Intersectional Discrimination in European Labour Markets in the **Voices of TCN Women**

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Abstract: Despite migration being a universal and secular phenomenon, recent studies and latest statistics show that unemployment among third-country nationals aged between 15 and 64 years old is generally higher than the rate among the overall population (76% among newcomers). Within this context, the current study aims to find out common patterns concerning the barriers that Third Country National (TCN) Women face in the host labour market and facilitating factors they used to cross them. The current research is supported by a qualitative methodology, based on 74 interviews to women from nine European countries and the analysis of 11 success stories. The interviewees have a very heterogeneous sociodemographic profile, concerning age, country of origin, host country and educational background. Despite some TCN women being employed, most are currently unemployed or in precarious condition. Our study proposes a four-fold categorisation of barriers faced by TCN women: i) cultural and linguistic; ii) diplomas; iii) support system; iv) discrimination. The lack of language skills was mentioned by almost all the women interviewed because free or easily affordable courses are limited. The second category of barriers entails the complexity of recognising academic qualifications and working experience from their home countries. The lack of a supporting system has impact in different dimensions of social and professional inclusion. The last category represents a large number of dimensions, related to an intersectional discrimination based on gender, race and religion. Regarding the facilitating factors that 11 women with integration success stories shared, we would highlight: i) the role and importance of Social and Solidarity migrant organisations as a support for TCN women; ii) the recognition the added-value of TCN women skills, such as being proficient in several foreign languages; iii) the empowerment of success stories reported by the storyteller herself and by other women in a similar situation; iv) the resilience to not give up, despite a considerable amount of obstacles.

Keywords: TCN women, Intersectionaity, Labour integation

1. Introduction

Despite some political European strategies for migration, migrants still face a lot of challenges, namely in the field of work integration. Specifically, Third Country Nationals (TCN) Women are, "from a legal point of view, much more vulnerable to discrimination than EU citizens" (Benedí Lahuerta, 2009, pp.754-755). According to the European Commission, TCN is "Any person who is not a citizen of the European Union within the meaning of Art. 20(1) of TFEU and who is not a person enjoying the European Union right to free movement, as defined in Art. 2(5) of the Regulation (EU) 2016/399 (Schengen Borders Code)"².

The 2018 Council of Europe report on gender perspectives on migration mentioned that the participation of TCN women in the labour market remains significantly fragmented and limited (Council of Europe, 2018). This reveals, on the one hand, that TCN women are structurally excluded from entering the labour market (Lutz, 2016). On the other hand, civic actors lack awareness, competences and infrastructure to integrate migrant women meaningfully in their activities.

Recent studies have shown that the EU labour market is a core area of marginalisation for migrant women, and, indeed, an area which spills over to other aspects of those women's adaption to their communal and social environment (Di Stasio et al., 2019).

This paper aims to share the preliminary results of a European Project "ENFEM - Female TCNs Integration in Local Communities through Employability and Entrepreneurship Local Oriented Strategies". In particular, we focus on the first part of the project, concerning the perceptions of TCN Women on their challenges and

¹ENFEM - Female TCNs Integration in Local Communities through Employability and Entrepreneurship Local Oriented Strategies (Project Number: GAP-101038287). There are nine European countries taking part of the project (Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, and Spain).

²https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/pages/glossary/third-country-national_pt

strategies for integration in the host country. The findings concern nine European Union countries: Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania and Spain.

2. Migration and Migrants

Migration is a social phenomenon that has gained even more attention, specifically at European Level (Menz, 2016). Even though there is not a consensual and universally accepted definition for "migrant", the International Organization for Migration (IOM) assumes that it is "a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons".

In a more recent report (2021), IOM reveals that the current global estimate is that there were around 281 million international migrants in the world in 2020, which equates to 3.6 per cent of the global population. Despite the numbers, the international migrant worker population is currently still gendered, with 58.5 per cent of male proportion of all migrant workers (IOM, 2021), there is a worldwide trend of feminization of migration (Ramos & Patrício, 2015).

There are several reasons for migrating that Góis (2019) systematised into three main push factors: i) the climate change; ii) the need and/or the desire to find other ways of life; iii) the lack of opportunities. In the center of decision for the migration journey, there are many factors that interfere. Some of them are racional and some are emotional, and the decision often combines migrant-centred and structural factors (Reis Oliveira *et al.*, 2017). For instance, the migration policies in the host-country is one of the structural factors which varies significantly between countries, despite a common matrix since the 1970s, centred on European intercultural policies (Dervin *et al.*, 2011).

The migration phenomenon is a growing and enduring problem, for different reasons. Amidst the most expressive ones, there is the annual increase in the number of migrants over the planet, most of them with the ambition to reach the global north. Besides, it is clear that migrants still face a lot of obstacles to be integrated, namely to get a decent work in the labour market (Careja, 2019; Oliveri, 2016).

Statistics show that employment rates of non-EU born (2020) are still lower that native born. So, the rate is 61,9% compared to 73,5% for native-born citizens. Adding gender to these data, we can observe that the differential is 52,5% for non-EU born women compared to 68,3% for native-born women (Eurostat, 2020). The European labour markets are very heterogeneous, and there is significant variation among countries. In fact, some countries show a higher percentage of non-EU-born female employment, above 70%, as is the case of Czechia, Estonia and Portugal. Nevertheless, others have a lower percentage, below 43%, as is the case of Belgium and Greece (Eurostat, 2000³).

According to the European Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2017, in 2019, around 34 million inhabitants were born outside the EU, representing around 8% of the EU population. Above a quarter of this migrants are highly educated, with 26,8% having a high level of education in 2019 (Eurostats, EU-LFS). In addition, and according to European Parliament resolution on intersectional discrimination in the European Union (2022), across the EU 91% of black women are overqualified for their jobs, compared with 48% of white women.

There is a pattern to the type of work migrants do in the host countries, as low-end occupations. For women, it is primarily domestic work, office cleaning, landscaping, food preparation services, prostitution, and agriculture (Crippa, 2020; Bauder, 2006). However, there is a more recent trend towards more qualified jobs for migrant women, namely in highly skilled jobs such as science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine (STEMM) (Bolzani *et al.*, 2021).

The role of Social and Solidarity Economy organisations dedicated to support migrants, namely with mutual help and peer support represents a fact and is now fully recognised and studied among reseachers. The growth of such organisations has been promoting the increase of an active participation of migrant women, by their engagement as volunteers, as workers or even as social entrepreneurs (Fisseha, 2018; Valentova & Alieva, 2018; Braun, 2017; Mesmin, 2017).

178

³https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/a/ae/Employment rates for the population aged 20-64 years%2C by country of birth and by sex%2C 2020 %28%25%29 MI2021.png

3. Intersectional Discrimination

The obstacles for migrants and particularly for migrant women have been revealed through different studies (Debono, 2021; Koulierakis *et al.*, 2019; Lutz, 2016), showing that the combination of being a migrant, a woman, a mom and a TCN National represents an even more difficult path to integration.

It is from this perspective that we follow the contributions of the theory of intersectionality used in different research and intervention contexts to shape the relationships of the different master categories which are sex/gender, class, ethnicity, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, and disability (Nogueira, 2017). The theory of intersectionality began to be developed by African-American studies and black feminists, in the 1980s. Crenshaw (1989) opens up a new approach in anti-discrimination studies, starting by analysing the multidimensionality of black women's experiences. More recently, this theory has been applyied to better understand migration experiences (Domass, 2021).

According to the report by the Center for Intersectional Justice (CIJ, 2019), intersectionality has gained attention in Europe over the last ten years, both in academic and policy spheres. Intersectional approach caters to the multidimensionality of peoples' experiences and identities. As an example at the international level, the Resolution 73/195 adopted by the General Assembly, on 19 December 2018, on "Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration" set the *Gender-responsive* as one of the ten so-called "cross-cutting and interdependent guiding principles".

Despite the tradition of the so called "colour-blindness" tradition in Europe that show reluctance to face the significance of race and racism (CIJ, 2019), several studies have been conducted on intersectional discrimination of women migrants (Crippa, 2020; Garrido *et al.*, 2009).

Crippa (2020) systematised the contributions of a number of studies (Barbiano di Belgiojoso and Ortensi 2019; Marchetti and Garofalo Geymonat 2019; Moro 2011) classifying the type of discrimination into three categories:

- the triple discrimination on the grounds of their race (some nationalities are preferred to others), their gender, and their social class;
- the new identity based on the need to adapt to a new female role within a new culture and a
 different society, usually feeling alone and isolated without the support from the 'extended family';
- the language and communication, cultural shocks, and post-traumatic effects both during the migration path and once in the country of destination, including domestic violence in the host country.

Garrido *et al.* (2009) add to these three categories the following issues: family structures, women's role within the household, social networks and political environment in the host country. Several empirical studies (Domass, 2021; Weichselbaumer, 2016) has shown that there is a specific discrimination in the labour market agains female migrants wearing a headcarf/hijad.

4. Methodology

The research question underlying the present study is: What are the perceptions of TCN women about the facilitating and hindering factors that influence their integration into the labour market?

In order to address such a question, we collected primary data by listening directly to TCN women. We started with 74 testimonies with an exploratory approach to their voices. Finally, we analysed 11 success stories reported by TCNs in different countries. All data were collected between March and May 2022.

The 74 women interviewed have a very heterogeneous socio-demographic profile, in terms of age, country of origin, host country (Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain) and educational background – some of them with little qualifications but some others with high education degree. Despite some TCN women being employed, most of them are currently in precariat situation or unemployed.

Regarding collecting the 11 success stories from TCN Women in the 9 EU countries (Table 1), our sample is also heterogenous. The following table characterizes our sample, identifying the host country, the country of origin, the number of years that each TCN woman has been staying in the host country, their background qualifications when they left their country of origin, and the main reason that led them to choose a given host country - the push factor. The findings of the analysis will be detailed.

Table 1: Characterising the WSS's Profiles

Woman Success Story (Code WSS)	Host Country	Country of origin	Years of stay in the host country	Background qualifications in the country of origin	Push factor for migration
WSS 1	Cyprus	Dominican Republic	20 years	Bachelors' Degree as a Hotel Administrator	Marriage
WSS 2	France	Dominican Republic	30 years	High school studies	To join her sister in law
WSS 3	Italy	Cabe Verde Islands	15 years	Middle high school	Economic issues
WSS 4	Greece	Iraq	5 years	High school	Desire for reunification with family in Europe
WSS 5	Greece	Ukraine	10 years	High school	Economic issues and to practice English
WSS 6	Netherlands	Nigeria	24 years	Higher Nation Diploma – Polytechnic	Marriage
WSS 7	Spain	Morocco	3,5 years	3 rd year of secondary school	As a child, she followed her parents, because of economic issues
WSS 8	Portugal	Venezuela	5 years	Bachelors' Degree in Law	Political repression
WSS 9	Lithuania	Ukraine	7 years	Bachelors' Degree as a lecturer at a college	Marriage
WSS 10	Romania	Jordan	4 years	1dt year Master Degree of Care Nursing	To study – Scholarship for cultural exchange program
WSS 11	Romania	Syria	30 years	High School	To study medicine

Source: Authors' elaboration

5. Findings - Exploratory Qualitative Analysis of the 74 TCN Women

Our study proposes a four-fold categorisation of barriers faced by TCN women: i) cultural and linguistic; ii) diplomas; iii) support system; iv) discrimination.

The lack of language knowledge was mentioned by almost every women interviewed because free or easily affordable courses are often limited. Paradoxically, this barrier seems to represent a major obstacle to employment. In fact, it is also by professional integration that immigrants can learn the host language. The lack of language skills also impacts on their daily routines, namely, to find training and a job position, or to have access to the national social security and health care systems.

The second category of barriers entails the complexity of the process of recognising academic qualifications and working experience from their home countries: These barriers make TCN Women feel their previous life is undervalued: "My studies don't have any value here, neither do my 10 years of experience as a social worker because for Spain, Gaza doesn't exist on the map" (Immigrant in Spain).

The lack of a supporting network has an impact in different dimensions of social and professional inclusion. Namely, being far away from the family makes the work-life balance difficult. In addition, the lack of public or low-cost childcare services is especially important for single or working parents.

The last category represents a large number of dimensions, related to an intersectional discrimination based on gender, race and religion. Some women felt discrimination, especially Muslim women because of wearing the hijab. In fact, the empirical data suggest that TCN women are in a particular vulnerable situation because they are not only facing gender-based discrimination but also racism and xenophobia in the host country. Particularly in the workplace, TCN women clearly feel that there is horizontal discrimination, namely by performing jobs that are in the "shadow", in the rearward: "they don't want us to be seen in front" (Immigrant in Greece).

6. Findings - In-Depth Analysis of 11 Women Success Stories

As previously stated, we collected 11 success stories from TCN Women in the 9 EU countries. As partners working directly with migrant women, we asked them if they felt confortable in sharing their story of integration. This approach implies that the ones who answered the request regard themselves as someone with a successful integration story. Every women utterances entail words such as "I'm very proud" and "I'm happy" to classify their pathway and their achievement in the host country. Despite the success they also experienced and reported some barriers, as "life itself is a never-ending struggle" (WSS 6 in the Netherlands).

The eleven women are highly qualified. Actually, some of them came to the host country specifically to complete their studies (WSS 10 and 11 in Romania). The push factors to the choice of the host country were either due to situations of marriage or due to the previous experience of family members, but also to escape socioeconomic and political turmoil (eg. WSS 8 in Portugal).

Mostly, they found job relatively easily, even if it was not always their "dream job". In fact, some women stated their integration journey with part-time, low qualified and precarious jobs. In some cases, they reported to have faced difficulties in accessing essential goods - "I've been through difficult times when I had no food, no money" (WSS 5 in Greece).

Regarding hindering factors, our successful women mentioned the proficiency in the language of the host country and also sexism and xenophobia in the labour market - "I felt prejudice [...]because I'm migrant. The job market will not offer equal opportunities to nationals and TCNs. You tend to be regarded as a threat and will be expected to accept short-term, low-skilled and low-paid jobs, local people do not want to do" (WSS 8 in Portugal). Being simultaneously migrant, woman and a mom is, in some of the success stories, challenging. In fact, "being a mother of four children while working" (WSS 11 in Romania) is demanding on work-life balance, namely because of the weak support system.

The identity must be reinvented and, sometimes, it can be very defiant, namely not be able to communicate properly as you used to do your entire life - "you suddenly feel that you are illiterate, you, you lose your identity when you lack language skills that allow you to communicate your world view" (WSS in Portugal).

Despite the communicative issues, adapting to a new reality, sometimes very different from the one they have known all their life long, can be very challenging, even physically - "having to deal with extreme weather and climate change" (WSS 6 in the Netherlands).

Less qualified women also report the struggle in accessing information about their rights and the administrative operation in the host country: "The knowledge about administrative matters is the main point for migrants since it is through the institutions and their work at the social level that we, as migrants, could improve our expertise and skills" (WSS 3 in Italy). The lack of information, namely about their diploma's recognition and the associated costs they have to cover is also pointed out as a major drawback.

Regarding facilitating factors, TCN women highlight the importance of learning, as quick as possible, the host country's language. To do so, they suggest socialising, to get a job or even to work as a volunteer: "by working you can learn faster. However, it's difficult" (WSS 1 Cyprus). They also stress the benefits of further education and training, namely language courses. Learn about the language but also about the local culture and values: "I even learned how to cook the traditional dishes of Cyprus" (WSS 1 in Cyprus).

Their narratives stand out the role and significance of social economy organisations supporting migrant women. Contact and mutual help with other migrant women experiencing similar situations seem to have an important role for integration. Some women mention the importance of solidarity support by friends or colleagues, namely in situations of temporary housing and food needs. This solidarity makes them feel, somehow, lucky: "When the student club, where I ate, was either closed or there was bad weather, I was unable to eat on some occasions. However, I was lucky, as I had an acquaintance who worked at the airport and would bring me food from flights" (WSS 5 in Greece).

Their story telling emphasises the need to ask for help, and not to be ashamed of it. There are people and institutions that are able to support migrant women "none of us is alone" (WSS 5 in Greece). In fact, some of those women are working precisely in NGOs.

The women interviewed also show a pattern in terms of entrepreneurship attitude. In fact, they are very active citizens: i) either directly by political engagement (WSS 1 in Cyprus); ii) either by engagement in movements supporting women in similar situations; iii) by participating in the local community, namely in church activities (WSS 6 in the Netherlands); iv) or even starting businesses. For instance, in Martinique, our testimony is from the Dominican Republic and started up her own hair and beauty salon and "the clientele is both local as well as form the Latin-American community" (WSS 2 in France)

Being proficient in several languages has proved to be an asset, particularly in terms of employment as interpreters or in work situations in the tourism sector: "I knew Ukrainian, Russian and spoke English (after a certain point I started speaking basic Greek) is quite useful for seasonal jobs" (WSS 4 in Greece).

Some of these women explicitly see themselves as role models which was the reason why they accepted our invitation to share their stories. In the case of WSS 11 in Romania, who has even participated in media programmes to share her success story. And the case of WSS 6 in the Netherlands decided to write inspirational success books to inspire others who might be in a similar situation. They have and plan to keep inspiring other women – "I believe I can formalise my knowledge in digital business and train other dreamers that want to upskill and reskill themselves" (WSS 8 in Portugal).

The eleven TCN women that shared their integration stories are satisfied with the life they have today and feel that they reached a good status:

"I feel happy and proud to be a translator and to be able to help myself and others" (WSS 4 in Greece)

"I am very proud and happy to be able to work and to help my family" (WSS 7 in Spain)

"When I think that 7 years ago when I came to Lithuania with no knowledge of the language, and now I can run a programme, teach, write and speak at conferences in Lithuanian, I don't even feel that I am a foreigner" (WSS 9 in Lithuania)

"I also earned the nationality of Romania after a successful journey with the Romanian language and work" (WSS 11 in Romania)

Despite feeling fulfilled, and explaining that the migration experience allowed for a "change of identity", as it obliged them to reinvent themselves and overcome their difficulties, several women dream of returning to similar functions they had already performed in their country of origin — "Teaching at university is still in my future plans" (WSS 9 in Lithuania) "I clearly regard Law as a way of life: I have the desire to help, to solve problems and to give guidance and advice to those who need it" (WSS 8 in Portugal).

7. Final Remarks

As previously stated, the study here presented is a work in progress. However, we believe that, at this stage, it is already possible to put forward some pragmatic measures that can be tested by researchers and stakeholders working in the field of TCN women's integration.

Our preliminary results are quite in line with previous studies, namely concerning the obstacles for TCN women's integration. Our findings reinforce that regardless the increasing European and national policies and measures, the integration of TCN women still remains a striking structural and social problem. To cope with this very complex and multidimensional issue it is vital to give visibility to TCN women in order to understand general patterns, but also their singular needs.

Overall, the interviews carried out provided very useful insights on the research topic and helped unveil different views by encouraging the sharing of representations and awareness of participants concerning the barriers and strategies to fully succeed in integrating the host country.

This way, and as a research action, we share some good practices that can be used as recommendations. They are addressed to TCN women themselves and and to other stakeholders working in the field of migrations such as NGO, local authorities, policymakers and employers:

- To diversify the strategies of integration, because of the heterogeneity of situations of each TCN woman:
- To give the floor to TCN women in order to empower themselves, to give visibility to their added value and persuade them to inspire other TCN women;
- To share TCN success stories to raise awareness to employers and the general public;
- To work with the double expertise of professionals trained to support TCN women and also TCN women themselves according to their self-determination;
- To create a network and a community of practice for professionals working in different fields;
- To integrate TCN women in real-life situations with other citizens, even as volunteers;
- To learn the language and the culture of the host country;
- To create network and support groups of and to TCN women;
- To promote Social and Solidarity organisations of migrants;
- To set up a support system, using public services, social and solidarity services but also Private Sponsorship programs that guide individual solidarity wishes. Those programs already exist, primarily for refugees, since the late 1970s, in Canada and worlwide. The UN Refugee Agency recognises the great impact of such programs, together with more institutional support.

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Ana Luisa Martinho et al.

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