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**"INTERSECTING INEQUALITIES IN THE ITALIAN LABOR MARKET:  
CASE OF HIGH-SKILLED MIGRANT WOMEN IN STEMM"**

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## INTRODUCTION

Migration is not a new phenomenon; it has been an issue of interest for years. There are many topics under discussion revolving around the subject and one of them is the integration of migrants into the labor markets of the host countries. Labor migration can be a powerful tool for development if it is fair, well-managed, and provides migrant workers with access to respectable positions.

Over the years highly skilled migration has started to consist more and more from females (Özden et al., 2011). Despite comprising a talent pool that can be crucial for innovation and growth highly talented migrant women are often discriminated despite their qualifications. This discrimination is a significant problem, particularly for women who seek employment in sectors that are dominated by men, such as STEMM. We address the barriers to employability faced by highly qualified migrant women majoring in STEMM subjects, that result from inequalities unique to their intersectional nature of being a woman, a migrant and a STEMM graduate. We rely on qualitative information gathered in Italy through in-depth interviews with women with various STEMM backgrounds and different origins.

In Chapter 1, we outline the aspects of the labor market that shape up the work conditions of migrant women today. We present quantitative evidence that shows the disadvantageous position of immigrant women in the EU job markets which was acquired from various sources. Then, we offer relevant data from Italy.

In Chapter 2, we introduce intersectional theory and provide a thorough literature review on it. Then, we present recent migration studies that has adopted an intersectional perspective to demonstrate how intersectionality and relational perspectives are important to study this phenomenon.

In Chapter 3, we present the framework of our research and provide the details of our research method. Following that, we present the data analysis method we have employed for this study.

Finally, in Chapter 4 we present the findings that has emerged from our study and offer exemplary data on our results.

# **1.CHAPTER ONE**

## **LABOUR MIGRATION IN EU AND ITALY**

### **1.1 Introduction to Labor Migration**

When labor migration is fair, well-managed, and gives migrant workers access to respectable jobs, it can be a significant development tool. An estimated 164 million migrant workers are counted in the world, with over half being women. They make up 4.7% of the worldwide labor force and make significant contributions to the expansion and advancement of society (ILO, 2021). But migrant workers are far too frequently subjected to unjust and uneven treatment on the job market.

Informal research suggests that migrant workers are among those most impacted by the numerous problems brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, however the full extent of this impact is still unknown. Millions of migrant workers were compelled to return home as a result of losing their jobs at the start of the COVID-19 crisis. This has had a significant influence on their income, earnings, and ability to support their families.

The pandemic has revealed major governance gaps in labor migration, many of which have existed for years. Migrant workers struggle with discrimination and marginalization in every country, but the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these ingrained beliefs.

There are growing worries that the principle of equal compensation for labor of equal value is being violated when it comes to many migrant workers who work in low-wage or informal jobs. The crisis poses a threat to widen existing gaps between nationals and migrant workers on the job market and in terms of access to employment, types of work, working conditions, and possibilities for skill development.

On the other hand, migrant women generally tend to be more disadvantaged in the labor market, they occupy lower ranking jobs and intersection of migration status and gender plays a role in creating particular barriers and opportunities for them.

## 1.2. Migrant Women's Disadvantaged Position: Overview of European Union

Since the beginning of time, Europe has been a crossroads of human mobility. The area has always played a key role in the world's migration systems. A system of laws and standards governing people's mobility in the area were developed in large part because to the influence of Europe.

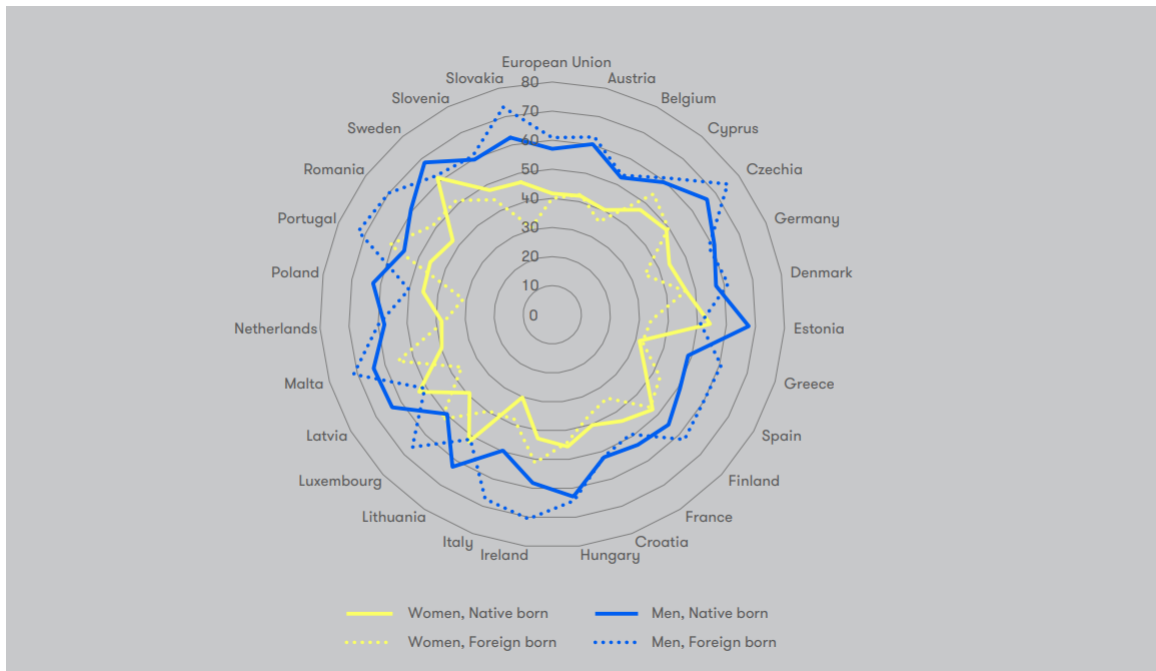
The majority of migration took place within and outside of Europe up until the end of World War II. More specifically, Europe was a continent of *net emigration* during the 19th and first part of the 20th century. However, since the middle of the 20th century, Europe has increasingly become a zone of *net immigration*.

Migration is not a new phenomenon: Europe has increasingly become a destination of significant migratory flows in the last decades. But system is still represented by systematic penalization of migrants in the labor market, especially women.

Figure 1 and 2 illustrates how the percentage of full-time equivalent employment rate and the duration of working life, respectively, reveal systematic disadvantages for women in the EU (40.9% and 32.6 years, respectively) compared to males (59% and 36.3 years). It is common to find in these nations that women with migrant status are further penalized on the basis of expected duration of working life. On average, in EU, foreign women are expected to have around 30 years of working life while native women and foreign men are expected to have around 35 years of working life. Native men are expected to have around 40 years of working life on average. This data demonstrates the gender gap but at the same time it demonstrates the foreign women's further disadvantaged position in terms of duration of working life compared to others.

The proportion of full-time equivalent employment rate yields conflicting findings among different countries. On average, in EU, foreign women's employment rate in full-time equivalent jobs is around 30% while native born women's is almost 50% signifying, again, a more disadvantaged position for migrant women. In most of the countries, gender gap patterns prevail while the migrants' data show some differences between countries.

**Figure 1: Full-time equivalent employment rate, 2018 (%)**



Source: ISMU elaboration on EIGE’s calculation of Eurostat microdata, EU-LFS 2018

**Figure 2: Duration of working life, 2019 (years)**



Source: ISMU elaboration on Eurostat data [demo\_mlifetable] and [lfsa\_argacob], EU-LFS 2018

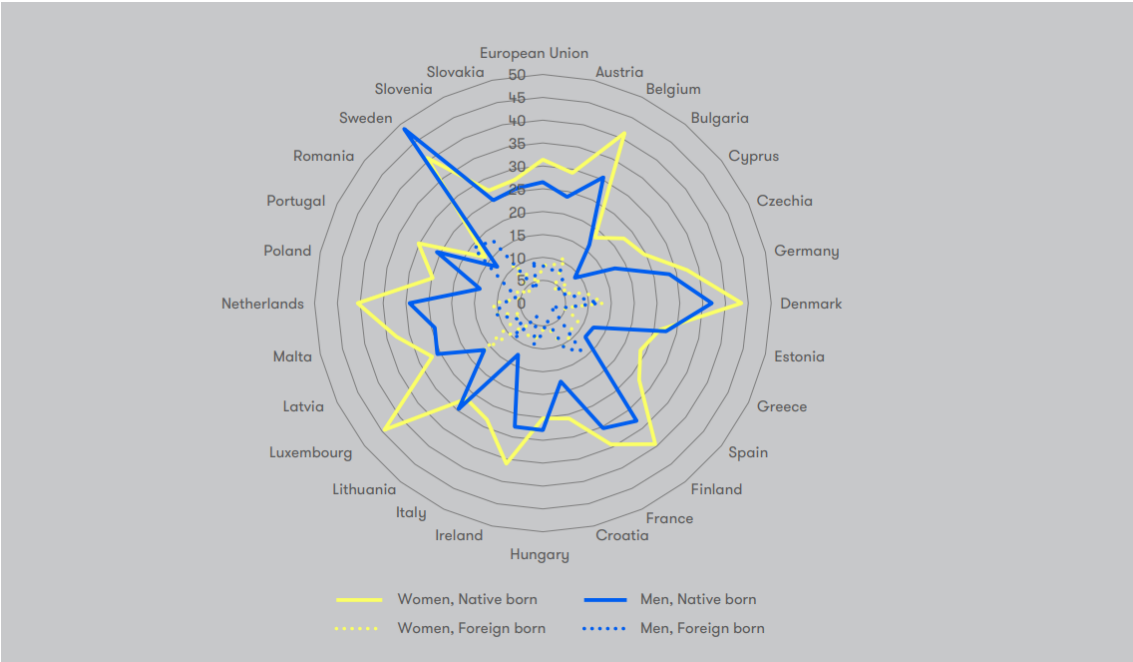


Figures 3, 4 and 5 show indicators of employment quality -with an emphasis on career prospects and the possibility of taking an hour or two from work- and sectoral segregation and they both imply that being a migrant woman has a greater penalty than being a native woman. Average data shows that, in EU, native women are mostly employed in education, health and social work. However, this may not fully represent the segregation among migrants and especially of migrant women's. Migrant women, in fact, are heavily concentrated in domestic jobs and caregiving and they are significantly less employed than native women in education, health and social work sectors (Figure 3).

In several countries, foreign women face more difficulties of taking one-two hour off from work to attend to their family matters or personal affairs (Figure 4). European Union average demonstrates that it is less likely for foreign women to take several hours from work than others.

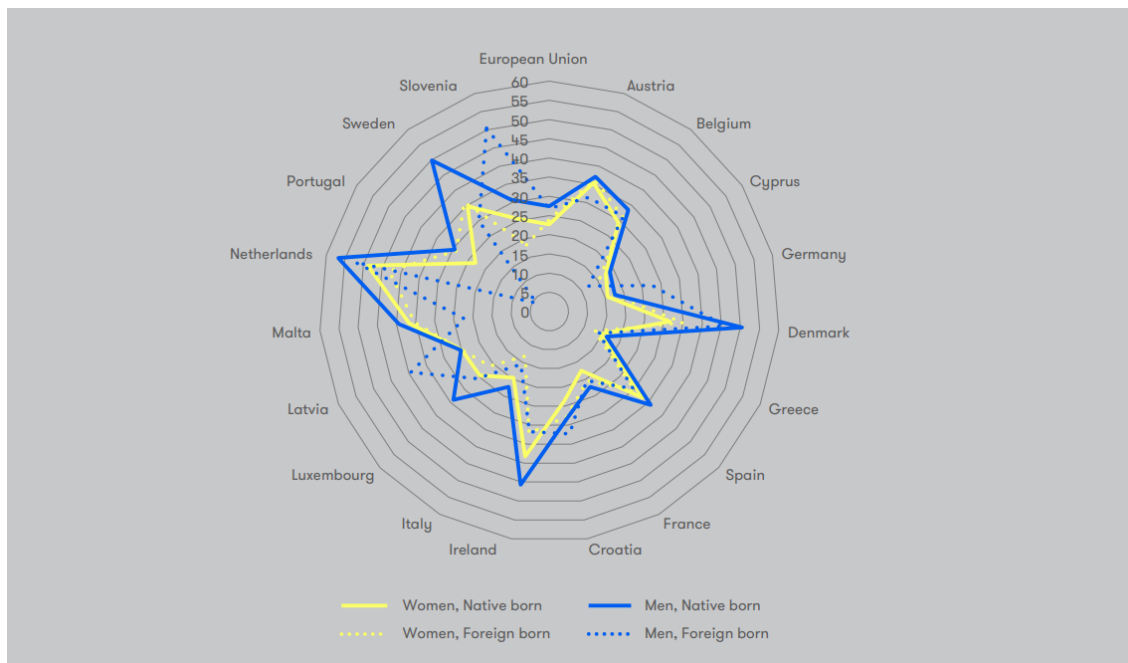
In several countries, they are expected to have lower career advancement compared to foreign men and native women (Figure 5). However, in most countries the career prospects of both migrant women and men are lower than the native members of the society showing that career prospects are more related with migration status rather than gender.

**Figure 3:** Employed individuals in the fields of education, medicine, and social work in 2018 (%)



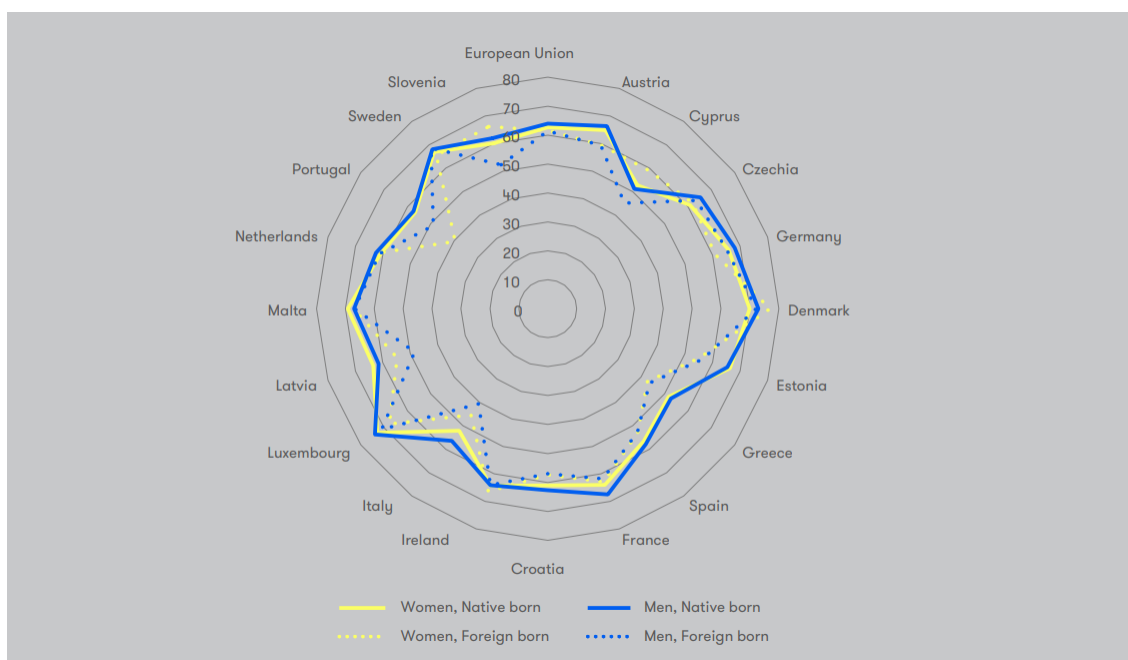
Source: ISMU elaboration on EIGE's calculation of Eurostat microdata, EU-LFS 2018

**Figure 4:** Possibility of taking an hour or two off work to attend to personal or family affairs in 2018



Source: ISMU elaboration on EIGE’s calculation with microdata, EU-LFS, 2018

**Figure 5:** Career Prospects Index, 2018 (range 0-100)

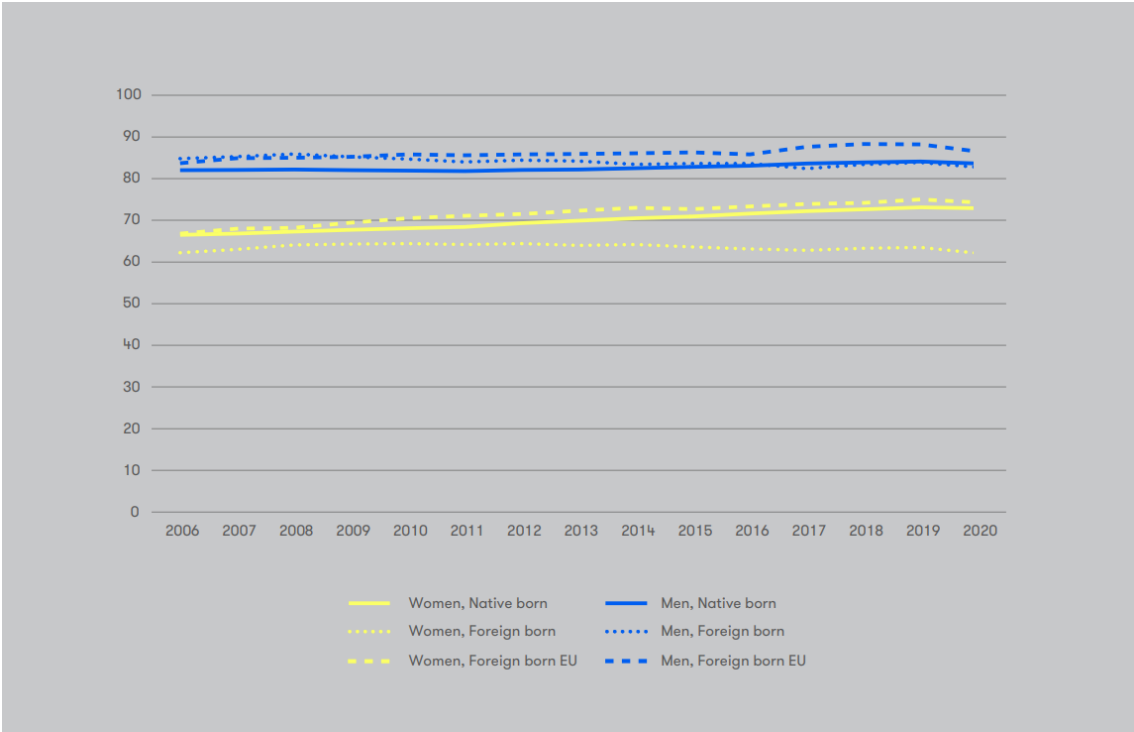


Source: ISMU elaboration on EIGE’s calculation of Eurostat microdata, EU-LFS 2018

It is important to focus on the origins with a focus on EU and Non-EU roots, in order to better analyze the effects of being foreign born and being a woman. In fact, data demonstrates that Non-EU migrant women’s labor market involvement in EU is significantly low than of EU born foreign women and it has been in the decline in the last few years (Figure 6). The intersection between gender and migration background is relevant almost everywhere though to varying degrees, depending on whether or not one has EU citizenship. EU-born foreign women have higher labor market participation rates than native women. In contrast, non-EU foreign women have lower rates than both.

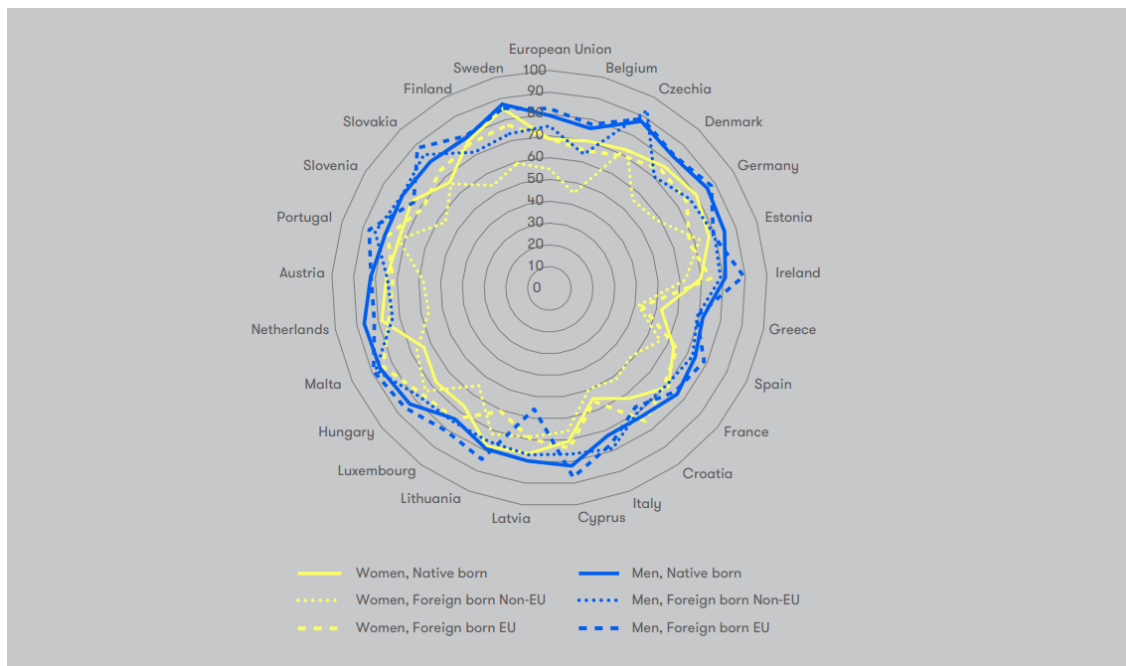
On average, in European Union, foreign born women with Non-EU roots, have significantly lower activity rates compared to others. In many countries, data points to the same result: Non-EU foreign women are the least active in the EU labor markets compared to others (Figure 7).

**Figure 6:** Activity rates of people aged 20-64 by gender and place of birth. EU27, years 2006-2020 (%)



Source: ISMU elaboration on Eurostat data [Ifsa\_argacob]

**Figure 7:** Activity rates of people aged 20-64 by gender, country and place of birth, 2020 (%)

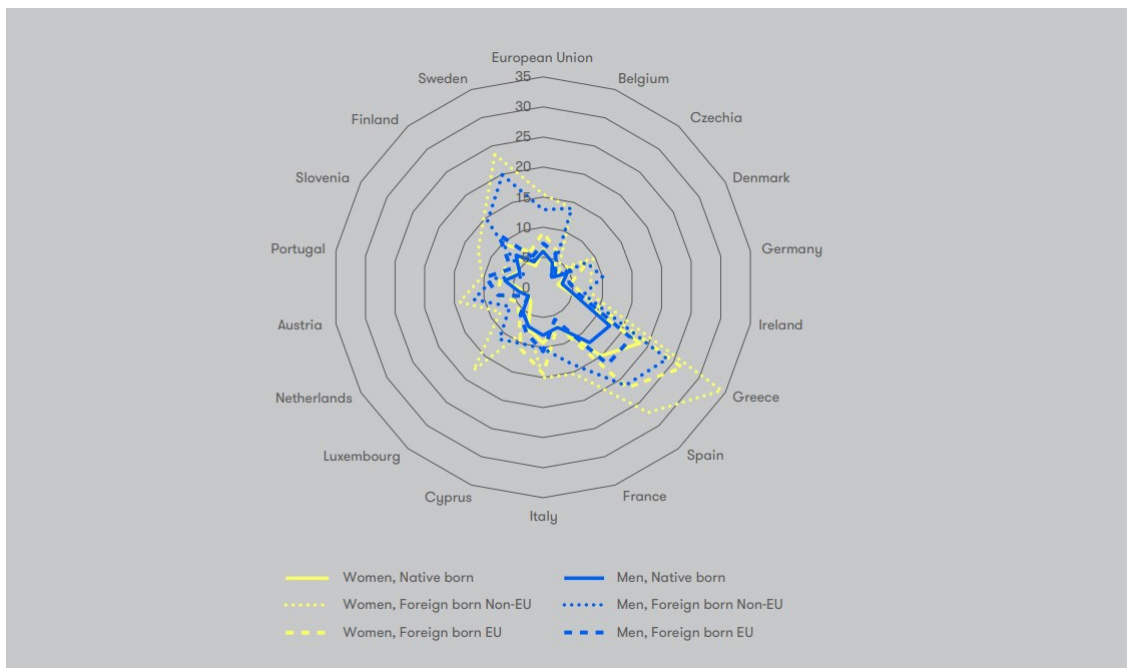


Source: ISMU elaboration on Eurostat data [Ifsa\_argacob]

Employment/unemployment rates also supports the disadvantaged position of migrant women in EU labor markets. While EU-born women and native women have similar rates of unemployment, non-EU born women are the least employed. Migrants and women are the most affected from unemployment, especially the non-EU born women (Figure 8).

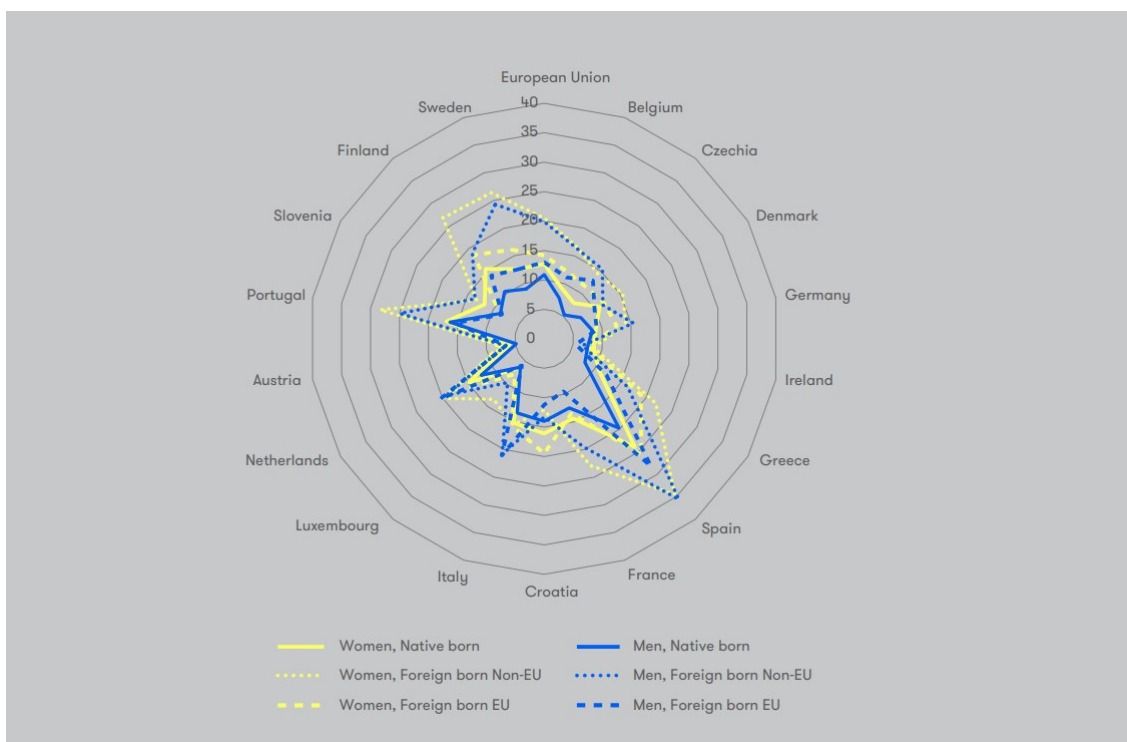
Temporary employment is also a phenomenon for non-EU men and women. International Labor Organization (ILO) describes temporary employment as whereby workers are engaged only for a specific period of time, includes fixed-term, project- or task-based contracts, as well as seasonal or casual work, including day labor. Temporary employment presents disadvantageous working conditions as it lacks to provide long-term job security and a stable income in the long term. Non-EU foreigners represent the highest proportion in temporary employment which means they are experiencing more unstable job conditions and less job security in the long run (Figure 9). Non-EU foreign women, in terms of stability of jobs, are again the most disadvantaged group as they represent the highest proportion among others in many countries.

**Figure 8:** Unemployment rate of people aged 20-64 by gender, country and place of birth, 2020 (%)



Source: ISMU elaboration on Eurostat data [lfsa\_urgacob]

**Figure 9:** Temporary employees as percentage of the total number of employees aged 20-64 by gender, country and place of birth, 2020 (%)



Source: ISMU elaboration on Eurostat data [lfsa\_etpgacob]

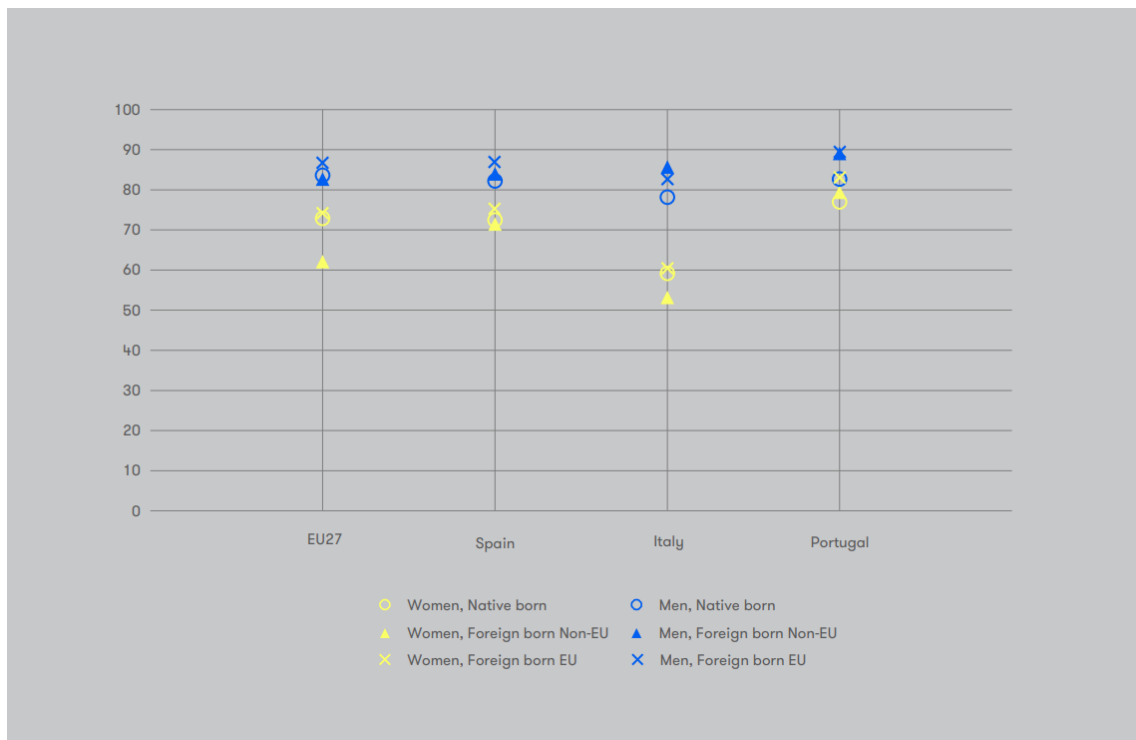
## Overview of Italy

EIGE's Gender Equality Index, providing an overall view of gender equality particularly in Spain, Italy, and Portugal, has put Italy in the 14<sup>th</sup> place among other European countries with 63.5 points, 4.4 points lower than the Europe's average score, 72.2 respectively in 2020. Even though, recent achievements have been achieved in the number of women in company boards and national parliament; gender gaps still largely prevail in earnings, home chores division among partners and the job market participation rate. Applying EIGE's analysis to work domain, Italy ranks behind the European average, holding the last place just before Greece and Slovakia (Ortensi & Tosi, 2021)

Employment rates are significantly low for non-EU migrant women in Italy, but the gender gap is large also for natives and EU migrants (Figure 10). Looking at the full-time equivalent employment rate (Figure 11) foreign born women seems more active than native women, while the gender divide is over pronounced for both.

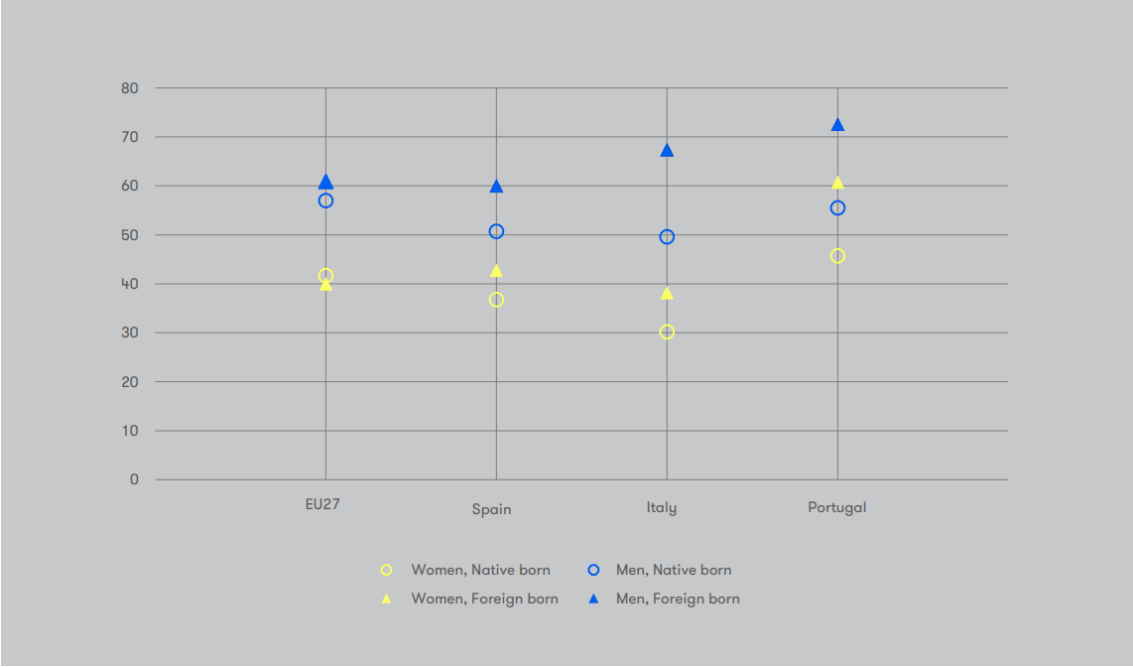
Finally, where data broken down by EU and non-EU citizenship is sadly not accessible, both the female pay gap and its intersection with migrant status (Figure 12) are large.

**Figure 10:** Employment rates of people aged 20-64 by country and place of birth. EU27, Spain, Italy, and Portugal, 2020 (%)



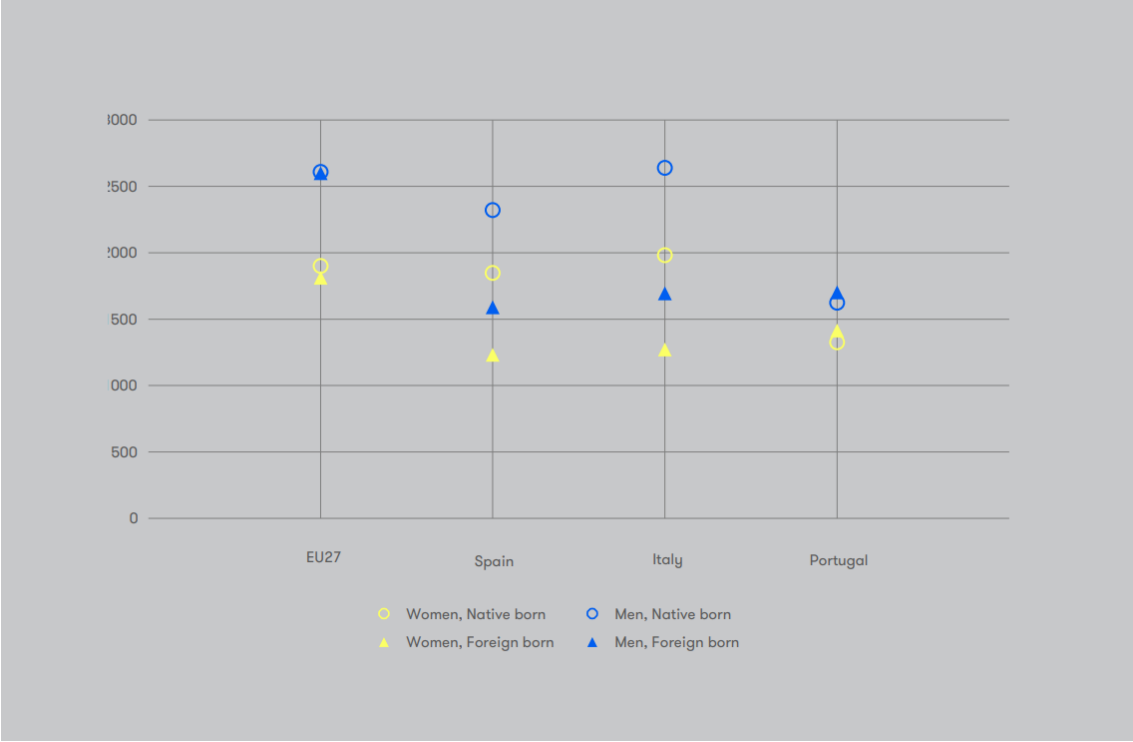
Source: ISMU elaboration on Eurostat data [Ifsa\_urgacob]

**Figure 11:** Indicators of Gender Equality: Full-time equivalent employment rate, 2018 (%)



Source: ISMU elaboration on EIGE’s calculation of Eurostat microdata, EU-LFS 2018

**Figure 12:** Monthly earnings of people aged 20-64 by gender, country and place of birth for the EU27, Spain, Italy, and Portugal, 2020 (%)



Source: ISMU elaboration on Eurostat data [Ifsa\_urgacob]

A key issue of inequalities resulting from migration status and gender is the possibility of measuring them (Hennebry et. al.,2021). This is currently a challenge for the scholars because the data relative to intersectionality are largely missing, which makes it hard to make any interpretations on the subject. In Europe, an important research that has been carried out by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), has been building a composite index of gender equality in EU countries for years. Recently, they have started to provide data on the basis of gender, age group, level of education and the origins. EIGE's work still represents limitations with regards to the availability of data. Even in Italy, where immigration is well-established, crucial information, like lifestyle, is still lacking (Ortensi & Tosi, 2021).

In order to measure intersectional disparities, more statistical development is needed in all areas, from early data collecting (survey design) to the dissemination of data that is broken down by gender and location of birth (ISMU, 2021).

### **1.3. Migrants' Disadvantaged Position: Evidence from Italy**

#### **1.3.1. The Perceptions Towards Migrants in Italy**

All too often, debates on migration policy are never-ending discussions and highly controversial ones. Even if sometimes they don't have a much say in the matter, societies have opinions on migration and migrants as well. Data polls and surveys reflect the shared opinions of the society and illuminates the common perception towards migrants in the host countries. One important study that has been conducted in Italy is the Ipsos' poll on "The perception of migrants in Italy during coronavirus" ("La percezione dei migranti nell'Italia del Coronavirus", 2021). Findings from this study shows that the perceptions are bounded by contexts. While one-fourth of the respondents identified the main problem of Italy, when asked, as "migration", when they are asked about the main problems of the cities they are residing, migration only took place as low as %12. Survey found that stereotypes on immigrants are widely-spread in Italy, especially highlighting the perception on causes of the Covid-19 pandemic. %43 of respondents said they think migrants are a threat to public health and %37 of them said that migrants have increased the cases of Covid-19 in Italy. Study also demonstrated the concerns on labor market. %80 of respondents believe that the principal problem in Italy is in fact the labor and economy. Another interesting finding of the



study highlights the perceptions towards migrants obtaining an Italian citizenship. While %40 of respondents stated that they are against birthright citizenship, %50 expressed that they are against granting citizenship to foreigners who studies in Italian schools and completes the compulsory schooling in Italy. Finally, %30 stated that Italian citizenship should only be granted to those who have Italian parents.

Another interesting study on “Migrants and labor in the Italian information system” by Osservatorio di Pavia (“Migranti e Lavoro nell’informazione italiana”, Osservatorio di Pavia 2020) investigates the media coverage of migrants. They have, in fact, found that migrants are generally the passive subjects of media, never being interviewed on the matters concerning them. They have also found that TV channels cover usually migrants in low-skilled work, especially in agriculture. Professional success is covered only as much as %7, while regularization of domestic work has been the most recurrent topic with %58,5. Study also found that qualifications and socio-economic status of the migrant workers are only reported in the detail and they are generally occupied in domestic work as caregivers or in agriculture. The study states that the migrant work in highly-skilled jobs are completely overlooked. The focus on the mere topic in low-ranking jobs is, thus, causing a misrepresentation of migrants overall, as the portrait of migrants are treated in a one sided manner.

### **1.3.2. The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Migrants in Italy**

The Covid-19 pandemic’s impact on the labor market is still hard to assess, especially the consequences of the pandemic in the longer term. On the other hand, short term consequences are especially expressed in several areas, one being, as widely known, the labor market. More than 9 in 10 workers live in the countries where un-employment has increased during the pandemic and mostly to the detriment of migrant work (ILO, 2021). The existing models for migrant inclusion have been proven inadequate to protect the workers during the pandemic.

Italy is a clear example of lack of existing models to ensure migrant inclusion. One of the main problems is the spread of undocumented employment in domestic jobs and agriculture where foreign workforce is over-represented. Wage gap between nationals and foreigners is an another pressing issue which contributes to poverty of the latter. In fact, one third of immigrant households

currently makes a living working in undocumented work and one fourth of foreigners has been found to live in absolute poverty despite the fact they are regularly employed (ISMU, 2021)

ILO (2021) estimates that there were 245 million working-age migrants globally in 2019, with 169 million of them working in the country of destination, accounting for 4.9% of the world's workforce (almost 6 in 10 were men). In the same year, there were 4 million foreigners in Italy who were of working age, while there were 2.9 million migrants who were actively seeking employment or employed. This represents 11.3% of the country's entire labor force.

In 2020, foreigners made up 10.8% of the working-age population, but their proportion in the workforce had decreased to 10.4% as a result of a significant growth in the number of non-working foreigners. While in 2019 8.9% of the inactive working-age population was of foreign origin, one year later this percentage has risen to 9.9%; conversely, the share of foreigners in the working population has fallen from 10.7% in 2019 to 10.2% in 2020 (ILO, 2021).

In addition to their size (Table 1), these variations show that the rising ethnic segregation that characterized the Italian labor market prior to the coronavirus pandemic has come to an end. Given that foreign workers account for up to one-third of the growth in the number of inactive people between 2019 and 2020, this can be largely explained by a sudden rise in inactivity. The low participation rate of significant portions of the working-age population has been made worse by the pandemic-induced crisis on the Italian labor market. Only 38.7% of the over 1 million workers, including 142,511 foreign workers, who lost their jobs in 2020 (due to layoffs, the employer going out of business, or the end of the work contract), actively sought out new employment. This is considered as the most significant effect of pandemic so far (ISMU, 2021).

Existing disparities across and within societies have been made worse by the crisis (Oxfam International, 2021). In Italy, the structural disadvantage that is experienced by migrants, has increased their vulnerability (Zanfrini, 2022). Before then anyone, foreigners have experienced the unemployment wave caused by the pandemic crisis which made them lose more jobs comparatively, especially reflected in the sectors in which they are traditionally employed in the greatest number – with the exception of agriculture, where the number of employed immigrants has increased (OECD, 2021).

**Table 1:** Employment status and nationality of the population in 2020

	<i>Italians</i>	<i>% var. 2020- 2019</i>	<i>EU foreigners</i>	<i>Non-EU</i>	<i>Total foreigners</i>	<i>% var. 2020- 2019</i>	<i>Total</i>
Working-age population (15-64 y.o.)	34,245,100	- 0.4	1,259,300	2,756,400	4,015,700	- 0.4	38,260,800
Workforce (15-64 y.o.)	21,869,500	- 2.3	853,400	1,797,300	2,650,700	- 7.3	24,520,200*
Employed people (15 or older)	20,557,674	- 1.4	752,600	1,593,500	2,346,088	- 6.35	22,903,762
Looking for a job (15 or older)	1,958,345	- 10.2	114,525	237,592	352,117	- 12.4	2,310,462
Unemployed (15-64 y.o.)	12,375,624	+ 3.1	405,900	959,100	1,364,982	+ 16.2	13,740,606

\* This figure refers to people between 15 and 64 years of age rather than to people who are 15 or older. Therefore, it does not amount to the sum of the number of employed people and the number of people who are looking for a job. Source: ISMU analysis of Eurostat data: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/lfsa\\_pganws/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/lfsa_pganws/default/table?lang=en)

### 1.3.3. Double Disadvantaged: Migrant Women in Italy

Since the 1970s, Italy, has been a country where migrants primarily fled for more than a century, and it has seen the first migratory inflows, with a significant presence of women from the very beginning.

The first wave of immigrants was Filipinos and Cape Verdeans in the 1970s which has easily found employment in the increased demand of household help of Italian families. In 1980s, African women and Middle Eastern had fled their countries, uniting with their spouses who have arrived to Italy earlier. They have mostly occupied caregiving roles, taking care of children and elder members of the Italian families as the demand was less for domestic work. Then, in 2000s many foreign women left their countries in Eastern Europe and fled to Italy. ‘Caregiving’ positions then broke out, characterizing the positions with low wages and tough work conditions. These jobs have in fact been seen as a trap for foreign women as they have represented no career advancement and lower wages compared to the positions held by foreign men (Giorgi, 2013).

Women have lately taken center stage in the migration process, and their share of migrants is rising on a worldwide, European, and Italian level. Migrant women in Italy choose careers that are regarded as "female" jobs, and they face various difficulties related with their identities as migrants, workers, and women. They are subjects of triple discrimination: on the grounds of their race, their gender, and their social class (Barbiano di Belgiojoso and Ortensi 2019). In Italy, migrant women workers, particularly those with irregular status, are frequently subjected to severe labor exploitation.

After accounting for all the factors that can affect the likelihood of finding, losing, and regaining a job, foreigners are comparatively more likely to lose their jobs than natives. Women have a 1.5 times greater chance of losing their job than males do (ISMU, 2021).

The pandemic has noticeably affected immigrant women in Italy, in particular. This demonstrates how the global health crisis has increased the vulnerability of female immigrant workers, who are overrepresented in low-paying, low-skilled jobs and have limited access to home support services. (ILO, 2021). Compared to male immigrants, the employment rate of foreign women in Italy has decreased by a factor of two. Foreign women lost one-fourth of the 456 thousand jobs that were eliminated by the Covid-19 pandemic. These here are the "feminized" consequences of the pandemic on the employment of foreign women. Comparatively, biggest change based on percentages was of foreign women, employment rate of foreign women decreased by %10 while those of Italian women decreased by 1,4% and foreign by 3,5% (ISMU, 2021).

Covid-19 pandemic has proved the particularly disadvantaged position of migrant women. The disadvantages do not only present themselves in underemployment but also in the terms of employment. (IDOS Statistical Immigration Dossier, 2021) showed that 14% of foreign women reported being underemployed in 2020, meaning possessing higher skills than required for the current job held. The reported number was 8.1% in 2019, showing a significant increase between 2019-2020. In contrast, same year 9.1% of Italian women reported being underemployed. The proportion of foreign women who are overeducated is also significantly high, with 42.3% of them having more education than is necessary for their line of employment. This is higher than the reported numbers of Italian women and foreign men, 24,8% and 27,7% respectively. Female migrant workers' pronounced vulnerability is partially explained by their obvious concentration in low-protected positions where they are more vulnerable to precariousness and constraints as well as the possibility of Covid infection (IDOS, 2021).

Three professions are highly occupied by foreign women: domestic work, caregiving and cleaning. More than 50% of migrant women occupy these, so called low-skill positions. In contrast, 13 professions are highly pronounced for foreign men while the number goes up to 20 for Italian women (IDOS Statistical Immigration Dossier, 2021). Domestic and care work are often characterized by irregularity and non-application or incomplete application of contractual requirements (Tognetti Bordogna, 2012). This gives an unbalanced authority to the employer, in which they manage all the matters regarding the worker, exposing workers to exploitation. Agriculture sector is mostly characterized by foreign male but it still employs a significant number of foreign women as well (26,9%) (IDOS Statistical Immigration Dossier, 2021).

#### **1.4 Conclusions**

In the past decades, In Europe and also in Italy, migration studies have analyzed migrants as one whole category. In the most recent years, scholars have pointed out that the experiences of migrant men and women are not the same. Because the latter, has been discussed to face double discrimination: on the basis of their gender and immigration status. These oppressions can even extend outside this framework, including discrimination on the basis of race, religion, social status, ethnicity and so on, as discussed widely under intersectionality theory. Intersectionality theory analyzes the multiple layers of oppressions that the distinct groups face, in this case it can shed light to different experiences of foreign men and women go through.

As we have widely seen in this chapter, immigrants are in a vulnerable position especially during extreme measures like Covid-19 pandemic. They are the first in line to absorb the shocks of these distressing events before any native, as we have seen earlier in the significantly increased numbers of unemployment within foreign men and women during Covid-19 pandemic in Italy. The facts also showed that migrant women are even more effected of these shocks compared to foreign men, putting them in an even more vulnerable position.

Although the available data on migrant men and women makes it difficult to accurately assess their job and living conditions, to have an all-inclusive picture of migrants in the European labor market, it is necessary to collect data with an intersectional approach so that statistics represent the society as a whole. Migration status is not sufficient enough to explain why migrant women suffer more disadvantaged positions with regards to working conditions than do others. Gender and

immigration status intersect, shaping employment opportunities and, in the end, leading to decent work and life conditions.

In the next chapter, we will introduce the concept of ‘intersectionality theory’ and how it can be used in the framework of migrant women’s experiences.

## 2.CHAPTER TWO

### INTERSECTIONALITY THEORY

Race and gender are two distinct social categories – but not two independent experiences – at work (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Yet, many studies continue to investigate them as two isolated social categories (Shore et al., 2011). And they are not the only ones; ethnicity, age, class, sexuality, nationality are many of the distinct categories that are investigated as separate categories but overlooked as when they overlap. This oversimplification results in grouping people in one social group while ignoring any other group membership. However, the way individuals position themselves and others in the workplace are way more intricate than that (Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop, & Nkomo, 2010). Such social categories at work are experienced as ‘and,’ not ‘or.’ They are conjunctive, not disjunctive. They are *intersectional* (Rosette et al., 2018).

#### 2.1. Intersectionality Theory: definition, critiques, implications

##### 2.1.1. Definition of Intersectionality

Intersectionality is previously defined as a metaphor (Cuadraz and Uttal, 1999; Acker, 2011), a concept (Knapp, 2005; Styhre and Ericksson-Zetterquist, 2008), a paradigm (Hancock, 2007a; Dhamoon, 2011), an ideograph (Alexander-Floyd, 2012), a broad-based knowledge project (Collins, 2015), and an analytical sensibility (Crenshaw, 2015). Despite of these various definitions, intersectionality has been and is essential to the studies of inequality in the latest years (Cho et al., 2013), emphasizing the importance of considering the joint effects of different social categorizations such as race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality and nation, and revealing how multiple layers of social differences can influence organizations and its members (Collins, 2000; McCall, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2011; Weber, 2010).

Being both female and Asian is more than the sum of being a member of either category separately. The social identities and perceptions related to one group changes with the intersection of two social categories. This intertwining of categories creates different stereotypes and conditions for individuals in different organizational contexts. Thus, focus on a sole category would not offer a holistic picture but a misleading one. Failing to acknowledge these complexities, scholars argue, one fails to acknowledge the actuality. All forms of inequality therefore must be investigated and addressed simultaneously to prevent one form of inequality to enhance another.

For example, gender gap is a largely investigated area but an investigation without considering other factors like race, migration status and class will likely lead to misleading result. In the US, White women, working full time earn \$0,79 for every dollar earned by White men while Black women are earning \$0,69 for every dollar earned by White men (Catalyst, 2017). The pay disparity remains even after checking for qualifications and other social capital characteristics between Black and White women (e.g., Alon & Haberfeld, 2007). Thus, when a Black woman is discriminated it is impossible to think her as only a female but in this case, an intersectional perspective should be adopted, in which the intertwining categories of race and gender are considered.

Another example of intersectionality can be traced back to forced child marriages. Child marriages are the examples of intersecting categories of poverty, gender, age and health. Young girls getting married at a young age are prevented from economic participation and their right to access to reproductive health care.

Cacari-Stone et al. (2017) addressed the social problems impacting women and girls in New Mexico with an intersectional perspective in their study. Figure 13 illustrates the intersecting factors that they have found to be effecting the experiences of women and girls. The first concentric circle emphasizes socio-demographic factors like income, race and ethnicity while second focuses on access to social resources such as access to food and geographic location. The next circle highlights the social relations like sexism and ageism and the last circle represents larger systemic oppressions like legal system, climate change and immigration system. Their study shows the importance of intersecting factors shaping the experiences of women of New Mexico primarily but they also offer a broad perspective of intersectionality's reach.

As we've seen, intersectionality has been identified in various areas and defined as many things but by now, a general frame on intersectionality's definition has been reached. "The term



intersectionality references the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities” (Collins, 2015). Intersectionality term was added to Oxford Dictionary in 2015 and it defines intersectionality as the network of connections between social categories such as race, class and gender especially when this may result in additional disadvantage or discrimination. (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016: online)

**Figure 13:** Layers of Intersectionality Diagram



Source: Cacari-Stone et al. (2017)

Intersectional lens allows us to tackle inequalities and injustice towards different social groups by investigating how the intersection of different social category memberships effects their

experiences, especially addressing the discrimination they face because of these multiple layers of oppressions. However, it is worthy to note that intersectionality is not about tackling all discrimination at once but it merely allows to address inequalities within inequalities by adopting a focus on multiple dimensions.

### **2.1.2. History and Contemporary Meaning of Intersectionality**

The term ‘intersectionality’ was first used by Crenshaw (1989) to draw attention to the concept of intertwining categories of being ‘black’ and ‘woman’ which, he suggested, created a unique experience for Black Women that was in fact different from of the Black men and White women. However, saying Crenshaw was the first person to point out to the multiple layers of oppressions would be misleading, as previous scholars (Collins, 1989; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1981; Mies, 1982; Mies et al., 1986; Spelman, 1982, 1988) have drawn attention to the need of a greater analytical analysis where there are intersections. The theoretical framework of intersectionality emerged also in the works of Black feminists (Frances Beal, 1970; bell hooks, 1984; and Toni Cade Bambara, 1970). Although, Black women are seen as the pioneer of the intersectionality concept Asian women were also addressing their deliberations (Asian Women United of California, 1989; Chow, 1987; Houston, 1982; Lim, Tsutakawa, & Donnelly, 1989; Yamada, 1981). Thus, Crenshaw’s 1989 article is considered a starting point only because the term ‘intersectionality’ was introduced for the first time but it can’t be considered as the place where the idea of multiple layers of oppressions has been introduced.

Crenshaw’s work had two foundational propositions: the intersectional process and the overlooking of intragroup differences. By conceptualizing Black women at the intersection of race and gender, he created the concept called ‘structural intersectionality’. Crenshaw argued that the experience of Black women cannot be understood by simply adding up racism and sexism but a different effect should be assumed where there is an intersection of two. Crenshaw’s contribution in this sense lies in conceptualizing how a single axis of analysis overlooks the intragroup differences.

Following Crenshaw’s framework, intersectionality gained a lot of popularity especially within contemporary feminist scholarship but a little attention from other fields of study. This may arguably be because academics publishing on intersectionality have mainly published in journals specialized in gender studies which was at that time the most receptive to these kind of studies.

A feminist scholar, McCall (2005) published a work in the feminist journal called *Signs* that identifies three different approaches to intersectionality. These three different approaches pointed out three different ways of categorization. Firstly, she argued, categories can be developed to compare experiences (*intercategorical*). Secondly, experiences can be studied within the given categories (*intracategorical*). Thirdly, we do not have to develop any categories, experiences can be studied without any presumptions of which characteristics individuals may be sharing (*anticategorical*).

Among these categories '*intercategorical*' has especially prevailed, as feminist scholarship has mostly included a gendered categorization, thus a comparison between male and female experiences. (Holgate et al., 2006). The focus on gender arguably predominated because it represented one of the most salient social categorizations (Brewer, 1988; Fiske, 1998; Stangor, Lynch, Duan, & Glass, 1992). Ellemers (2018) argues that gender is the primary perception we have on others, meaning it is immediately detectable and permanent. It is a way we immediately sort others at work (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998).

In recent years, a lot of work was published in different spheres. Scholars found a use for 'intersectionality theory' in nursing, employment, sociology, psychology, geography and social policy (Valentine, 2007; Simien, 2007; Davis, 2008; Cole, 2009; Hunt et al., 2009; Squires, 2009; Choo and Ferree, 2010; Durbin and Conley, 2010; Van Herk et al., 2011; McBride et al., 2015; Mooney, 2016). More recently, scholars have expanded intersectionality's reach by linking the theory with different theoretical frameworks like migration and mobility studies and development studies (Kim, 2007; Chow et al., 2011; Healy and Oikelome, 2011; Anthias, 2012; Metcalfe and Woodhams, 2012; Purkayastha, 2012; Mirza, 2013; Bastia, 2014; Grosfoguel et al., 2015).

### **2.1.3. Gender Stereotypes and Intersectionality**

To fully understand intersectional experiences, it is necessary to understand the way women tend to be viewed in organizations. Stereotypes related to men and women have been studied in psychological research as early as 1966 (Bakan, 1966). He proposed two main concepts of agency and communion. He described agency as a trait related with individuation, success, self-focus and communion as a trait allowing connection, relation and congregation. Bakan avoided but implied a gendered distinction of stereotypes. Following him, Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu (2002) made

stereotype content model explicit. The model of stereotype content supported Barkan's work by showing women are linked with low levels of aptitude, high levels of warmth associating them with the communal stereotypes. Following these two foundational work, the concepts of agency and communion set to be the main differentiators of men and women stereotypes and remained to be in the last 30 years or so (Haines, Deaux, & Lofaro, 2016). These stereotypes still affect the experiences of women in organizations (Heilman, 2012).

Following the early psychological work on gender stereotypes, the concepts of feminine communion and masculine agency started to get linked with several workplace phenomena. Schein (1973, 1975) pointed out with the 'think manager-think male' paradigm the low fraction of women to men filling up to managerial seats. His work especially pointed out the agentic stereotypes attributed to managerial roles like assertiveness, strive for success and power; which would make women naturally un-fit for these types of roles since they were associated with communal stereotypes rather than agentic ones. Since Schein's work, several studies emerged pointing out to the barriers women face throughout their careers (Heilman, 1983, 2001, Eagly & Karau, 2002, Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012). Their studies especially drew attention to penalties, negative evaluations and lessened status that women experienced when they didn't act in line with their communal stereotypes, for example asserting dominance which is considered as an agentic behavior. Consequences of these counter-stereotypical behavior was called as *backlash* (Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001). Backlash creates a double bind for women because to gain a managerial position they have to show that they are sufficiently dominant but if they overdo it they are deemed too opposing to their communal stereotype (Rudman & Phelan, 2008). Women exhibiting dominance is deemed necessary for their career advancement and appointment to high status roles but they are penalized for exerting dominance throughout their careers, examples can be seen in salary negotiation (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010; Bowles, Babcock, & Lai, 2007), daily interactions (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004; Koch, 2005), job promotion (Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux, & Heilman, 1991; Heilman, 2001) and hiring (Phelan, Moss-Racusin, & Rudman, 2008; Tyler & McCullough, 2009). Agentic behavior clearly conflicts with communal stereotype prescriptions (Gill, 2004; Prentice & Carranza, 2002), and women behaving outside of the roles appointed to them deemed as unpleasant and not likeable (Kobrynowicz & Biernat, 1998; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004).

Most of the research on gender stereotypes, evaluated how White women are affected from the gender norms and left out the consequences of intersectionality. By doing so, they categorized all

women the same, so in theory the experience of Black women and Asian women would be the same of the White women's. Research shows that even though the White women are associated with communal stereotypes, stereotypes associated with Black women and Asian women are significantly different from the White women's. Black women are associated with a dominant and tough character while Asian women are associated with an intelligent and a compliant character (Rosette, Koval, Ma, & Livingston, 2016). Different stereotypes of women shaped by their race and gender clearly demonstrates the role intersectionality is playing in shaping their experiences. White women face backlash when they assert dominance but how about Black women that are already associated with a dominant character? The intersectionality of race and gender shapes their backlashes as well.

Black women are especially associated with dominance, that is different from the communal qualities attributed to superordinate category of White women. Black women are widely portrayed as angry and strong (Childs, 2005, Collins, 2005; Radford-Hill, 2002). The intersection of gender and race that Black women are experiencing is characterized as threatening, dominant and angry (Walley-Jean, 2009; West, 2008; White, 1999). And these perceptions of Black women as dominant and strong are in contrast to those of White women's (Eagly & Steffen, 1984).

Latest research approves the extensive representations of Black women. Black women face stereotypes of dominance, assertiveness and strength while White women on the contrary face expectations of warmth. (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013). Donovan (2011) identified that Black women are highly linked with the racial personas like strong, assertive and dominant than White women. It's notable that the Black women were associated both with communal and agentic traits, which made them both similar and distinct from White women.

On the contrary of Black women, Asian women are associated with high competence. They have been stereotyped as naive, fragile and obedient just like Lotus Bloom and China Doll which are the widely known Asian characters that have their roots in ads, books and television shows (Prasso, 2005; Li, 2014). In addition, Model Minority stereotype was introduced in US, suggesting that Asian Americans are an exemplary minority group and should be looked up by other minority groups (Zia, 2000). These stereotypes portrayed Asian women as hardworking and highly successful (Lee & Rotheram-Borus, 2009; Miller, 2013). Just like Black women, Asian women are associated with a mix of communal and agentic traits. Their agentic stereotypes carry intelligence and competence, while their communal stereotypes carry obedience and passiveness (Ghavami &

Peplau, 2013; Rosette et al., 2016). Due to the obvious differences of perceptions between Black women, White women and Asian women they hold certain advantages and disadvantages that are distinct than each other's. For example, while Asian women can find it easy to prove themselves as competent for some roles, they might find it hard to show that they are capable for the managerial roles requiring assertiveness and dominance which clearly is in contrast with Asian women's communal stereotypes of passiveness and submissiveness.

More recent studies demonstrate the backlash women experience as well. Even though dominance is associated with various organizational roles, displaying dominance can hinder a woman's career development. According to the study of Williams & Tiedens (2016) women are perceived as less likeable than men when they exert dominance and in result less hireable. Another study, in line with the former, by Koch, D'Mello, & Sackett (2015) showed that in male dominated industries women are highly disadvantaged in hiring process because they seem deemed to be not a match for these roles requiring dominance or in general agentic behavior.

Backlash continues even when women convey dominance (Brescoll, Okimoto, & Vial, 2018). Rudman and Glick (1999, 2001) in their study found that women exerting dominance was perceived as less likeable than men exerting dominance.

#### **2.1.4. Gendered Stereotyped Jobs and Intersectionality**

Gender stereotypes, among other aspects, has an influence on women's job roles and their occupation. These stereotypes influence their earnings, career advancement, resources at their availability and social network (Heilman, 2001; Kossek, Su, & Wu, 2017). Women generally tend to be more disadvantaged in the labor market, they occupy lower ranking jobs and intersection of race and gender plays a role in creating particular barriers and opportunities for women with different race.

In US, women highly occupy roles related with human resources and administrative service occupations (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017a), while their employment rates are significantly low in high-paying fields such as construction and fast-growing STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields (International Labour Organization, 2016). Even though women's participation in labor market increased drastically over the last years, gendered

organizational roles still continue to exist. Koenig and Eagly (2014) revealed in their study people thought White men most commonly occupied high-ranking jobs like business professional, lawyer, doctor; on the contrary they believed White women occupied low-ranking jobs like nurse, teacher and secretary.

A job is gender-stereotyped when the one gender is overrepresented or underrepresented and the job requirements are comprehended to be gender-linked (Lyness & Heilman, 2006). Pinto, Patanakul, and Pinto (2017) found that female applicants face occupational sex bias in the male-dominated industry: project management. Bias doesn't always appear in employment but it can come into view as different paths for women and men regarding the career advancement (Milkman, Akinola, & Chugh, 2012, 2015). This bias has been previously demonstrated in STEM field academic programs as unequal treatment of male and female students (Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham, & Handelsman, 2012).

As high-ranking jobs such as corporate executive, lawyer and business professionals are dominated by men, gender wage gap is unavoidable (Blau & Kahn, 2000, 2006; Cha & Weeden, 2014; Joshi, Son, & Roh, 2015). One of the largest wage gaps exists in finance and insurance industry where women earn 60 cents per hour while men earn 1 dollar (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017b).

Gender stereotyped roles and pay disparities have been largely discussed in the scholarship but as discussed earlier, women's experiences are not one unique experience. Many aspects can differ for different intersectional stereotypes in the occupational segregation of men and women as well. In fact, Black women, compared with White women, have found to be more likely to occupy lower ranking jobs like caregivers, agricultural employees and factory workers (Amott & Matthaiei, 1991; Cox, 1994; Nkomo & Cox, 1996). Many of which are labor-intensive jobs unlike the administrative jobs White women tend to hold. Communal gender stereotypes can cause White women to be perceived inadequate for male-dominated jobs and industries, while unconstructive stereotypes of Black women can cause them to be perceived as competent only for low-ranking jobs.

Intersectional stereotypes of Black women lead to being perceived as unfit for traditionally feminine jobs (Galinsky et al., 2013; Hall et al., 2015). Being associated to physical strength and masculinity Black women relative to White women are expected to do more physical workload. These stereotypes can also lead to a wage gap. Kim (2002) found that pay disparity can't be

explained only by the separate effects of sexism and racism but only when intersection of gender and race were considered the penalties made sense.

In the US, Asian women in comparison to Black and White women occupy more high-ranking jobs even though they still lag behind White men and Asian men (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). These results are in line with the stereotypes associated with Asian women as intelligent and highly competent.

## **2.2. Intersectional Barriers and Migrant Women**

The vast amount of findings, mentioned so far, from the intersectional lens enhances our understanding of gender issues in the workplace. It is highly relevant to our study to show how intersectionality can play a role for distinct stereotypes. In the scholarship, Black women's and Asian women's experiences have largely been investigated with an intersectional perspective, in fact as mentioned before Black women and their distinct experiences have driven the studies of intersectionality in the first place. They have been the integral part of intersectional theory's advancement. Thus, mentioning the vast collection of studies on Black women and Asian women is highly significant for our study to show the relevance of multiple layers of oppressions they have experienced in the workplace because of the distinct stereotypes associated with them. Now we move onto more relevant and recent topics of migrant women and their particular experiences shaped by the distinct stereotypes associated with them.

Before the 1970s, migration studies were largely dominated by traditional views which did not consider intersection of categories like ethnicity, race and gender. Starting from 1970s these views started to incorporate a wider spectrum reflecting the multiple intersections which migration operated with and affected the lives of migrants. For starters, there was an increasing realization that women consisted of a significant part of the migrants both to United States and to Western countries. These women migrants and their experiences, in fact, were special cases (Curran and Saguy, 2001). Special cases that differed from the migrant men's, native women's and native men's.



## *Skills and Deskilling*

In the literature, deskilling has been described as underemployment (Jong and Madamba, 2001), downward occupational mobility (Bauer and Zimmermann, 1999), degrading of skills (Granda, 2008), over-qualification (Chen et al., 2010), over-education (Chiswick and Miller, 2009), job mismatch (Pecoraro, 2011) and skill erosion (Galgóczi et al., 2009). Deskilling, in the broadest sense, can be defined as migrant workers occupying jobs that requires lower levels of skills compared to their qualifications and experience. Flatau et al. (1995) tried to conceptualize deskilling as “mismatched unemployment” meaning that a worker’s skills can be in a better use in an another position than their current one which causes an underutilization of their skills, therefore a mismatch. Notions of “brain waste” and “brain drain” are also widely used in the deskilling literature. “Brain drain” describes the situation when a skilled worker migrates to an another country and therefore no longer contributes to his/her origin country. While, “brain waste” points directly to the underutilization of the skills of the migrant workers in the host country, waste points to the loss that the host country occurs by overlooking these migrants’ skills and qualifications (Moreno-Fontes Chammartin, 2008). Given these definitions, it is clear that skills and deskilling can be discussed from various aspects. However, it is worthy to point out that it is greatly important to argue these topics with an intersectional perspective.

The discussion on ‘deskilling’ also requires an understanding of ‘skills’. However, the term ‘skills’ remains rather a vague concept. In the scholarship, generally skilled migrant workers are considered as the ones holding a tertiary degree but even the skilled migrant workers can be divided into two subgroups of skilled and highly skilled workers (Iredale, 2005). Highly skilled workers are generally considered to be highly skilled because of their educational background or their area of specialization. Skills can also be defined as the outcomes of a formal or an informal education (Sabadie et al., 2010). The definition of a skilled migrant is also influenced by occupations in demand, like the information technology sector (United Nations, 1995). Recognition of these skills are also dependent on the distinct countries (Batalova and Lowell, 2005). Many countries offer work permits to ‘highly skilled migrants’ who generally hold high educational degrees and have previous work experience. Zulauf (2001) discussed that ‘skills’ are ideological, pointing out many of them are constructed on the basis of gender stereotypes. Kofman (2000, 2007), on the other hand, argued that skilled work is considered as the work that has a direct contribution to the economy, while social reproduction sectors tend to be overlooked such as education and nursing

which are more likely to be attributed to feminine characteristics. These gendered perspective of skills and deskilling therefore requires a broader analysis.

### *Intersectionality: Connecting Experiences of Gender with Migration Status*

The biggest problem of analyzing the flow of high skilled women so far has been the lack of data. Kofman (2000)'s study pointed out the lack of gendered data and argued that highly skilled migrant women should be studied in more detail and popular notions dictating all migrant women as unskilled should be challenged. In recent years, efforts have been made to quantify the number of skilled migrant women. Allan and Larsen (2003) provided interesting statistics in their study, displaying that the migration rate of women were generally higher than those of men arriving to OECD countries. Another study from Dumont et. al (2007) showed that women holding a tertiary degree have a higher tendency to migrate than men.

Studies from early 2000s focused on “gender-related problems” which included physical, sexual abuse, family planning and health problems however, areas like employment, workplace integration and career advancement remained unexplored (Ribeiro, 2008). Urging on accounting for institutional factors which has a direct effect on migration patterns, Ribeiro (2008) suggested examining these factors from a gender perspective in his study. Even if the recent studies demonstrated that most female migrants mostly have a tertiary degree, there was a still a lack of knowledge on deskilling of these women.

Findings of European Commission in 2008 revealed some concerning statistics regarding migrant women in Europe. (Rubin et al., 2008) It demonstrated that migrant women coming from third world countries had higher possibilities of being unemployed compared to third world country men, European Union migrants and native women. This clearly was an evidence of intersectional barriers these women experienced, their experience differed from the men, from the other women and other migrants. Belonging to multiple categorizations their experience was a different one, an intersectional one.

The researchers pointed out that: “High-education migrant women are more ‘at risk’ than native-born women of equivalent education of being ‘under-employed’, that is in employment that requires a lower level of education than they hold. Third-country migrant women of high education levels are more likely than either native-born or EU-born migrant women to be employed in low-

skilled sectors of employment. High-education migrant women born outside the EU are twice as likely to be employed in low-skill jobs as EU-born and native-born women with the same level of education.” (Rubin et al., 2008).

The deskilling is affecting women all around the world. Women from Philippines with a university degree are migrating more and more to Arab Gulf region and work as caregivers or similar domestic jobs (Kofman and Raghuram, 2009). Within Europe, migration occurred from Southern countries to Northern European countries. Sassen (2000) pointed out that many women, migrating from Southern countries to North, took on roles as caregivers. According to her, in North, women have been obtaining high skill degrees more and more, which, in fact, created a shortage of low-ranking jobs like caregivers. Southern women, arriving to these countries started looking after children and the aging population of the Northern countries. This system was further enhanced by non-recognized qualifications of migrant women which lead to deskilling. Even though the EU regulations protect these minorities now, the career advancement of these women into more aligned jobs with their educational background is yet an unsolved issue (Kofman and Raghuram, 2009)

Deskilling is a serious issue that migrant women face. Bolzman (2007) revealed that deskilling is also related with entry ways to the host country. He demonstrated deskilling occurs mostly when one enters a country with a non-work-related visa, e.g. family reunification or asylum seeking. He points out that the perception towards migrants entering with the aforementioned methods raises prejudice towards them and their competence. Especially, when a women’s entry is dependent on a male member of her family, it raises questions about their qualifications as an independent individual (Zaman, 2008). Consequently, the skills of the migrant women entering the host country with a non-work-related reason are disregarded. (Kofman, 2007; Kofman and Raghuram, 2006).

The skilled migrant women undergo deskilling because of their gender, national origin and race. Mojab (1999) argued that the capital is constrained by many factors like gender, national origin, race, culture and revealed that in Canada most of the recent migrant women was not seen as fit to the Canadian culture. Cardu (2007) discussed that migrant women, having non or little social network, does not have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the host country’s labor market. Not knowing the work culture of the host country limits their ability to find jobs matching with their skills. He also argued that recognition of their qualifications and their family responsibilities can be the other reasons of deskilling.

Riaño and Baghdadi (2005) investigated how the intersection of gender, class and ethnicity effected the migrant's women experience in Swiss labor market. They have found that these intersections can push skilled women towards accepting part-time, low-ranking jobs to raise extra income for their family. They also argued that many migrant women don't have the social means to find a place for themselves in the high-ranking positions. A third of these women cannot integrate to the labor market and a quarter ends up working for low-skill jobs. They also argued that this cannot be simply attributed to the market mechanisms or the entry mode to the host countries but it should be analyzed in the light of the intersection of class, gender and ethnicity (Riaño and Baghdadi, 2005).

Scholars, alongside investigating the barriers skilled migrant women face, have investigated 'reskilling'. Reskilling, in the context of migrant women, means women trying to regain recognition or gain new skills by enrolling to a host country university. However, it can't be disregarded that these women don't generally have the means to undergo these costly educations. Further, their ability to attend these lengthy courses are limited due to their family responsibilities and lack of childcare support (Kofman and Raghuram, 2009). Some studies also showed that women's education might not be prioritized before of the male members of the family (Kofman and Raghuram, 2009; Cardu, 2007).

It is also worthy to mention, reskilling does not guarantee a full integration to the labor market as well. Undergoing lengthy and costly educations, migrant women still face the class and race based discrimination in the labor market (Zaman, 2008). Zaman argues that: "In the name of reskilling, a gendered division of labor emerges between men and women, and a racialized division of labor surfaces within the female labor force itself" (Zaman, 2008)

### **2.2.1 Migrant Women in Male-Dominated Sectors of the Labor Market**

Over the years highly skilled migration has started to consist more and more from females (Özden et al., 2011). Following this trend, scholars focused more on understanding the experiences of highly skilled female migrants. Many scholars have examined the experiences of these women from the intersection scope of gender with other categorizations like age, ethnicity and so on (Jenkins, 2004; Williams & Baláz, 2008; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2019). However, there has been

only few studies investigating the female migrants' experiences regarding the labor market especially within male-dominated industries (Raghuram, 2008; Grigoleit-Richter, 2017).

Gender has been one of the main drivers of the nature of work (domestic jobs, nursing, caregiving). Therefore, many of the studies investigated migrant women's experiences in domestic work (Anderson, 2000), caregiving (McGregor, 2007) and sex work (Agustin, 2006) which have been the sectors that account for the most of the migrant women's employability. There have been several studies investigating the migrant women's experience in cleaning and hospitality sectors as their employment rates have increased in these sectors (Datta et al., 2006). These low-ranking jobs and sectors have long been the subject of migration research while high-ranking jobs and migrant women's employability in these jobs have been overlooked. Kofman (2000) argued that migrant women, in fact, has been invisible in migration research. However, in the early 2000s there has been a boom of studies focusing on the migration of nurses (Buchan et al., 2003; Ball, 2004; Kingma, 2006), which was different than the previous studies' scopes because nursing required ownership of a range of relevant skills. Some scholars addressed the issue of integration of the nurses (Winkelmann-Gleed, 2006), some addressed the deskilling of migrants in the care sector (McGregor, 2007).

But how about migrant women in male-dominated sectors of the labour market? The problems migrant women are facing in male-dominated sectors still largely remains not tackled. For example, looking back at the past studies nurses have been largely studied which is a sector mostly populated by women while there haven't been any significant efforts made to investigate doctors. So, generally academic interest has been unevenly focused on where the migrant women seem to over populate or generally where women seem to overly populate. Raghuram (2008) pointing out to these uneven interests argued that male dominated sectors and industries should be studied with a gendered perspective. More recently, several scholars discussed that with the many layers of social categorization and difference highly skilled migrant women and their experience in the labor market offered an important setting to study (Grigoleit-Richter 2017; Shirmohammadi et al. 2018).

Shirmohammadi et al. (2018) demonstrated migrant women's employment by emphasizing their individual characteristics like migratory status, language proficiency and educational background. While Grigoleit-Richter (2017) drew attention to the barriers these women face in the labor market like social network and work-family balance.

Grigoleit-Richter (2017) examined the German labor market for migrant women working in STEM professions with an emphasis on the effects of gender and ethnicity on their experiences in the host country. She found that even if Germany adopted several policies in early 2000s to smooth the transition of skilled migrants, they have faced several barriers with regard to their integration to the labor market. For migrant women these barriers surfaced in technology sectors, which is considered to be overpopulated by men. She further argued that gendered segregation in the technology sector caused devaluation of the migrant women's work performance. Alongside the gendered barriers, she found, they have also encountered ethnical barriers that made them the subject of unequal treatment. Working in Germany required them to be aware of the local culture and fluency in the language. The migrant women she interviewed, stated they have employed various tactics to gain these competences before they could think of career advancement. Even if they successfully integrated to the labor market after gaining these skills they have felt that not everything was available for them as it was for the others. In the light of these findings, Grigoleit-Richter (2017) concluded that skilled migrant women faced not only gendered barriers but also ethnical barriers as 'others'. Yet an interesting finding in her study was that, after stating the unequal treatment they have faced in German labor market, the skilled migrant women also expressed that they want to stay in Germany. They, in fact, employed a resilient agency, which over the years made it possible for them to learn the local language and invest in their cultural capital. After developing these abilities, they have felt belonging to the local context and expressed their wish to stay.

Bolzani et. al (2021), in their study, identified four main mechanisms that gender and migrant status can play a role in career advancement with a focus on male dominated STEM fields. Firstly, they argued, that there is a significant gender disparity in STEM fields following Jungwirth (2011) Kofman (2014) and Raghuram (2008)'s studies. Female migrants still represent a small fraction of these jobs, although increasing, there still exists a significant gender imbalance (Cerna & Czaika, 2016). Alongside STEM fields significant gender disparities appear in IT and biomedical professions which are attributed to workplace culture and also inadequate work-life balance policies (e.g., Raghuram, 2008). Gender stereotyping of the jobs and industries is also an important reason of these disparities (Valenduc, 2011)

Secondly, they pointed out that women in STEM fields are further differentiated because of their nationalities, suggesting the differences of educational systems and also educational patterns. Thirdly, they emphasized that it is not easy to internationally transfer language skills, professional

experiences and education histories of highly skilled migrants, following Chiswick & Miller (2009) Friedberg (2000)'s works. Having a degree in one of the highly specialized fields of STEM might put extra barriers for the transfer of these skills (Dumont & Monso, 2007). Educational gaps between origin and destination countries, lack of technical language proficiency, difference between work cultures also increase the possibility of a mismatch (Al Ariss, 2010; Chiswick & Miller, 2009; Friedberg, 2000).

Finally, they argued that even if there is a large need of qualified STEM professionals in Western countries, the recruiting processes of migrants are highly gendered. These recruiting processes follows the traditional market mechanisms, for example emphasizing the educational history while not accounting for the skills earned on the job (Kofman, 2014). These filters, thus, causes discarding the migrant women's untraditional past experiences (Gonzales Enriques & Triandafyllidou, 2016). Due to these four mechanisms Bolzani et al (2021) argued that migrant women with a STEM background will have hard time finding a matching job with their skills and will experience deskilling in the host countries (Beckhusen et al., 2013; Mollard & Umar, 2012).

### **2.2.2. Migrant Women's Agency**

As many scholars demonstrated over the recent years, migrant women experience significant barriers regarding their integration to the host country's labor market. These barriers prevail as gendered stereotypes, deskilling, devaluation of skills in the host country, racial or ethnical discrimination, lack of social capital and on the individual levels family responsibilities and overall work-family balance.

Recent studies demonstrate that migrant women are not unvoiced victims but they are actively working for change (Hargreaves and Anderson 2014). Some of these women raise their voices and use their agency to address the issues surrounding them and their community (Hargreaves and Anderson 2014). The term *agency* means a person's ability to make effective decisions and turn them into the outcomes they want (Kabir 2010). It is a process in which women use their own resources and the opportunities at hand to create the desired outcomes for themselves. Grine (2014) argues that some of the migrant women employ several strategies such as social networking and mentoring which gives them a chance to become self-confident and empowered.

As Grigoleit-Richter (2017) demonstrated in her study, women can overcome the barriers they are facing with their perseverance and their investment on social capital (e.g. gaining proficiency in local language and learning the local culture). Bolzani et. al (2021) identified contextual, organizational and individual barriers that skilled migrant women are facing in STEM fields and addressed the relevant resources for each category of barriers that women stated to employ. By identifying relationships between first-order concepts, they created first-order categories and classified them into second-order themes (Figure 14).

They have argued that the structural barriers can be found in the bigger context like gender norms, lack of job opportunities in the host country (in their case, Italy), not recognized qualifications, costly reskilling, racial and ethnical discrimination embedded in the system and finally bureaucracy (e.g. the residence permit procedures that all migrants have to through). The relevant resources addressing structural barriers, structural resources, has been identified as local organizations like migrant communities. Furthermore, they have argued that organizational barriers are the barriers determined by employer's attitudes like their preference towards men, strict selection criteria they deploy, racial/ethnic prejudice towards candidates because of race, foreign name or religious clothing (e.g. hijab), general prejudice caused by negative experiences in the past with migrant employees and naturally the limited job positions that companies can offer. Migrant women they have interviewed during their study expressed that the recruitment processes based on both hard and soft skills can be the solution to address the organizational barriers. Finally, Bolzani et. al (2021) demonstrated that migrant women face individual barriers like lack of command in the local language, lack of social and psychological capital and responsibilities towards the family. Women expressed they have overcome these issues with their perseverance, ability to adapt and by developing social networks.

## **2.3 Conclusions**

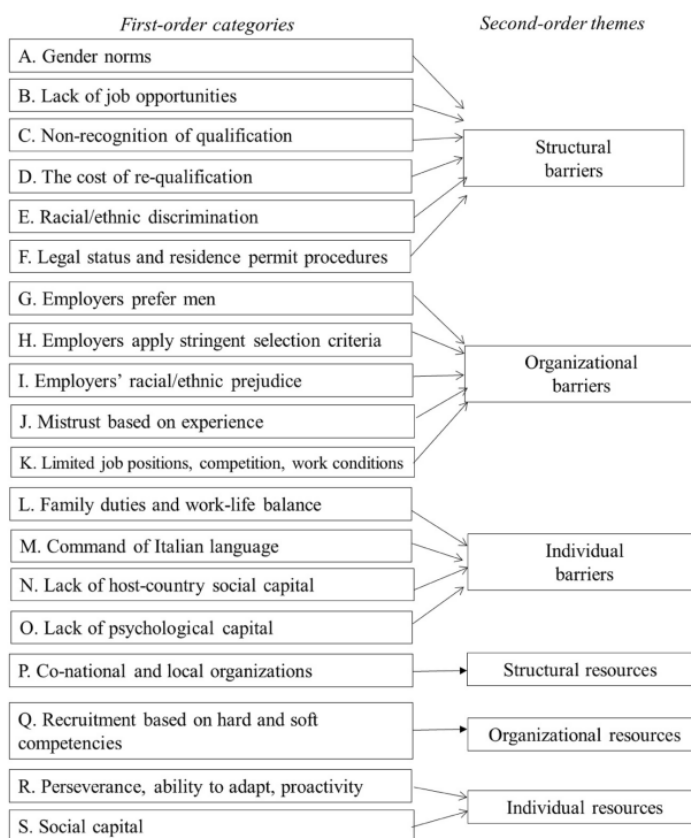
Traditional viewpoints that did not take into account the junction of categories like ethnicity, race, and gender predominated migration research in the past. Since the 1970s, these viewpoints have expanded to reflect the various intersections that migration operates at and how it affects migrant life.



Earlier studies still lacked the analyze male and female migrants’ experiences separately. Studies on female labor mobility were afterwards conducted in an effort to close these gaps. However, a substantial portion of these research was centered on women who relocated to work in professions with a disproportionately high female labor force. Less research has been done on women who seek work in industries with a male predominance. Areas where migrant women appear to overpopulate or areas where women generally appear to overpopulate have received inconsistent attention from academics while the issues migrant women face in industries with a predominance of men are still largely unaddressed.

In the next chapter, we will introduce our research framework and design and how we are planning to utilize intersectionality theory in the framework of migrant women’s experiences in the male-dominated industry of STEMM.

**Figure 14:** Overview of first-order categories and second-order themes



Source: Bolzani et al. (2021)

## **3.CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND DESIGN**

In the previous chapters we have presented the migration data in Europe and Italy and we have pointed out the disadvantaged position of migrant women in the European and Italian labor market. Subsequently, we have dedicated a chapter to analyze the ‘intersectionality theory’ and its broad use in the literature and in the context of migrant women. We will now dive into further investigating the topic through an empirical research in order to create a framework to analyze migration and especially migrant women’s systematic penalization in Italian labor market through intersectionality theory’s scope.

#### **3.1. Rationale and Contributions of Our Research**

Our study aims to adopt a perspective; looking at the factors that influence the employability of highly skilled migrant women. As described in the previous chapter, intersectionality theory has been used widely in the literature in different contexts. Its use in migration studies is recent and limited with a focus on low-skilled women or on high-skilled women working in feminized sectors like humanities and social sciences (Kofman & Raghuram, 2006; Raghuram, 2008). While the high-skilled women’s experience in male dominated sectors remains unexplored. For this reason, scholars agree on the need for further research exploring high-skilled women’s experiences in male dominated sectors. Raghuram (2008) pointed out the uneven interests of scholarship towards low-skilled women or high-skilled women working in female dominated sectors and argued that male dominated sectors and industries should be studied with a gendered perspective. Kofman (2000) pointed out the lack of gendered data and likewise, argued that highly skilled migrant women should be studied in more detail and popular notions dictating all migrant women as unskilled should be challenged. Grigoleit-Richter (2017) and Shirmohammadi et al. (2018) argued, characterized by multiple layers of oppression, high-skilled women and their experience in the

labor market offered an important array of study. On the light of these considerations, this paper aims to respond to calls and provide further insights on high-skilled migrant women's experience in the male dominated sector of STEMM, with an emphasis on Italian labor market. Despite being a population that is usually ignored by organizations and policymakers in the host nation, highly talented migrant women in STEMM areas are a talent pool that can be crucial for innovation and growth (Iredale, 2005). In this study, we will conduct an in-depth analysis of the experiences of women on the basis of their employability. We will examine the employability of female graduate students majoring in STEMM disciplines in the Italian labor market to determine whether or not certain factors have a negative impact on their participation rates and place them at a disadvantage compared to natives.

Another contribution of our study lies in the demonstration of the intersections between gender, migrant status and educational/professional background in sectors with a predominance of men with which it adds to the growing literature on intersectionality. As described earlier, one of rare studies that focused on migrant women working in technology sectors with an emphasis on the effects of gender and ethnicity on their experiences in the host country, Grigoleit-Richter (2017) revealed that migrant women have faced specific several barriers with regard to their integration to the German labor market. Similarly, a study conducted in Italy, Bolzani et. al (2021) identified contextual, organizational and individual barriers that skilled migrant women are facing in STEM fields. The study interviewed professional women coming from different countries and revealed their respective challenges working in STEMM sectors. Our paper is differentiated from previous studies about the labor market outcomes of female migrants in STEMM sectors, which mostly focused on professional women and the barriers they have faced working in these sectors. (Grigoleit-Richter (2017); Bolzani et. al., 2021).

### **3.2. Research Question**

This study focuses on the following research question: What are the barriers to employability faced by highly qualified immigrant female graduate students majoring in STEMM subjects in Italy that result from inequalities unique to their intersectional nature? Our research methodology is based on interviews conducted with highly qualified immigrant female graduate students specializing in STEMM disciplines that aims to provide rich qualitative evidence.

Another goal of our study is to reveal the perceptions of foreign women regarding the equality in employability with a focus on the STEMM labor market. In Chapter 1, as we have widely seen, foreign women tend to be more disadvantaged compared to their male and native women peers. Thus, we will explore the perceptions and experiences of women on employability and its comparability to the men's and native women's.

The research questions mentioned has been tackled in Italy with students graduated or about to graduate from Italian universities. There are several reasons why we have chosen Italy as the relevant country for our study and research questions. As we have seen earlier in Chapter 1 as well, Italy is characterized by high unemployment rates especially among young people, while the lowest employment rates are among migrant women. Italy's labor market is also characterized by large gender gap both for natives and foreign women; ranking behind the European average in work domain, holding the last place just before Greece and Slovakia (Ortensi & Tosi, 2021). Additionally, Italy is among the top 10 countries that have a concerning disparity between a lack of highly-skilled professionals in STEMM fields and the overabundance of human capital in the social sciences. This, in fact, leads to high unemployment rates, mismatch between skills needed and available jobs, brain waste, and dissatisfaction within the skilled labor market (Pagano, 2018).

On the other hand, Italy has traditionally focused on attracting low-skilled workers to fill in the jobs like logistics or caregiving and domestic work (Allasino et al., 2014). Additionally, the nation has implemented immigration policies that are largely influenced by European policymaking and are intended to draw and keep a more constrained and carefully chosen flow of highly skilled workers needed for the knowledge-based economy, such as innovative business owners, investors, well-known artists, top managers, or professionals in regulated sectors that require a specialized education (European Migration Network, 2007; OECD and EU, 2016). However, the recruitment of high-skilled workforce has been overlooked both from policymakers and employers (Bonizzoni, 2018).

Finally, Italy was severely hit by Covid-19 pandemic with its consequences significantly expressed in its labor market. The pandemic has noticeably affected immigrant women in Italy, in particular. Compared to male immigrants, the employment rate of foreign women in Italy has decreased by a factor of two. Foreign women lost one-fourth of the 456 thousand jobs that were eliminated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Comparatively, biggest change based on percentages was of foreign women, employment rate of foreign women decreased by %10 while those of Italian women decreased by

1,4% and foreign by 3,5% (ISMU, 2021). Covid-19 pandemic has proved the particularly disadvantaged position of migrant women.

Our study was conducted with the female graduate degree students majoring in STEMM fields at University of Padua, welcoming 2.100 international students in 2021 only, the university holds a long tradition of international cooperation and participation in international networks of excellence as well as in research and education projects, making it a rich sample for our study.

### **3.3 The Research Method: Interview and Its Structure**

Data for our study was gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 13 highly skilled migrant women majoring in STEMM fields. Interviews were conducted through phone individually, considering the location constraints of some of the interviewees. Individual interviews allowed participants to speak more freely and gave us the chance to focus more on their specific stories and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As interviewers, our intervention was minimal, enough to keep the interviews in scope with several opening questions with a focus on participants' labor integration and their relative experiences.

Each interview took around 15-20 minutes to allow the optimal time for participants to share their relevant experiences and to keep the scope on the subject. Participants were informed that the interviews were being conducted in order to understand their relevant experiences regarding the employability of foreign women in STEMM sectors in Italian labor market. They were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. The interviews were mainly conducted in English and recorded with the participants' consent.

With semi-structured interviews we aimed to keep the focus of interviews on four main topics:

1-Personal background

2-Job search

3-Work experience

4-Comparison

The complete structure of the interviews is reported in the Appendix.

The first group of questions focused mainly on gathering relevant personal background data. Interviewees have been directed questions to allow further analysis on the basis of their origins, their Italian citizenship status, their study field and their graduation dates.

The following set of questions focused on the participants' experiences regarding the job search. They have been first asked whether they have searched for a job in Italy and based on their answers have been asked to describe their job search. The open-ended nature of this inquiry gave us the opportunity to learn about participants' experiences from a variety of angles without directing them. Later they have been asked to describe the difficulties and barriers they have faced while looking for a job. These questions are significant in order to understand respondents' job search experience both from the perspective of the barriers they face and from a more general scope.

The third set of questions was dedicated to initial work experiences that the participants' might have had and the relative ease of finding them. Participants have been asked whether they have had a work experience in Italy. If they answered yes, they have been asked their job title and how much they think that their educational and professional background matched with that job. These questions have been asked merely to reveal whether they have felt overqualified for the job positions they've held. Lastly, they have been asked which skills they felt like made them get these jobs.

To give them the chance to compare their experiences with the foreign men's and native women's, the fourth and the last set of questions focused on relativity of the barriers they face. They have been asked whether they thought that foreign men face the same problems as them and lastly whether they thought that native women face the same problem like them. These questions have been asked to reveal foreign women's thoughts and experiences on the barriers they face and their relativity with different intersectional groups.

### *Sample*

In order to maximize variances in participant characteristics, the sample was created using snowball and purposeful sampling techniques (e.g., women's nationality/ethnicity and educational background).

Snowball sampling is applied because it has been thought as difficult to access subjects with the target characteristics. Snowball method allows the existing study subjects to recruit future subjects

among their acquaintances. Sampling continues until data saturation. (Burns, 1993). This approach, sometimes referred as the "chain method," is successful and affordable for reaching people who would be hard to locate otherwise (Polit-O'Hara & Beck, 2006). This approach involves asking the initial samples, who are often chosen by convenience sampling, if they know anyone who could have the same opinions or circumstances and participate in the study. Snowball approach minimizes the time to search for the participants but also it gives researchers the chance to interact in a more comfortable manner with the research sample since the initial sample is acquainted with the sample and the researcher (Polit-O'Hara & Beck, 2006).

In this study, following snowball methodology, first, only an initial sample of couple of foreign women has been found. They were the acquaintances of the researchers. Later, they have led us to other individuals in their social circle who would be able to participate in our study.

The foreign women participating in the qualitative research came from various countries and held various degrees. They have obtained or are about to obtain their Master's degrees in different STEMM fields. All women achieved their qualifications in Italy. For an overview of these participants' profiles, see Table 2.

**Table 2:** Overview of participants' characteristics

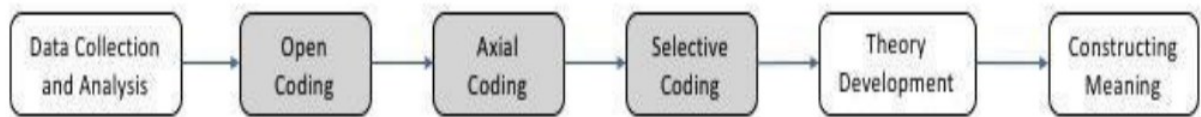
	<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>Scientific area of qualification</b>
W1	Turkey	ICT
W2	Uzbekistan	Management Engineering
W3	Kazakhstan	ICT
W4	Turkey	Food Engineering
W5	Indonesia	Environmental Engineering
W6	Russia	Data Science
W7	Iran	Food Engineering
W8	Russia	Mathematical Engineering
W9	Uzbekistan	Cyber Security
W10	Armenia	Data Science
W11	Iran	ICT
W12	India	Food Engineering
W13	Iran	Financial Engineering

### 3.4 Data Analysis

In qualitative research one of the fundamental analytical methods that researchers employ is coding. In qualitative research, coding is the act of assembling, categorizing, and thematically sorting acquired data to provide a structured framework on which to build meaning. Each qualitative research orientation uses a strategy for organizing the data through coding, despite the fact that they differ in theory and practice with regard to managing the acquired data. Themes hidden in the data are revealed through techniques used in coding methodologies. In qualitative research, coding is a crucial structural function that enables data interpretation and subsequent procedures to further the study's goals (Moser & Williams, 2019).

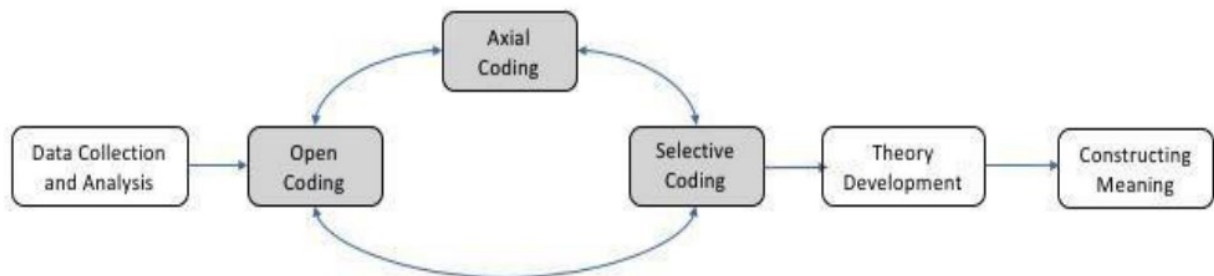
In grounded theory research, there are three basic types of coding: open, axial, and selective (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Importantly, the open, axial, and selective coding system allows for an interactive, continuously comparing, and consolidating data loop in which the researcher participates. Linear and non-linear process representations of the qualitative research can be seen in Figures 15 and 16, respectively.

**Figure 15:** Linear Process for Qualitative Research



Source: Moser & Williams, 2019

**Figure 16:** Non-linear Process for Qualitative Research



Source: Moser & Williams, 2019



*Open coding*, the first level of coding, is the interpretative method used to deconstruct data in an analytical way. Its goal is to provide the analyst with insightful perspectives by challenging accepted conceptions on the way we think and interpret the data (Wicker, 1985). The researcher finds different concepts and themes for categorization using open coding. By establishing initial broad thematic categories for data aggregation, the first level of data is arranged.

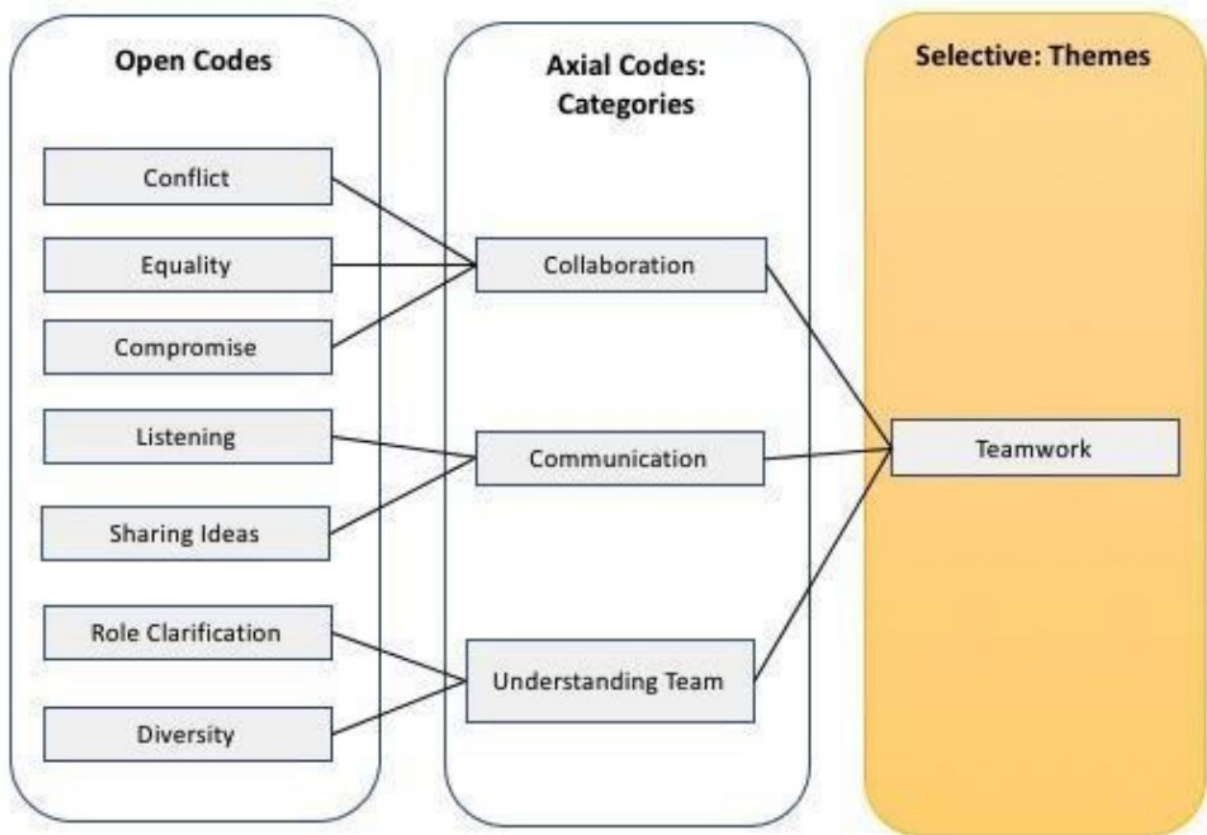
Open coding gives researchers the ability to make comparisons between events, actions and interactions to identify the similar and different traits among them and to develop a conceptualization. Categories and sub-categories are created from similar events, actions and interactions by grouping them together. These categories and their sub-categories form the basis of interpretation of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). “The first step [open coding] aims at expressing data and phenomena in the form of concepts. Units of meaning classifying expressions (single words, short sequences of words) in order to attach annotations and "concepts” (Flick, 2009, p. 307). Researchers can describe the precise characteristics and dimensions of each category once they are aware of the differences between them and ensure the specificity of each category (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In practice, the researcher should go through the participants’ responses and look for the similar statements and indicators of concept that is embedded in the respondents.

*Axial coding*, on the other hand, as the second level of coding, helps to link sub-categories with the categories and test the relationship among them. On the contrary of open coding trying to identify emergent themes, axial coding further links and categorizes the themes. In order to create core codes, axial coding analyzes linkages between open codes (Strauss, 1998). So while open coding helps to develop themes it does not explore the relationships among these themes. Taking over as the second level of coding, axial coding helps to explore the relationships among the emergent themes from open coding and further categorizes them (Moser & Williams, 2019).

Lastly, *selective coding* enables researchers to develop a core category that encompasses all the categories developed before. The core category can come from the categories identified before or it can be a new one that is inclusive of all of the categories that has been revealed earlier. The core category is identified by asking questions like: “What is the main analytic idea presented in this research?”, “If my findings are to be conceptualized in a few sentences, what do I say?”, “What does all the action/interaction seem to be about?” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The representation of the whole process can be seen in Figures 17 and 18.

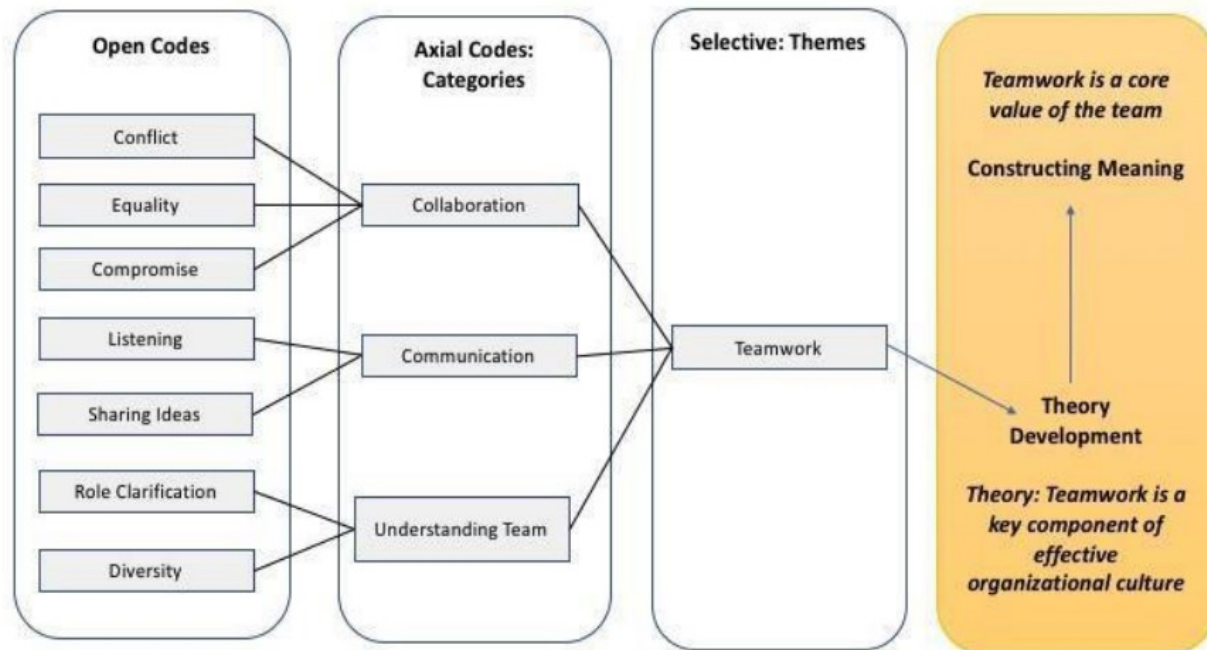
Typically, in open coding various themes are captured from the fragmented and scattered data obtained from the field study. Later, axial coding is used to form key categories that integrates the previously identified themes by open coding. Finally, the research can be refined to a unique theme with selective coding. Frequently, research studies generate numerous selective codes; enabling researchers develop theory resulting in a theoretical framework and the ability to construct meaning (Moser & Williams, 2019).

**Figure 17:** Open Codes to Selective Themes



Source: Moser & Williams, 2019

**Figure 18:** Creation of Theory and Meaning

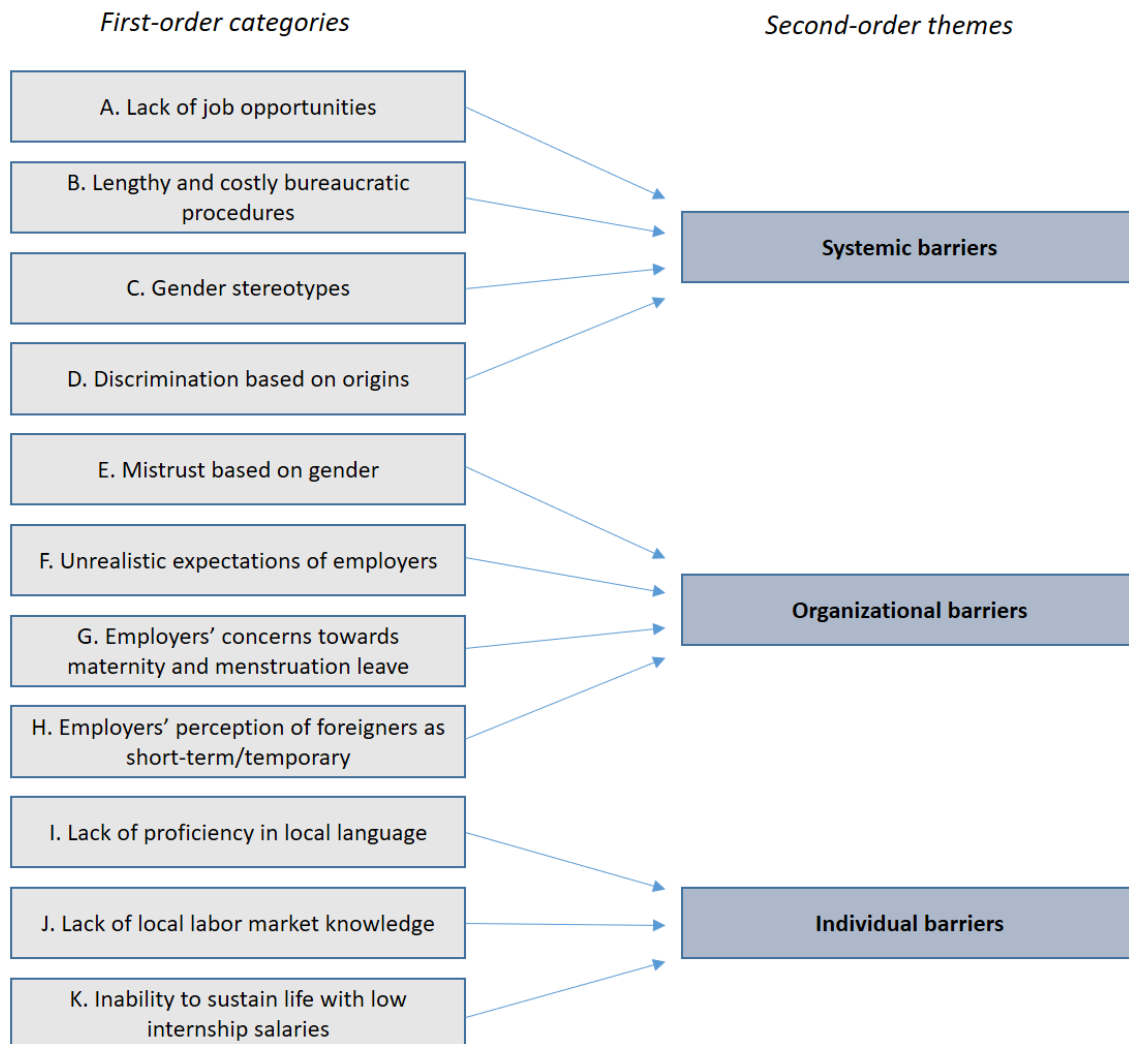


Source: Moser & Williams, 2019

In this study, we have adapted both open coding and axial coding for analyzing the data we have gathered from the interviews conducted with foreign women in STEMM. To begin with, we transcribed each interview so that we could go over the data and perform a thorough analysis. By analyzing each interview following open coding, we have deconstructed the data and made comparisons between statements to identify the similarities and differences. This process allowed us to conceptualize our labels for the distinct categories and to develop first-order categories that formed the basis of our classification. More specifically, the first-order categories helped us to identify the barriers and difficulties foreign women majoring in STEMM fields face upon their entry to Italian labor market, during their job search. Each woman expressed the difficulties they face during job search differently, sometimes as a reply to different questions and at the different phases of the interviews. Thus, this process allowed us to compare the statements of foreign women and identify the ones pointing to the similar and distinct category of barriers.

After identifying the first-order categories, we have employed axial coding, helping us to link first-order categories and identifying the relationships among them. By analyzing the links between open codes we were able to create second-order themes and further categorize our first-order categories that have emerged from open coding (Figure 19).

**Figure 19:** Overview of first-order categories and second-order themes



### 3.5 Conclusions

This chapter provided a presentation of the general framework of our study, which has the objective to investigate the barriers to employability faced by highly qualified immigrant female graduate students majoring in STEMM subjects in Italy that result from inequalities unique to their intersectional nature.

First, we presented rationale behind our study, following that we have presented the specific contributions of our research with comparison to similar studies conducted in this scope.

The second part of this chapter covered our research question and the reasons we decided to conduct this study in Italy.

Following that, we have presented our reasons to conduct interviews, the structure and the themes our semi-structured interviews revolve around and lastly, characteristics of our sample.

Final section in this chapter introduced the data analysis methods we decided to adapt with a brief literature review on these methods. Most importantly, we presented an overview of first-order categories and second-order themes that have emerged from our study.

In the next chapter, the results will be discussed in detail.

## 4.CHAPTER FOUR

### EMPIRICAL STUDY

In previous chapter, we have presented the framework of our research and the data analysis methods we will be employing for analyzing the results of our study. In this chapter, we will investigate the barriers and difficulties, briefly introduced in previous chapter, that female graduate students in STEMM subjects encounter in terms of employability in Italy. We will present exemplary data gathered from interviews conducted with 13 women which will allow us to further investigate our findings in detail. Following that, we will discuss what our findings mean from an intersectional perspective.

#### **4.1. Results: The Barriers Foreign Female Graduate Students Face While Looking for STEMM Jobs in Italy**

As introduced briefly in Figure 19, after going through each interview thoroughly we have found three main contexts/themes that we could classify our fragmented finding of categories into. These three contexts are: systemic barriers, organizational barriers and individual barriers. We will first explore the themes themselves for each of these topics before talking about what each category signifies. Exemplary data for each category can be found in Table 3.

##### **4.1.1. Systemic Barriers**

For the first theme, we have taken into account all sorts of systemic barriers that come from policies, practices, or processes that deny foreign women equitable access or exclude them. We have classified each barrier that have deep roots in systems and people's beliefs, and that have a lengthy history of emergence. In this consideration, the first level of systemic barriers we have found is linked with *lack of job opportunities* in Italian labor market especially in some cities and in some fields. Women generally mentioned the lack of technical roles and abundance of sales roles

in STEMM fields which are not a match with their skills, coming from technical-oriented backgrounds.

The second level of systemic barriers are linked with, as commonly expressed by our interviewees, *lengthy and costly bureaucratic procedures* that are mainly related with the need to obtain a work visa and to find a sponsorship to remain in Italy. These costly and lengthy procedures, for both employer and the foreign workers, undermine foreign graduate students' ability to become active members of the Italian labor market. These processes can be complex and difficult, which in the end hinders the chances of being employed for foreign women. This can be especially significant during job search because, as expressed by our interviewees, companies generally put a mandatory question asking candidates whether they need sponsorship or will be needing it in the future that can cause them to be eliminated from recruiting process without even making it to the next stages. Visa obligations can push companies to adopt a more local recruiting prospective, hiring abundantly native candidates that needs no more than standard documentation.

Another barrier is represented by *gender stereotypes*. Women we have interviewed expressed that they face gender norms at work from their co-workers and managers. They have expressed that they are expected to do chores even at work, that are traditionally assigned to women. Our respondents have also stated that they experience gender norms at universities during their studies, not being directed hard questions as men during their exams and getting the 'kind' treatment from their professors. These perceptions on stereotypical gender roles can hinder women of being accepted to roles that are traditionally associated with men. In STEMM fields, it can be especially problematic considering the technical-oriented roles which are typically associated with men.

Finally, another barrier that our respondents highlighted was *discrimination based on origins*. One of our respondents expressed that she wasn't able to get a room because she was from Iran and that she faced the same treatment during her job search only it was not expressed explicitly. Discrimination can also appear during visa or residence permit applications. In fact, one of our respondents expressed that a friend of hers was exposed to discriminative behavior by the immigration office. Foreign women have to go through visa and residence permit procedures to remain and work in Italy, discrimination they face in different stages of these processes can hinder their willingness to find a job in a country that has mistreated them.

**Table 3:** Exemplary data from the interviews conducted with foreign female graduate students on the barriers/difficulties they face while looking for a STEMM job in Italy

## **Systemic barriers**

### **A. Lack of job opportunities**

“There are not many technology companies around Padua, especially the big ones, there are some small companies. I had lectures at the university that is why I was searching around here but now I’m considering also other cities.” [W1]

“I have a background in Data Science and they don’t have much interesting jobs here in Italy in Data Science, most of them are in Business Analytics and I’m not interested in that. That is why I’m not considering to apply to Italian companies anymore.” [W10]

“I am coming from a science background so my options are like working in R&D, research centers and so on but in Italy there are not many jobs in these fields. But they are mostly in sales. Like, I went to a career fair recently and they have been only hiring for sales positions.” [W12]

### **B. Lengthy and costly bureaucratic procedures**

“They have to provide you a work visa and at the start they ask you anyway when you’re applying, whether you will need a work visa now or in the future. If you reply ‘yes’, I think there is a great chance that you will be eliminated. They don’t even consider you.” [W1]

“Of course, many of the countries would want to hire their own citizens first of all, so that they won’t have any further problems. Let’s say with visa and so on. That is why they will definitely prioritize their own citizens.” [W2]

“There is no system in Italian bureaucracy. Sometimes you can get an answer in two hours, one day or sometimes next year. Which makes it harder for us expats because we really need to fit into the system but how can we fit into the system that does not exist?” [W5]



**Table 3** (Continued)

“If you’re a foreigner, they have to do all the paperwork. This was a problem for my friend. She was doing internship and at the end they wanted to hire her but then after few weeks they said there is a problem with the documents. After all, they said that they can’t hire her because it is too difficult.” [W8]

“I’m international, I’m student, I’m foreigner and I don’t have a permit to work here (...) And I think it is challenging to get one.” [W9]

### **C. Gender stereotypes**

“I noticed it in my previous work experiences as well, the managers, around 50 years old, they would tell jokes like ‘Oh, my wife is my boss, I might be the boss here but when it comes to my wife she is my boss’, these kind of weird jokes (...) I even talked to my women colleagues, she would tell me like you’re expected serve as well. Once, there were some investors coming and we ordered food and the boss was like girls could you help etc. He wanted us to set up the food for them. It is expected that women do these kind of stuff or even cleaning up the dishwasher, these kind of things. It is not something that is spoken about but still the society expects a bit of doing like this.” [W3]

“I think being a male in Italy and looking for an internship in the sphere of Data Science is much easier, for sure. You know, I got this impression from professors at the university. Like, you’re coming to ask some questions or doing an oral exam and they kind of like smiling and not asking you hard questions. Like one time, we were in the row to take an oral exam, professors are asking males students really detailed questions and if he sees them hesitating he will ask more and more. While, with the female students, they are really like nice, kind, smiling, almost giving the answers instead of you. You know, just give me a chance to answer my question.” [W6]

**Table 3** (Continued)

“Me and my boyfriend we are studying in the same field, Food Engineering. I saw that I generally can’t get a job when I apply for technical, on-site jobs but he does. When I apply to research centers it is easier to get an answer. I guess they think these are the appropriate jobs for women.” [W12]

#### **D. Discrimination based on origins**

“A friend of mine wanted to apply for an orientation visa and she found it very difficult because of the way immigration offices have treated her. (...) So, she is from Iran and she told me that they think everyone from Iran is a refugee. They told her that there are too many people from her country and all this mean stuff. She is already so traumatized by that and I don’t think for whatever reason you should treat people like that.” [W5]

“I could really feel the discrimination, you know, even at university because in my department all Italian students are given thesis topics for their research but none of my professors actually chose international students.” [W5]

“People are different from each other, so maybe some of them judge, some not. But in general, when I said I’m from Iran people were like ‘Oh, I’m sorry’ because of the current situations. But it is not exactly related with getting the job or something, right? Actually, when I wanted to find a room, they were like ‘Oh, you’re Iranian, then no’. When I’m searching for a job they didn’t tell me like this but they said ‘Oh, sorry’.” [W7]

### **Organizational barriers**

#### **A. Mistrust based on gender**

“In my recent experience working for a start-up, I was working there for only two weeks in R&D, I started there, right? And the boss was always like ‘You shouldn’t disappoint me.’. I felt like I had less reliability because I’m a woman (...) I had an Italian friend, she was working as an intern in one of the NGOs, she was also struggling a lot with mean colleagues, kind of similar lack of reliability in her in terms of completing the tasks and I remember she was quite disappointed.” [W3]

**Table 3** (Continued)

**B. Unrealistic expectations of employers**

“I got hired in small start-up, which was not professional at all. I always worked in big corporates and I felt like working in this company they didn’t have a constructed way of doing things. They would give me a task and leave me alone with it, even if I had a mentor he didn’t manage to have time with me. One day, he told me ‘I can’t be a mentor to you and you’re losing time because of me, I don’t want to take any more of your time’. And I was dismissed just like that, no warning whatsoever. I don’t know what they expected to get from me without teaching me anything.” [W1]

“Another problem is the content of the job offers. They want like three years of experience, skilled in Java, C, C#, Python, R; bunch of programming languages, you need to have experience with cloud technologies and you also need to be really proficient in both Italian and English written and spoken. They put everything, the perfect candidate. You can never find such a person. This is particularly like this in Italian job offers. Because the German offers are more concrete, if you apply for a Data Analyst position, they don’t put bunch of those programming languages but they put specific knowledge that you probably had experience with during your studies. In Italy, it was everything in one. I looked at those offers and I thought this is not me. Requirements are really high and it’s only for the internship, I’m afraid what they would require for junior or senior positions. I think they have really unrealistic understanding of what students are doing at university. Particularly, universities in Italy, considering how theoretical the education is.” [W6]

“Since I didn’t do any student jobs or internship before it was really hard to find a job in our field. Because all of them needed that you have to have internship experience or like student job experience or something like that (...) When you study you don’t really get experience in such programming languages or some applications like the specific ones they use at work. We don’t really get experience in those in our courses (...) But they need us to know before what they need but we don’t get experience in our studies.” [W11]

**Table 3** (Continued)

**C. Employers' concerns towards maternity and menstruation leave**

“In general, if you are a student in engineering the companies would prefer men to work with them because most of the time engineering jobs are on-site and us women we have to have this pregnancy leave, we have period every month. (...) But now that everything is becoming digital maybe it won't be such a big issue.” [W5]

**D. Employers' perception of foreigners as short-term/temporary**

“You know, we are not originated from here and the problem with foreign students is that it is not guaranteed that you're going to stay here for long time. Because they will be investing on us, they will teach us and so on. (...) They always ask questions like how long do you want to stay here.” [W7]

**Individual barriers**

**A. Lack of proficiency in local language**

“When I was first looking for a job, I got a reply from this company, they wanted to make an interview with me. They asked me whether I was able to speak Italian, in the meantime we were speaking in English, when I told them that I can't speak Italian but only English, they told me that the mentor cannot speak English and that is why I was eliminated from the start, without even being able to qualify for an interview.” [W1]

“If you have language barriers, like if you don't speak Italian at all, they won't look at your CV at all. Some are open, they think you will learn but not all the time. It's really difficult to find these kind of open-minded employers.” [W2]

“I had some interviews but overall, I didn't enjoy the process because most of them required Italian from me, although it is a technical field, which is very surprising. That is why I was disappointed. I didn't like this approach. (...) I was perfect for this one internship that I applied earlier and he got back to saying that interview was great, that I'm perfectly fine with my experience but you don't speak Italian.” [W3]

**Table 3** (Continued)

“I didn’t have much hope anyway applying for jobs in Italy because of Italian language and on top of that I’m not Italian and I don’t have any experience. (...) My Italian friends would say it would be really hard to find a job without knowing Italian, that’s why Italians would have precedence. (...) I had one interview and they were like how would it even work with these Italian knowledge and funny thing is I thought the same. Because production sites are really dynamic environments, you have to understand what they are telling you immediately, it is not like I could open Google Translate and check every time.” [W4]

“If you don’t speak Italian in Italy, then there is basically no hope for you. Especially for STEMM majors because even though you know basic Italian, it is not enough, you have to know the technical terminologies and all. When I looked for a job in Italy, I looked for jobs that are not in my major, because I already know that there is no hope for me to work in technical background in Italy. (...) For me it is a bit strange, because why would Italy accept international students if they can’t provide us job opportunities.” [W5]

“I was looking for an internship both in Italy and Germany but main thing was that my German knowledge was better than my knowledge of Italian. It made it easier for me to find a job in Germany. In Italy, many of the job posts were in Italian and I thought if the HR didn’t bother to translate this to English, they probably will not hire, they don’t need international students. They don’t care, they don’t care even translating the job post. It doesn’t mean that I don’t know Italian, my Italian level is B1 let’s say, I can understand but the technical terminology is really different. Even with German, initially, I had problems when I first started. I can’t imagine myself working in Italy.” [W6]

“I have an Italian friend, same age as me, we’re classmates, we have exactly same qualifications but when we go to different seminars or different opportunity for work or something, when she starts speaking Italian they behave more friendly, showing more willingness to be in contact with her. Another friend of mine is Brazilian, and she can speak Italian as well but still they understand you’re Italian or you speak Italian.” [W7]

**Table 3** (Continued)

“I don’t know Italian, only basic level. And they are interested in candidates that knows both Italian and English.” [W9]

“A reason why it could be hard to find a STEMM job in Italy, most of the companies, Google for example, it doesn’t have positions in Italy that are purely technical (...) Here they have sales positions. And for sales positions you need not only good level of Italian but a fluent level of Italian.” [W10]

“If you don’t know their language, you can’t be hired.” [W11]

#### **B. Lack of labor market knowledge**

“I think I couldn’t represent my own profile very well because it was very difficult. I didn’t know what the employers really expected from me. It was the main problem for me. That is why even if I sent many resumes, I got rejected. I mean they don’t really explain why they rejected me but I think it was because I couldn’t represent myself very well. My CV was not standing out (...) The foreigners in Italy should represent themselves better than native Italians to stand out and to prove that they are more proper to this position than any other person. They have to put more effort to fight for a position.” [W2]

“I specialized in Wine when I was studying Food Engineering but my previous education was in Turkey and I have work experience in Turkey now. The wine belongs to Italy and France; they are the world leaders in wine so I’m thinking why would they hire anyone from Turkey that is much behind of these countries in wine production.” [W4]

“As a woman from Iran, we are too restricted in Iran. And then, when we come to Europe, Italy then we don’t see so much restrictions. That is why we don’t understand like too much what is needed.” [W11]

**Table 3** (Continued)

**C. Inability to sustain life with low internship salaries**

“You need to think how you’re going to earn money. I am on my own and I need to find a way to stay here in Europe and how I’m going to earn my money and live here. The jobs are generally in Milan in Italy but they are offering 500-600 euros of salaries to the interns. Only renting a room costs 500 euros to you in Milan.” [W6]

“I can’t believe how low they are paying to interns here in Italy. Like, a friend of mine got an internship and they were paying her 400 euros. And she had to commute like kilometers for that job every day. How is she supposed to cover her road expenses even? (...) My father even tells me to go back to India, he said ‘What are you going to do with 700 euros they are going to pay you?’, he even knows about Italian labor market (...) I started working as a part-time baby sitter and I think I can even earn more money with this way.” [W12]

**4.1.2. Organizational Barriers**

Organizational barriers include various barriers that is shaped by the employer and the organizations. Employers’ perception and sometimes bias during recruitment phase can hinder foreign women’s employability. The first barrier under organizational barriers, that has emerged from our study, is *mistrust based on gender*. Mistrust based on gender signifies not finding one’s work reliable or thorough simply because of their gender. Our respondents expressed that employers can question their work because of their gender. This mistrust based on gender can lead managers to constantly check women’s work and make them feel insecure about their competence. This whole misconduct can push women away from pursuing STEMM jobs.

The second barrier that has surfaced from our study is *unrealistic expectations of employers*. Practical activities that shapes labor markets does not always go hand to hand with the theoretical teachings of the universities. In our study, several women expressed that their education and the job requirements they come across in the job posts do not match and that job requirements even for entry level jobs are shaped by many required skills that are not thought at universities. They

have also stated that Italian labor market is especially characterized with unrealistic expectations like proficiency in many programming languages, total command of Italian and English languages almost drawing the image of a perfect candidate that does not exist. Our respondents also compared Italy with Germany, expressing that the requirements in German labor market are pretty straightforward and on point, asking for specific skills only while Italian labor market in their opinion is characterized by unrealistic, overwhelming requirements that a graduate student cannot match. Unrealistic expectations of employers, that are mismatched with the teachings of the universities can put a lot of stress on students and push them to pursue their job search in different labor markets that in their opinion is a better match with their skills.

The third set of barriers is *employers' concern towards maternity and menstruation leave*. Employers might think that men show better stability because their work will not be interrupted by a maternity leave or menstruation leave. This can be significant, as expressed by our respondents as well, for on-site jobs that require constant presence and one's absence can cause disruption of work. These concerns that employers might have can put women in further disadvantaged position when they are looking for a job.

Employers may also think of foreign workers as transitory and short-term which characterizes our fourth and last set of barriers under organizational barriers, *employers' perception of foreigners as short-term/temporary*. Some of our respondents believed that employers might not want to invest on foreign workforce because their investment may not pay out. To keep the retention rates higher employers might believe that it is in their best interest to hire native workers, which in their eyes might have less probability of leaving the country and in the end, leaving their jobs. This creates a further challenge for foreigners who seek job abroad as they might have to ensure employers that they are for the long term.

#### **4.1.3. Individual Barriers**

Individual barriers are shaped by personal realities that changes from one to another. The first individual barrier is *the lack of proficiency in local language*. Women, in our study, unanimously expressed that the knowledge of Italian hinders their chances of getting a job in Italy. They have expressed that they don't even feel considered by Italian companies as they publish job posts only



in Italian. Some believed after a job search period that they had no chance of finding a job in Italy because of the stringent criteria of having a fluent Italian and that they have to take their job search to other countries. Additionally, our respondents stated that the technical vocabulary required by STEM occupations would always present a barrier for them, therefore they did not believe that understanding intermediate or advanced Italian would solve this issue. They also stated that even if they had the similar experiences and qualifications Italians would always have precedence over them merely because of their knowledge of local language. Most importantly, many of our respondents spoke about directing their job searches outside Italy after trying to find a job here for a while because they thought that it was a hopeless pursuit looking for a job in Italy without knowing Italian. Our results demonstrate that due to the strict language requirements, the Italian labor market is characterized by considerable entry barriers for foreigners. It can take a long time to become fluent, and not everyone has the resources or the free time to learn a language before looking for work. Applying rigid selection criteria based on local language proficiency might considerably reduce foreigners' chances of finding employment and force them to apply to other countries where they could find greater flexibility in terms of local language proficiency.

The second set of individual barriers is *lack of labor market knowledge*. Foreign women applying for jobs in a new market, which they are not familiar with, can feel intimidated because of their lack of knowledge about what is needed and how they can represent themselves better in terms of resumes, motivation letters etc. Our respondents expressed that they didn't know about labor market requirements and believed that they could represent themselves better when they are looking for a job if they had more knowledge on what is needed from them. Lack of labor market knowledge can reduce the chances of foreign students integrating into the labor market.

Final set of individual barriers is characterized by *inability to sustain life with low internship salaries*. Some of our respondents expressed that the internship jobs do not pay enough for them to cover even the expenses of commuting to their jobs. These raises issues especially for migrant women who does not get financial support from their families and are trying to make a living out of their salaries. Underpaying internship positions can lead to finding underqualified positions of women as one of our respondents explicitly expressed of preferring to work as a part-time baby sitter rather than an intern because it simply paid more.

## 4.2. Barriers: The Intersectionality Perspective

Our research demonstrates how the aforementioned restrictions have a subtle effect on the employability of highly talented immigrant women in STEMM. In our study, migrant women's successes in terms of finding a job in Italy differed. When the research was performed, none of the women were working in Italy, except one which was working as a part-time babysitter. 4 out of 13 women were employed, all but one as an intern, abroad. 2 of them found internship in Germany, one in Denmark and one as a full-time employee back in Turkey. 6 out of 13 women were looking for employment actively while all had obtained or were about to obtain diplomas issued from an Italian university, University of Padua specifically. All women have completed their Bachelor's degree abroad, in different countries.

Job searching can be a long, time-consuming and frustrating process and, in many cases, the information on why a candidate is turned down is not easily accessible. 10 out of 13 women expressed that they rarely received any replies from the Italian companies they apply to.

“You know; the worst thing is they don't even get back to you. I've been applying jobs for 6 months now and nothing. At least when I apply to German companies they write me I'm rejected and it is something, right?” [W12]

The existence of language barriers hinders the highly skilled migrant women's participation in the Italian STEMM labor market. The likelihood of foreigners getting employment in STEMM fields is very limited because these positions not only require an intermediate or advanced level of Italian, but also a knowledge of technical terminologies. The strict requirements for Italian fluency may considerably reduce migrant women's chances of integrating into the workforce because it may not be possible for them to fully master a foreign language in the limited period available during their Master's degree. This requirement also places restrictions on the amount of time needed to study a language, and many students may find it challenging to make time for language learning in the midst of their busy university schedules filled with exams, coursework, and other commitments.

“If you don’t speak Italian in Italy, then there is basically no hope for you. Especially for STEMM majors because even though you know basic Italian, it is not enough, you have to know the technical terminologies and all.” [W12]

Limitations in job search due to language issues may also exist in cases where immigrant women are successful in finding employment. One specific story from one of our respondents, who was able to secure an internship in Italy, can serve as an example of how social isolation at work might result from language barriers.

“I started working as an intern in one of the major banks in Italy which was mostly online. Everything was in English because you know, it is a global bank. But when I started working there as a full-time employee, Italian language started to get in the way because I had to go in person three times a week. My communication, the people I had communication with they spoke English, not very well but it was understandable. But I couldn’t find my way more into the group because they were all speaking Italian and it was easy for them. So, I started to be isolated kind of. Especially by my manager because he asked me how I feel and I told him I feel bad because I was promised an English environment but it was not. He started to feel insecure around me after that, I don’t know why.” [W13]

Selection processes may be hampered for immigrant women by incidents of origin-based discrimination. The issue with discrimination based on origin, or any discrimination in general, during the job search is that it is not always evident and is rarely expressed clearly by employers. Discrimination can manifest itself in a variety of situations, as we have already seen, such as while interacting with immigration officials, looking for accommodations and so on. However, it can be difficult to tell during a job hunt whether a woman is being treated unfairly due to her origin.

“In this year, not only the sex but my nationality can affect. Because some people see that I’m coming from Russia. But they never tell you were not accepted because you are a woman or Russian. They will never say it explicitly. But they will say they can’t. So you

can never know. I guess you can know it when you start working but when you're applying you cannot know. Maybe I'm Russian, I'm woman, I don't have great experience in programming languages and all of them can influence." [W6]

Employers may have unrealistic expectations for recent graduates, which causes a mismatch between their educational backgrounds and the abilities actually needed to perform in-demand jobs. A prospective candidate wanting to apply to a job may be commonly confronted by the words "must have experience" during job hunting. Additionally, there are situations when a corporation will request prior experience while using the words "entry level." With these high expectations from the employers and the limited financial support provided by internships, it may be difficult for migrant women to maintain their competence. Low internship salaries can make this unachievable because it is usual for migrant women to not receive financial support from their parents, which means they would be dependent on the income they are making from working. In fact, this can drive women to seek alternative employment that does not match with their background.

"I started working as a part-time baby sitter and I think I can even earn more money with this way." [W12]

Migrant women don't always end up in underqualified jobs with their will but it can happen that they are put in these positions.

"I was one of the few people who got an offer after internship at one of the major banks (...) After the Russian-Ukrainian war the bank entered kind of a bankruptcy position, it started to move around employees, fire them or move them to other teams. And I was one of them. I was doing a very important job and I was the only one working in my field, on that application. I always think that my manager put me there because he couldn't communicate with me. I think before they moved me nobody even noticed me being there, I was ignored. So, they were like she is not doing anything let's put her in the list (...) They moved me but then they realized I was the only one working on that application and then

couple of my colleagues started to speak for me. So, you see how it goes? So, they isolated me from the major group because of the language and maybe because of my race they wanted to eliminate me from their floor (...) Imagine you're doing something for them and they are not even aware (...) So, I resigned. (...) I was a developer and they moved me to a secretary position, I'm not saying secretary position is bad but it is not my line of work.” [W13]

Selection processes may occasionally involve instances of gender-based discrimination for migrant women. Pregnancy and menstrual leaves can cause employers to become concerned about disruption of work. This may be particularly true for the jobs which call for on-site presence. Work-life balance can be a challenge for women employees, and recruiters may perpetuate gender prejudices linking women to childcare duties, which can lead to discrimination in hiring practices.

“In general, if you are a student in engineering the companies would prefer men to work with them because most of the time engineering jobs are on-site and us women we have to have this pregnancy leave, we have period every month (...) In my opinion, now that everything is digital an engineer can work from a computer basically. Usually, in Environmental Engineering we mostly work with data, we mostly work with policies or we are mostly be signing the project, actually managing them, that is why in my particular major I don't think there should be any problem with gender gap.” [W5]

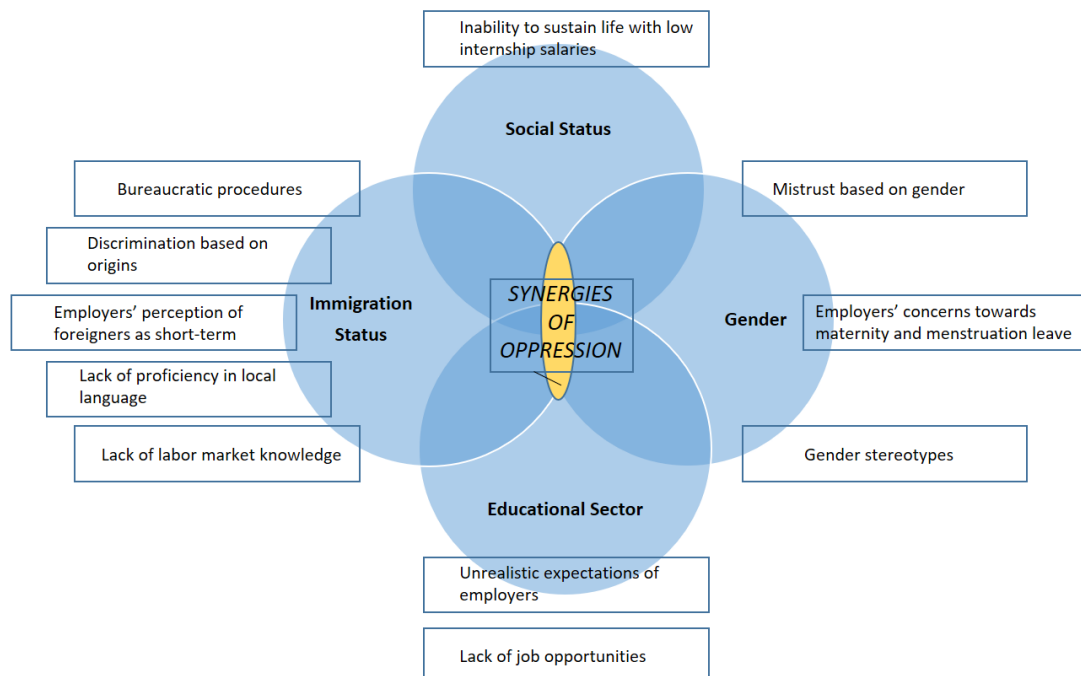
Additionally, gender norms can be seen in the jobs that are deemed 'appropriate' for women. Migrant women may struggle to demonstrate that they are competent, assertive, or dominant enough for roles that are typically dominated by men. Because of their origins, skin colors, and even how they have been portrayed in the mass media, migrant women might be linked to particular stereotypes, as we saw in Chapter 2. These harmful associations, which may not be accurate in the end, can harm migrant women's ability to get employment and integrate smoothly into the labor markets.

“I’m an engineer, a woman engineer. I have more like soft personality. In the interviews maybe I wasn’t enough assertive.” [W3]

These examples from our study show that organizational and individual barriers, as well as systemic ones, limit migrant women's ability to participate in the STEMM job market. The barriers we have revealed do not act as separate barriers but they mutually reinforce the disadvantaged position of migrant women and harm their successful integration into the labor market. As it can be seen in Figure 20, migrant women face intersecting barriers because of their immigration status and also their gender, on top of these our study revealed barriers that can be attributed to the educational sector and social status. Unrealistic expectations of employers and lack of job opportunities may in fact be seen in other educational fields but as far as our study’s concern our respondents pointed the systemic and organizational barriers they have faced in STEMM job market. Finally, inability to sustain life with low salaries can be attributed to the barriers that arises from social status.

As a result of the intersectional nature of these inequalities—in this study's specific case, immigration status, gender, educational sector, and socioeconomic position—highly skilled female graduate students majoring in STEMM experience particular barriers to employability in Italy.

**Figure 20:** Overview of intersecting barriers



## CONCLUSIONS

Over the past few decades, large migration flows have increasingly been heading toward Europe. However, the system is still evident in the systemic barriers against immigrants in the job market, particularly against women. Migrant women are represented with high unemployment rates and concentration in low-paying domestic jobs and caregiving.

As we saw in Chapter 1, immigrants are particularly at risk during extreme situations like the Covid-19 outbreak. The substantial increase in the number of foreign men and women who were unemployed during the Covid-19 outbreak in Italy shows that they are the first in line to absorb the shocks of these upsetting events before any native. The data also demonstrated that immigrant women are more exposed to these shocks than foreign men, making them even more vulnerable.

Migration research used to be dominated by conventional ideas that ignored the intersection of categories including ethnicity, race, and gender. These perspectives have evolved since the 1970s to reflect the many points at which migration functions and how it influences migrant life. Intersectionality theory's use in migration studies is recent and limited with a focus on low-skilled women or on high-skilled women working in feminized sectors like humanities and social sciences (Kofman & Raghuram, 2006; Raghuram, 2008), while the high-skilled women's experience in male dominated sectors remains unexplored. In our study, we tried to address these requests and offer more insights on high-skilled immigrant women's experiences in the STEMM sector, a male dominated sector, with a focus on the Italian labor market.

We aimed to investigate following question: What are the barriers to employability faced by highly qualified immigrant female graduate students majoring in STEMM subjects in Italy that result from inequalities unique to their intersectional nature? We gathered data for our study through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 13 highly skilled migrant women majoring in STEMM fields to provide rich qualitative evidence based on their experiences.

By employing open coding and axial coding we have obtained our first-order categories and second-order themes, revealing the barriers high-skilled foreign graduate students encounter in terms of their employability in Italian STEMM labor market.

The results of our research demonstrate that there are a variety of barriers impacting migrant women's employability in the STEMM labor market in Italy, each of which contributes to their

disadvantage. We have grouped these barriers in three main categories: (1) Systemic barriers: the scarcity of technical job opportunities in the Italian STEMM labor market, the lengthy and costly bureaucratic processes that characterize applications for work visas and residence permits, gender stereotypes that act as a discriminatory factor, particularly when it comes to male-associated jobs, and discrimination based on origins that results in bias in hiring foreign-born candidates; (2) Organizational barriers: mistrust based on gender to the extent of questioning the reliability of migrant women's work, unrealistic expectation of employers which creates a mismatch between the skills in need and the skills available, employers' concern towards maternity and menstruation leave that acts as a discriminatory factor and employers' perception towards foreigners as short-term/temporary which tends to make them unwilling to invest on foreign talent; (3) Individual barriers: lack of proficiency in Italian, lack of labor market knowledge and inability to sustain life with low internship compensations.

Our study adds to the literature on intersectionality from a theoretical standpoint by considering how various individual-level social differentiation factors, such as gender, migrant status, educational sector, and social status, interact to shape highly skilled migrant women's limitations in STEMM labor markets (Raghuram, 2008, Bolzani, 2021). Additionally, our study adds to the growing body of research on highly skilled immigrant women and their participation into the labor market in Western societies (Kofman, 2000). The added value of our paper comes from the insights it offers on migrant women who graduated or about the graduate from Italian universities. To some extent, migrant women who graduated in Italy are considered to have more chance to enter the STEMM labor market, holding diplomas issued in Italy, having knowledge of language and cultural context and having broader social networks (Bolzani, 2021). Thus, our paper's added value stems from the insights it offers on the specific obstacles faced by foreign female graduate students as they enter the STEMM labor market. It outlines the specific obstacles they face differently from STEMM professionals, including gender-based mistrust, employers' views of foreign workers as temporary or short-term employees, a lack of familiarity with the local labor market, and an inability to support oneself on the relatively small salaries of internships (Bolzani, 2021). Our study sheds light on the experiences of young migrant women majoring in STEMM fields as well as their initial interactions with the STEMM labor market in Italy, regardless of whether they had previous work experience.

The findings from our study can offer management implications for decision-makers to take into account. First of all, as we have repeatedly observed, applying strict language requirements during



selection may result in the exclusion of many highly skilled migrants before they have even advanced to the next stages but this does not only result in a loss for the migrants; it also results in a loss for both the companies and the host countries, Italy in this context. Not able to find jobs, migrants take their job search to alternative countries and become active members of different labor markets and different societies. Particularly in light of the country's growing lack of these high-skilled profiles, Italy may lose the high-skilled foreign students who come to Italy with every intention of remaining and making a contribution to its economy, but the relative lack of job opportunities for foreign workforce may force them to move their lives to alternative countries. In this regard, policies might be made to encourage public and private businesses to hire a certain number of foreign nationals each year. However, it is worthy to note that hiring does not end the process of inclusion as migrants can face further isolation because of language and cultural barriers, that is why we believe there is room for improvement in terms of company cultures which may call for a second assessment with a focus on inclusion of foreign individuals into the workforce.

Our study has various limitations that can be addressed in future research. First off, while covering immigrant women from a wide variety of countries, the limited size of our sample may have an impact on the results and restrict the applicability of our findings. A larger sample size may reveal other barriers that migrant women confront that were not identified in our study. Along with expanding the sample size, additional study can look into STEMM-unrelated fields or a particular STEMM field that is known for its technicality and high on-site presence. Our respondents stated that men would have greater employment opportunities in these jobs than women, thus it could be interesting to further investigate the technical and high-presence roles and migrant women's relative experiences.

In conclusion, we feel that greater research on this subject could be helpful to the public discourse by bringing attention to the potential of STEMM women migration and the opportunities that it can create for both migrants and host countries. Therefore, we encourage more research into this area of study and the adoption of an intersectional perspective to aid academics, decision-makers, and managers in critically recognizing inequality and supporting efforts to eliminate it.

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## **APPENDIX – Outline for Interviews Targeting Foreign Women**

### **First Phase: Introduction and Personal Background**

- Where are you from?
- What do you study?
- When did/will you graduate?

### **Second Phase: Focus on Job Search**

- Are you looking/have you looked for a job in Italy before? NO (end interview), YES (continue)
- How would you describe your job search?
- What are/were the main difficulties you face while looking for a job in Italy?

### **Third Phase: Focus on Work Experience**

- Did you have a work experience in Italy?

*If yes:*

-What is/was your job title?

-How much do you think that your educational and professional background was a proper match for the job?

### **Fourth Phase: Focus on Comparison**

We talked about some barriers/difficulties that you have faced while looking for a job;

- Do you think that men face the same problems? Please provide examples.
- Do you think that “native” women face the same problems? Please provide examples.
- Do you think there are specific barriers migrant women face different than foreign men and native women? Please provide examples.