

# **DIFFERENCES IN CULTURAL COMPETENCE FOR ARAB IMMIGRANT WOMEN BASED ON FAMILY, WORKING, AND MOTHERHOOD STATUS**

**Nour Hazim Sa'ad Aldin Alsaraj**

PhD Student in Work and Organizational Psychology

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

E-mail: nsarraj28@yahoo.com

Tel: 00359877004522

**Abstract:** This study explores the role of cultural competence in the sociocultural adaptation of Arab immigrant women and examines how their marital status, employment status, and motherhood impact their adaptation. Cultural competence is essential for navigating societal expectations and overcoming barriers to inclusion. The integration experiences of Arab women are influenced by their employment, family status, and degree of social engagement. The current study employed a quantitative research approach, surveying 300 Arab immigrant women from Türkiye, Bulgaria, and England. Validated instruments, such as the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS), evaluated adaptation outcomes. The findings indicated that working women exhibited higher levels of cultural competence and social integration than unemployed women and stay-at-home mothers, as they benefited from greater exposure to multicultural environments and more opportunities for professional interactions. In contrast, unemployed women and stay-at-home mothers reported feeling more isolated, primarily depending on their ethnic networks for social interactions, which created both opportunities and barriers in their integration process. Additionally, the marital status of Arab women can significantly affect their integration, as married women may face additional barriers resulting from cultural expectations that limit their freedom of movement and participation in social and professional roles. Conversely, single women might experience greater independence but encounter societal pressures to seek autonomy. Another layer of complexity surrounding integration and adaptation for Arab immigrant women involves motherhood. Mothers must navigate their cultural identity while helping their children adapt to European societal expectations. This study emphasizes the importance of implementing targeted actions, such as promoting workplace diversity initiatives, encouraging community participation, and enhancing cultural competence initiatives, to bridge the adaptation gap for Arab immigrant women. Policymakers can create a framework for inclusion and well-being when designing an integration strategy by considering the interplay of marital status, employment, and motherhood. If Europe aims to support Arab

immigrant women in overcoming cultural challenges, enhancing access to economic opportunities, and fostering a culture-specific understanding of their integration experiences is vital.

***Keywords:***

Cultural Competence, Arab Immigrant Women, Marital Status, Work Status, Motherhood Status

**Introduction**

Migration has played a crucial role in Europe's cultural and demographic history, and Arab migrants have undeniably contributed to this narrative. Arab women, like all groups of migrants, face migration-related challenges that are unique to their experiences as they strive to integrate into European societies. These challenges include cultural adaptation, identity negotiation, and societal expectations. Barriers to integration may encompass, but are not limited to, language acquisition, access to the labor market, and societal acceptance (Errichiello, 2023; WHO, 2017).

The Arab world includes 22 countries across Northern Africa and the Middle East, showcasing a highly diverse cultural landscape. In fact, despite shared language and religious customs in Arab societies, notable differences in social norms and beliefs exist among them. Over time, due to the colonial past and geopolitical location, the culture of the Arab world has become associated with that of Europe, influencing Arab migration and, consequently, how migrants attempt to integrate into new societies. (Harb, 2016; Kalliny et al., 2011)

Cultural competence originated in social work and counseling and has become vital to intercultural interactions. It involves recognizing and creating opportunities to include and successfully connect with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Cultural competence entails prioritizing diversity, conducting cultural self-assessments, and safeguarding cultural knowledge, essential for enhancing intercultural communication and reducing barriers for Arab immigrant women. ICC competence is crucial for facilitating integration and requires motivation, self-awareness, and tolerance for ambiguity (Jani et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2021).

Arab women seek diverse and sometimes conflicting traditional gender roles alongside emerging social expectations and will continue to navigate transitions and adaptations. Consider how identity, language, community involvement, and creating opportunities for social engagement intersect to foster a more inclusive environment and successful integration (Tamunomiegbam & Arinze, 2024).

This paper will examine cultural competence and improve the integration experiences of Arab women in European societies. It will investigate the barriers and supports they encounter and the contexts in which Arab women are included. Ultimately, it will consider how social policies can promote equity and voice, enhance cultural awareness, and implement diversity and social engagement policies. Doing so will maintain the premise that more vibrant communities can foster healthy and inclusive environments.

## **Methodology**

### **• Research Design**

This study employs a quantitative research approach, using standardized psychometric scales to measure key variables, including cultural competence, family, work, and motherhood status. The research follows a comparative framework, analyzing responses from two distinct periods.

### **• Participants and Sampling**

The study involves 300 Arab immigrant women living in Türkiye, Bulgaria, and England. Participants were chosen using a purposive sampling method to ensure representation across various factors, including employment status, marital status, and motherhood status. The inclusion criteria required participants to be Arab immigrant women with at least one year of residency in the host country. The study involved 300 women, comprising the following demographics: women aged 18-25 (19%), 26-35 (18%), 36-45 (21%), 46-55 (19%), and over 55 (21%). The sample came from three European countries: 98 from Türkiye (32%), 118 from Bulgaria (39%), and 84 from England (28%). Among these women were Arab immigrants who left their home countries to settle in Europe for various reasons. Some migrated for business, some were refugees fleeing war searching for a peaceful place for their families, and others came to study in Europe and decided to work and stay there. Regarding work status, 29% were employees, 32% were housewives, and 39% worked online. Regarding marital status, 32% are married, 36% are single, and 32% are widowed. Among the sample, 68% are mothers, while 32% are not.

### **• Instruments and Measures**

To examine cultural competence, participants responded to the standardized Sociocultural Adaptation Scale-Revised (SCAS-R) and Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS), which assessed their ability to adjust to their host countries' social and cultural norms. These scales evaluated participants' capacity to adapt to these norms. This tool was chosen for its validity and reliability in assessing social adaptation factors across diverse cultural contexts.

## • Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multivariate regression modeling to examine the relationships among key variables. Cross-country comparisons were made to identify variations in sociocultural adaptation and cultural competence. Statistical software, such as SPSS, was utilized for data processing.

## Results & Discussion

Table 1 illustrates how work status influences various dimensions of cultural competence, including cultural awareness, interpersonal competence, and survival competence, as reflected in the overall cultural competence score. Employees, housewives, and those who work online are subcategories within the work status category.

**Table 1**

### ANOVA, Impact of Work Status on Cultural Competence

Descriptives					ANOVA			
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Between Groups			
					Sum of Squares	df	F	Sig.
Cultural awareness	Employee	37.3908	3.42140	.36681	37.322	2	.674	.511
	housewife	37.3854	4.57998	.46744				
	working online	38.1111	6.71306	.62062				
	Total	37.6700	5.25737	.30353				
Interpersonal competence	Employee	21.3333	2.37069	.25416	2.297	2	.191	.827
	housewife	21.4792	2.44079	.24911				
	working online	21.2735	2.52786	.23370				
	Total	21.3567	2.44870	.14138				
Survival competence	Employee	12.4713	1.65543	.17748	7.783	2	1.091	.337
	Housewife	12.3021	1.90909	.19485				
	working online	12.6838	2.02846	.18753				
	Total	12.5000	1.88906	.10907				
Cultural Competence	Employee	71.1954	5.56952	.59711	56.322	2	.532	.588
	Housewife	71.1667	7.14757	.72950				
	working online	72.0684	8.40436	.77698				
	Total	71.5267	7.26258	.41931				

Beginning with cultural awareness, employees have an average score of 37.39 (SD=3.42), while housewives also have an average of 37.39 (SD=4.58). Those working online score higher, averaging 38.11 (SD=6.71). The overall mean for cultural awareness across all groups is 37.67, with a standard deviation 5.26. The results from the ANOVA on cultural awareness show a sum of squares of 37.322,  $F=0.674$ , and  $\text{Sig.} = 0.511$ ; therefore, there is no statistically significant difference in cultural awareness based on work status.

The employees reported a mean score of 21.33 (Standard Deviation = 2.37), while housewives scored slightly higher with a mean of 21.48 (Standard Deviation = 2.44). Those working online achieved an average score of 21.27 with a Standard Deviation of 2.53. The overall average interpersonal competence across all work statuses is 21.36, with a Standard Deviation of 2.45. ANOVA analysis indicates a sum of squares of 2.297, an  $F$ -value of 0.191, and a significance level of 0.827, suggesting no significant differences in interpersonal competence across all work statuses. In terms of survival competence, employees reported a mean of 12.47 (SD = 1.66), housewives had a slightly lower mean of 12.30 (SD = 1.91), while those working online reported a mean of 12.68 (SD = 2.03). The overall mean for survival competence is 12.50, with SD = 1.89. The ANOVA results indicate a sum of squares of 7.783, an  $F$ -value of 1.091, with a significance level of 0.337; thus, there is no significant difference in survival competence by work status.

For cultural competence, employees have a mean score of 71.20 with a standard deviation of 5.57; for housewives, the mean is 71.17 with a standard deviation of 7.15. The mean for working online is higher: 72.07 (SD = 8.40), so the total mean for cultural competence across the whole group stands at 71.53 (SD = 7.26). Using ANOVA, the sum of squares is 56.322, the  $F$ -value is 0.532, and the significance level from ANOVA is 0.588, indicating no general statistically significant difference in cultural competence across these working statuses.

From the ANOVA results in Table 1, concerning work status (employee, housewife, working online), we note that the cultural awareness and knowledge sensitivity variable has an  $F$ -statistic of .064, with a significance level of 0.511. This indicates that, with  $p > 0.05$ , the differences among the three types of attire are not statistically significant regarding the cultural awareness factor. In the interpersonal competence factor, the  $F$ -value is .191, with a  $p$ -value of 0.827. Thus, differences in interpersonal competencies across the three attire types are insignificant at  $p > 0.05$ . In survival competence, the ANOVA output analysis shows an  $F$ -statistic of 0.1091; the level of statistical significance is 0.337. This suggests no difference in

survival competence among the three types of attire based on the statistical significance level ( $p > 0.05$ ).

Table 2 examines the relationship between marital status and four dimensions of cultural competence: cultural awareness, interpersonal competence, survival competence, and overall cultural competence.

**Table 2**

**ANOVA, Impact of Marital Status on Cultural Competence**

Descriptives					ANOVA			
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Between Groups			
					Sum of Squares	df	F	Sig.
Cultural awareness	Married	37.0722	4.36427	.44312	60.137	2	1.089	.338
	Single	37.7593	6.80828	.65513				
	Widowed	38.1789	3.88116	.39820				
	Total	37.6700	5.25737	.30353				
Interpersonal competence	Married	21.3299	2.56061	.25999	.293	2	.024	.976
	Single	21.3981	2.39524	.23048				
	Widowed	21.3368	2.41718	.24800				
	Total	21.3567	2.44870	.14138				
Survival competence	Married	12.3093	2.08846	.21205	5.281	2	.739	.479
	Single	12.5741	1.83529	.17660				
	Widowed	12.6105	1.73386	.17789				
	Total	12.5000	1.88906	.10907				
Cultural Competence	Married	70.7113	7.77276	.78920	103.172	2	.978	.377
	Single	71.7315	8.16719	.78589				
	Widowed	72.1263	5.38959	.55296				
	Total	71.5267	7.26258	.41931				

The groups to be compared are married, single, and widowed. Starting with cultural awareness, married participants reported a mean of 37.07 (SD = 4.36), whereas single participants reported a higher mean of 37.76 (SD = 6.81). In contrast, the mean for widowed participants was the highest at 38.18 (SD = 3.88). All groups' overall mean response rate regarding cultural awareness is 37.67 (SD = 5.26). In the ANOVA analysis, this has a sum of squares of 60.137, an F-value of 1.089, and a significance level of 0.338. This indicates no significant differences in cultural awareness by marital status.

Interpersonal Competence: Married women have an average score of 21.33 with a standard deviation 2.56. Singles achieved a higher score at 21.40 with a standard deviation of 2.40. Widowed individuals have an average score of 21.34 with a standard deviation 2.42. The sample's mean score for interpersonal competence is 21.36, with a standard deviation of 2.45. The results from ANOVA indicate a sum of squares of 0.293, an F-value of 0.024, and a significance level of 0.976, suggesting that marital status does not account for any variance in interpersonal competence.

Survival Competence: Marital status and survival competence: Married 12.31 (SD = 2.09); Singles 12.57 (SD = 1.84); Widowed 12.61 (SD = 1.73); Overall 12.50 (SD = 1.89). From the ANOVA analysis, the sum of squares is 5.281, the F-value is 0.739, and the significance level is 0.479, indicating no significant difference in survival competence among subjects with different marital statuses.

Regarding cultural competence, married respondents have an average rating of 70.71 with a standard deviation (SD) of 7.77, while single respondents have an average rating of 71.73 with an SD of 8.17. In this category, widowed participants score the highest, with a mean of 72.13 (SD = 5.39). The overall mean for cultural competence across all groups is 71.53 (SD = 7.26). According to ANOVA, the sum of squares is 103.172, and the F-value is 0.978, with a significance level of 0.377. This indicates that marital status does not significantly affect general cultural competence.

The ANOVA results in Table 2 indicate the Marital Status variable (Married, Single, or Widowed). We observe that the Cultural Awareness and Knowledge Sensitivity factor has an F-statistic of 1.089, with a significance level of 0.338. This suggests that with  $p > 0.05$ , the difference is not statistically significant regarding this factor.

The F-value for the Interpersonal competence factor is 0.024, with a p-value of 0.976. Therefore, the difference in this factor is non-significant at  $p > 0.05$ . For Survival competence, the ANOVA output analysis shows an F-statistic of 0.739, with a statistical significance level of 0.479. This indicates no difference in this factor based on the statistical significance level ( $p > 0.05$ ).

Motherhood is a significant factor influencing the cultural competence of Arab immigrant women. Raising children brings substantial responsibility and adds extra pressure on immigrant women, in addition to the stress of achieving success in the host country.

Table 3 analyses the effects of motherhood status on selected cultural awareness competencies: interpersonal, survival, and general cultural competence. The participants were divided into two groups: mothers and non-mothers.

**Table 3**

**ANOVA, Impact of Motherhood Status on Cultural Competence**

Descriptives					ANOVA			
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Between Groups			
					Sum of Squares	Df	F	Sig.
Cultural awareness	Yes	37.2316	4.05928	.41647	26.722	1	.967	.326
	No	37.8732	5.72606	.39993				
	Total	37.6700	5.25737	.30353				
Interpersonal competence	Yes	21.1053	2.64766	.27164	8.787	1	1.468	.227
	No	21.4732	2.34845	.16402				
	Total	21.3567	2.44870	.14138				
Survival competence	Yes	12.4842	2.06729	.21210	.035	1	.010	.922
	No	12.5073	1.80582	.12612				
	Total	12.5000	1.88906	.10907				
Cultural Competence	Yes	70.8211	7.15628	.73422	69.219	1	1.314	.253
	No	71.8537	7.30552	.51024				
	Total	71.5267	7.26258	.41931				

Cultural awareness: Mothers = 37.23; SD = 4.06, Childless = 37.87; SD = 5.73, and Overall = 37.67; SD = 5.26. The ANOVA test shows that the sum of squares is 26.722, the F-value is 0.967, and the Sig is 0.326. These results confirm no significant statistical differences in cultural awareness between mothers and non-mothers.

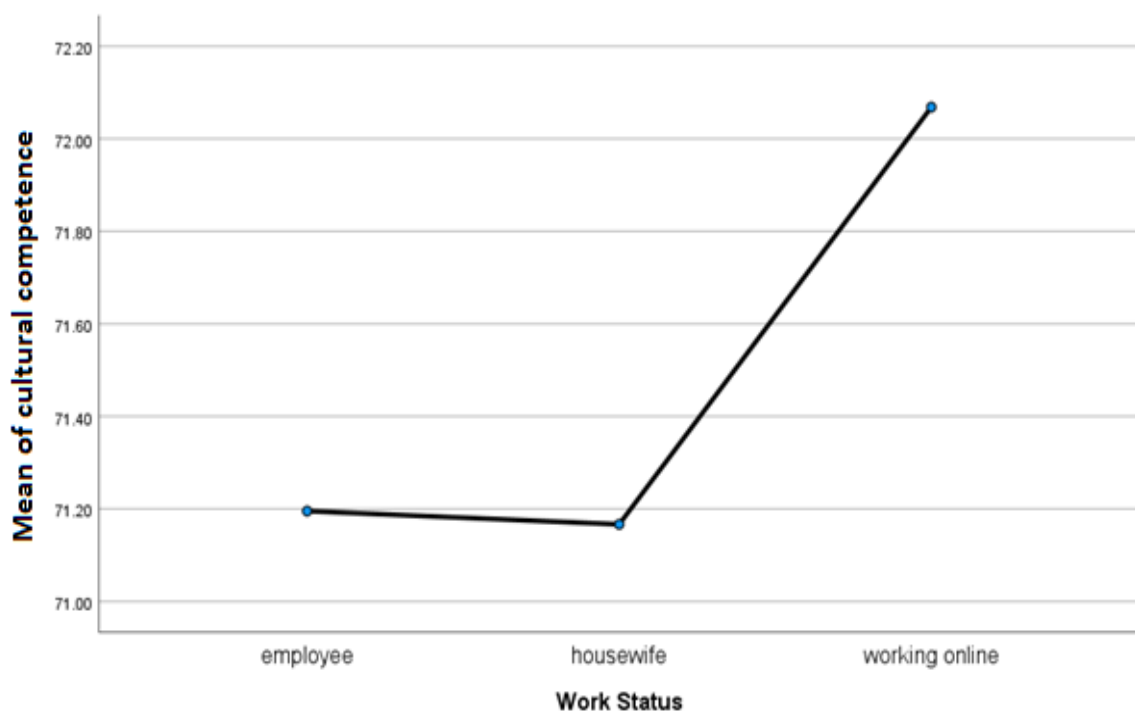
Interpersonal Competence: Mothers reported a mean score of 21.11 (SD = 2.65), whereas non-mothers had a higher mean of 21.47 (SD = 2.35). The overall mean interpersonal competence across all groups is 21.36 (SD = 2.45). The ANOVA results show a sum of squares of 8.787, an F-value of 1.468, and a significance level of 0.227. Once again, these findings do not indicate differences in interpersonal competence based on motherhood status.

The mothers report an average score of 12.48 (Standard Deviation = 2.07), while non-mothers report an average of 12.51 (Standard Deviation = 1.81). The overall mean is 12.50 (Standard Deviation = 1.89). The ANOVA analysis yielded a sum of squares of 0.035, an F-value of 0.010, and a significance level of 0.922. This indicates no significant difference in survival competence between mothers and non-mothers.



On the cultural competence scale, mothers had a mean score of 70.82 with a standard deviation of 7.16, while the mean for non-mothers' aggregate score was 71.85, with a standard deviation of 7.31. The overall mean for the three groups is 71.53, with a standard deviation of 7.26. The ANOVA yielded a sum of squares of 69.219, an F-value of 1.314, and a p-level of 0.253. Therefore, motherhood status did not influence aggregate cultural competency.

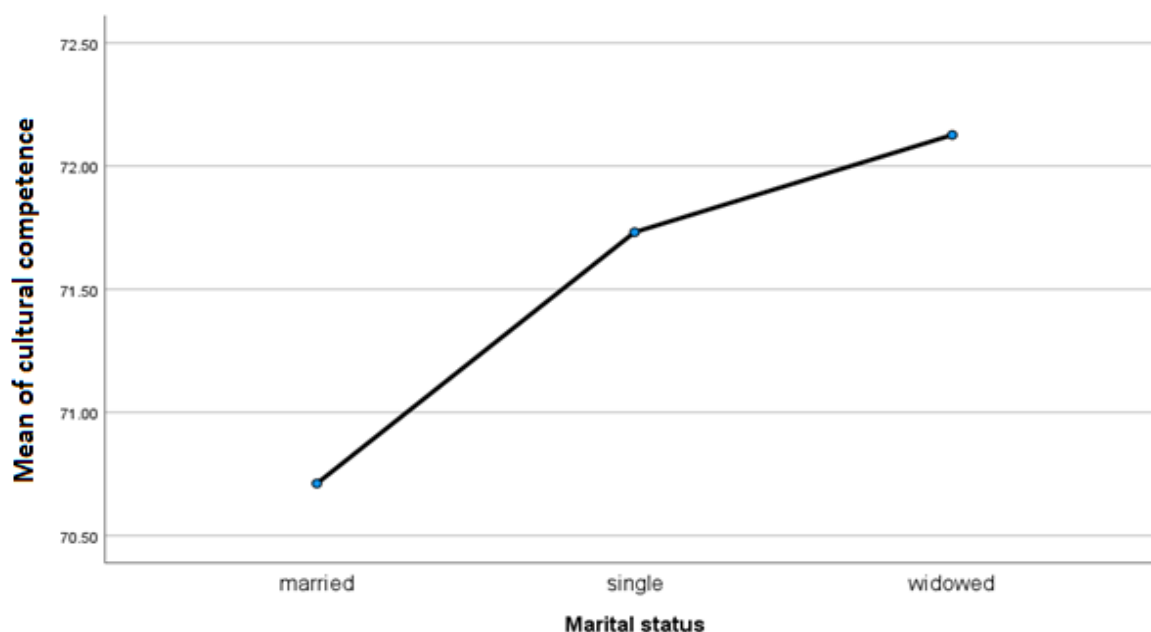
From the ANOVA results in Table 3, motherhood status shows that the cultural awareness and knowledge sensitivity variable has an F-statistic of .976 and a significance level of 0.326. This indicates that, with  $p > 0.05$ , the difference regarding the cultural awareness factor is not statistically significant. The F-value for the interpersonal competence factor is 1.468, with a p-value of 0.227. Therefore, differences in interpersonal competencies across the three attire types are non-significant at  $p > 0.05$ . The ANOVA output analysis provides the F-statistic for survival competence, with a statistical significance level of 0.337. This suggests no difference in survival competence across the three types of attire based on the statistical significance level ( $p > 0.05$ ).



**Figure 4: Cultural Competence in Work Status**

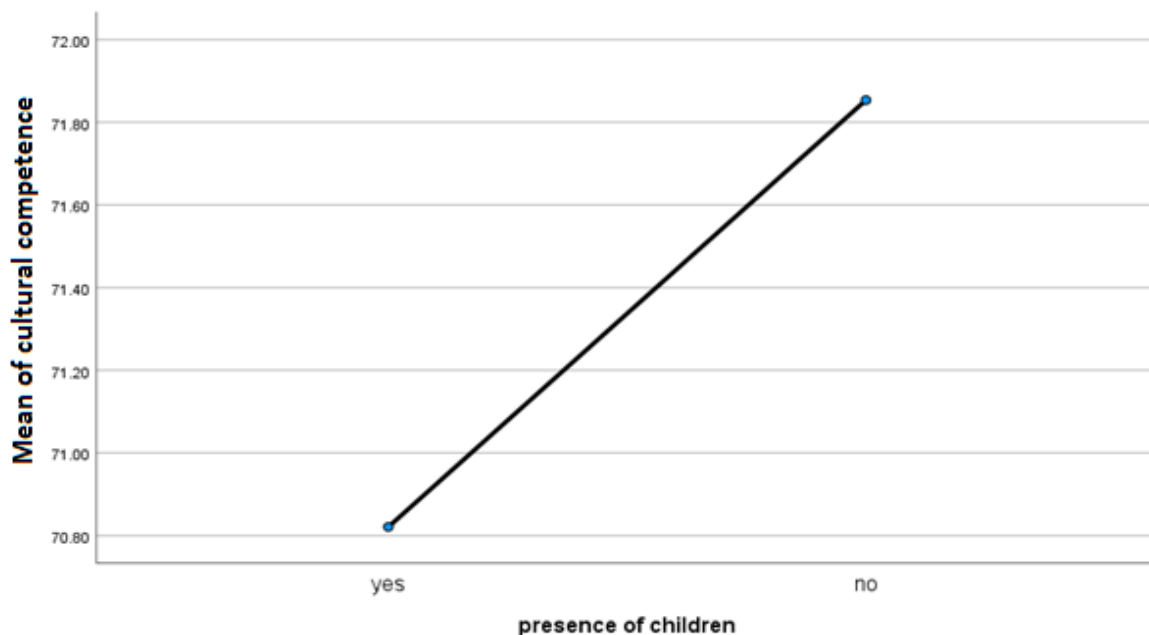
In Figure 4, Arab immigrant women working online exhibit the highest level of cultural competence. This is likely due to their frequent interactions with people from diverse cultural backgrounds in their work, which gradually enhances their cultural competence through cross-cultural engagement. Furthermore, online work often requires strong communication skills in

either the local language or English, prompting women to improve their language proficiency and ultimately enhancing their cultural competence. Online work offers greater flexibility regarding hours and location, allowing women to balance work and family responsibilities effectively. Additionally, online work may help overcome some traditional barriers immigrants face in the labor market, such as discrimination or a lack of recognition for foreign qualifications. Unlike housewives, who may experience greater isolation, online workers engage in regular virtual interactions that reduce feelings of loneliness and promote cultural learning and competence in their host country.



**Figure 5 Cultural Competence in Marital Status**

In Figure 5, it is clear that widowed women and single Arab immigrant women demonstrate greater cultural competence than married women. The independence of single and widowed women allows them to interact more freely with the host society and adapt to the new culture. Furthermore, because they do not have to navigate the potential limitations of a spouse's social circle, they can build diverse social networks, including locals and other immigrants, which results in increased cultural exposure and competence. In contrast, married women may be pressured to uphold traditional cultural practices and experience greater isolation within their family units.



**Figure 6 Cultural Competence in Motherhood Status**

Figure 6 shows that Arab immigrant women with children demonstrate the lowest level of cultural competence in three European countries. This results from their limited language skills, which make communication with healthcare providers, teachers, and other essential contacts in the host country difficult. Additionally, these mothers struggle to balance their cultural heritage and parenting traditions with integrating into the host society. The responsibilities of motherhood may restrict their employment opportunities and social integration. Furthermore, mothers in the host country may encounter changing roles and expectations compared to motherhood in their home countries.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this research demonstrate that cultural competence is crucial for integrating Arab women's identities into European sociocultural and organizational spaces. It supports Arab women's cultural identities as they adapt to new contexts. However, many Arab women face inherent barriers in the integration process, including language, cultural differences, and gender stereotypes. Implementing cultural competence programs within educational institutions, workplaces, and communities can equip Arab women with the tools to navigate various social situations. This approach fosters understanding not only of the cultural practices of others but also of their own. Being sensitive to personal cultural behaviors, such as dress codes, dietary restrictions, and religious observances, while striving to promote inclusion

in workplaces, can establish trust with Arab women and help them feel a sense of belonging. Moreover, whether organizations or policies exhibit accommodating attitudes toward cultural diversity affects opportunities for collaboration and productivity, fostering inclusion and providing Arab women with a more genuine sense of belonging in their workplaces.

Another often-neglected consideration in the integration experiences of Arab women revolves around their marital status. In this study, marital status is defined and acknowledged as an important factor in how Arab women navigate their journeys into integration. For example, married Arab women may face additional barriers due to traditional gender role expectations, norms, and values that influence their participation in work and society. These cultural expectations may prevent married Arab women from engaging in employment and social life at the level they desire, which, in turn, can hinder their integration into European communities. Single Arab women may encounter fewer complications when adapting to their host societies. However, they still face stereotypes stemming from their independence and the choices that accompany it.

Incorporating policies that recognize and address the various marital statuses of Arab women can enhance their adaptation by acknowledging and fulfilling their unique needs. Employment status is a crucial factor influencing cultural competence and adaptation. Arab women in the workforce have greater access to diverse interactions, which may positively affect their sociocultural adaptation. Employment policies that promote inclusion and integration, such as diversity training and flexible work arrangements, can provide Arab women with opportunities to thrive in a supportive environment. Conversely, unemployed or underemployed Arab women may be more prone to occupying isolated spaces, reinforcing cultural barriers, and limiting their social and economic engagement opportunities.

Motherhood presents specific challenges in the integration process for Arab women, especially as Arab mothers face the dilemma of balancing their cultural expectations and priorities with the desire for their children to be assimilated into, or accepted by, European society. The time-consuming nature of motherhood affects employment opportunities, as the complexities of accessing childcare and having flexibility at work significantly hinder women's chances of participating in the labor market. Stay-at-home mothers often depend on ethnic networks for support, which may facilitate integration but can also be isolating, further confining them from mainstream society. Educational and training programs focused on cultural exchange and inclusion enhance mothers' ability to adapt while ensuring their children develop cultural competence and support their overall successful integration.

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