



## Review

# Education and Other Factors Influencing Women Migrants' Employability and Entrepreneurship

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**Abstract:** Education is considered to be one of the most critical factors when it comes to finding work or starting a business. However, for women migrants, other factors can have an even more decisive influence, since they are starting out with the double disadvantage they face as women and migrants. This manuscript sets out to identify and analyse the individual and external factors that affect the employability and entrepreneurship of women migrants. To do this, we conducted a systematised qualitative review of recent literature. The studies analysed address different aspects of integration and employment but agree on many of the factors that hinder employability and entrepreneurship, such as traditional gender mandates, racism, socioeconomic status, the migration process, age or human capital. However, the scientific literature continues to mask the reality of women migrants who face discrimination or inequalities derived, for example, from their belonging to the LGBTQ+ collective or their functional diversity.

**Keywords:** education; labour insertion; entrepreneurship; employability; self-employment; gender; ethnicity



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## 1. Introduction

International migration, that is, “the movement of persons away from their place of usual residence and across an international border to a country of which they are not nationals” ([Organización Internacional para las Migraciones 2023](#)), is not a recent phenomenon but is consubstantial to human aspirations to improve their well-being or to satisfy their unmet needs in a new territory. However, as [Carrasco \(2003\)](#) points out, the economic globalisation that developed in the last years of the 20th century has been the trigger for the increase in migratory flows.

Most voluntary migrations—that is, they are not linked to compelling and/or tragic situations—are motivated by work, family or study-related reasons ([McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou 2021](#)). It is estimated that out of 281 million international migrants in 2020, 99 and 70 million were male and female migrant workers, respectively, that is, they were part of the labour force in the destination country ([McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou 2021](#); [Organización Internacional del Trabajo 2021](#)).

Furthermore, although migrations are a historical phenomenon and one that currently involves 4% of the world population ([McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou 2021](#)), with a very equal distribution between sexes, the experiences of women have been excluded from scientific knowledge under an assumed gender neutrality, ignoring the fact, pointed out by [Monzón \(2017, p. 81\)](#), “que este fenómeno afecta las relaciones inter-géneros e intra-géneros de maneras diversas y contradictorias” (that this phenomenon affects inter-gender and intra-gender relations in different and contradictory ways).

In this context, [Rosas \(2013, p. 115\)](#) states that gender can be conceived as a set of long-lasting and transferable dispositions of feelings, thoughts and actions which, when shared, influence the actions of people ([Ataide 2019](#)). Therefore, gender can be considered

a socially constructed individual trait (Homel 2022), which differentiates women from men, based on alleged differences and similarities originating in the sex assigned at birth and affecting interpersonal relationships. The effects of this social construct on the lives of women migrants do not usually alter substantially, since the subordination of women to men is maintained when they cross borders (Tapia 2011; Ataide 2019). Therefore, “gender is a common site of struggle” (Carangio et al. 2021, p. 91).

This sociocultural and historical construct, based on biological differences, to establish opposing attributes, roles and forms of treatment for women and men (Largarde 1996; Allegue and Carril 2000), is part of the identity of the person, influencing interpersonal relationships and affecting all areas of daily life. One of these areas is employment. Thus, among other aspects, women from all over the world leave their home facing greater difficulty than men in terms of finding work and, according to Organización Internacional del Trabajo (2023), when they do so it is usually in low-skilled and precarious jobs, with no significant changes foreseen in the short term.

As Peláez and Rodríguez (2020) note, we need simply look at the link between gender and education to understand the diverse situations and mechanisms that shape labour markets. It had traditionally been considered that a good level of education translated into better job opportunities and elevated social status. However, in the case of women migrants, other factors may have greater significance since even overqualification—that is, the possession of human capital over and above the requirements of a job—is, according to Shershneva and Fernández (2018, p. 46) “más acusada entre los colectivos más vulnerables, especialmente entre la juventud y las personas inmigrantes” (more pronounced among the most vulnerable groups, especially among youth and immigrants). In addition, research such as that of Read and Oselin (2008) shows that women’s education in certain ethnic and religious contexts is scarcely linked to employment and that, far from empowering women, it can reproduce patriarchal gender relations, considering “female education as a collective family resource [that is, as] a resource to be invested in the home and not in the market” (p. 296).

Therefore, employability cannot be understood purely as a set of personal competences but needs a broader and multidimensional definition. Thus, access to employment depends on a set of internal and external factors that, in addition, must be understood “as shared responsibility by the individual, employers, governments and educational institutions” (Suárez 2014, p. 102). Within the responsibility of social agents and employers, it is necessary to promote “actively the labour mobility of women migrants to other sectors of work” (Oso and Parella 2012, p. 34), since almost 80% of them are inserted into the service sector (Organización Internacional del Trabajo 2021), often characterised by its social undervaluation and precariousness.

It is worth mentioning that the concept of employability integrates the concept of self-employment and entrepreneurship (Suárez 2016). According to Pérez (2014, p. 130) “el autoempleo se basa en la búsqueda de una actividad laboral/profesional que permita el sustento vital mientras que emprendimiento se basa en la ideación, deseo, interés y esfuerzo en la generación/creación de una estructura que genere o aporte valor añadido a stakeholders” (Self-employment is based on the search for a working/professional activity that allows for vital sustenance while entrepreneurship is based on the ideation, desire, interest and effort in the generation/creation of a structure that generates or contributes added value to stakeholders). Based on this, in this review, the notion of “employability” and “self-employment” will be indissoluble since women migrants act as workers, seeking their individual livelihood, while entrepreneurship requires special attention since it goes a step further, generating employment for other people and the business; therefore, it requires differentiated training and support programmes (Pérez 2014). However, it should be noted that in some investigations both terms, self-employment and entrepreneurship, are taken as synonyms (Pérez 2014; Raya and Caparrós 2013).

With regard to the scientific literature on migration, gender and employability, it is necessary to diversify research lines in terms of employability, which have so far focused

largely on unskilled labour, and for the entrepreneurship of women migrants to be studied in greater depth (Oso and Parella 2012; Osorio and Fuentes-Lara 2019).

This systematised review is developed within that context. Without entering into the particular cultural aspects of the different origin and destination societies of women migrants, it focuses on identifying and analysing the individual factors of women migrants and the contextual factors of destination countries, which may influence the employability of women migrants (Bilgili et al. 2015) and which have been identified in recent literature.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Although this review focuses on identifying and analysing the factors that affect employability in general and entrepreneurship in particular, the ultimate objective of the research is broader, as it is developed within the framework of research FPU21/05179 and the ERDF operational project (UPO-1380907).

This review aims to identify and analyse the factors that affect the employability and entrepreneurship of women migrants.

To achieve these objectives, we conducted a systematised review of recent scientific literature, derived from systematic reviews with shared procedural aspects (Grant and Booth 2009), applying the Resiste-CHS framework proposed by Codina (2018), especially with regard to the search and evaluation phases.

The databases used for this review have been generalist, “Scopus” and “Web of Science” and specific, “Social Science Database” and “Sociological Abstracts”, through ProQuest.

To identify the descriptors usually included in the subjects studied here, a series of exploratory searches were carried out, using the UNESCO thesaurus and ProQuest’s own thesaurus for the databases it hosts.

In addition, the final search for keywords referring to the object of study was restricted to the titles of the articles, since some key terms are too generic and are used with different meanings, such as “work”. Also, since Scopus and Web of Science incorporate only peer-reviewed research, this inclusion criterion was applied to the results of the Social Science Database and Sociological Abstracts to ensure that initial searches were conducted on an equal footing, applied before the rest of the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Therefore, this aspect must be taken into account, since the results obtained with the initial search equations incorporate this criterion.

Table 1 details the equations used in the review, after discarding others with fewer results or which yielded poorer results in terms of their relationship to the topic addressed by this systematised review.

**Table 1.** Definitive list of search equations used without applying exclusion or inclusion criteria, except for the scientific quality criterion.

Databases	Search Equations
Scopus	TITLE(("WOM*" OR "FEMALE") AND ("*MIGRA*" OR "FOREIGNER*" OR "NONCITIZEN*") AND ("WORK*" OR "EMPLOY*" OR "UNEMPLOY*" OR "ENTREPRENEUR*" OR "SELF-EMPLOY*"))
Web of Science	TI = (("WOM*" OR "FEMALE") AND ("MIGRA*" OR "INMIGRA*" OR "FOREIGNER*" OR "NONCITIZEN*") AND ("WORK*" OR "EMPLOY*" OR "UNEMPLOY*" OR "ENTREPRENEUR*" OR "SELF-EMPLOY*"))
Social Science Database	TITLE(FEMALE OR WOM*) AND TITLE(MIGRA* OR FOREIGNER* OR INMIGRA*) AND TITLE(WORK* OR EMPLOY* OR UNEMPLOY* OR UNDEREMPLOY* OR ENTREPRENEUR*) [Peer-reviewed]
Sociological Abstracts	TITLE(FEMALE OR WOM*) AND TITLE(MIGRA* OR FOREIGNER* OR INMIGRA*) AND TITLE(WORK* OR EMPLOY* OR UNEMPLOY* OR UNDEREMPLOY* OR ENTREPRENEUR*) [Peer-reviewed]

Source: Authors’ own.

In the evaluation phase, inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined, based on those used in the research of Terrón-Caro et al. (2022), in order to ensure that the resulting studies responded more accurately to the objectives of this review. The inclusion criteria

“typological”, “temporal” and “linguistic” and exclusion criteria “methodological” and “availability” were applied using the filters of the database, while for the criterion of duplicity and specificity the bibliographic reference manager Zotero was used. For this last criterion, the titles and abstracts of the publications were analysed, excluding research that was clearly not directly related to the labour insertion, self-employment or entrepreneurship of women migrants.

Table 2 details the inclusion and exclusion criteria used in the search and evaluation phases. These translate into the search for scientific articles that in the last five years and, approximately, in the first half of 2023 met the peer review quality criterion and which were published in two languages: Spanish, the mother tongue of the researchers, or English, the language in which most research is published. On the other hand, the following were excluded: identical research papers published in several of the databases used; papers that, although related to the employment or entrepreneurship of women migrants, were focused on other aspects outside the scope of this review, such as health; articles that have not indicated their methodological approach in the abstract; and those that are not available through Open Access.

**Table 2.** Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Type of Criterion	Name	Description
Inclusion criteria	Typological	Scientific articles
	Temporal	Five years (2018–2022). In order to carry out as up-to-date a review as possible, approximately the first half of 2023 (up to 10 July) has also been considered
	Scientific quality	Peer review
	Linguistic	Publications in English or Spanish
Exclusion criteria	Duplicity	Identical publications included in different databases
	Specificity	Topics not related to the employability or entrepreneurship of international women migrants or with areas other than the humanities and social sciences
	Methodological	In relation to the scientific quality criterion, publications were excluded that did not specify the type of methodology used (they must at least have mentioned whether the approach is quantitative, qualitative or mixed) in the paper abstract
	Availability	Publications that were not available through Open Access were excluded

Source: Authors’ own.

Table 3 details the definitive search equations, as well as the filters used to apply all possible inclusion and exclusion criteria automatically. Later, the results obtained would be reviewed, through Zotero, in order to eliminate duplicate results or those that did not meet the specificity criterion.

**Table 3.** Definitive list of search equations and filters used in databases, applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Database	Search Equations
Scopus	TITLE(("WOM*" OR "FEMALE") AND ("*MIGRA*" OR "FOREIGNER*") AND ("WORK*" OR "*EMPLOY*" OR "UNEMPLOY*" OR "ENTREPRENEUR*")) AND ABS("QUALITATIVE" OR "QUANTITATIVE" OR "MIXED") AND (LIMIT-TO (OA, "all")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2023) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2022) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2021) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2020) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2019) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2018)) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English") OR LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "Spanish"))
Search filters applied to the results obtained Open Access; 2018–2023; article; English or Spanish.	

Table 3. Cont.

Database	Search Equations
Web of Science	<p>TI = (("WOM*" OR "FEMALE") AND ("MIGRA*" OR "INMIGRA*" OR "FOREIGNER*" OR "NONCITIZEN*") AND ("WORK*" OR "EMPLOY*" OR "UNEMPLOY*" OR "ENTREPRENEUR*" OR "SELF-EMPLOY*")) AND AB = ("QUALITATIVE" OR "QUANTITATIVE" OR "MIXED")</p> <p>Search filters applied to the results obtained Open Access, Publication Years: 2018–2023; Document types: articles.</p>
Social Science Database	<p>TITLE(FEMALE OR WOM*) AND TITLE(MIGRA* OR FOREIGNER* OR INMIGRA*) AND TITLE(WORK* OR EMPLOY* OR UNEMPLOY* OR UNDEREMPLOY* OR ENTREPRENEUR*) AB(QUANTITATIVE OR QUALITATIVE OR MIXED)</p> <p>Search filters applied to the results obtained: 2018–2023; Article OR Main article; English.</p>
Sociological Abstracts	<p>TITLE(FEMALE OR WOM*) AND TITLE(MIGRA* OR FOREIGNER* OR INMIGRA*) AND TITLE(WORK* OR EMPLOY* OR UNEMPLOY* OR UNDEREMPLOY* OR ENTREPRENEUR*) AB(QUANTITATIVE OR QUALITATIVE OR MIXED)</p> <p>Search filters applied to the results obtained: 1 January 2018–1 January 2023; Article OR Main Article; English.</p>
Source: Authors' own.	

In order to minimise the drawbacks of systematised reviews, mentioned by [Grant and Booth \(2009\)](#), and to make the analysis phase more systematic, qualitative content analysis was applied. According to [Díaz and Navarro \(2007, p. 181\)](#), this technique allows human actions to be interpreted based on, in this case, written expressions, unravelling their meaning, producing “un meta-texto analítico en el que se representa el corpus textual de manera transformada” (an analytical meta-text in which the textual corpus is represented in a transformed way).

As for units of analysis, sampling units can be differentiated from content analysis, i.e., studies resulting from systematic review; recording units, introductory sections, materials and methods, results and discussion or equivalent; and the context units, the terms and phrases that respond to the categories established in the content analysis, according to the explanations of [Fernández \(2002\)](#).

The categorical system used aims to conform to the minimum requirements indicated by [Fernández \(2002\)](#) regarding relevance, exhaustiveness, homogeneity and mutual exclusion. [Fernández \(2002\)](#) means that the categorical system should be in accordance with the research objectives, comprise as many subcategories as possible, be made up of the same or very similar elements and avoid, as far as possible, an outcome where the units of analysis can be placed in more than one of them. This latter requirement is particularly difficult in this case, since the factors involved in the employability of women migrants are interconnected.

The categories have been established inductively, i.e., as information sources have been exploited ([Guix 2008](#)) during encoding. This last process was carried out using the qualitative data analysis software [ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH \(2023\)](#) for Windows 10, version 23.4.0.29360.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Results of the Search and Evaluation Phases of the Systematised Review

A total of 2535 potential results were obtained by applying the search equations without applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, apart from the scientific quality criterion. Once the typological, temporal, linguistic, methodological and availability criteria were applied using filters, the number of potential results was reduced to 89. Next, by eliminating 35 duplicate results, the number of potential results was reduced to 54. Finally, by applying the specificity criterion, 13 results were left for analysis. These 13 results met the established criteria, i.e., non-identical articles from scientific journals indexed in any of the four databases consulted, that were studies related to migrant women's employability, peer-



reviewed and with the methodology defined in the abstract, published between 1 January 2018 and 10 July 2023 in English or Spanish, and that were published in Open Access.

Research excluded through the specificity criteria deals with female migrant workers and poor working conditions of domestic and care work (Aceros et al. 2021, 2023; Anam et al. 2021; Au et al. 2019; Briones-Vozmediano et al. 2020; Chanamoto 2022; Duque et al. 2023; Ghaddar et al. 2020; Rivera-Navarro et al. 2019; Van Bortel et al. 2019; Shewamene et al. 2022; Vianello and Wolkowitz 2023) or other types of work, formal or informal (Cabras and Ingrasci 2022; Fardella Cisternas et al. 2021; Duda-Mikulin 2020; Hendrickson et al. 2019; Karandikar et al. 2022; Kim et al. 2021; Linardelli 2018; Luque-Ribelles et al. 2018; Molina-Rodríguez 2020; Molina-Rodríguez 2021; Mourouvaye et al. 2019; Premji 2018; Vacchelli and Peyrefitte 2018); on health issues (Briones-Vozmediano et al. 2020; Koudstaal et al. 2020; Marques et al. 2021; Premji 2018; Chung and Mak 2020; Vianello and Wolkowitz 2023), specific areas such as sexual and reproductive health (Freeman et al. 2023; Miles et al. 2022; Paulino-Ramirez et al. 2023), mental health (Aceros et al. 2021; Van Bortel et al. 2019; Zotova et al. 2021) or COVID (Anam et al. 2021; Cabras and Ingrasci 2022); subjective well-being (Paillard-Borg and Hallberg 2018); money remittances (Juddi et al. 2021; Lenoël and David 2019; Velásquez-Hoque 2021; Wahyono et al. 2019); religion (Subchi et al. 2022); and other vulnerabilities (Wang and Tang 2020). The study by Aslan et al. (2021) was also excluded on account of the specificity criterion, since the participants were children of immigrants born in the destination country.

Table 4 shows the definitive list of publications, in alphabetical order by authorship, which are the object of analysis in this review. As we can see, a small number of scientific articles met the inclusion and exclusion criteria established.

**Table 4.** Studies analysed.

	Year	Authorship	Methodology	Technique(s)	Population	Sample	Destination Country
1	2019	Ataide	Qualitative	In-depth interviews; participatory observation	Women from Tarija from farming origins who migrated between 1980 and 2000, associatively, through male networks to work in northwestern Argentina and are engaged in horticulture in Apolinario Saravia (province of Salta)	Women ( $n = 25$ )	Argentina
2	2019	Bali et al.	Qualitative	In-depth interviews; focus group; thematic analysis	Women migrant workers and students from Indonesia	Women ( $n = 5$ )	People's Republic of China
3	2021	Carangio et al.	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews; thematic and inductive analysis	Skilled women migrants from the UK, India, People's Republic of China and the Philippines in an Anglo-dominant white society	Women ( $n = 19$ )	Australia
4	2023	Chy et al.	Qualitative	In-depth interviews	Women Bangladeshi migrant domestic workers forcibly returned to Bangladesh	Women ( $n = 28$ )	Bangladesh

Table 4. Cont.

	Year	Authorship	Methodology	Technique(s)	Population	Sample	Destination Country
5	2020	Farris	Qualitative	Content analysis of agency websites; in-depth interviews with agency managers/owners, women migrant workers and key informants	Websites of agencies, managers of private assistance and domestic service agencies, representatives of recruitment confederations; immigrant workers' organisations	Agency websites ( <i>n</i> = 50), managers ( <i>n</i> = 10), representatives of recruitment confederations ( <i>n</i> = 3); Kalayaan immigrant workers' organisations ( <i>n</i> = 2) and Migrants Rights Network ( <i>n</i> = 2).	United Kingdom
6	2018	Gomes	Qualitative	Life-story	Migrant woman, approximately 20 years old, who migrated from Ethiopia to Saudi Arabia to work as a domestic worker	Woman ( <i>n</i> = 1)	Saudi Arabia
7	2022	Hapugoda	Qualitative	Semi-structured in-depth narrative interviews	Migrant businesswomen from Sri Lanka	Women ( <i>n</i> = 7)	United Kingdom
8	2022	Homel	Qualitative	In-depth interviews	Belarusian and Ukrainian beauty specialists who developed their career in Warsaw	Women ( <i>n</i> = 13): Ukrainian ( <i>n</i> = 10), Belarusian ( <i>n</i> = 3)	Poland
9	2020	Kwok	Qualitative	Ethnographic fieldwork in Asian immigrant communities; in-depth interviews with women migrants entrepreneurs	Asian women who founded or worked in small businesses in Hong Kong	Women from South Asia: Nepalese ( <i>n</i> = 7) and Pakistani ( <i>n</i> = 4). Women from Southeast Asia: Thai ( <i>n</i> = 3), Indonesian ( <i>n</i> = 3) and Philippine ( <i>n</i> = 3).	People's Republic of China
10	2018	Njaramba et al.	Qualitative	Semi-structured in-depth interviews	African-born women who have emigrated to Australia, over 18 years of age, with a permanent residence permit or Australian nationality, who live in the Cairns region and have a small business	Women ( <i>n</i> = 11)	Australia
11	2020	Osorio-García-De-Oteyza et al.	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews	Women migrants from Latin America (Brazil, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Venezuela, Bolivia, Paraguay and Peru), Africa (Morocco and Senegal), and Eastern Europe (Bulgaria and Romania) who have been living in Madrid for at least 4 years and have created business initiatives in different sectors	Women ( <i>n</i> = 27)	Spain

Table 4. Cont.

Year	Authorship	Methodology	Technique(s)	Population	Sample	Destination Country	
12	2023	Raimi et al.	Qualitative	Systematic review	Articles about motivation factors for enterprise among ethnic minorities, immigrants and women entrepreneurs; the types of uncertainty; and business strategies used by ethnic minorities, women and immigrants to deal with the consequences of the political environment and different forms of uncertainty.	Articles ( $n = 117$ )	Switzerland
13	2021	Riaño	Mixed	Statistical analysis; biographical interviews	Swiss statistical databases and individuals with higher education who live in a household with children and are approximately 40 years old in 13 different Swiss cantons	Statistical databases ( $n = 2$ ), women ( $n = 45$ ), men ( $n = 32$ )	Switzerland

Source: Authors' own.

In all the resulting articles, a qualitative methodological approach was used, except that of [Riaño \(2021\)](#), in which statistical analysis was combined with biographical interviews. The representativeness of the samples is qualitative and does not allow inferences to be made on the entire population contemplated but it does help us to understand the reality and to have evidence that can be contrasted with previous or future investigations.

The key technique applied in these studies is the interview, used by all researchers, with the exception of [Raimi et al. \(2023\)](#), who carried out a systematic review to examine “the motivational factors, types of uncertainty, and entrepreneurship strategies of transitional entrepreneurship among ethnic minorities, immigrants, and women entrepreneurs” (p. 1).

### 3.2. Results of the Analysis Phase

#### 3.2.1. Topics Studied

Following the evaluation phase, only 13 scientific articles remained that met the inclusion and exclusion criteria established. A thematic analysis was carried out of the titles, previous questions and objectives of the research articles, identifying 6 studies dedicated to entrepreneurship ([Homel 2022](#); [Kwok 2020](#); [Njaramba et al. 2018](#); [Osorio-García-De-Oteyza et al. 2020](#); [Raimi et al. 2023](#); [Hapugoda 2022](#)) and 7 related to the employability of women migrants ([Ataide 2019](#); [Bali et al. 2019](#); [Carangio et al. 2021](#); [Chy et al. 2023](#); [Farris 2020](#); [Gomes 2018](#); [Riaño 2021](#)).

The issues addressed in relation to entrepreneurship among international women migrants mainly concern motivations ([Kwok 2020](#); [Raimi et al. 2023](#)), the business activities in which they engage ([Homel 2022](#)), the difficulties or barriers they face ([Njaramba et al. 2018](#); [Raimi et al. 2023](#); [Hapugoda 2022](#)), the strategies they follow ([Homel 2022](#); [Raimi et al. 2023](#)) and the resources they can use ([Homel 2022](#); [Osorio-García-De-Oteyza et al. 2020](#)).

The main topics addressed in studies linked to employability, on the other hand, are participation in the labour market of the destination country, in terms of gender and racial and ethnic identity ([Ataide 2019](#); [Bali et al. 2019](#); [Carangio et al. 2021](#); [Chy et al. 2023](#); [Gomes 2018](#); [Riaño 2021](#)), the social and cultural factors of the destination society that affect



women migrants (Carangio et al. 2021; Chy et al. 2023; Gomes 2018) or the requirements of recruitment agencies or employers (Farris 2020).

Finally, the studies analysed have focused more on the individual traits of women migrants and less on the contextual factors of the destination country.

### 3.2.2. Factors That Influence the Employability and Entrepreneurship of Women Migrants

In the absence of a general theory of migration, or a standardised model to investigate this phenomenon (García 2003), each research paper usually makes use of different theories to explain the employability of women migrants, although they have not explicitly stated this, since these are always present in the theoretical conceptions from which the objectives of the research arise (Grosser 2016). Therefore, depending on the theoretical framework used and the objectives of the research, there will be researchers who have focused more or less intensely on some factors or others.

The starting point used in this review is expressed by the theory of double disadvantage, also explicitly pointed out by Hapugoda (2022), which states that women migrants are discriminated against because of their gender and their status as migrants. Hapugoda (2022) emphasises that, in the scientific literature, the double disadvantage is evident in the participation of women migrants in the labour market and in entrepreneurial activities.

Gender can influence the employment of women migrants, starting with their self-perception, what they project about themselves to others, the networks they can establish, their motivations and their job and business opportunities (Raimi et al. 2023). Women are associated with the domestic sphere—where they are in charge of double the work, productive and reproductive (Ataide 2019)—and “part-time paid employment. . . [which identifies them] as caregivers, domestic workers and consumers” (Riaño 2021, p. 2) due to the traditional roles of women as a mother, wife and daughter (Ataide 2019; Gomes 2018; Riaño 2021; Hapugoda 2022; Kwok 2020; Njaramba et al. 2018) and not as a breadwinner (Njaramba et al. 2018; Ataide 2019; Riaño 2021). However, there are exceptions in some contexts, such as the case of the Rastafarian women and Ethiopian-born Rastafari women with heterosexual partners presented by Gomes (2018) in her study, where they tend to generate more income than men. In the case of one of the participants in Kwok’s (2020) study, family economic crises led a migrant woman of Thai origin whose husband was a national of the destination country, the People’s Republic of China, with alcoholism problems and unemployed, to start a business to support her family. She herself warns that this contradicts traditional gender mandates: “[. . .] As a man, I know this would be a loss of face for him . . . It is also a loss of face for him to apply for government subsidy. . . [.] At that time, I started to sew clothes at home. Later, I rented this place. I do this while taking care of my daughters . . . If I do not do this, where do I find money to feed my daughters?” (Kwok 2020, p. 111). Another participant in the Kwok (2020) study, of Nepali origin, became the sole breadwinner in her family by setting up a beauty and hairdressing salon without her husband’s support after he had to close his business due to mismanagement. A third participant in Kwok’s (2020) study, also of Nepali origin, despite her own poor health chose to set up a business when her husband was unable to work due to an accident, in order to avoid claiming a government subsidy.

As far as motherhood itself is concerned, it is not a biographical milestone that, in itself, should lead to inequality in a heterosexual couple but, when it takes place in a country with a conservative culture, it is quite likely (Riaño 2021). Thus, when women aspire to work, they find it difficult or impossible to reconcile work and family life—due to working hours, the cost of hiring outside childcare, the lack of male co-responsibility or support from the state (Riaño 2021)—so they often choose to halve their working hours or stop working to concentrate on raising their children. Maternity can therefore affect not only the willingness to participate in the market but also the quality of employment (Riaño 2021).

Furthermore, women migrants who participate in the labour market often enter feminised sectors and jobs, as a result of gender stereotypes (Farris 2020). A manager of a domestic and care agency, interviewed by Farris (2020), pointed out this situation: they

are favoured over men for jobs as cooks, cleaners or babysitters, while men are chosen to work as gardeners or drivers. Along with this, and according to [Riaño \(2021\)](#), gender is also key in shaping inequalities in pay and in the quality of employment, including for highly skilled women.

Another gender-related problem is the lack of autonomy and participation of women in decision-making in employment. Firstly, as [Ataide \(2019\)](#) points out, the autonomy that women migrants can have, when they often end up getting precarious jobs, needs to be questioned. The degree of autonomy to which migrant women can aspire will vary according to the way in which they reproduce or can force or transform established gender patterns, family dependency, ethno-racial stratification of markets and discrimination by nationals ([Ataide 2019](#)).

Related to the above, unequal agreements between men and women remain one of the enduring gender-specific disadvantages in labour markets ([Riaño 2021](#)). [Ataide \(2019\)](#) offers an example: in the agricultural sector, women are usually hired through their husbands or a male relative. [Ataide \(2019\)](#) links this to the fact that the gender system follows the same patriarchal logic both at destination and at origin, although it varies in intensity. For example, if migration happens from a country with a high level of equality between women and men to one with a more conservative gender culture, it can be a turning point, and heterosexual couples can begin to develop traditional gender roles ([Riaño 2021](#)).

Another example of unequal arrangements between employers and women migrant workers is in some Gulf countries with regard to domestic employment. According to [Chy et al. \(2023\)](#) citing [Azad \(2019\)](#) and [Nisrane et al. \(2019\)](#), such workers may be subjected to the traditional Kafala system which, recognised by individual states, subjects such women to the will of their employers who hold their passports and other documentation, preventing them from leaving or seeking other work without permission. Moreover, as [Chy et al. \(2023\)](#) citing [Nisrane et al. \(2019\)](#) and [Tonny \(2016\)](#) point out, the Kafala system results in these women workers being exploited and abused and hastens the decision to return home.

In the area of entrepreneurship, women migrants also face gender-related challenges. In fact, as [Homel \(2022\)](#) points out, based on [Mahler and Pessar \(2006\)](#), gender affects entrepreneurship more than ethnicity, in terms of behavioural attitudes towards women migrant entrepreneurs. However, according to [Kwok \(2020\)](#), the literature on migrant entrepreneurship has systematically neglected women, as markets, resources and networks have been considered the male domain. Early studies on women entrepreneurs described them as unpaid and unrecognised support for male-dominated family businesses.

In some cultures, women find it very difficult to become entrepreneurs or to do so on their own terms, especially because of the opinions and pressures of husbands, relatives or even the community ([Njaramba et al. 2018](#)). This is the case, for example, of one of the women interviewed by [Kwok \(2020\)](#) who accepted the limits imposed by her husband to become an entrepreneur: “she had to stay at home, she can only entertain female customers and she cannot use household money for the business” (p. 112). She was also unable to open a fashion business although, when she gained her husband’s trust after several years, “she was allowed to have a fashion booth occasionally at the local festival market” (p. 113). However, sometimes women migrants from conservative cultures decide to become entrepreneurs, especially out of necessity, inverting gender roles and becoming the breadwinner ([Ataide 2019](#)).

In other cases, relatives prefer women to become self-employed or entrepreneurs rather than work as domestic workers because they say that it is not right for married women to engage in domestic work ([Kwok 2020](#)).

Even so, the number of women entrepreneurs from developed or developing countries has increased in recent decades but they remain outnumbered by male entrepreneurs in almost all countries ([Hapugoda 2022](#); [Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2021](#)). However, for

example in the European Union, the gender gap related to business activities is somewhat smaller for women migrant entrepreneurs than native-born ones (Hapugoda 2022).

The fact that gender affects women migrants and native-born women in the destination country differently is due to intersectionality with other sources of subordination; starting with what we call “migrant status” when dealing with the theory of double disadvantage in which a “stigmatised” origin—whether ethnic, racial or national—can be included as their administrative status in the destination country. As Hapugoda (2022) points out, “in line with theories of ‘otherness and belonging’ and ‘disadvantage theory’, it is clear that other than the issues and challenges faced by any entrepreneur, [women] migrant entrepreneurs deal with extra difficulties because of their nature of othering” (p. 208).

While some researchers use the word “immigrant” and “ethnicity” interchangeably, Hapugoda (2022) points out that “the term ‘ethnic’ refers to a particular group of the same culture, ethnicity or nationality” (p. 203). However, in the other articles, these categorisations are usually differentiated.

Osorio-García-De-Oteyza et al. (2020) use the definition of ethnicity provided by Isajiw (1993): the “social-psychological process which gives an individual a sense of belonging and identity” (p. 34). However, ethnicity affects not only the individual perception of women migrants, but also the acceptance or rejection by those who consider themselves the same or different, respectively, based on the supposed similarities or differences involved in this categorisation (Barth 1969; Riaño 2021).

As for race, it is important to make an observation here. According to Wade (2022), some researchers reject the use of this concept because they consider that, by accommodating this socially and historically constructed category without a biological basis, it continues to differentiate between people and encourages racism. Wade (2022) argues that the coherence of the field of racial studies derives from the historical context of colonialism from which racism derives. We understand that this division of ideas has led some articles to omit the concept of race and replace it with others such as “ethnic group” or “nationality”, for example. With regard to “nationality”, it can sometimes also be justified by the availability of comparative data using this categorisation against ethnic groups, as in the case of Osorio-García-De-Oteyza et al. (2020).

The study that pays the most attention to the racial factor is that of Carangio et al. (2021), focused on examining how racism and white privilege operate in workplaces in the—Australian—labour market and coming to the main conclusion that the careers—starting from recruitment—of skilled women migrants were not only determined by the multiple identities that represent them but is also a combination of the intersectionality of these with a workspace marked by prejudice based on gender and race. This intersectionality of gender and race is also noted by the study by Farris (2020) in the recruitment of personnel for domestic and care work since, as indicated by the women migrants interviewed, it seems that recruitment agencies, employers or families in need of their services believe that such jobs require vocation, which these racialised women have, rather than skills; and that women are caregivers by nature. In this sense, according to Farris (2020), race operates in labour segregation toward less desirable occupations according to the destination society, many of them related to reproductive work. Carangio et al. (2021) also points out, based on the testimonies of the respondents, that the skill level of racialised women is questioned or devalued and that even highly skilled women are underemployed.

Nationality also acts as a factor in discrimination against women migrants or as a system of hierarchies in which women of one nationality are preferred for certain jobs over those of another, as is the case in domestic employment, due to stereotypes linked to gender and national origin (Bali et al. 2019; Farris 2020). The study by Ataide (2019) exemplifies how, by dint of nationality—and being a mother—one migrant woman felt discriminated against by the Public Administration dedicated to social policies in the destination country, considering her less “deserving” of such policies compared to national women. Therefore, they face not only administrative barriers but also borders stemming from gender, xenophobic and ethnic-racial stereotypes both by national workers who

deal directly with migrants and by the state, which through immigration laws and/or policies reinforce differences (Ataide 2019; Farris 2020), both in terms of opportunities and treatment, between nationals and migrants, or between themselves.

Furthermore, marital status not only affects women migrants in terms of fulfilling gender roles, but the nationality of the husband can be a factor for or against with regard to other women migrants. In their study, Njaramba et al. (2018) showed that the wives of nationals—in this case Australians—experienced fewer barriers and challenges compared to those faced by single women migrants or those married to other migrants.

Other cultural aspects that can significantly affect the career path of women migrants' paths are religion and/or moral norms. Four of the studies analysed (Chy et al. 2023; Kwok 2020; Riaño 2021; Hapugoda 2022) refer to religion, with Kwok (2020) paying the most attention to it, since this study was developed in traditional Hong Kong society and addresses the role of moral norms in female migrant entrepreneurship. For Kwok (2020), the employability of women migrants can be better understood through class, gender, ethnicity and religion or moral norms, strongly marked in this latter case by gender. For example, one of the women interviewed by Kwok (2020) pointed out that she wanted to work more because her family needed more money but that her husband did not allow her to work outside of her business and, moreover, she was not allowed to wear lipstick, hoop earrings or low-cut clothing, according to him out of respect for his religion.

Kwok's (2020) study shows how moral norms can positively influence starting a business to escape structural economic inequalities, discourses that racialise and sexualise them and obtaining the freedom and autonomy that they do not have because they are subject to the moral expectations of the family. However, in most of the cases analysed by Kwok (2020), these aspirations end up conforming to the norms derived from morality and gender.

Another example of how religion can affect the employability of female migrants is from the study by Chy et al. (2023) who, citing Tonny (2016), note that "traditional, conservative, religious Bangladeshi society views female migration for work negatively and as harmful for women's virtue" (p. 140).

Apart from how religion can affect migrant women's personal decisions, people in the host country, including employers, may reject them due to stereotypical ideas about other religions (Riaño 2021; Hapugoda 2022), as exemplified in Gomes' (2018) study with one of her participants, who pointed out that Muslim women are more likely to be employed in Saudi Arabia than Christian women, as the majority religious current in the territory is Wahhabism.

The migration process is another factor mentioned in the literature consulted. On the one hand, in order to understand the employability options of women migrants, one must know the causes of migration. As highlighted by Osorio-García-De-Oteyza et al. (2020), it is usually assumed that migration is economic—because of its predominance (Bali et al. 2019)—but it can also be due, for example, to academic or extra-economic reasons, such as displacement. Furthermore, as noted by Ataide (2019), migration can be due to family reunification or associational, not autonomous, and this influences the employability of women migrants while reinforcing their role as caregivers and their dependence on the husband, for example, to access work. Regardless of the cause, as Chy et al. (2023) citing Donato and Gabaccia (2015) point out, the decision to migrate is influenced by gender norms.

Moreover, as mentioned by Osorio-García-De-Oteyza et al. (2020), considering the migration project is important because it is one of the reasons why migrant women can access certain resources.

In addition to influencing women's employability in destination countries, the migration process, including work experiences abroad, influences reintegration in countries of origin, as noted by Chy et al. (2023). In the study by Chy et al. (2023), female migrants from Bangladesh who migrate to work in domestic employment and are forced to return to their countries of origin due to exploitative working conditions are often rejected by their family



and society for not exceeding the income and status expectations placed on them, which is not the case for male migrants.

Chy et al. (2023) point out that these women have serious difficulties in returning to work: “they are either unemployed or not working in their previous jobs after return” (p. 146). This is because in their former jobs they may be offended, verbally abused by co-workers and employers and paid less than before their departure (Chy et al. 2023).

In addition, the type of migration—regular or irregular—may influence access to certain services or rights, also impact the employability options of women migrants and, more specifically, their entrepreneurial career path, especially with regard to their role as business owners and the resources they can use, as noted by Homel (2022) and Osorio-García-De-Oteyza et al. (2020). These studies also take into account the time that women migrants have spent in the destination country to better understand the migration experiences of their participants.

Age is another individual trait that can affect the employability or entrepreneurship of women migrants (Homel 2022; Riaño 2021). Riaño (2021), citing Riaño and Baghdadi (2007) and Chicha (2012), specifically points out that employers have the perception that certain ages make women candidates less suitable for work. Homel (2022) points out that age together with migration status, education and marital status have a direct impact on the mechanisms whereby support networks are configured and the entrepreneurial role of migrant women. In the same vein, Osorio-García-De-Oteyza et al. (2020) relate age to the ethnic resources—which will be defined below—available to them. Riaño (2021) takes into account the age of participants with the aim of assessing, on the one hand, how the skills of women migrants have evolved over time and, on the other hand, why the ages of 30–40 are the most critical years for their professional career. Within this age bracket, women may be forced to reduce their working hours or to stop working in order to devote themselves to family and childcare. Furthermore, being a young migrant woman may also mean that, due to the lack of experience associated with age, they are not familiar with legal issues, taxes, business creation or organisations that can help them (Hapugoda 2022).

In addition, not only does age affect women from the perception of other people, but they themselves may believe that it is a limitation, as exemplified in the study by Njaramba et al. (2018) in which one of the participants believes she is too old to acquire technological skills.

Social status, mentioned previously by Kwok (2020), is another variable that affects the integration of women migrants in the destination country (Homel 2022). Precarious social status is one of the factors that, according to Raimi et al. (2023) can lead women migrants to start a business. This status level is characteristic of women workers in the domestic and care sector—given the undervaluation of reproductive work—and agencies take advantage of this to prosper at the expense of the working conditions of these women (Farris 2020), who are, for the most part, migrants.

The studies analysed also point out as determinants of the successful employability and entrepreneurship of women migrants not only the social constructs that shape individual traits (Homel 2022)—which have been discussed so far—but also the resources available in general terms, distinguishing by categories—of class, ethnic, social, strategic and opportunity resources—or specific ones such as financial, educational, human, institutional or legal.

According to Álvarez’s (1996) interpretation of Bordieu’s contributions, a person’s social status depends on how the different types of capital he or she possesses are related. According to the definition of Osorio-García-De-Oteyza et al. (2020) based on Solé and Parella (2005) and Light and Gold (2000), class resources would be “the different forms of capital that are possessed by a group, access to financial resources, educational level or heritage” (pp. 34–35). As stated explicitly by Ataide (2019), Bali et al. (2019), Homel (2022) and Osorio-García-De-Oteyza et al. (2020), one of the inequalities affecting migration projects and professional experiences is social class. An example of how class resources affect the employability of women migrants is that the poor economic status linked to not

being able to access the labour market can lead women migrants to start a business, as a survival strategy (Kwok 2020; Njaramba et al. 2018; Raimi et al. 2023).

To offer a definition of ethnic resources, Osorio-García-De-Oteyza et al. (2020) provide a summary of the studies of Aysa-Lastra and Cachón (2016), Güell et al. (2015), Light and Rosenstein (1995) and Light and Bonacich (1988), stating that they are “values, knowledge, skills, information, attitudes, leadership and solidarity, among others [factors]” (p. 34). In addition, Morokvasic (1991) stated that women migrants have limited access to such resources, which are predominantly dominated by men. In contrast, Kwok (2020) warns that the scientific literature has neglected female migrant entrepreneurship—Osorio-García-De-Oteyza et al. (2020) point out that the first studies on the phenomenon date back to the 1980s, historically assuming “that resources, social networks and markets are male-driven” (Kwok 2020, p. 102).

The social resources used in business, according to Homel (2022), can represent access to migrant networks and strategic resources, understood as information, finances and specialists; access to female migrant networks, such as female clients, advisers or friends; or access to the local market. According to Ataide (2019), support networks play a very important role in the emancipation of women from patriarchal mandates and become fundamental when it comes to entrepreneurship (Njaramba et al. 2018), even more so in transnational business (Osorio-García-De-Oteyza et al. 2020), and Hapugoda (2022) particularly highlights those of family origin. However, during the migration process, it is common for migrants to lose contact with previously established networks and encounter barriers to forging new relationships, which translates into another vulnerability (Hapugoda 2022).

Opportunity resources are those obtained by transforming structural impediments through business strategies (Homel 2022).

Continuing with the more “specific” resources and starting with educational resources, Bali et al. (2019) note that women migrants with low educational attainment are forced to work in low-skilled jobs, where they may suffer gender discrimination and/or precarious and dangerous working conditions (Homel 2022; Kwok 2020), such as domestic and care work (Bali et al. 2019). Even when women start from the same educational level as their male partners, “gender-based inequalities in their quality of employment develop and consolidate over time” (Riaño 2021, p. 9). Another case of inequality with regard to educational attainment is the devaluation of qualifications obtained in countries of origin, which can lead to underemployment or, in other words, the recruitment of these women into work that requires a lower level of skill than they possess (Carangio et al. 2021; Gomes 2018; Riaño 2021) with the negative implications that this has in terms of remuneration and other working conditions.

Furthermore, Njaramba et al. (2018) based on Kermond et al. (1991), indicate that an inadequate level of education or training may constitute a barrier to female entrepreneurship “and an obstacle to growth and survival for existing entrepreneurs” (Njaramba et al. 2018, p. 4). Njaramba et al. (2018) also cites Kloosterman (2003) to point out that migrants from non-industrialised countries, who start their business in advanced economies without the necessary financial funds and academic qualifications, can set up businesses in specific sectors “of the urban economies that allow... small-scale labour-intensive [production], mainly low-skilled” (p. 1057). Or, as highlighted by Osorio-García-De-Oteyza et al. (2020), there are success stories of women migrants with low levels of education who, thanks to previous experience in their countries of origin, are able to set up transnational businesses, taking advantage of other circumstances such as capitalising on migratory flows from the family network.

Another important aspect is that a gender gap still exists in certain countries that prevents girls from accessing education on equal terms with boys. This can be exemplified in the study by Gomes (2018), which shows that this gap is significant in Ethiopia, both in primary and secondary education.

While a low level of education may limit women migrants’ access to the labour market, at the other extreme, a high level may discourage women migrants from self-



employment, as they feel more prepared to compete in the labour market for better-valued jobs ([Raimi et al. 2023](#)). For those who decide to create their own business, according to [Osorio-García-De-Oteyza et al. \(2020\)](#), a high level of education and professional experience can be useful to “exploit their skills, bi-culturalism and transnational networks” (p. 43). This statement coincides with the theoretical contributions of [Homel \(2022\)](#), who points out that the intersection of women migrants’ human capital with their age, origin and marital status influences their role as entrepreneurs and the mechanisms by which they establish networks. Therefore, in one way or another, as [Raimi et al. \(2023\)](#) point out, based on [Hindle et al. \(2009\)](#), the level of education is decisive to the entrepreneurial intentions.

If they decide not to start a business but want to improve their chances of access to employment or their working conditions, they can combine work and studies, requiring hourly availability as shown in the study by [Bali et al. \(2019\)](#), economic resources and a situation in which their immigration status does not prevent them from doing so ([Homel 2022](#)).

In addition to improving their level of education, it is important for them to master the language of the destination country. The inability to speak and understand this language may constitute a barrier ([Homel 2022](#); [Njaramba et al. 2018](#); [Raimi et al. 2023](#); [Hapugoda 2022](#)) both in the general integration of the migrant person and in terms of employability, in particular. The lack of language proficiency also serves to mark out the differences between nationals and immigrants ([Homel 2022](#)). With regard to employability, the negative consequences of language can be mitigated, for example, when engaging in self-employment or entrepreneurship.

Information and Communication Technologies—ICTs—represent another type of knowledge that is becoming more and more necessary, as evidenced by [Osorio-García-De-Oteyza et al. \(2020\)](#), for example, in the case of women wishing to conduct transnational business.

Continuing with human capital, professional experience is another aspect to consider in the employability of women migrants. Thus, both agencies and employers may consider such experience to be necessary or not among women candidates for vacancies. For example, [Farris’ \(2020\)](#) study points out that London’s largest domestic employment and care agencies, which act as intermediaries between potential workers and clients with high purchasing power, may not provide training to women workers if it is not expected to be a requirement in recruitment. On the contrary, smaller agencies aimed at a more economically modest client base, provide training but focus on efficiency, to optimise processes so that workers can perform more tasks in less time, which results in worse conditions for workers, such as an increase in work stress.

Previous experience can also influence the decision to start a business, since women migrants might aspire to do so in a sector they already know and in which they want to continue developing their professional career ([Homel 2022](#)). In contrast, [Njaramba et al. \(2018\)](#) based on [Lerner et al. \(1997\)](#), and [Raimi et al. \(2023\)](#), citing [Smith-Hunter \(2006\)](#), point out that the lack of prior experience can be a disadvantage to start a business in the destination country, especially for women migrants from developing countries.

In view of the above, it is inappropriate and simplistic to attribute women migrants’ work trajectories solely to their own individuality since more formal barriers, such as institutional ones or those derived from the labour market, are strongly affected by socio-cultural factors, especially because of gender and sociocultural and historical constructs associated with the origin of women migrants.

#### 4. Discussion

This systematised review focuses on identifying and analysing the factors that influence the possibilities of finding work, self-employment or entrepreneurship. By work we have referred to paid work since, as feminist studies have been arguing for years, men and women have worked throughout history but with the difference that men have been paid and women have not, depending on whether the work has been conducted in

the public or private sphere (England and Lawson 2005), and with consequences such as lack of economic autonomy, lack of influence and decision-making power for women (Salazar et al. 2022; citing Dutt et al. 2016; Majlesi 2016; Rojas 2010).

This review of recent literature has shown how, in relation to the employability of women migrants, lines of research have focused particularly on domestic employment and the repercussions of the precariousness of this sector for the women it employs. This is because it is one of the sectors with the highest demand in countries with a high level of population ageing, lack of state intervention to meet these needs, a high participation of national women in the labour market and a lack of male co-responsibility, which leads many women migrants to occupy the role of caregivers derived from traditional gender mandates when they do not find other professional opportunities, sometimes because of their level of education or because they cannot prove their human capital in the destination country (Moreno-Colom et al. 2016).

However, it is necessary to promote the labour mobility of women migrants to other sectors (Oso and Parella 2012) and, to do this, progress must be made in the scientific field to address this complex and multidimensional phenomenon.

According to Esteban et al. (2011), the theoretical approaches that have tried to explain the differences in career paths between natives and foreigners in a country can be roughly summarised in three: human capital theories that emphasise the importance of individual characteristics of workers, especially educational level, and professional skills; labour market segmentation theories; and the third explanation, which arises from gender analysis.

It was traditionally thought—for example with the human capital theory—that a good level of education translated into better job opportunities and that it could facilitate social elevation. However, in the case of women migrants, as reflected in this review and in research such as Bussemakers et al. (2017), education plays a very important role in women's employment and empowerment but the “economic, political and socio-cultural contexts moderate the impact of education” (p. 33). Even such economic or political characteristics, as shown in this review, are permeated by historical and sociocultural constructs, such as gender or those related to the ethnic-racial or national origin of women migrants.

The focus of this review on migrant women's employability is more akin to theories of labour market segmentation and analyses from a gender perspective.

Bauder's (2001) review of the scientific literature on segmentation theories reveals those supply-side processes—such as education, occupational skills, occupational preferences, etc.—trap women, especially those from minority and working-class backgrounds, in the lower segments of the labour market.

According to Bauder (2001), under the notion of the ‘social nature of labour’, the social division of labour takes place first in the social sphere and then spills over into the labour sphere, through the intervention of “policies, practices and institutions that reproduce social inequality” (p. 39). This approach would be in line with the analysis of factors identified in recent literature that affect employability, as subordinate relations, for example on the basis of gender or migrant status, affect all spheres of daily life and permeate the working conditions of migrant women.

In relation to gender, this systematised review provides some examples of how gender socialisation, i.e., the norms, roles and expectations that women and men assimilate and incorporate into their self-concepts and that guide their behaviours based on what is expected according to their assigned sex (Espinár 2007), affects the employability of women migrants. These examples are related to the socio-occupational consequences of gender socialisation for women, as Olivares and Olivares (2012) point out: low job prospects, difficulty in reconciling their work and personal life as they would like, job stratification towards feminised sectors or obstacles to promotion, among other factors. In this sense, for example, the study conducted by Ataide (2019) and that of Riaño (2021) exemplify one of the behavioural consequences derived from gender identity observed by Katz (1986), the professional choice to work in labour niches considered appropriate for them.

As noted by [Carangio et al. \(2021, p. 91\)](#), “gender is a common site of struggle” for all women but what makes the integration of women migrants especially difficult is the subordination that exists by ethnicity. Both gender identities and those related to origin have been the factors highlighted most often by the studies analysed in their explanations of the professional trajectories of women migrants, while [Kwok \(2020\)](#), [Riaño \(2021\)](#) and [Hapugoda \(2022\)](#) also point to religious identity as an influential factor in job success.

On the other hand, although this analysis of the literature has not considered the ethnic particularities of the women participating in the studies analysed, since it is focused on the structural factors and inequalities that can commonly interfere in the professional trajectories of women migrants, it is necessary for social actors and employers to analyse their particular impact in their contexts, taking into account the diversity of women in their territory and the inequalities they face, in order to adopt specific measures to improve their employability.

Although it can be established, in a general way, that the three most important social inequalities for women migrants are those derived from their gender, origin and socio-economic status ([Antón 2013](#)), it is necessary for scientific knowledge to analyse the impact of others that are systematically concealed. For example, when dealing with the reality of women migrants, only cisgender women—those whose gender identity corresponds to the sex attributed to them at birth ([Pérez 2020](#))—and heterosexual women are usually taken into account, despite the fact that LGBTQ+ people—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transvestite, intersex, Queer and other identities not included in the previous ones—find themselves in a situation of greater vulnerability than that of other migrants ([Naciones Unidas 2022](#)).

Another inequality seldom addressed by the scientific literature and statistical data on female migration, including those of the present review, relates to women with functional diversity, pathologised by certain integration policies ([Díaz et al. 2019](#)). For example, in the study conducted by [Sangaramoorthy \(2019\)](#), women who participated reported how gender and race became the basis for their recruitment into certain professions, which influenced the risk of developing some form of disability due to the conditions of certain jobs, in this case crab fishing.

All of the above results in the fact that the responsibility of finding a job or starting a business should not fall solely to the person, their human capital and strategies ([Suárez 2016](#)), as deduced from some traditional concepts of employability. Rather, as [Suárez \(2014\)](#) points out, it must be a responsibility to be shared between individuals, educational institutions, governments and employers.

While education is not the only factor that explains the career paths of women migrants, since the rejection of otherness is based on sociocultural constructs, education systems can play an important role since it is the most efficient and effective way, not only to reproduce and socialise, but also to transform culture, through the different educational levels ([Duarte and Ruiz 2009](#)).

## 5. Conclusions

This systematised review contributes to recognizing the factors that have been mentioned by the literature analysed as having the capacity to influence the employability of migrant women. As [Gomes \(2018\)](#) points out, this can enrich future “quantitative analyses, providing the groundwork for equitable policies” (p. 53).

However, the major limitation of the study is to present these factors in a generalised way when they cannot represent the totality of existing cultural contexts on the supply side—women migrant workers—and on the demand side—employers in destination countries.

On the one hand, the migrant women workers, of many nationalities, who have participated in the studies are not a representative sample of their countries of origin, as these studies have mostly focused on obtaining a qualitatively representative sample. On the other hand, although the studies have been carried out in different continents, they have been developed in certain areas of Argentina, Australia, People’s Republic of China,

Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, Poland, Spain and Switzerland. The analysis of the studies can therefore reveal a number of common factors whose actual presence and degree of intensity will ultimately be determined on a case-by-case basis. For this reason, it has been pointed out above that the agents involved in the employability of migrant women must start from these factors but, in their diagnoses, they must consider the female migrant population and the contextual factors of their own territory.

Despite the initial number of employability-related studies in the databases consulted, only 13 articles met the established inclusion and exclusion criteria. Many of them did not specifically address labour market insertion, self-employment or entrepreneurship, but dealt with the issues in a circumstantial manner. All this highlights the need for further studies on the social dimension of these phenomena to overcome the gaps in immigrant women's access to employment or to facilitate their access to the upper segment of the labour market envisaged by segmentation theories.

The findings reaffirm that the employability of immigrant women is influenced by factors that go beyond human capital theories. Theories of labour market segmentation or feminist theories—such as that of double discrimination with which the analysis of the studies began—would be more in line with the findings of this review. The intersectionality of gender, ethnicity and class permeates other factors specific to individual women and contextual factors in countries of origin and destination.

This systematised review illustrates that the scientific literature approaches the employability and entrepreneurship of migrant women differently from the general population of the countries in question. Thus, while for migrant women socio-demographic data are particularly considered, for the general population the focus is on aspects such as work-based learning, business models or active labour market policies.

Human capital theories continue to be used today in scientific production to address issues related to employment or employability. While this is common in economic scholarship even in the 21st century (Quintero 2020), it is still debated with some degree of importance in the area of social sciences, even if only to be disproved as is the case in the present review. A search carried out in Scopus on 22 December 2023, using the keywords “employ\*” and “human capital theories” or “HCT” over the last decade—2014–2023—reveals that 52 documents used these terms to define their topics and, of these, 20 belong to the area of Social Sciences.

Quintero (2020) points out that one of the criticisms of one of the central ideas of human capital theory, according to which people who wish to improve their employment and economic position must act rationally in their choice of education, is that people often do not have all the necessary information that the theory assumes they need to make a decision, and that they are often not even in a position to make the decision. The latter is highlighted, for example, in the study by Gomes (2018), which notes that there is a gender gap that prevents girls from having equal access to education. It has also been mentioned in the analysis of studies that irregular administrative status in the destination country may restrict access to certain rights, for example, education.

Moreover, the conception that the responsibility for the employment and economic position of individuals rests so heavily on their investment in education leaves aside the structural and social conditions of the labour market (Tibajev 2022) that have been shown during the review. For example, migrants' education is devalued (Tibajev 2022; Farashah et al. 2023). This is pointed out, for example, in studies by Carangio et al. (2021); Gomes (2018); and Riaño (2021). Thus, in countries whose diversity management follows an assimilationist model—i.e., where immigrants are expected to substitute their cultural identity for that of the country in order to integrate (Cárdenas-Rodríguez and Terrón-Caro 2021)—the focus of nationals is, rather than on migrants' human capital, on immigrants' adaptation to codes and customs of behaviour and use of the national language (Farashah et al. 2023), which has also been highlighted in the present review.

Becker went a step further in the development of human capital theory by not only differentiating between market or productive time and leisure or unproductive time, but

also by valuing domestic or reproductive work, while at the same time reinforcing gender roles and the sexual division of labour (Anzorena 2009), an issue that is still relevant today as reflected in the narratives of the participants in the studies in the review. Becker justified wage differentials between women and men, apart from biological determinants, on the basis of women's presumably lower investment in human capital and greater investment of time in reproductive work, to the detriment of market work, as opposed to men's (Anzorena 2009). This represented patriarchal heterosexual families as efficient, given the complementarity of the couple's gender roles (Anzorena 2009). As has been shown over the years and as exemplified by Riaño's (2021) study, heterosexual couples with the same level of education have had different trajectories because of existing gender inequalities.

As Anzorena (2009) points out, human capital theories have profoundly affected women and, Becker, despite valuing domestic work, has reduced women's agency to family decisions, where the man is the head of the family.

This review shows those common factors that the recent literature considers to be involved in migrant women's employability. As exemplified throughout the text, these factors influence career decisions, albeit sometimes in different ways. This could be explained by theories such as those of Bordieu, who conceives of a person's actions as the result of a habitus (Álvarez 1996); in contrast, Archer's theory of reflexivity, which understands the internal conversation as a debate between personal concerns or projects and the conditions of the world that give rise to agency (Aedo 2014) of the female migrant population. In this sense, it would be very useful to delve deeper into the question of migrant women's agency, which, as mentioned above, has traditionally been neglected in the literature.

The studies in this review are based on other theories with a historical–structural perspective, i.e., they do not deny the conflict between different social groups with conflicting interests, such as the fragmented labour market theory (Micolta 2005). However, theories such as the push–pull theory, which, among other criticisms, does not take into account the social dimension of migration, but is based on the fact that the decision to migrate is made at the individual level (Micolta 2005), continue to be referenced. This, together with the androcentric view of migration until a few decades ago, and the study of heteropatriarchal families, makes it necessary to continue to address the employability of migrant women in future research, without forgetting the intersectionality of inequalities or discrimination based on origin, gender or class with others that have been little studied, such as functional diversity.

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