
PAVING THE WAY: MIGRANT WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES REGARDING GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION ON THE ROMANIAN LABOR MARKET

Vlad I. ROȘCA¹
Georgiana-Virginia BONEA²

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35782/JCPP.2024.2.02>

***Abstract:** Through qualitative research conducted with migrant women, this study is relevant for analyzing their perceptions and experiences of gender-based discrimination against them, when looking for a job, for marriage and family reunification, or for studying. It is about a series of difficulties encountered by migrant women in the process of integration in Romania. The study is structured as follows: I) The first part offers an analysis of empirical data extracted from specialized literature and relevant studies to highlight the main defining aspects regarding gender-based discrimination criteria in relation to migrant women's access to the labor market; II) The second part of the study consists in explaining the research methodology; III) The third part provides an analysis of the findings from oral history six interviews conducted on Zoom with migrant women, between June 2021 and January 2022; IV) The last part offers a set of relevant conclusions on the subject.*

***Keywords:** migration, gender-based discrimination, women, labor market*

¹ Assistant Professor, Ph.D., UNESCO Department for Business Administration, The Faculty of Business Administration, in foreign languages (FABIZ), The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, e-mail: vlad.rosca@fabiz.ase.ro

² Scientific Researcher III (CS III), Ph.D., Research Institute for Quality of Life, the Romanian Academy, e-mail: georgiana.bonea@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The labor market is built around competition regarding the selection of workers according to certain qualities that employers consider desirable and valuable. Consequently, some people have limited access based on considerations of gender and nativity, age and skills, education and experience (Kraal et. al., 2009). The integration of migrant women into the labor market is a complex process that involves, among others, the elimination of gender-based discrimination in employment and in determining the monthly salary amount (Syed and Murray, 2009). Also, the integration of migrant women, not only on the labor market, but also in society, requires capturing the socio-cultural and economic elements of the gender dynamics regarding the phenomenon of migration and, at the same time, the identification and application of effective specific pro-integration social policies.

Both men and women migrate in order to access a quality education and to increase their financial and professional opportunities, but also for family reunification and marriage (Fleury, 2016). It was only between the 1970s and 1980s that research on migrant women began to take shape, thus changing the views of the phenomenon of migration (Gabbacia, 1991; Bevelander, 2005). In this way, the notion of gender appears in discussions about migrants, along with the problems faced by migrant women (Benería et.al., 2012; Sinke, 2006). The notion of gender studies in migration research has been developed later during the 1990s and 2000s, being also encouraged by decision-making policies of the International Organization of Migration (IOM) (Collins, 1998; Parreñas, 2000).

The term "gender" refers to the roles, behaviors, and identities traditionally associated with women and men in a given society or culture. Gender is not just a matter of biology (sex) but is a complex social and cultural construct that influences how people behave, perceive themselves and are perceived in society. Gender can include aspects such as gender stereotypes, social norms, expectations, gender identity and more.

Discrimination against migrant women and migrant men, in general, refers to the unfair treatment or favoring of one category of migrant over another based on their gender. Discrimination can take many forms and vary according to the society and culture in which it occurs (Pokharel, 2008; Aigner and Cain, 1977). In other words, discrimination against

migrant women and migrant men may have some differences and also similarities, but it is important to emphasize that both migrant women and men can be victims of discrimination in different contexts and for different reasons. However, differences between discrimination against migrant women and migrant men may depend on several factors, including culture, legislation, history and the specific context of migration. There are some elements related to discrimination against migrant women. The first element could relate to the fact that migrant women may be subjected to gender-specific discrimination, which means that they are discriminated based on their sex. This may include employment discrimination, lower wages for the same work, limited access to educational opportunities, or reproductive health discrimination. Of course, migrant men may also be subject to gender discrimination, but in a different way (Ellemers, 2018). Also, related to gender discrimination is gender violence, to which migrant women can be more vulnerable. Furthermore, both migrant women and migrant men can be discriminated because of their migratory status, especially where legal documents regarding this status are missing. The cultural norms and values promoted in the host country may have more conservative attitudes towards women, which may lead to additional discrimination for migrant women. Regarding discrimination at the workplace of migrant women, things are more complicated, in the context of discriminatory trends that may vary depending on the work sector. For example, certain sectors may have more pronounced discrimination against male migrants, while others may discriminate against female migrants (Heilman and Caleo, 2018). Also, migrant women may experience difficulties accessing sexual and reproductive health services or exercising their reproductive rights, such as access to contraception or abortion (Allotey et.al., 2004).

Discrimination based on gender and ethnicity on the labor market of migrant women contribute to their marginalization and implicitly to keep them in poverty, denying them free and unconditional access to basic services such as education or primary preventive medicine. Career progress for both migrant men and women is full of obstacles and difficulties, as they are forced to accept inconsistent positions, even inferior to their training (Schrover et. al., 2007). Therefore, migrants have been illustrious as victims of a discriminatory culture and policy based on gender and ethnicity (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007).

The present study proposes an analysis of the perceptions of discrimination experienced by migrant women upon labor market access. Thus, the study starts from an examination of the specialized literature in order to build a complete picture on the subject and continues with a presentation of the research findings. The six oral history interviews were selected out of a set of 21 interviews with third country nationals in Romania, carried out as part of a doctoral research investigating access and inclusion mechanisms of migrants in Romania. The six were selected as, out of the 21 interviews, these were the women who had labor experience in Romania. The interviews were conducted in the period between June 2021 and January 2022. Thus, the scope of the current study is to reveal the lived experiences of migrant women and their perceptions regarding labor market integration.

2. General theoretical approaches and a short policy review

By and large, the term integration is often associated with social cohesion and migration, in the sense of the integration of migrants in the receiving country. Thus, the integration of migrants is a process developed in time and space, involving assimilation, inclusion and adaptation (Favell, 2010). Also, special attention must be paid to the problem of the integration of migrant women in the labor market, which most often takes into account factors such as: gender, ethnicity, age, spoken language, experience and education, which most often become disadvantages for employment (Schieckoff and Sprengholz, 2021).

Gender-based discrimination is a form of violence against women, regardless of ethnicity, age or social status. According to the Istanbul Convention on combating violence against women and domestic violence, dated 12 April 2011, gender-based violence against women is translated by abuse and violence against women only on the basis of being a woman, or that affects women directly, being a serious violation of Human Rights and, at the same time, it is a gender-based discrimination against women. Acts of a physical, economic, sexual, psychological or social nature, in the public or private space, as well as the limitation of women's access to the labor market or the educational system, which is meant to bring damage and suffering to the victims, are therein included. Non-discrimination,

according to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (Article 21), implies (1) "the prohibition of discrimination of any kind, based on reasons such as sex, race, color, ethnic or social origin, genetic characteristics, language, religion or beliefs, political or other opinions, membership of a national minority, wealth, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation"; (2) "Within the scope of the treaties and without prejudice to their special provisions, any discrimination is prohibited on grounds of citizenship".

Further, according to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, (Article 1), United Nations, gender-based discrimination represents "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, regardless of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil, or any other field".

In other words, the limitation of women's access to the labor market implies the violation of the fundamental rights promoted at the international level and causes damage not only to the victims, but to the economic and social system of the receiving country, ignoring the advantages of the integration and use of this important human capital (Alfarran et.al., 2018; Behtoui, 2008). In the global context of population aging and taking into account the multiple difficulties created by the COVID-19 pandemic, capitalizing on the labor force of migrant women can be a beneficial solution for both sides.

As far as Romania is concerned, through a legislative set, the observance of some basic principles regarding gender equality is guaranteed, as it is: Law no. 202, April 19, 2002, on equal opportunities between women and men; Emergency ordinance no. 45/2020 for completing Government Ordinance no. 137/2000 on the prevention and sanctioning of all forms of discrimination. Also, Romania has a National Immigration Strategy regarding Migration for the period 2021-2024, which consists of a set of public policies designed to effectively manage the reception and integration of migrants.

There are several factors that contribute to the women's desire and subsequently, to their decision to migrate to another country, such as: age and ethnicity; the level of education and the profession practiced; the

marital status and existence of children etc. (Boyd and Grieco, 2014; Hiralal, 2017). In addition to gender, age and place of birth, migrant women face discrimination based on body weight when hiring. For health and economic reasons, body weight is sometimes taken into account by employers (Busetta et.al., 2020). Thus, the socio-economic and political dimension of discrimination against migrants on various grounds, in the receiving country, acquires new values.

In general, there are several factors that influence the labor market in a country, such as: the integration policy of migrants; policy favorable to the employment of women and the elderly; the moment in which the economy of the respective country is located; fiscal policies; the degree of fraud in the fiscal system; the openness that employers have towards other ethnicities and the training possibilities they have and can offer to employees etc. Depending on such factors, migrants face more or less difficulties in finding a job according to their training (Borjas, 2001; Damm, 2009). For example, for purely economic and logistical reasons, employers prefer to check the health status of their future employees, and also being overweight becomes a clear disadvantage at the time of employment. Body weight is most often associated with the physical state of health and with the work potential and resistance of the employee. Some employers even provide their employees with access to various gyms or monthly subscriptions for this purpose, being a good way to prevent various cardiovascular diseases. So, body weight is a very important factor for the employer, not only regarding migrants, but also all other categories of employees and future employees. Consequently, this form of discrimination is based on purely economic considerations taken into account by employers (Busetta et.al., 2020; Busetta et.al., 2018a).

Therefore, there are some main key elements regarding the integration process of migrants on the labor market and in society. It is important to emphasize that each of these key elements can become a disadvantage for migrants who want to find a job and integrate in the host country. For example, a considerable disadvantage for migrants in terms of employment can be the age. Age is often taken into account by employers, not only in the case of migrant women, but also in the case of natives. It is considered that with advancing age, the speed of adaptation and response to new challenges decreases, but above all, the degree of performance in the field of activity decreases (Balch and Scott, 2011; Stypińska and Gordo, 2018). Migrant

women are doubly disadvantaged from this perspective, so that, in addition to specific vulnerabilities, they could face preconceptions regarding the link between gender and work performance; speed of learning and adaptation; the degree of endurance and response to challenges. It must be clarified that gender difference highlights the advantages granted to men when employed on the labor market compared to women (Raghuram, 2008; Ballarino and Panichella, 2018).

Likewise, gender and race are part of the socially constructed categories meant to create notable differences between individuals in terms of identity, interrelationship with those around them and positioning in society. Multiracial feminist theory has its roots in the approaches and the feminist movement, based on the implementation and application of the principles of gender equality and racial non-discrimination. Since migrant women face, in some cases, integration difficulties caused by discrimination based on gender, ethnicity and social class, multiracial feminist theory can be applied in this case as well, to analyze, from certain points of view, both the factors and the consequences of discrimination and marginalization. In essence, the consequences fall not only on the victims of discrimination and marginalization, but also on society as a whole (Zinn and Dill, 2016; Browne and Misra, 2003).

Knowing the language of the host country by migrants, in general, is an advantage in finding a job faster. At the same time, the migrant's place of origin can be accompanied by a series of preconceptions, which only complicate the process of assimilation and integration. Natives of that country may be at an advantage in terms of employment due to their knowledge of the language, acquired experience or educational level. All these aspects, in general, are predictable signs of good integration in the work team, and employers take these aspects into account (Kaas and Manger, 2012; Schieckoff and Sprengholz, 2021).

The level of assimilation and integration capacity of the receiving country is a very important aspect, because each state has its own policy regarding the integration of migrants on the labor market, with more or less disadvantages for them. Preventing and combating the marginalization of migrants is crucial in facilitating free access to education and finding a suitable job (Brell et.al., 2020; Dustmann, 1996). Also, many times, in the case of migrant women, the level of education and experience are not taken into account by the employer. Migrant women present a series of

adaptation problems, and at the same time, their ability to adapt and integrate, is being underestimated. Thus, the migrant woman is employed in a position inferior to her training and experience accumulated over time, having to demonstrate repeatedly that she can have good results at work (Piracha et.al., 2012; Buzdugan and Halli, 2009).

Another disadvantage can be the socio-cultural differences between the country of origin and the receiving country translate into difficulties in accepting and adapting to new social and legislative rules, different customs, etc. The process of accommodation and integration is different for each individual migrant, depending on the life history; level of education and experience; the cultural similarities between the country of origin and the host country; whether or not there are family relatives in the host country etc. (Fokkema and De Haas, 2015; Diehl et.al., 2016).

A very important aspect is the socioeconomic status of the migrants can be an advantage in the process of integration in the receiving country, in the conditions where they come from a higher class, or it can be a disadvantage, in the case of a lower class. Among other things, socioeconomic status shows the degree of access to education, health, culture, etc. Also, the lower social class and the precarious material situation shows an increased degree of marginalization and it can force the members of a family to separate and migrate in search of new sources of income and for a better life (Chen et.al., 2020; Rose, 1958).

In order to ensure proper integration, migrants need several guarantees and actions from the host country's government, starting from general human rights, up to facilitating access to education and participation in the labor market, such as: eliminate all forms of discrimination based on gender, culture, age and ethnicity by promoting equal rights and legal protection against discrimination; guarantee free access to social, educational and medical services in the receiving country; respecting and facilitating migrants access to the labor market; capitalizing as much as possible on this new source of experience and manpower; offering legal and material support to migrants in order to integrate them as quickly and easily as possible; adapting the relevant legislation to the new challenges of the period regarding the needs of migrants nowadays; the existence of centres that offer support in order to learn the language of the receiving country, to identify a suitable job and a home that the migrant can afford; ensuring respect for women's rights and human rights, through the state

apparatus and the competent institutions; promoting tolerance towards other cultures and ethnicities (Merrouni and Machak, 2019; Velluti, 2007).

3. Gender-based discrimination of migrant women on the labor market

Gender-based discrimination of migrant women on the labor market is defined as unequal treatment that migrant women may experience in employment and work-related opportunities due to their gender (Pustulka, 2015). It is obvious that this form of discrimination intersects with both gender discrimination and discrimination based on migration status. Gender-based discrimination against migrant women in the labor market, in general, reveals a series of disadvantages and difficulties such as: language and cultural barriers; discriminatory hiring practices favoring native-born candidates over migrants; also, migrant women may face barriers to accessing benefits such as maternity leave; sometimes, migrant women may not be aware of their rights or may fear reporting discrimination due to concerns about immigration status; language barriers in general; some migrant women may be vulnerable to precarious work conditions, including long hours, low pay, and lack of job security; some migrant women often face a wage gap compared to both male migrants and native-born women; occupational segregation, where migrant women are concentrated in certain industries; and last, but not least, migrant women may have difficulties accessing skilled or professional job opportunities, even if they possess the qualifications because of gender and ethnic stereotypes (Irastorza, 2020; Phillion, 2003; Tastsoglou and Preston, 2005).

The general process of integration of migrant women in the new country involves efforts regarding learning the language, accepting the culture, getting used to the customs, familiarizing with the history and geography (Boyd and Grieco, 2014). The integration of migrant women on the labor market is perceived from several perspectives like: the gender angle regarding the migrant woman's ability to adapt and obtain satisfactory results with performance at work; market indicators; training and application for the job - most of the time, they are not related to each other because the studies in the native country of the migrants are not taken into account; the migrants' labor experience; integration policies in the receiving country etc. (Schieckoff and Sprengholz, 2021; Foroutan,

2008). The vast majority of migrant women face difficulties in finding a job and, moreover, against the background of the precarious material situation, they are forced to accept positions inferior to their educational training in their country of origin (Man, 2004; Misztal, 1991).

For migrant women, ethnicity and gender are two defining characteristics of the migration dimension, while the occupational structure within the labor market of the receiving country reflects the integration policies of migrants (Misztal, 1991).

The frustration of migrant women looking for a job is directly proportional to their efforts to participate in the labor market of the host country and integrate into society. Thus, the indicators of integration difficulties relate to the high unemployment among migrant women, to the situations in which they are forced by circumstances to accept low-paid, part-time or temporary jobs and below their professional qualification and training. Also, the educational level and the desire to find a job, as well as the existence of children or other family obligations, determine to a certain extent the salary level of migrant women (Rubin et. al., 2008).

Gender-based wage discrimination makes a clear difference between men and women on the labor market. In this way, women are in a lower position than men. At the same time, migrant women are discriminated against native women in the same positions and with similar experience regarding the monthly salary. Thus, on the one hand, there is ethnic discrimination between native women and migrant women, and on the other hand, gender discrimination between migrant women and migrant men (Nicodemo and Ramos, 2012). In other words, for a similar position, men are remunerated better than women. Gender-based discrimination takes place, especially in patriarchal societies, but also in developed countries, where women's rights are promoted. This form of discrimination is extended to a multidimensional level, including the family, society and the labor market. In the absence of equal employment opportunities for women and men, the maintenance of discrimination against women is promoted, creating disadvantages at every step, thus limiting women's access to a decent living and accentuating poverty based on gender, but also age, or ethnicity. A dual structure can be observed, with a double standard of employment opportunities and salary (Agrawal, 2014; Padhi et.al., 2019).

Labor market discrimination of migrant women is important in order to identify the most appropriate strategies for the integration of this category, especially since it is an underutilized workforce. Therefore, the intersectional discrimination based on ethnicity and gender of migrant women on the labor market is a challenge and represents an important point of work for future specific social policies. Migrant women face this double discrimination not only regarding their integration in the labor market, but in all aspects of their life in the receiving country. Discrimination leads to marginalization and, implicitly, to the increase of their poverty (Duran, 2018).

In general, migrants need active support from the institutions of the receiving state in order to be able to integrate into society and the labor market. Also, the flexible schedule and transparent, secure labor contracts are necessary in order to use properly this workforce. It is important to respect the principles of gender equality and to promote and implement a balanced lifestyle between work schedule and rest time. The state, through its specific policies, is responsible for equalizing employment opportunities on the labor market between natives and migrants, especially among women, because they face more difficulties compared to men.

In conclusion, the integration of migrants into the labor market represents a challenge for the host country and for migrants alike. The gender factor places migrant women at a disadvantage compared to men when integrating into the labor market. Thus, gender equality regarding the labor force of migrants is a first condition for a good integration and the reduction of the risk of marginalization (Schneider, 2018; Duran, 2018).

4. Methodology

This research study builds upon six oral history interviews with migrant women employed in Romania. The interviews were important tools for exploring the in-depth experiences of migrant women regarding their access onto the labor market. The interviews were conducted online, on Zoom, over an extended period of six months, between June 2021 and January 2022 and were part of a doctoral research regarding social inclusion mechanisms of third country nationals in Romania. The selection of the six interviews for this research was based on gender and

labor market status determinants. The six participants were all women who had labor experience on the Romanian labor market at the moment or interviewing, or have had it previously. Convenience sampling was used for the research, with the participants to the interviews were recruited either with the help of informal networks (i.e., through NGOs dealing with the integration of migrants, such as the Migrant Integration Centre Brasov; contact with this NGO was established after the participation of the researchers at a conference on migration, then the head of the NGO provided contacts of the migrants), or through snowball sampling, where interviewees recommended other participants. The shortest interview lasted for 55 minutes, while the longest for 100 minutes; in general, though, the rest of the interviews lasted for about one hour. Overall, a total of 410 minutes of recording were available for this study. The oral history interviews targeted dimensions both before and after the migration to Romania, and encouraging participants to provide detailed responses about their experiences.

All six women whose interviews have been selected for this study were third country nationals who settled in Romania for various reasons (education, work, family reunification), but who all had labor experiences in the destination country. They resided in four different cities in Romania. The language of the interviews was chosen by the participants, either English or Romanian. Pseudonyms were used to replace the real names of the participants.

Darcelle (20 years of age at the moment of the interview, from Cameroon), felt that her life completely changed after she moved to Romania to pursue university studies. Learning Romanian, although not perfectly, helped her integration process, as did the friendship with a small group of her nationals which she met in Bucharest. She worked for several days, but has quit because of the the poor payment and the harsh labor conditions;

Gloria (45, Dominican Republic), moved to Romania with her husband. Trained physician with a PhD in Medicine and vast research experience in her native country and the United States of America, Gloria couldn't find employment in the Romanian medical sector because her degrees and

diplomas were not recognized. She accepted employment in two non-medical businesses, during which time she pursued a specialization course as nutritionist, which allowed her to obtain a position at a private clinic;

Milena (36, Belarus) graduated from university in her home country, then moved on to work in the cruise ship leisure industry, where she also met her future husband, with whom she moved to Romania. Once in Romania, Milena found a job with ease in the shared services / call-center industry, thanks to her native language skills. The job was not related to her university degree. She had to quit the job in order to provide mother care to her son. At the moment of the interview, only the husband was employed, while Milena was taking care of the child.

Ramiza (24, Sudan) moved to Romania to pursue her education. Upon arrival, she started looking for jobs to earn her own money and not depend that much any longer on the financial aid from her parents back home. After many rejections, she found employment in a blue-collar vending job.

Stephanie (37, The Philippines) graduated in business administration in her native country and also worked in real estate there. She moved to Romania to marry her partner whom she met on the internet. She was pregnant at the moment of the interview, her greatest wish being to become a mother. Also, at the moment of the interview, she was employed in a call-center, after similar experiences both in Romania and in her native country.

Valeria (22, the Republic of Moldova) moved to Romania for her studies. She splits her time between going to university, going to the library for studying, doing the house chores and also working. Her first labor experience in Romania was in a blue-collar job, but she had to give it up as she felt it was exhausting her and she could not handle both university and work. She then found a project-based employment that gives her the possibility to combine study and labor.

Table 1 summarizes the biographic and labor-related characteristics of the participants.

Table 1: Biographic and labor-related characteristics of participants

Migrant	Age	Country of origin	Number of years and place of settlement in Romania	Employment status
Darcelle	20	Cameroon	2 years, Bucharest	Student, unemployed, had a brief labor experience
Gloria	45	Dominican Republic	8 years, Brasov	Employed, nutritionist at a private clinic
Milena	36	Belarus	8 years, Brasov	Unemployed, worked in a call centre, had to quit to take care of the child
Ramiza	24	Sudan	1 year, 2 months, Cluj-Napoca	Student, employed in a store
Stephanie	37	The Philippines	2 years, 4 months, Ghimbav	Employed in a call centre
Valeria	22	The Republic of Moldova	5 years, Brasov	Student, employed on a project, work basis

Source: Own representation

One of the methodological drawbacks of the research is that the sample is characterized by heterogeneity, which negatively impacts upon the generalizability of the findings, as the sample may not accurately represent broader population groups. Since the external validity of the findings is challenged by heterogeneity, this article only takes an exploratory form, with further in-depth research being necessary to consolidate generalizations. Sources of heterogeneity in this research occur from variations in age (three respondents in their twenties, two in their thirties and one in her forties), ethnicity (all six respondents coming from six different countries, with most diverse cultures and habits), social status in Romania (some of them married, others not; some students, other already graduated etc.) etc. This heterogeneity occurred as a result of the snowball sampling used for data collection, as well as following the subgroup analysis: the six interviews were selected out of the total sample of 21 interviews used in the doctoral research, based on gender and employment status. The presence of such a subgroup also leads to less consistent effects of the findings, potentially masking trends or realities regarding labor market discrimination in the case of larger groups of migrants.

5. Research Findings and Discussions

The statements from the interviews indicate several patterns pertaining to the migration reasons which have had an impact on the labor experiences of the interviewed migrant women in Romania. Two of these patterns stand out, namely that family reunification migration and educational migration have had considerable effects on the labor opportunities and labor experiences of women. Box 1 offers the statements of the migrant women based on the transcriptions of the interviews. Mentions from Ramiza were informal, hence not transcribed.

Box 1. Transcripts from the interviews

Milena (36, Belarus)

„Unfortunately, I couldn't resist anymore. The health problems had already started and I resigned, then I got pregnant and then I went into lockdown and then I stopped looking for work because it's just my husband and myself and I don't have anyone to take care of the baby. Now, who wants to have you if you stay at home every two weeks, with the child, with the kindergartens closed?!”

Stephanie (37, The Philippines)

„Although I was able to get a job - my first company in Romania was Psych, one of the call centers here in Romania, I used to work with them for I think if I could recall five months... Problem is, because of the pandemic... And I also got pregnant but I had miscarriage, you know, so it was quite tough for me adjusting with language, culture, people general in general and then I had a miscarriage and then the Covid hit. So, my first year here in Romania was quite challenging, and somehow affected my emotional being or psychological being, you know what I mean.”

Gloria (45, Dominican Republic)

„Yes. I felt [that I was vulnerable], especially in the beginning. Not any longer now. For example, I looked for a job in a call centre, because I wanted to do something [until solving the issue with the diplomas and the job at the hospital]. My husband told me not to [worry], but I, who have been used to working for a long time, did not feel well with just sitting at home and doing nothing. I went twice, to two different call centres, in two jobs, and I saw that internationals were sometimes paid even less than half of what Romanians received. Let me tell you something: it was the only time in eight years that I felt like someone tried to humiliate me. About five years ago, I was at a table with several people, and I was very happy that I had a job. I have been working for six years already in a fixed job. Before that, I was a volunteer, I also taught Spanish, so that I could do something, not sit around. And someone [at the table] told me that he is very nationalistic and that he does not agree to give a job to an international. But I asked him what he did for Romania, one thing he did? And he remained silent. He probably thought I was going to sit with my head buried in the ground. But at the same time I also gained confidence in myself. I don't know if you have gone through this experience, but to change the country, to change the language, to change many small details that add up to a big mass.”

Darcelle (20, Cameroon)

“From all the colleagues in the group of students, I was the only one who could not find an internship, although I have applied in many, many companies.”

Valeria (22, the Republic of Moldova)

„It was easy for me to get hired, it wasn't a problem [...]. It wasn't hard for me to get hired because, again, [a friend, n.a.] helped me. On Saturday and Sunday I had to do my four hours a day. I spent Saturdays and Sundays cleaning, eating, shopping, especially on Saturdays, and on Sundays I studied all day. I also studied on school days, in the afternoon. I couldn't handle the fatigue. Maybe I wasn't mentally tired, but I was physically tired, I was sleepy.”

Source: Transcripts of the Zoom interviews

Research results indicate that migrant women had to deal with an inadequate work-life balance and had challenges in finding a balance between private lives and employment. Milena had to quit her job to take care of the child, while Stephanie did the same after she gave birth (after our interview). Also, Darcelle, Valeria and Ramiza had struggles to find a balance between university studies and employment.

Many of the migrants had to accept positions they considered as being inferior to their education and qualification. Milena, Stephanie and Gloria are all university graduates, who, for shorter or longer periods of time after arriving in Romania, took on jobs in call-centres. For Gloria it was only a temporary position until she finished her qualification course as nutritionist (despite being a MD with vast labor experience), while Milena and Stephanie had a longer-period employment in call centres. Darcelle, Valeria and Ramiza worked part-time, this also because they are students and the law does not allow them to work full-time.

Almost all women interviewed (except Milena and Valeria) had difficulties in finding a job, which they only obtained after several attempts. Milena reported that she had an employment interview which was „piece of cake”, while Valeria found it easy because she knew the language and was also directed towards the job by a member of her informal network, yet these seem to have been exceptions. Darcelle, who had to pursue a mandatory three weeks internship as part of her university curriculum, mentioned that she was the only one in her group of students who could not find an internship, although she made several attempts. Ramiza as well was aware that had it not been for the hint from her informal network, it would have been much more difficult for her to access the labor market. Having difficulties in accessing the labor market puts migrant women at risk and diminishes their opportunities of labor integration. While labor integration is acknowledged as a resilience mechanism for migrants (Fernández Guzmán Grassi and Nicole- Berva, 2022), facing difficulties as the ones previously shown can slow down or reduce the effects of this mechanism. Reasons for the difficult access the labor market are the reluctance of employers to hire internationals (Ramiza, Darcelle), maternal situations (Milena, Stephanie), the lack of willingness to employ students, or the non-recognition of studies (Gloria).

Another barrier to better employment opportunities identified in the research was pregnancy. For Milena and Stephanie, the pregnancies

reduced their chances of active participation in the labor market. For Milena, the lack of help in taking care of the child (both because she has no other family members here in Romania and because she cannot financially afford to hire a nanny) negatively affected her participation in the labor market, so she had to quit her job in order to take care of the child. Valeria, as well, found it exhausting to have a job and take care of the household chores at the same time, not to mention she was also a student who had to learn. Yet Valeria, as well the other women interviewed, had to take on the job to gain what was needed for making a living. Valeria mentioned that, at some point, she couldn't handle the fatigue any longer and had to quit.

Gloria felt humiliated (the one and only time when she felt this way in Romania, as she mentioned) when she understood that internationals were paid less than the locals at one of her employers, even half of the amount. Valeria found employment quite easily because, coming from the Republic of Moldova, she shared a common language with the natives. Still, both Valeria and Ramia were helped to find their jobs by acquaintances in the informal network.

Research results also indicate that the pathways towards accessing the labor market differ depending on age or stage of life. While young migrant women and students mainly depended on hints received from their informal networks, elder women, who could prove an existing labor experience (either in the home society or in the host society) had more chances of securing a job through direct applications.

Another idea arising from the statements of the migrants was the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic crisis had on their labor status. Both Milena and Stephanie were impacted by the effects of Covid-19. Stephanie suffered from the disease, which forced her into medical leave and affected her labor capacities, while for Milena, the Covid-19 pandemic struck while she was at home with her child and forced her into having even more time for mother care at the cost of potential labor opportunities, because she had to supplement for services that would have otherwise been provided by other institutions: „Now, who wants to have you if you stay at home every two weeks, with the child, with the kindergartens closed?!“.

6. Conclusions

This article analysed the perceptions of gender-based discrimination against migrant women looking for a job in the host country, as they were reproduced by the experiences of the respondents included in the research. Through the six interviews, the study provided an overview of the difficulties that migrant women face in the integration process. Unequivocally, the problem of the integration of migrant women influences the relevant policies around Europe, creating the necessary framework for the reconfiguration of the entire paradigm.

Many times, women who are victims of gender-based discrimination are discouraged in the process of integration into society and in finding a job appropriate to their training and experience. Thus, often, they are forced to accept poorly paid jobs and far below their training. Practically, gender-based discrimination pushes the migrant woman to make various compromises in order to survive in the host country, to which various difficulties of adapting to the culture and language are added. This bares the risk of a route towards poverty and marginalization of migrant women. Although the risk of poverty was not an issue with our interviewees, marginalization, loss of dignity and humiliation were aspects reported in the interviews. These can also lead to social inequalities so often discussed when it comes to the integration of migrant women (Riaño and Baghdadi, 2007). Therefore, migrant women face multidimensional discrimination simultaneously, based on criteria of gender, ethnicity, their minority in the receiving country, age, class, educational level, culture practiced by them etc. (Pio and Essers, 2014). In other words, gender-based segregation on the labor market and in payroll creates difficulties and a series of vulnerabilities for migrant women, making it difficult for them to integrate in the host country (Fleury, 2016). In conclusion, the gender factor is still an element that constitutes a considerable disadvantage for migrant women who try to integrate into the labor market of the receiving country. In conclusion, employment opportunities for migrant women are limited.

It should be emphasized that migrant women are an important resource and a workforce that must be valued by the receiving country and in no way viewed as a burden. The offer of existing workers on today's labor market is in a continuous metamorphosis, and unilateral approaches no longer make sense, as it is a matter of complexity that involves both women and men; both natives and migrants. Thus, at the moment,

concerns regarding the situation of migrant women occupy a central place in understanding the mechanisms of socio-economic integration. Recognizing the experience and educational level of migrant women who want to integrate into the labor market, means the correct use of this labor force and its valorization (Tastsoglou and Preston, 2005; Raghuram, 2008). On the other hand, it must be admitted that in the hiring process, discrimination can be justified from economic perspectives, especially when it comes to age or weight (Busetta et al., 2018b).

Authorship

Materials and methods, V.I.R.; formal analysis, V.I.R., G.V.B.; investigation, V.I.R., G.V.B.; review and theoretical conceptualization, V.I.R., G.V.B.; data collection, V.I.R. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Acknowledgements

N/A

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declare no conflicting interests.

References

- Agrawal, T. (2014). Gender and caste-based wage discrimination in India: some recent evidence. *Journal for Labour Market Research*, 47(4), 329-340.
- Aigner, D. J., & Cain, G. G. (1977). Statistical theories of discrimination in labor markets. *Ihr Review*, 30(2), 175-187.
- Alfarran, A., Pyke, J., & Stanton, P. (2018). Institutional barriers to women's employment in Saudi Arabia. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 37(7), 713-727.
- Allotey, P., Manderson, L., Baho, S., & Demian, L. (2004). Reproductive health for resettling refugee and migrant women. *Health Issues*, 78(2004), 12-17.

- Balch, A., & Scott, S. (2011). Labour market flexibility and worker security in an age of migration. In: Bommers, M., & Sciortino, G. (Eds.): *Foggy Social Structures: Irregular Migration, European Labour Markets and the Welfare State*. IMISCOE Research, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam (pp. 143-168).
- Ballarino, G., & Panichella, N. (2018). The occupational integration of migrant women in Western European labour markets. *Acta Sociologica*, 61(2), 126-142.
- Behtoui, A. (2008). Informal recruitment methods and disadvantages of immigrants in the Swedish labour market. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 34(3), 411-430.
- Benería, L., Diana Deere, C., & Kabeer, N. (2012). Gender and international migration: Globalization, development, and governance. *Feminist Economics*, 18(2), 1-33.
- Bevelander, P. (2005). The employment status of immigrant women: The case of Sweden 1. *International Migration Review*, 39(1), 173-202.
- Borjas, G. J. (2001). Does immigration grease the wheels of the labor market?. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 2001(1), 69-133.
- Boyd, M., & Grieco, E. (2014). Women and migration: Incorporating gender into international migration theory. Migration Information Source, available online at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/women-and-migration-incorporating-gender-international-migration-theory>, retrieved on June 5th, 2023.
- Brell, C., Dustmann, C., & Preston, I. (2020). The labor market integration of refugee migrants in high-income countries. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 34(1), 94-121.
- Browne, I., & Misra, J. (2003). The intersection of gender and race in the labor market. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 29(1), 487-513.
- Busetta, G., Campolo, M. G., & Panarello, D. (2018a, April). Weight-based discrimination in the Italian Labor Market: how do ethnicity and gender interact?. In 50th Scientific meeting of the Italian Statistical Society.
- Busetta, G., Campolo, M. G., & Panarello, D. (2018b). Immigrants and Italian labor market: statistical or taste-based discrimination?. *Genus*, 74(1), 1-20.
- Busetta, G., Campolo, M. G., & Panarello, D. (2020). Weight-based discrimination in the Italian Labor Market: an analysis of the interaction with gender and ethnicity. *The Journal of Economic Inequality*, 18(4), 617-637.
- Buzdugan, R., & Halli, S. S. (2009). Labor market experiences of Canadian immigrants with focus on foreign education and experience. *International Migration Review*, 43(2), 366- 386.
- Chen, H., Wang, X., Liu, Y., & Liu, Y. (2020). Migrants' choice of household split or reunion in China's urbanisation process: The effect of objective and subjective socioeconomic status. *Cities*, (102), 102669.
- Collins, P. H. (1998). Intersections of race, class, gender, and nation: Some

implications for Black family studies. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 29(1), 27-36.

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in Article 1, United Nations, available online at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf>, retrieved on October 21th, 2022, 14:48.
- Damm, A. P. (2009). Ethnic enclaves and immigrant labor market outcomes: Quasi-experimental evidence. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 27(2), 281-314.
- Diehl, C., Lubbers, M., Mühlau, P., & Platt, L. (2016). Starting out: New migrants' socio-cultural integration trajectories in four European destinations. *Ethnicities*, 16(2), 157-179.
- Duran, N. (2018). Dual Discrimination of Syrian Refugee Women in the labour markets in Europe and Turkey: Identifying the challenges. *Journal of Social Policy Conferences*, (75), 43-67.
- Dustmann, C. (1996). The social assimilation of immigrants. *Journal of Population Economics*, 9(1), 37-54.
- Ellemers, N. (2018). Gender stereotypes. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 69, 275-298.
- Emergency ordinance no. 45/2020 for completing Government Ordinance no. 137/2000 on the prevention and sanctioning of all forms of discrimination, available online at: <https://www.cncd.ro/legislatie/>, retrieved on October 11th, 2022, 12:46.
- European Institute for Equal Opportunities Between Men and Women, Gender discrimination, available online at: <https://eige.europa.eu/ro/taxonomy/term/1161>, retrieved on October 21st, 2022, 10:31.
- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (Article 21), Non-discrimination, available online at: <https://fra.europa.eu/ro/eu-charter/article/21-nediscriminare>, retrieved on October 11th, 2022, 13:18.
- Favell, A. (2010). Integration and nations: the nation-state and research on immigrants in Western Europe. *Selected Studies In International Migration And Immigrant Incorporation*, 1, 371-404.
- Fernández Guzmán Grassi, E., & Nicole-Berva, O. (2022). How perceptions matter: Organizational vulnerability and practices of resilience in the field of migration. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 33(5), 921- 935.
- Fleury, A. (2016). Understanding women and migration: A literature review. KNOMAD Working Paper, Washington, DC, 55.

- Fokkema, T., & De Haas, H. (2015). Pre-and post-migration determinants of socio-cultural integration of African immigrants in Italy and Spain. *International Migration*, 53(6), 3-26.
- Foroutan, Y. (2008). Migration differentials in women's market employment: An empirical and multicultural analysis. *International Migration Review*, 42(3), 675-703.
- Gabaccia, D. (1991). Immigrant women: nowhere at home?. *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 10(4), 61-87.
- Heilman, M. E., & Caleo, S. (2018). Gender discrimination in the workplace. *The Oxford handbook of workplace discrimination*, 73-88.
- Hiralal, K. (2017). Women and migration-challenges and constraints—A South African perspective. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 26(2), 18-18.
- <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocumentAfis/245996>, retrieved on October 23rd, 2022, 15:31.
- <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocumentAfis/245996>, retrieved on October 23rd,
- In: *International handbook on the economics of migration*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Irastorza, N. (2020). The labour market integration of Migrant Women. Canada-EU Migration Platform on the Integration of Migrant Women, 6.
- Istanbul Convention, 12 April 2011, on combating violence against women and domestic violence, available online at: <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>, retrieved on October 21st, 2022, 10:12.
- Kaas, L., & Manger, C. (2012). Ethnic discrimination in Germany's labour market: A field experiment. *German Economic Review*, 13(1), 1-20.
- Kraal, K., Wrench, J., Roosblad J. & Simon, P. (2009). The ideal of equal opportunities and the practice of unequal chances. In: Wrench, J., Roosblad, J., & Kraal, K. (Eds). (2009). *Equal opportunities and ethnic inequality in European labour markets: discrimination, gender and policies of diversity* (p. 124). Amsterdam University Press, pp. 9-22.
- Law no. 202, April 19, 2002, on equal opportunities between women and men, available online at: <https://anes.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Legea-202-din-2002.pdf>, retrieved on October 21st, 2022, 11:37.
- Man, G. (2004, June). Gender, work and migration: Deskilling Chinese immigrant women in Canada. In: *Women's studies international forum* (Vol. 27, No. 2, pp. 135-148). Pergamon.
- Merrouni, S. A., & Machak, S. (2019). Migrant women in Morocco: a gender-based integration strategy?. *La Revue Marocaine de Droit d'asile et Migration*, (4), 74-91.
- Misztal, B. A. (1991). Migrant women in Australia. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 12(2), 15- 34.

- National Immigration Strategy regarding Migration, 2021-2024.
- Nicodemo, C., & Ramos, R. (2012). Wage differentials between native and immigrant women in Spain: accounting for differences in support. *International Journal of Manpower*, 33(1), 118-136.
- org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/01/Challenges-and-opportunities-of-refugee-integrationin-turkey-full-report.pdf (01.10. 2018).
- Padhi, B., Mishra, U. S., & Pattanayak, U. (2019). Gender-based wage discrimination in Indian urban labour market: An assessment. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 62(3), 361- 388.
- Parreñas, R. S. (2000). Migrant Filipina domestic workers and the international division of reproductive labor. *Gender & Society*, 14(4), 560-580.
- Phillion, J. (2003). Obstacles to accessing the teaching profession for immigrant women. *Multicultural Education*, 11(1), 41-45.
- Pio, E., & Essers, C. (2014). Professional migrant women decentring otherness: A transnational perspective. *British Journal of Management*, 25(2), 252-265.
- Piracha, M., Tani, M., & Vadean, F. (2012). Immigrant over-and under-education: The role of home country labour market experience. *IZA Journal of Migration*, 1(1), 1-21.
- Pokharel, S. (2008). Gender discrimination: Women perspectives. *Nepalese journal of Development and Rural Studies*, 5(2), 80-87.
- Pustulka, P. (2015). Escaping workplace gender discrimination through mobility? Labor-market experiences of Polish female migrants in the West. *InterDisciplines. Journal of History and Sociology*, 6(1).
- Raghuram, P. (2008). Migrant women in male-dominated sectors of the labour market: a research agenda. *Population, Space and Place*, 14(1), 43-57.
- Riaño, Y., & Baghdadi, N. (2007). Understanding the labour market participation of skilled immigrant women in Switzerland: The interplay of class, ethnicity, and gender. *Journal of International Migration and Integration/Revue de l'integration et de la migration internationale*, 8(2), 163-183.
- Roggeband, C., & Verloo, M. (2007). Dutch women are liberated, migrant women are a problem: The evolution of policy frames on gender and migration in the Netherlands, 1995–2005. *Social Policy & Administration*, 41(3), 271-288.
- Rose, A. M. (1958). Distance of migration and socioeconomic status of migrants. *American Sociological Review*, 23(4), 420-423.
- Rubin, J., Rendall, M. S., Rabinovich, L., Tsang, F., van Oranje-Nassau, C., & Janta, B. (2008). Migrant women in the European labour force. Current situation and future prospects. RAND Europe Technical Report, Santa Monica, CA.
- Schieckoff, B., & Sprengholz, M. (2021). The labor market integration of immigrant women in Europe: context, theory, and evidence. *SN Social Sciences*, 1(11), 1-44.

- Schneider, T. (2018). *The Integration of Migrants Into the Labor Market: An Analysis of Germany and the United States* (Doctoral dissertation, Hertie School of Governance, Berlin).
- Schrover, M., Van der Leun, J., & Quispel, C. (2007). Niches, labour market segregation, ethnicity and gender. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 33(4), 529-540.
- Sinke, S. M. (2006). Gender and migration: Historical perspectives. *International Migration Review*, 40(1), 82-103.
- Stypińska, J., & Gordo, L. R. (2018). Gender, age and migration: an intersectional approach to inequalities in the labour market. *European Journal of Ageing*, 15(1), 23-33.
- Syed, J., & Murray, P. (2009). Combating the English language deficit: The labour market experiences of migrant women in Australia. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 19(4), 413-432.
- Tastsoglou, E., & Preston, V. (2005). Gender, immigration and labour market integration: Where we are and what we still need to know. *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice*, 30(1), 46-59.
- Velluti, S. (2007). What European Union strategy for integrating migrants? The role of OMC soft mechanisms in the development of an EU immigration policy. *European Journal of Migration and Law*, 9(1), 53-82.
- Zinn, M. B., & Dill, B. T. (2016). Theorizing difference from multiracial feminism. In *Race, gender and class* (pp. 76-82). Routledge.