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Chapter Author(s): Maria Luisa Di Martino, Concha Maiztegui and Iratxe Aristegui

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Part II:
Labour migration, imaginaries
and aspirations

Balancing personal aspirations, family expectations and job matching: “migratory career” reconstruction among highly educated women in the Basque Country

Maria Luisa Di Martino, Concha Maiztegui and Iratxe Aristegui

Introduction

International migration is a complex phenomenon in which individuals face a decision-making process based on different determinants at personal, relational and professional levels. Aspirations are crucial in this process, but they cannot be separated from structural and relational factors, which produce different impacts and mark bifurcations for each person on the move (Bermúdez, 2014). Personal aspirations and professional expectations are crucial for shaping the migratory process. Scholars claim that migratory aspirations are linked not only to socio-economic and political factors related to the expectations of better life and job opportunities in the host country society, but geographical imaginaries linked to the place of immigration (Thompson, 2017; Timmerman, 2008; Timmerman & Wets, 2011). Among women, the sentimental imaginaries of their partners' countries of residence seem to play a key role (Riaño, 2016). In this respect, “migration, in the broadest sense, is much more than mere movement between places; it is always embedded in wider processes of meaning-making” (Salazar, 2010, p. 6). Therefore, professional expectations of job matching are also crucial in shaping highly educated women's migratory careers. Precisely for this reason, “the relationship between qualifications, policies and local labour market dynamics is thus central for defining the value of immigrants in this context” (Hercog & Sandoz, 2018, p. 455), which has generated the unsolved dilemma between highly skilled and highly educated conceptualisation and problematisation.

This chapter analyses the migratory careers of a group of highly educated women in the Basque Country (Spain) by using, on the one hand, a qualitative approach through in-depth biographical interviews from the life-course perspective (Wingens, Windzio, de Valk, & Aybek, 2011) and, on the other hand, a multidimensional analytical perspective, at macro (structural), meso (relational) and micro (personal) levels. With this text we seek to contribute to the scientific knowledge on the fostering or hindering factors concerned in the international migrations of highly educated women by exploring, on the one hand, personal aspirations and professional expectations, shaping their migratory careers, and the coping strategies that have allowed them to achieve job matching; to overcome the structural/personal constraints encountered in the process; and to seize the evolving opportunities in the host country (Mahieu, Timmerman & Heyse, 2015). On the other hand, we seek to advance the understanding of the interplay between the macro, meso and micro determinants that influence highly educated women's migration experience which, while occurring under privileged conditions, also entails experiences of vulnerability and weakness in the context of the host country.

The concept of migratory career is the lens that allows us to advance beyond personal aspirations as motors of the mobility process in order to understand the invisible dynamics in a process of constant evolution among highly educated women in the transit from home to host country (Martiniello & Rea, 2014). Actually, it offers an inspiring tool for the reconstruction of respondents' experiences in different domains such as the personal, family and professional. Migratory career conceptualisation has been used in previous studies of migrant women occupied in low qualified sectors (Godin, Freitas & Rea, 2015; Poncelet & Martiniello, 2015), but has rarely been applied to highly skilled women's mobility. The literature on highly educated women, from a macro and micro analytical perspective, argues that over-qualification and deskilling are the main problems in the professional career building process due to structural constraints in the host country (Liversage, 2009; Kofman, 2013; Raghuram & Kofman, 2004).

Nevertheless, deskilling is also linked to family obligations (Mearns, 2010; Roca, 2016; Timmerman, Martiniello, Rea & Wets, 2015). In Spain, some of the best-known cases are the downward occupational mobility of women from Latin America (Aysa-Lastra & Cachón, 2015; Oso & Parella, 2012; Parella & Cavalcanti, 2010; Roca, 2016). The main research question we address in this paper are the following: what is the interplay between personal aspirations and strategies (micro level), structural constraints and opportunities (macro level)

and relational chances (meso level) that explains job matching and work-life balance in highly educated migrant women from two different geographical areas of origin (extra-European and intra-European) in the Basque Country?

Literature on highly skilled migrant women is quite new compared with studies focused on migrant women employed in highly feminised and lower skilled reproductive sectors (Kofman, 2000). Moreover, it has been recognised that the international movement of highly skilled professionals is also a gendered phenomenon (Docquier, Marfouk, Salomone & Sekkat, 2011), and migration may be a loophole for overcoming gender-based discrimination (Ruysen & Salomone, 2018). A number of studies have documented women's difficulties in entering the high-level labour markets in many countries, such as Denmark (Liversage, 2009); the UK (Kofman & Raghuram, 2004); between Germany and the UK (Föbker & Imani, 2017); México (Ramírez & Tigau, 2018; Ramos, 2018); New Zealand (Meares, 2010); Switzerland (Riaño & Baghadi, 2007; Riaño, 2016); and Spain (Fernández & Parra, 2013; Riaño, 2014; Roca, 2016; Shershneva & Fernández, 2018). Studies show that the intersection of gender/ethnicity is another constraint (Grigoleit-Richter, 2017; Killian & Manohar, 2015; Triandafyllidou & Isaakyan, 2016). This body of work often suggests that migration has a negative impact on women's professional careers, indicating the deskilling process as one of the biggest risks they take (Raghuram & Kofman, 2004). Furthermore, studies which explore highly educated migrant women's and men's social and occupational integration, such as that of Sandoz (2019) in Switzerland, show that the interplay between structures and agency shapes different settings related to different opportunities and constrains for each migrant situation.

Another topic of the research has been the concomitant intensification of their work at home (Liversage, 2009; Meares, 2010; Roca, 2016). Riaño (2016) described the paradox of job-education mismatch and proposes the term 'marginalised elites' (p. 1) to express the imbalance of women's pre-migratory expectations and the post-migratory reality. This chapter builds on this body of literature to focus on the experiences of women who have achieved a job suited to their level of studies. In the process, we contribute to the discussion on highly educated migrant women and the analysis of the process towards job matching. The empirical analysis is based on a qualitative study of 36 in-depth interviews conducted with respondents from Latin America (18) and Europe (18). Their backgrounds are in different sociopolitical contexts, and restrictive non-gender-sensitive European labour migration policies affect them in different

manners. However, regularisation seems insufficient to understand different dynamics for labour integration (Shershneva & Fernández, 2018). By providing in-depth insights into the selected groups, the migratory career perspective helps us to understand how their experiences could be affected by structural or personal factors. This study emphasised that there is not a univocal career, but heterogeneous experiences emerging from the intersection of multiple elements in migrant women's biographies.

The present chapter is structured as follows: the first section examines the theoretical and methodological importance acquired by the analysis of migratory careers due to the great heterogeneity and variability of migration paths. The second section describes the research methods. The third section is based on our findings, analysing highly educated migrant women's biographies from the life-course perspective.

Migratory careers and migrant women

Martiniello and Rea (2014) have developed an analytical tool which allows us to integrate "structures of opportunities, individual characteristics and networks to make sense of the migratory experience" (p. 1079). In doing so, it provides a holistic perspective on the migration process that includes, simultaneously, objective dimensions (legal-institutional structures) and the subjective perspective related to the migrant's personal assessment of their migratory trajectory from a retrospective angle (Mahieu et al., 2015, p. 19). This approach is valuable for understanding the logics that accompany the mobility process and the meaning the employment strategy acquires for migrants within the framework of their life trajectories. The migration career framework has been applied to gender studies.

Among the various studies it is worth mentioning the FEMIGRIM collective research "Factors and dynamics affecting and explaining female migration in Belgian society" (Timmerman et al., 2015). This project proposed a gender sensitive framework for research on women which includes a longitudinal perspective based on the macro, meso and micro levels. FEMIGRIM's fieldwork carried out five case-studies based on the careers of migrant women of different nationalities (Zibouh & Martiniello, 2015; Poncelet & Martiniello, 2015; Godin et al., 2015; Mahieu et al., 2015). Those cases in Belgium point to women's agency as a key element in the interplay between macro, meso and micro dimensions. According to Godin et al. (2015), "women place their expectations, aspirations

and projects at the very core of their migratory careers, which are [...] shaped by existing structures of opportunities and constraints” (p. 129). The migratory career analytical framework is suitable for analysing the changes and bifurcations in migrant women’s trajectories (Bermudez, 2014; Freitas & Godin, 2013; Poncelet & Martiniello, 2015; Ramos, 2018). Either way, far from being linear, migratory careers are subject to bifurcations as a result of changes linked to sociopolitical opportunities, the ability to mobilise financial resources following the acquisition of new capital and individual trajectories, responding to new frameworks of mobility. According to Martiniello and Rea (2014), these paths are not always rationally planned, but built by people in the interplay between structural opportunities and challenges and personal coping strategies. Observing the careers of migrant women reveals the confrontation between initial expectations and the realities experienced through the migratory experience. Local context has an impact on this process.

In contrast to the traditional analyses of migration, mobility focused on the structural dimensions (macro), “political-economic process by which people are bounded” (Salazar, 2018, p. 157). The studies carried out in Spain on women’s immigration and their patterns of incorporation into the labour market highlight that Spanish migration policies favour the concentration of women in the care and domestic work sectors (Parella, 2003). Most foreign women are in a situation of labour market and social vulnerability, related to patterns of employment characterised by the concentration of these workers in jobs linked to social reproduction (cleaning, caring) (Oso & Parella, 2012). This is due to the dynamic of commercialisation of care responsibilities in an insufficiently developed welfare state that lacks an adequate design of social services for people and families of universal character. It corresponds to a “regime of care” that distributes the responsibility for care and assistance between the state, the family and the market (Lutz, 2008). These conditions also present a serious worsening as a result of the economic crisis for women of Latin American origin in particular (Aysa-Lastra & Cachón, 2015).

In the Basque Country, according to Shershneva and Fernández (2018), 48.1 per cent of foreign women perceive an over-qualification in their work compared to 36.7 per cent of men. The origins of most women (54%) affected by this phenomenon (above the average of the Basque Country) are Latin American (especially those of recent settlement) and eastern European. The lower percentage of women does not have a dependent family in the home country, reducing slightly the pressure on them, as they can prioritise qualified job search

(Shershneva & Fernández, 2018). In addition, the stable legal situation allows for formal contracting and the possibility of broadening the job search in sectors according to the training received. Other factors are the recognition of the degree obtained in the home country and the time of residence. Four years is considered as the first step in the “stability continuum” (Moreno & Aierdi, 2008, p. 11) for securing residence and work permits.

Methodological aspects and profiles of respondents

We adopted an interpretative approach to enable a deeper understanding of the interplay between personal aspirations and strategies with the structural constraints and opportunities of the women interviewed, to understand their way of balancing initial aspirations and desires with the reality faced in the host country. Data from field work were collected in the Basque Country throughout 2016. In total, 36 in-depth interviews were held with respondents from six European² and nine Latin American countries. Women interviewed from those two areas were considered for this research study based on their different migration patterns: South-North and North-North (or intra-European) migration in the Basque Country. The interviewees were contacted within personal networks and by the snowball sampling technique, based on the following selection criteria: a) high educational level (university degree, master's, PhD); b) job-education matching; c) a minimum of three years of professional experience; and d) a minimum of four years of continuous residence in the Basque Country (after the first step in the regularisation process for Latin-American and European women). The sample provides a picture of different occupational sectors (Table 1). Among the women interviewed, eight are self-employed and freelancers (four from intra-European mobility and four from Latin America). The respondents' average age is 40 and the average time of permanent residence in the Basque Country is 12 years.

The main interview approach for the examination of the career path reconstruction process in different mobility regimes was the life-course perspective. The term “regime” suggests how national administrations affect individual mobility (Glick Schiller & Salazar 2013). Firstly, nationality is a key variable that establishes who is entitled to what type of mobility. In addition, the possibilities granted to certain nationality-holders depend on their economic power or class position. In the case of the people interviewed, it can be seen that the variety of circumstances in which they arrive in the Basque Country depends

Table 1 Respondents' Occupation Sectors in the Basque Country labour market

Occupational Sectors	European	Latin American	Total
Transversal Sectors Technicians (gender, culture, environment, cooperation, international relations)	6	6	12
Education & Research	5	2	7
Music	4	1	5
Health			
Medicine & Nursing	0	3	3
Psychology	0	3	3
Translation	1	0	1
Communication, Journalism, Marketing	1	2	3
Fashion Style	1	1	2
Total	18	18	36

not only on their origin, but also on the opportunities derived from their legal situation. Having a native couple or an employment contract prior to their arrival opens the door to possibilities that other women of the same nationality cannot obtain.

Open-ended questions related to the motivations for migrating, past and current employment, families and expectations. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data were analysed thematically, based on the interplay of: a) constraints; b) opportunities; and c) coping strategies. They were organised in macro, meso and micro dimensions (Table 2).

Searching for balance in a migratory career: opportunities, constraints and strategies

We used the aspirations for emigration criteria, because women's "aspirations can be considered as a crucial step towards actual migratory behaviour" (Van Mol et al., 2018, p. 1), and identified three main behaviours among the set of nationalities.

(1) Women who moved for sentimental reasons. They are mainly European with partners from the Basque Country. In this group women face periods of initial job mismatch; their main strategy for labour market integration passes

through upskilling and/or reskilling as a main post-migratory strategy for better job opportunities.

(2) Women who moved for professional reasons (single or with a partner). They had a pre-existing employment contract before moving. This group is characterised by matching opportunities raised from the intersection of pre-migration professional aspirations and job opportunities in the host country, like the musicians from both Latin-American and European countries.

(3) Women whose strongest reason for migration was breaking structural violence and oppression in their home country, most of whom came from Latin American countries. For this group migration seems to have had a real “instrumental value” (Carling, 2014, p. 2) related to an intrinsic imaginary of constructing a better future, planned through their migratory careers.

These circuits reflect the diversity of migratory itineraries. All three groups share aspirations to achieve job matching. Other characteristics these women share is the lack of support networks. They view their migration as an individual project. Some of them claim to have had satisfying socio-economic conditions before migration; others claim to have used the opportunity to get a scholarship to start migration. Based on the narratives of the interviewees, Table 2 presents the constraints, opportunities and strategies in the migratory careers of a group of highly educated women in this study.

Legal status of entry is one of the factors that determines job placement (Bermudez, 2014). In Spain residence status is conditional upon a work contract, an internship or study enrolment. Women who came with a “sentimental regime” had an easier entry compared with other groups. Most of them were considered to be movers in the multisite landscapes of their migratory careers, which may start with an “Erasmus” experience in the case of European mobility, or studying for a Master’s degree abroad and taking a job in another country. In one of these several experiences in a “pit-stop country modality” they meet their sentimental Basque partner and decide to start a family. In the case of a European woman from France:

I was studying in the United States to improve my English; I decided to attend a master’s in a feminist environment, which was an innovative subject in the 80s. After that, I couldn’t stay in the US without a job, I was searching on the internet, and it was amazing in those times [...]. I applied for a job in London, and they hired me. So, I was working there in a great job for 5 years [...]. There I met my husband; he is Basque, that’s why we moved

Table 2 Opportunities, Constraints and Strategies of Highly Skilled Women in the Basque Country

Opportunities & Constraints		Migrant Women's Strategies	
Structural Dimension (macro)	Opportunities	Education: Grant policies	Apply for a grant.
		Labour market: Fixed contract	Submit the CV; Skype interviews.
	Constraints	Residence & work permits	Student visa; Naturalisation; Marriage.
		No homologation studies; No validation of previous work experience; Temporal de-skilling	(Partial) homologation; Reskilling; Upskilling.
		Temporal Immobility	"Bridge-works"; Multitasking; Moonlighting; Volunteering.
		Languages	Reorientation of career toward international sectors.
Relational Dimension (meso)	Opportunities	Sentimental couple & family project	Attempt matching interests/ opportunities & family/work balance.

Migratory Career towards job matching

Opportunities & Constraints		Migrant Women's Strategies	
Relational Dimension (meso)	Constraints	Limited Networks	Participation in non-profit organisations; Relationship with native partner's groups of reference (friends, family).
		Immobility as product of family & maternity	Native husbands' temporary support based on his better job conditions; Self-employment.
Personal Dimension (micro)	Opportunities	New perceptions of personal experience	Change desires/aspirations; Lower expectations; Redefinition of ladder of priorities and road maps.
	Constraints	Frustrated aspirations of self-realisation	Resilience & flexibility; Redefinition of the professional profiles (horizontal mobility).

Migratory Career towards job matching

here. (EU17, France. Gender Expert, 50 years old, 30 years in the Basque Country).

Another group of European women migrants moved upon being hired, as it is the case for musicians. Musicians are part of a steadier professional career group, but that does not mean that their migratory process was also linear. On the contrary, they were part of the cosmopolitan culture “marked by diversity rather than homogeneity” (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013, p. 186) and experienced upskilling in different European countries before getting a steady contract in Bilbao. In the case of a musician from Albania with French heritage:

I was studying my master’s in Rome and after that I prepared several auditions for different orchestras. Finally, I was hired in the *Bilbao Orkestra Sinfonika*. (EU3, Albania. Musician, 38 years old, ten years in the Basque Country).

The third group of women corresponds to the type of “migrant students” (Bermúdez, 2014) who have completed their schooling and apply – especially in the case of Latin American women – for student visas. Later they start procedures to acquire an NIE (National Identification Number for foreigners). Some of the respondents found an opportunity through a grant in the host country, and once arrived they applied other coping strategies to start new lives in the Basque Country. Hence, they opt for personal development, aimed towards upskilling linked to better future job expectations with an open perspective on the destination where they will settle down. In the case of a Paraguayan woman’s decision to migrate:

I married an Argentinean to escape my family’s gender-based violence. I divorced and I came back home. But, I could no longer abide so much narrow-mindedness and structural violence in my country’s society [...]. I had a friend in Malaga, so I decided to come to Spain to finish my thesis. Once here, I chose to remain, because there were better opportunities for my life, after all. (AL9, Paraguay. Psychologist, 42 years old, 11 years in Spain, five years in the Basque Country).

According to Salazar (2010), “the link with imaginaries is established through the recognition of possibilities, of alternative constructions of future lives in other places” (pp. 9–10). In the migratory careers of migrant women with high levels

of education migration has an instrumental value (Carling, 2014), with the main aim of changing their lives and achieving better jobs, in equality of conditions, with better salaries, according to their high level of qualifications.

I was tired of the glass ceiling under which I lived in Venezuela. So I decided to move to the Basque Country [...]. But, everybody told me that I would have had to wait for everything: for title recognition, for job access, for work permits, for opportunities [...]. I had no idea about the euskera; I had to work in home care sector; I had to wait and I said to myself “resist, resist”. Anybody told me the truth about migration and anybody told me about all the false myths about Spain! (AL4, Venezuela. Freelance in cooperation issues, 40 years old, ten years in the Basque Country).

Related to this, although migration could often be the outcome of a social network, in this research with highly educated women some of the interviewees do not seem to follow a network model in their migratory processes. There is an exception to the trend of women as agents of their migratory careers. In the case of a Peruvian woman, emigration is a family decision with a long-term strategy for settlement in a better country, whose family migratory imaginary established the United States as the first choice for a better standard of living.

I was tired of the gender inequality, prejudice and stereotypes, and also of the bad political and economic situation in my country. I thought that the better option was to go to the United States. But I didn't know English, so the other option was Spain. I was desperately looking for a grant. I emailed hundreds of universities [...]. Finally, I was offered a half grant from the University of the Basque County [...]. Once my situation was regularized [five years at least] I started the family reunification process and I brought my grandparents and my brother too. (AL3, Peru, Psychologist, 50 years old, 18 years in the Basque Country).

Educational credentials could be predictive of labour market success. However, additional mechanisms seem to reduce the effect of education on newcomers (Kogan, Kalter, Liebau & Cohen, 2011, p. 76). In Spain, restrictions on the homologation and validation of diplomas, as well as delays in procedures, are obstacles to the labour mobility of qualified women (Parella & Cavalcanti, 2010). Among Latin American respondents the main tendency was to complete

a partial homologation process as a pre-migration strategy. Later, they had to take new examinations within the Basque Country system at a post-migration stage. This is the case for respondents working in the area of healthcare. They knew how easy it was to find jobs if they provided the academic certificates:

I tried to homologate my nursing studies from Venezuela, and I had to be examined again on some subjects [...]. (AL15, Venezuela. Nurse, 36 years old, eight years in the Basque Country).

Other women, for whom it seems less clear that they can use their professional qualifications to get jobs, opt for non-homologation or partial homologation. They apply upskilling and/or reskilling strategies in order to neutralise partial gaps in the host country. The academic literature on skilled women migrants with their families describes an entrenching of domestic roles related to their difficulties in entering the labour market (Meares, 2010; Riaño, 2014; Roca, 2016). Our interviewees reveal that this process was also shared by women who arrived for sentimental reasons. When they experienced difficulties in overcoming constraints related to homologation they opted for different strategies (upskilling or reskilling) to increase future job opportunities. Similar findings were found by Liversage (2009) when analysing professional trajectories in highly skilled women in Denmark.

In terms of family life, the impact ranges from increased household and/or childcare responsibilities to complete immersion in the domestic sphere (Meares, 2010). The redomestication process (Yeoh & Willis, 2005) drives the transformation of a professional woman into a housewife (Riaño & Baghadi, 2007; Roca, 2016). The main strategies for fitting family conciliation and professional aspirations are part-time jobs, self-employment of the women and/or a partner with more flexibility. Those options are based on their personal aspirations as professionals, while at the same time they require family support strategies. A doctor from Costa Rica explains that the role her partner plays allowed her to combine their professional and family responsibilities during her first steps in her working life:

We have three children and I was working night shifts at the beginning. In the evenings and nights my husband was in charge of childcare [with a flexible job]. (AL12, Costa Rica. Doctor, aged 55, 25 years in the Basque Country)

Language seems to be a crucial aspect of the choice of labour integration strategies. Our interviewees reported some limitations associated with the official nature of the Basque language when joining the local labour market, due to its prescriptive use in specific working environments (such as education) in both public and private sectors. A woman from Latin America says:

The linguistic policy is an unknown obstacle for migrants who come to the Basque Country; it clashes with our aspirations as it is very difficult to learn. (AL4, Venezuela. Freelance in cooperation issues, 40 years old, ten years in the Basque Country).

To overcome language constraints, previous studies highlighted that skills related to language knowledge have been used as an opportunity when they are convertible into economic capital (Föbker & Imani, 2017). Among the women interviewed, we identified three strategies related to language skills. First, some of the women decided to move towards an international work environment where those capabilities are valued, such as technicians or researchers. Second, some women were able to enter into the education field as teachers specialising in their mother tongue (French, English). The third group combines this tactic with reskilling. This is the case of the German interviewed, who chose reskilling convinced that the new professional profile as translator would be helpful for work-life balance and childcare:

I was studying a master's in translation online while I was employed in a company. I wanted to start my own professional project and be able to balance my family life and childcare [three children] with my professional aspirations. (EU7, Germany. Translator, age 38, 13 years in the Basque Country).

At a personal level (micro), the main constraints in both groups are frustrated aspirations linked to the temporary initial immobility in the local labour market. Moreover, women often cite the pain and sadness of leaving their country (Roca, 2016). Our results suggest that, whether married or not, with or without a job, the experience of solitude is quite common. Whereas some initiated strategies to construct networks (meso level) through contacting intercultural or migrant women's associations, our respondents explained that they distinguish themselves from women with other regimes of mobility which forced them to accept more

precarious jobs in order to help their families. For this reason, even if they feel partially identified, they do not manage to create bonds of friendship.

Respondents confirm that migratory processes independent from companies or states require great initiative and investment (Kofman & Raghuram, 2004). Women who have had less difficulty finding jobs due to labour shortages in certain fields (health, music) confirm that once this goal is achieved their careers tend to stabilise. On the other hand, when some women are asked about why the mobility experience became static when they got their permanent employment contracts, they explain that they have adapted to this life and have not risked moving to progress professionally, even if they desire to move on:

I thought I was going to be somewhere else, but then it happens that you lower your expectations completely, and, to tell you the truth, I didn't take much risk [...] because I also wanted to build my family project [...]. (EU9, Poland. International Relations, aged 32, eight years in the Basque Country)

From an intersectional perspective it is interesting to note that personal and family factors can be, at the same time, constraints or opportunities, depending on the case analysed and migratory career evolution. The music composer from Latin America said:

Maternity has delayed all my plans for my professional career, it was a big sacrifice at the same time that it was the most inspiring phase of my life, and a big resistance-building too. (AL18, Argentina. Musician, aged 59, 14 years in the Basque Country)

In line with previous analysis (Liversage, 2009; Zibouh & Martiniello, 2015) our findings show that women have an active role in achieving their aspirations. At the same time, the data show a contradictory situation with the reproduction of gender roles at times exacerbated by loneliness and isolation in migration. Both the women who have come to create a family and those who form a family in the host country affirm that they made decisions to relegate their projects to a second level. It seems that affective relationships and the family take precedence over paid work, although they were able to maintain job matching. There has been a change in priorities, and in more extreme cases a process has been noted that could affect their autonomy:

I continue to reproduce traditional family roles, as woman responsible for the home. I must admit it: the mistake was mine. Out of the house? When I got here I felt like a “fish out of water”. I went with a “bodyguard” everywhere. I always move with my husband, but with the years I am becoming more autonomous. (EU5, Italy. Lecturer, aged 55, 25 years in the Basque Country).

Conclusion

In this chapter we have focused on the coping strategies that highly educated women from Latin America and Europe have activated for overcoming structural and personal constraints through the renegotiation process of their personal aspirations and professional expectations in order to achieve job matching and work-life balance. The analysis of their migratory careers allows us to explore how initial aspirations, expectations and desires that women had when they arrived have been adapted, to a certain extent, to the circumstances encountered. There is a common characteristic of all the women interviewed: none of them has abandoned her professional expectations which, finally, have allowed her to achieve a job suited to her level of studies. In some cases, it has been a long process based on different professional strategies, such as retraining, bridging jobs or family support. During the meaning-making process, personal aspirations have also evolved, redefining their scales of priorities. For example, in the case of women with families, the professional goals have been temporarily relegated.

The fieldwork confirms that there are no univocal careers, but heterogeneous experiences related not only to the reasons for migrating and settling, but also to different migrants' situations (Sandoz, 2020). Despite the fact that all the women interviewed fulfilled the requirements established a priori (higher education studies, embedded work, length of stay), in the analysis we have confirmed that their country of origin is not a main variable for identifying the processes associated with their migratory careers. On the one hand, aspirations among the women interviewed are adapted to their particular social contexts. Thus, there is an interconnection between the personal and relational dimensions. Among the women whose migratory process is initiated by an affective relationship, the imaginaries about the country of destination are not always fulfilled since they observe difficulties, personal and professional, which they had not thought of. On the other hand, the women interviewed who have fled from situations of structural violence and the women whose migratory process is based on a

professional project also modify their imaginaries. The feeling of loneliness and the difficulty in finding affective relations and friendship, suppose the main difficulties of personal nature, beyond the structural difficulties related to access to the labour market.

As previous research showed (Bermúdez, 2014; Godin et al., 2015; Liversage, 2009; Timmerman et al., 2015), the findings illustrate that migratory career evolution is not linear, but depends on the interplay of different structural and personal/family factors which hinder or foster women's goals and aspirations. Moreover, fundamental variables such as age, the presence or absence of children, the years of residence and the direction and duration of mobility should be considered, as they influence migratory careers in various ways.

One of the main conclusions of this study is that the diversity of careers seems to be related to the different regimes of mobility. These regimes seem to be a more powerful factor than nationality in understanding the process of integration and mobility in the labour market. In particular the diversity is reflected in two turning points: sentimental and professional. Both seem to be deep-rooted motives that provoke processes of subjective immobility, modifying the work expectations of women who, until then, had stood out for their ambition and agency capacity.

One of the limitations of this study is the heterogeneity of nationalities and regimes of mobilities selected. For future research it would be interesting to focus on a deeper analysis of migratory careers in specific professional groups; specific mobility regimes; or length of stay, in order to understand more particular dynamics linked to specific profiles.

Our focus has been on the work experience and work-life balance of our protagonists. The findings are partially consistent with what other authors have pointed out about the determination to maintain skills or even upskill. For this reason, we highlight how women's agency has a key role in the achievement of this matching by activating coping strategies to overcome barriers (both in home and host country) and find the best way for their self-realisation. Agency, as a main finding, is also present in Sandoz's (2020) study related to different highly skilled migrants' situations moving in different migration channels.

The main strategies found in the respondents' narrative analysis are the following: first, the use of their personal "toolkits" based on international competences (transversal and intercultural skills; multilingual skills; international degrees; international job experience); second, flexibility in the management of the life-work balance (assumed by respondents to be a projection towards an

international setting of work and life); third, taking the path of self-employment as a good option for matching aspirations and work-life balance.

Finally, findings also suggest that social networks are not identified by our respondents as a resource for looking for either jobs or social relationships. It seems remarkable that most women in the “sentimental regime” seem not to value these networks, instead relying on their households and partners. Women who arrive for structural reasons also do not seem to value these networks. On the other hand, it is true that some women mention having approached women’s associations as a way out of immobility, but it does not seem that they have had a relevant role in their migratory processes and job matching.

Notes

- 1 In this chapter with the term “highly educated” we refer to migrant women with tertiary-level education, such as a university degree, PhD or post-doctoral studies. This stream of migration is often associated by scholars with the terms “skilled” or “highly skilled”, which have implications for the problem of definitions. On the one hand, the indiscriminate use of these terms has generated the unsolved dilemma between skilled and highly skilled migrants and professionals on the move, as the standards of qualifications are based on different ways of measuring depending on the criteria of classifications adopted and applied in each country of immigration. On the other hand, it is stressed that “skill recognition policies belong to the realm of migration selection because they contribute to defining more or less wanted categories of immigrants” (Hercog & Sandoz, 2018, p.455).
- 2 France, Germany, Italy, Moldova, Serbia and the United Kingdom.

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