table 2).

Table 2. Categorical distribution

Variable	Category	Count	Percent
Country of residence	Austria	108	8.44
	Germany	295	23.05
	Poland	482	37.66
	Netherlands	395	30.86
	Total	1280	100.00
Skill level	Semi-skilled	131	10.23
	Medium-skilled	158	12.34
	Highly skilled	991	77.42
	Total	1280	100.00
Field of education	Health	142	11.09
	Construction	102	7.97
	STEM	512	40.00
	Other	524	40.94
	Total	1280	100.00
Gender	Man/Male	647	50.55
	Woman/Female	633	49.45
	Total	1280	100.

Source: own elaboration.

Table 3 shows clear and consistent descriptive differences between AI-motivated and non-AI-motivated migrants across all five outcome dimensions. In every case, AI-motivated migrants report substantially more positive post-migration experiences, and all differences are statistically significant at the 1 percent level. This indicates that the observed gaps are unlikely to be due to random variation alone.

The most important finding for the article is that AI-motivated migrants appear to fare better on key indicators of labour market incorporation. They score 15.3 points higher on the skill recognition index and 14.2 points higher on the job quality index than regular migrants. These are large differences on a 0 to 100 scale and suggest that migrants who moved with stronger AI-related motivations are more likely to perceive that their qualifications and skills are recognized and that their jobs offer better overall quality.

The largest gap appears in AI-related workplace satisfaction. AI-motivated migrants score 70.8, compared with only 38.9 among non-AI-motivated migrants, a difference of 31.9 points. This suggests a particularly strong alignment between AI-oriented migration motives and positive evaluations of AI and automation in the workplace. Put differently, migrants who are drawn by AI-linked opportunities seem much more likely to feel satisfied with how AI-related change is affecting their work environment.

The table also shows that the advantages associated with AI-motivation extend beyond narrowly defined labour market outcomes. AI-motivated migrants report higher economic satisfaction, with a gap of 16.7 points, and higher social integration, also with a gap of 16.7

points. This suggests that AI-oriented migration motivation may be associated with a broader incorporation advantage, touching not only work and skills, but also migrants' wider assessment of life in the destination country.

Substantively, the pattern is striking because the gaps are both broad and large. Rather than showing improvement in only one area, AI-motivated migrants appear better positioned across labour market, workplace, economic, and social dimensions. This is consistent with the article's argument that AI-oriented migration motivation may reflect a distinct form of skilled migration linked to more favourable opportunity structures and better post-migration alignment between migrants' expectations and actual experiences.

Table 3. Bivariate Differences in Outcomes Between AI-Motivated and Non-AI-Motivated Migrants

	Regular migrants	AI-motivated migrants	Difference	t-stat	p-value
Skill recognition index	58.24	73.56	-15.32***	-9.75	0.000
Job quality index	59.23	73.44	-14.21***	-11.35	0.000
AI workplace satisfaction index	38.93	70.83	-31.90***	-19.63	0.000
Economic satisfaction index	55.70	72.42	-16.72***	-12.74	0.000
Social integration index	53.92	70.62	-16.70***	-12.24	0.000

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Source: own elaboration.

At the same time, these are bivariate results and should be interpreted with caution. They do not yet show whether AI-motivation itself is associated with better outcomes, or whether AI-motivated migrants differ from other migrants in characteristics that also shape incorporation, such as education, country of residence, employment status, or years since arrival. The table therefore provides strong descriptive evidence of group differences, but multivariate regression analysis is needed to determine whether these associations remain once compositional differences are taken into account.

Regression analysis

Table 4 shows that the positive descriptive differences between AI-motivated and other migrants persist after adjusting for skill level, country of residence, field of education, gender, age, years since arrival, employment status, and perceived agency. Across all five models, the AI motivation index is positively and statistically significantly associated with post-migration outcomes. This suggests that AI-oriented migration motivation is not simply a descriptive marker of a distinct subgroup, but is systematically related to migrants' labour market and incorporation experiences net of key observable characteristics.

Table 4. AI Motivation as continuous variable (0-100): regression models

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

	Skill Recognition index	job_quality_index	AI satisfaction index	economic_index	social_integration_index
AI motivation index	0.243***	0.217***	0.485***	0.218***	0.256***
	(0.0270)	(0.0236)	(0.0277)	(0.0247)	(0.0249)
skill:					
semi-skilled	-3.297	-2.858	2.231	-1.689	2.349
	(2.694)	(2.173)	(2.435)	(2.333)	(2.309)
medium-skilled	-5.680***	-4.870***	-2.532	-4.838***	1.935
	(2.177)	(1.851)	(1.983)	(1.830)	(1.991)
highly skilled (reference)	0	0	0	0	0
	(.)	(.)	(.)	(.)	(.)
country:					
Austria	5.831*	2.410	-0.913	2.568	-7.883***
	(3.001)	(2.086)	(3.270)	(2.342)	(2.540)
Poland	-4.548**	-3.628**	-4.783**	-0.402	-7.207***
	(2.161)	(1.671)	(2.186)	(1.780)	(1.867)
Germany	-4.028*	-4.826***	-5.223**	-0.206	-11.26***
	(2.268)	(1.750)	(2.316)	(1.871)	(1.835)
Netherlands (reference)	0	0	0	0	0
	(.)	(.)	(.)	(.)	(.)
agency:					
Agency index	2.964***	2.157***	1.032	2.319***	1.326**
	(0.679)	(0.550)	(0.726)	(0.606)	(0.644)
field:					
Health	-4.122*	-0.0437	-3.226	1.532	2.795
	(2.315)	(1.983)	(2.226)	(2.153)	(2.169)
Construction	-0.376	2.743	1.597	2.833	4.718*
	(2.787)	(2.212)	(2.522)	(2.477)	(2.519)
STEM (reference)	0	0	0	0	0

	(.)	(.)	(.)	(.)	(.)
Other	-3.144*	-2.418**	-2.911*	-0.653	-0.0515
	(1.632)	(1.224)	(1.679)	(1.314)	(1.377)
gender:					
Man/Male	2.373	2.092*	-0.447	3.373***	1.552
	(1.445)	(1.134)	(1.491)	(1.246)	(1.276)
Woman/Female (reference)	0	0	0	0	0
	(.)	(.)	(.)	(.)	(.)
Age in years	-0.198**	-0.266***	-0.00207	-0.0223	-0.0504
	(0.0985)	(0.0726)	(0.0926)	(0.0743)	(0.0798)
Years since arrival	0.375**	0.547***	0.202	0.217	0.314**
	(0.173)	(0.144)	(0.175)	(0.137)	(0.138)
employed_now:					
No (reference)	0	0	0	0	0
	(.)	(.)	(.)	(.)	(.)
Yes	6.061***	9.125***	3.689*	3.395*	2.540
	(2.237)	(1.823)	(2.095)	(1.851)	(1.931)
Constant	48.35***	51.02***	31.32***	41.42***	49.18***
	(4.637)	(3.494)	(4.461)	(3.675)	(3.938)
Observations	1138	1148	1150	1145	1146
R-squared	0.117	0.170	0.282	0.139	0.146

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$
Source: own elaboration.

The findings are especially important for labour market incorporation. In Model 1, AI motivation is positively associated with the skill recognition index (b = 0.243, p < 0.01). Substantively, this means that a 10-point increase in the AI motivation index is associated with a roughly 2.4-point increase in perceived skill recognition. This is consistent with research showing that migration decisions are shaped by perceived opportunity structures and that migrants' pre-migration motivations can influence how successfully they translate their skills into labour market outcomes after arrival (de Haas, 2021; Cerdin et al., 2014). The result supports the argument that AI-motivated migrants may arrive with expectations and orientations that are more closely aligned with destination-country opportunities, particularly in sectors and jobs where technological change increases demand for specialized skills (Basso et al., 2020; Beerli et al., 2023; Giesing, 2023).

A similar pattern emerges for job quality. In Model 2, AI motivation is positively

associated with the job quality index ($b = 0.217$, $p < 0.01$), implying that a 10-point increase in AI motivation corresponds to about a 2.2-point increase in perceived job quality. This reinforces the interpretation that AI-oriented migration motivation is linked not only to recognition of skills, but also to broader employment conditions after migration. This finding speaks directly to migration scholarship showing that skilled mobility is often driven by expectations of professional development, better working conditions, and stronger returns to qualifications, rather than by wages alone (Polavieja et al., 2018; Reinold & Czaika, 2026). In this sense, AI-motivated migration appears to reflect a specific form of future-oriented career mobility.

The strongest association is observed for AI workplace satisfaction. In Model 3, the coefficient for AI motivation is 0.485 ($p < 0.01$), meaning that a 10-point increase in the AI motivation index is associated with a 4.9-point increase in satisfaction with AI-related workplace conditions. This is substantively large and suggests that migrants who moved in response to AI-linked opportunities are much more likely to experience positive alignment between their expectations and the technological realities of the workplace. This resonates with Ong's (2003) argument that technology-oriented migrants are embedded in specific circuits of knowledge, capital, and organizational change, and with more recent work showing that AI-related labour demand is reshaping migration patterns and workplace experiences (Giesing, 2023). At the same time, the strength of this association may also indicate that AI-motivated migrants are more attentive to, and more positively disposed toward, AI-related transformations at work.

The relationship between AI motivation and broader incorporation outcomes is also notable. In Model 4, AI motivation is positively associated with economic satisfaction ($b = 0.218$, $p < 0.01$), and in Model 5 with social integration ($b = 0.256$, $p < 0.01$). Although these coefficients are smaller than for AI workplace satisfaction, they remain meaningful. A 10-point increase in AI motivation corresponds to roughly a 2.2-point increase in economic satisfaction and a 2.6-point increase in social integration. These findings suggest that the advantages associated with AI-oriented migration are not confined to narrow workplace outcomes, but extend to broader perceptions of economic wellbeing and incorporation in the destination society. This fits with research showing that migrants' aspirations and motivations shape not only labour market outcomes, but wider trajectories of settlement and adaptation (Cerdin et al., 2014; Appadurai, 2004).

Several of the control variables further strengthen this interpretation. Perceived agency is positively associated with skill recognition, job quality, economic satisfaction, and social integration. This is theoretically important because it aligns with Appadurai's (2004) notion of the capacity to aspire and with work showing that migrants' ability to convert aspirations into concrete outcomes depends on their sense of control, resources, and institutional navigation capacity (Hooijen et al., 2020). In our models, migrants who report greater agency also report better incorporation outcomes, suggesting that AI-oriented motivation works within a broader framework of aspiration and capability rather than independently of it.

Employment status also matters. Currently employed respondents report significantly higher levels of skill recognition, job quality, AI workplace satisfaction, and economic satisfaction. This is unsurprising, but analytically important, because it shows that labour market attachment remains central to migrants' evaluations of their incorporation. Even after accounting for current employment, however, AI motivation remains positively associated with all outcomes, which suggests that its effect is not reducible simply to whether migrants are employed.

Years since arrival is positively associated with skill recognition, job quality, and social integration, indicating that incorporation improves over time in several domains. This accords with classic migration scholarship showing that labour market adaptation and social embedding are gradual processes. At the same time, the persistence of the AI motivation coefficient after

controlling for time since arrival suggests that AI-oriented migrants do not merely benefit from having been in the destination longer; rather, they appear to experience a distinct incorporation profile.

There are also meaningful differences by skill level and country. Compared with highly skilled migrants, medium-skilled migrants report significantly lower skill recognition, job quality, and economic satisfaction. This underlines that the advantages associated with AI motivation are still stratified by broader human-capital inequalities. Country coefficients further suggest that destination context matters, especially for social integration, which is lower in Austria, Poland, and particularly Germany relative to the Netherlands. The positive association between AI motivation and incorporation therefore unfolds within destination-specific institutional and social environments rather than outside them.

Taken together, the regression results claim that AI-motivated migration is associated with a distinctive pattern of post-migration incorporation. Robustness checks further support this argument.[3] Migrants with stronger AI-oriented motivations report higher skill recognition, better job quality, more positive experiences of workplace AI, and more favourable economic and social outcomes, even after accounting for a range of alternative explanations. This suggests that AI-related opportunity structures matter not only for migration decisions themselves, but also for how migrants evaluate and experience life after migration. In theoretical terms, the findings reinforce the argument that AI-motivated migration can be understood as a new form of skilled migration, one in which technological futures shape both migrant selectivity and incorporation trajectories (de Haas, 2021; Ong, 2003; Giesing, 2023).

Conclusions

This article has argued that AI-motivated migration is an emerging form of skilled migration that deserves explicit attention in migration research. Drawing on survey data on non-EU skilled migrants in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and Poland, it conceptualized AI-motivated migrants as migrants whose mobility decisions are shaped by AI-linked opportunity structures, including expectations surrounding AI-related work, technologically advanced workplaces, and/ or future-oriented career development. AI-motivated migrants form a substantial share of the analysed sample (22 percent). It then examined whether such motivation is associated with distinctive post-migration outcomes.

The findings provide consistent evidence that stronger AI-oriented migration motivation is associated with more positive post-migration experiences. Migrants with higher levels of AI motivation report stronger perceived skill recognition, better job quality, more positive experiences of AI and automation at work, and more favourable economic and social outcomes. These associations persist even after accounting for skill level, employment, years since arrival, perceived agency, and destination-country differences. The results therefore suggest that AI-related opportunity structures matter not only for the decision to move, but also for how migrants experience labour market incorporation after arrival.

The article contributes to migration research in three main ways. First, it introduces AI-motivated migrants as a distinct analytical category within skilled migration research. Second, it links pre-migration motivations to post-migration incorporation, showing that motivations oriented toward technological opportunity structures are associated with more favourable labour market outcomes. Third, it situates these processes within the institutional context of the EU, highlighting how digital governance and labour market regulation shape the realization of migrants' projects.

[3] We conducted robustness checks based on alternative samples, including: 1) excluding Poland, and 2) including Canada. Across all specifications, the coefficient on the AI motivation index remains positive and statistically significant at conventional levels, suggesting that the core relationship is not driven by any single country.

The broader significance is that the article brings a new empirical development into conversation with long-standing theoretical concerns. AI-related change does not displace classic migration questions about selectivity, recognition, stratification, and incorporation; rather, it reconfigures them. The study therefore suggests that future work on skilled migration should pay closer attention to how migrants orient themselves toward technological futures and how those orientations are filtered through receiving-country institutions and labour markets.

At the same time, the conclusions should be understood as exploratory. The study identifies robust associations, not causal effects, and the concept of AI-motivated migration still requires further refinement and testing. Even so, the evidence points to a meaningful pattern: migrants who move with stronger AI-oriented motivations appear to experience a more favourable incorporation profile in the EU. This makes AI-motivated migration a useful concept for understanding how digital transformation is beginning to reshape the motives, pathways, and outcomes of skilled mobility. To grasp the phenomenon more fully, future research should also investigate how AI-motivation unfolds among prospective migrants in origins and under what conditions AI-motivated migration aspirations translate into actual mobility.

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Conflict of interest
The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethics statement
This study was approved by Erasmus University Rotterdam's DPAS Research Ethics Review Committee (approval numbers ETH2324-0932).

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