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Integration of Highly Educated Nepalese Women in the Portuguese Labour Market: Labour Market Mobility Barriers

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Department of History

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To my parents

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For all the best that is yet to come.

Abstract:

There are almost 700 highly educated Nepalese women in Portugal according to 2021 statistics. And despite being here in growing numbers, they face unique challenges in the socio-economic and systematic front when it comes to being integrated into the labour market and ensuring mobility. The main purpose of this study is to explore the barriers to labour market mobility faced by these women. For this, the research aimed at understanding migration experiences, factors affecting labour force participation and mobility, and challenges specific to these women. This study is a qualitative study relying on semi-structured interviews to understand these women's lived experiences and perspectives. Findings indicate that it is primarily the mindset of individuals and community followed by structural barriers and institutional support that hinder the labour force participation and mobility of highly educated women in jobs respective to their field of study.

Keywords: Nepalese Women, Structural Barriers, Labour Market Mobility, Mindset, Challenges

Resumo:

Residem em Portugal quase 700 mulheres Nepalesas com educação superior, de acordo com as estatísticas de 2021. E, apesar de estarem aqui em número crescente, enfrentam desafios únicos de cariz socioeconómico e sistemático quando se trata de se integrarem no mercado de trabalho e garantirem a mobilidade. O principal objetivo deste estudo é explorar as barreiras à própria mobilidade no mercado de trabalho enfrentadas por estas mulheres. Para tal, a investigação procurou compreender as experiências de migração, os fatores que afetam a participação e a mobilidade no mercado de trabalho e os desafios específicos destas mulheres. Trata-se de um estudo qualitativo baseado em entrevistas semiestruturadas que quer compreender as experiências vividas e as perspetivas dessas mulheres. Os resultados indicam que é principalmente a mentalidade dos indivíduos e da comunidade, seguida de barreiras estruturais e apoio institucional, que dificulta a participação na força de trabalho e a mobilidade das mulheres altamente qualificadas em empregos correspondentes à sua área de estudo.

Palavras-chave: Mulheres Nepalesas, Barreiras Estruturais, Mobilidade no Mercado de Trabalho, Mentalidade, Desafios.

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Abbreviations

AIMA - Associação de Imigrantes e Minorias Asiáticas (Association of Asian Immigrants and Minorities)

CNAI - Centro Nacional de Apoio ao Imigrante (National Immigrant Support Center)

DGES - Direção-Geral do Ensino Superior (Directorate-General for Higher Education)

EU - European Union

IEFP - Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional (Institute for Employment and Vocational Training)

INE - Instituto Nacional de Estatística (National Institute of Statistics)

MIPEX - Migrant Integration Policy Index

NIALP - Intercultural Association Lisboa, Portugal

NWAP - Nepalese Women Association Portugal

NIF - Número de Identificação Fiscal (Tax Identification Number)

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

NRNA - Non-Resident Nepalese Association

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PCM - Presidency of the Council of Ministers

PALOP - Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa (Portuguese-speaking African Countries)

PPDM - Plataforma Portuguesa para os Direitos das Mulheres

SEF - Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras (Foreigners and Borders Service)

TRC - Título de Residência para Cidadãos (Residence Permit for Citizens)

Chapter 1: Introduction

This study aims to understand the Integration of a segment of the population that is normally overshadowed by politicians and the media: educated Nepalese women. Even though they are still a minority, especially in the first generation, given the patriarchal practices of Nepalese society, the diaspora of Nepalese women is gaining a new role, pushed by globalization and adaptation to Western cultures.

1.1 Background and Research Rationale

As a female Nepalese immigrant student in Europe since 2018, I lived in two countries so far. Denmark (2 years) and Portugal (4 years). In my span of stay in Denmark, and studying in one of the most reputed universities, it was incredibly challenging for me to integrate myself, to feel motivated or included in society from a social as well as professional perspective. The barriers to integrating successfully were incredibly tough, ranging from language, job availability, types of jobs, as well as resources available to help me as an immigrant in terms of equality of opportunities.

As for Portugal, my experiences are contradictory to those of Denmark. Be it in school or trying to find myself a job in the labour market. Portugal has been more welcoming, and I feel I am more integrated to the society in terms of language, having friends, alignment with governmental rules, and availability of resources and opportunities. This has also helped me to integrate further into the labour market and find an internship or job that fits my expectations and ambitions.

Since there are many Nepalese immigrants in Portugal, I was and am motivated to understand how well the integration of other Nepalese women in the labour market and their experiences as a non-EU immigrant woman is. From personal experience, there are many Nepalese women in Portugal with a higher level of education achieved from the country of origin, as well as from other European countries, where they resided before coming to Portugal. Therefore, I approached this study with a gendered lens to understand how well the integration of highly educated Nepalese women is in Portugal in terms of their mobility within the job market, followed by the understanding of the effectiveness of labour market policies in place in Portugal.

The gendered research on mobility and migration has been in the picture for a long time in the European context. While much research on Asian communities in Europe has gained academic attention, often it lacks studies on specific groups such as the Nepalese population (Bajracharya, 2015; Schieckoff & Sprengholz, 2021, Perfeito, 2021). In the case of Nepal,

Portugal is one of the most popular destinations for its citizens who are planning their stay in Europe. There is some research done on Nepalese migration in Portugal and family dynamics over recent years (Pereira, 2023a). However, there is limited research done to understand the labour market success in terms of the mobility of these women, therefore, as Cachado (2014) notes in a similar context, there is a need for understanding vertical and horizontal mobility in the job market in the context of Hindu Gujaratis in the UK and Lisbon.

According to data from SEF, as of 2022, there are a total of 23,839 Nepalese residing in Portugal of which 8,817 are women. In 2021, there were 13,607 males and 7,938 females Nepalese residing in Portugal. The below figure shows the steady increase in the number of Nepalese populations in Portugal over the years:

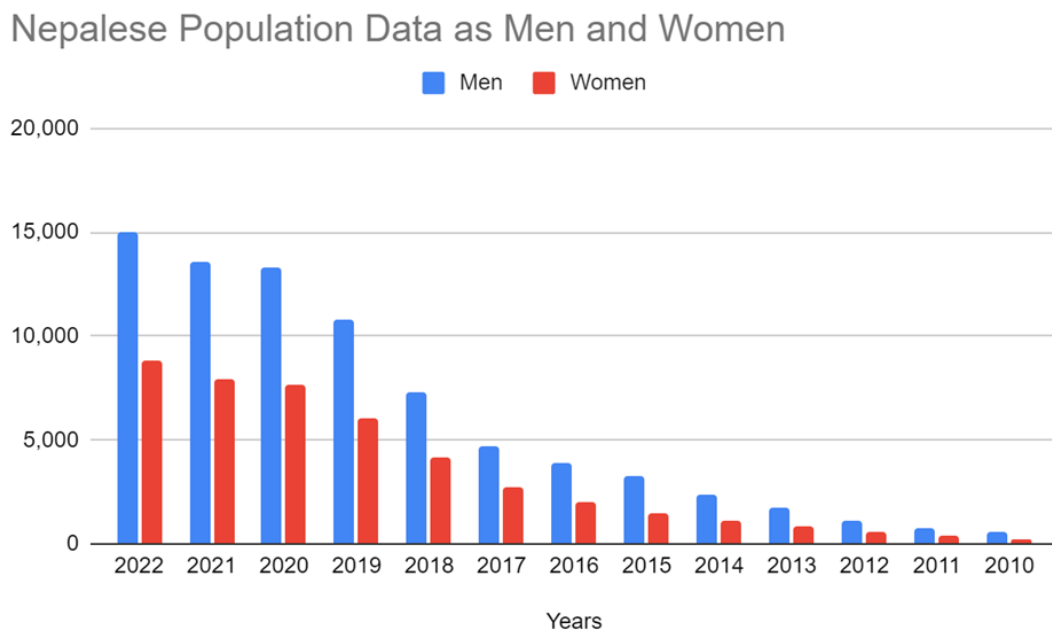


Figure 1: Population of Nepalese in Portugal over the years (SEFSTAT Data)

While these people travel primarily from other European countries to Portugal, there is also a growing trend of people arriving from Nepal directly. While on a conversation with the chairman of the Consulate of Nepal in Lisbon in July 2024, it was suggested that most of the Nepalese people arrive in Portugal from Denmark and Cyprus. It becomes clear that these countries change according to the Immigration legislation enforced in each and with the Immigrant's own perceptions and word-to-mouth:

“Many people are coming through Poland because it’s the easiest way now... but also others from Israel, Dubai.... Denmark, as we have many students there, north Europe... (Ram2, male, 32)”
(Pereira et al., 2021).

While there is a lack of clear data on how many of these people were undergraduates or graduates, one can rely on the trend that about 30% of women who arrive in Portugal asked for equivalence of their degree and translation in the past 2 years. Following this feedback, we investigated the most recent Census done in Portugal (2021). According to INE requested data, 668 Nepalese women have received University education and reside in Portugal. These highly educated women, typically arrive in Portugal from Denmark and Cyprus.

Country	Basic Education 1st, 2nd, 3rd cycle		University Education	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Portugal	1,630	1,132	999	668

Table 1: Number of Nepalese students according to their level of education (2021: INE Census)

1.2 Research Question and Objectives

This study focuses on understanding the success of labour market integration and mobility within the Portuguese labour market. Therefore, this research aims to answer the following question: How are educated Nepalese women navigating through barriers of labour market mobility in the Portuguese labour market?

To answer the above research question, it is important to explore the objectives below:

1. Understand the integration experience of Nepalese women who completed at least their undergraduate degree.
2. Understand the factors that influence labour force participation and mobility.
3. Understand the challenges and barriers faced by Nepalese women in terms of job market and mobility.

1.3 Structure of the Study

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first is the introductory chapter to the research inclusive of the background of the study, research rationale and objectives. The second chapter explores a broad literature review of the different concepts of migration integration and factors of integration of Nepalese women. The chapter also sheds light on the barriers to labour market

integration. The third chapter consists of the methodology, where the research design, strategy, sampling, and data collection methods are explained. The fourth chapter consists of the findings and analysis of the data from semi-structured interviews and literature review, alongside secondary data collected from statistical sources such as SEF (AIMA) and INE. The concluding chapter aims to conclude the research with the highlights of the major findings and an outlook towards to the future.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Analytical Framework

2.1 Labour Market Mobility: Immigrant Women in the EU

Labour market mobility is, by definition, the ability of employees or workers to be able to move freely between different jobs, job sectors and geographic locations within a labour market. This encompasses both vertical and horizontal mobility. Vertical mobility refers to moving up one's career ladder to higher positions or roles with more responsibility and higher compensation while doing so. Horizontal mobility refers to the ability to move between jobs of similar status or within the same field of work. The key elements of labour market mobility are the transferability of skills, opportunities for career progression/development, flexibility, and adaptability of workers to adapt to changing labour market conditions and legal and regulatory laws/policies that facilitate or hinder mobility.

Labour market mobility, according to MIPEX, can qualify as only as much as half favourable when it comes to promoting equal quality employment for the longer run with a score of 49 out of 100. Within the EU, there are many countries where permanent residents alongside their family members can access the labour market, training, and social security. But that does not ensure full equality in rights and access to opportunities in the labour market. There are provisions and processes in place where immigrants can have their academic qualifications recognised and depend on public employment services as equal to national citizens, however, the support gap makes the process difficult and adds complexity, especially for women and youth who are within the more vulnerable groups.

The Labour Market Mobility score for Portugal is 94 (MIPEX, 2019). As per MIPEX, labour market integration is a phenomenon that occurs over time and is dependent on the general national policies, context of migration, skills, and reasons for migration of the immigrants. There is a possibility that certain effective employment policies are new and niche to reach and benefit many non-EU residents regardless of their gender, especially the ones who barely seek access to training and benefits. Pereira et al. (2021) also mention that of the Nepalese migrants interviewed

in their studies, most of them had a good qualification, nevertheless, because of a lack of language and being undocumented or being in procedures, they face major setbacks in terms of integration to the Portuguese labour market. Moreover, they are mostly involved in agriculture especially if they come from professional networks and have faced downward professional mobility.

For non-EU citizens, labour immigration channels such as the Blue Card and student migration emphasise the EU's focus on global competition. Nevertheless, these channels are restrictive such that family migration or reunification remains one of the most popular paths for migrants outside of the EU (de Haas et al., 2020). Since the Second World War, the migration flow in Europe has been influenced by labour migration and humanitarian reasons alongside family reunification, and at the present day, it is also necessary to address other motives such as higher education being one of the influential factors (King, 2002).

The most recent Migration Outlook Report (OECD, 2023) concludes that “compared to native-born mothers, the employment of immigrant mothers is more sensitive to the number and age of children, suggesting that they face higher childcare constraints” (p.4) and they normally have kids sooner which increases the importance of policies related to childcare (maternity/paternity leave, other examples...) which is something that is normally unaddressed in public policy.

2.2 Socio-Economic Integration: Concepts and Theories

Migrant integration is one of the most debated and complex concepts to define. The interpretation differs from actor to actor in several layers with diverse meanings about social and geographical nuances, especially among politicians and researchers (Esteves et al., 2018). Often, migrant adaptation, inclusion and incorporation are synonymously applied for migrant integration. In terms of immigration, the skilled labour force in industrialised nations has played a crucial role in building competitiveness and growth in the global economy through economic development alongside innovation.

Integration in social studies is a descriptive and broader term especially when it emphasises the cohesion of bigger entities as opposed to in practice, when it is often equated with the assimilation of immigrants in the host nation and society. The outcomes of integration of immigrants, while the debate stands on assimilation, cannot be assessed in the absence of a reference group, therefore a concept of socio-economic integration is adopted with the understanding of assimilation of immigrant labour market outcomes to certain natives and Nationalities (Schieckoff and Sprengholz, 2021). In terms of the socio-economic integration of migrants, it is a multi-dimensional process involving both structural, as well as individual factors,

especially when talking about South Asian immigrants. In this case, the integration entails a multitude of factors such as access to health, employment, healthcare, housing, social conduct and participation and education. Moreover, the labour market participation of migrants is intricately linked with other factors of participation and integration, including culture, housing, social and educational concerns which highlights their importance to succeeding labour market integration (Brekke and Borchgrevink, 2007).

Schieckoff and Sprengholz (2021) did a quantitative study with empirical findings on immigrant women in Europe (2002-2020) based on labour force participation, employment and working hours and employment quality. They found that although empirical evidence often supports the theoretically relevant determinants of immigrant women's labour market integration, the degree to which these factors fully explain their labour market experiences varies significantly across different studies. This variability highlights the need for more systematic and comparative research that considers the complex interplay of individual and contextual factors. Another remarkable note was that quantitative studies that adopt a comprehensive approach to examining the labour market disadvantages faced by immigrant women - considering all aspects related to their gender and immigrant status - are uncommon in the existing literature. Future research should focus on addressing this gap.

Immigration itself is a selective process, and labour market participation is another stage of selectivity, especially for women. Only a subset of the reviewed studies on labour market success accounts for selection into labour force participation in their estimates. Selection effects extend further, as data on immigrant outcomes can be biased due to remigration or naturalization (if immigrants are only classified by nationality). Although this type of selection is recognised as important for female immigrant labour market outcomes (see, e.g., Dustmann and Görlach, 2015), its gendered effects are rarely addressed in empirical research. In this segment of the chapter, we closely review the different integration concepts and theories and explore the existing literature on South Asian and Nepalese women corresponding to the established notions.

2.2.1 Labour Market Assimilation Theory

The theory of assimilation suggests that the immigrants will, in time, adapt to the cultural values and norms of the host nation, leading to full assimilation over the years. It also emphasises on cultural integration, including the capacity of Immigrants to immerse and adopt the different emblems of culture, such as the languages, customs, and societal norms of the host nation. The labour market assimilation hypothesis, aligning with the assimilation theory, suggests that over time, depending on how much the immigrant integrates to the host society, he/she will be able to improve their socio-economic situation, such as employment outcomes including better jobs and

salaries. The foundation of the theory lies in the idea on the acquisition of human capital ranging from language and education, to work experience by immigrants, leading them to be more competitive in the labour market for more secure jobs. This also includes the likelihood of having high-paying jobs. However, contradicting to this thought are other researchers who believe social factors influencing the labour market integration, such as lack of social connections, economic restructuring and prevalence of discrimination or discriminatory practices.

The above theory has been applied in multiple nations in the Western and Southern European nations to understand whether migrant women's labour market outcomes align with native-born counterparts over time. The studies on above have shown convergence hypothesis (for instance, Convergence of LFPR in the USA) while also contrary outcomes (in the case of Canada in the 1970s) thereby moving towards alternative theories. One of the main patterns of divergence is seen when migrant women initially contribute to family capital to support their husbands and later are more inclined towards family roles. The divergence also calls for a deeper understanding of the factors that lead to varied paths of migrant women's involvement in the labour market compared to native-born women (Rendall et al., 2008).

In terms of Nordic countries such as Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, in political sphere, the assimilation theory is more prevalent, as immigrants are expected to make more effort to adapt (Brekke and Borchgrevink, 2007). The labour market integration policies are like assimilation policies where the immigrant population becomes increasingly like the majority population measured against a list of indicators. The concept of assimilation, in this case, has more of a negative connotation as informants in the study used it to explain a state of being unwanted, avoided and only sometimes something worth to seek for. Moreover, it is thus stated in this theory, that immigrants stay disadvantaged in the labour market in comparison to the natives, even though they have matched education level and have previous work experience; and the labour market outcomes become similar to the natives only when they stay longer in the host country and earn capital with relevance to the new labour market (Schieckof & Sprengholz, 2021). This includes education and work experience, alongside the language of the host country, and success means establishing social networks and other sociocultural capital.

In the context of Nepalese in Portugal, a study done by Maharjan (2020) on young students and their parents in Portugal showed that the need for assimilation was rather an obligation to receive Portuguese nationality, especially by the fathers of the family to bring in their spouses and children. Moreover, their research also suggested that people had more positive affirmation towards Portugal, especially if they were living here above 7 to 8 years of their lives. In terms of integration, the study concluded that for the reasons of attaining a Portuguese passport and within that process, Nepalese migrants were adhering to labour market policies such as

taxation systems, learning language or even opening small businesses as a way of life. The study also concluded that it is likely that people will stay committed to Portugal and not move from the nation as a transition given the people feel content over time. Another interesting finding was that Nepalese who learned the language over time, tend to have better experience, and integrated better into the Portuguese society, including the job market.

In the context of Nepalese women in the Portuguese labour market, this hypothesis provides a solid framework to assess the challenges that they face when they are entering the job market, including but not limited to, language barriers, issues in recognition of their foreign university certifications and work experience. Nonetheless, it does not fully embrace the complexity of dynamics that determine the outcomes in the labour market for these women, for example, how gender is associated with the ethnicity and class that shapes their experiences.

2.2.2 Labour Market Segmentation and Segmentation Assimilation Theory

The concept of labour market segmentation dates to the early 1970s during works done by American industrial sociologists who emphasised the division of the labour market into two parts. The first with lower wages, fewer career opportunities and poor working conditions, while the second is higher salaries, growth in career and better working situations. The segregation theory is rooted in the idea that employers might be biased against immigrants' skills and suggests that immigrant workers are likely to face segregation and exclusion from the labour market. Segregation manifests in many different forms, including but not limited to, low access to job opportunities from professions or industries, limited mobility in levelling up in the job market and being concentrated to low-skill-low-paying jobs.

The segmented assimilation theory was introduced in 1993 by Portes and Zhou. They concluded that immigrants experience a variety of assimilation depending on their social status, racial identity, country of origin and the nature of interaction they have in the host economy and society. The theory emphasises that some immigrants, or even immigrant groups are fortunate to have upward mobility and integration into the host culture and community, while others lack integration, face marginalisation and can be stuck in disadvantaged situations.

This theory is relevant in the study of Nepalese women in the Portuguese labour market as it assists in understanding the impact of social status alongside social identity on the future and experience in the labour market. As an example, these women with higher qualifications, experience and better networking in Portugal are likely to have a higher probability of integrating better than their counterparts who have lesser qualifications, networking, and job experience. As a result, there is a possibility to have upward mobility in their jobs and professional journey. On the other hand, those who lack these resources are likely to accept low-paying, low-skilled jobs

such as restaurant service, housekeeping and cleaning jobs, like most of their networks are involved.

2.2.3 Feminist Migration Theory

Feminist Migration scholars have identified numerous patterns regarding the push and pull economic factors that shape the migration experiences for women, as compared to their male counterparts. The feminist migration theory analyses the experience of migration from a gendered lens. This theoretical framework focuses on the importance of comprehending the complexity and intersectionality of many different social factors including gender, class, race, and country of origin.

For instance, some industries majorly depend on hiring women workers, however, have not expanded the advantages for women to access social networks. The opportunities immigrant women can access are limited by both the host and home country. It is found that immigrant women's livelihood is impacted more by their home cultural norms than their own human capital capacity.

Within the area of feminist migration, scholars have found two intriguing aspects in their research. Firstly, the employers' preferences for immigrant women labour force and secondly, the impact on the power of women in their families, post labour market participation. For instance, when it comes to domestic care services, light manufacturing and service industries, employers have shown a preference for immigrant women as opposed to male counterparts (Kofman et al., (2005); Schieckoff and Sprengholz (2021)). The reason for this is that immigrant women are much easier to exploit than native men and women. Moreover, these preferences are accommodated by institutions in the sending countries which only support the segregation of immigrant men and women in particular occupations.

Some studies argue that some women usually migrate from one patriarchal system to another where they face barriers to autonomy in the host country (Boyd and Grieco, 2003) but have better access to opportunities and bigger ways to negotiate for higher power (Kofman et al., 2005). The feminisation of migration is the rising trend of women migrating from their home countries independently to other nations in search of better opportunities, education, family reunification and fleeing away from abusive households. As observed in the feminist migration scholarship, economic factors such as the rise in demand for female labour force in a particular service or industry is one of the leading driving forces (Kofman et al., 2005). The complexity poses challenges as well such as gender-based discrimination in the host nations as well that limits their access to services such as health care and legal aid about their gender and migrant status. This is prevalent and reflected in South Asian women in Portugal as well, even though there is

limited study done directly in this regard. These women face discrimination and marginalisation because of their gender, nationality, ethnicity, origin, and migration status, along with their qualifications (Pereira et al., 2023). This has pushed them historically into low-paid and less secure jobs. Unfortunately, this promotes economic and social exclusion. Another important aspect to notice is feminisation of migration, opposing the conventional gender roles and family constructs that, on one hand, lead to a rise in economic empowerment of women, and on the other, lead them to be exposed to risks and concerns about their expected gender roles.

2.2.4 Social Capital Theory and Implications

Social Capital refers to the notion that relationships and networks that people share can be an asset, producing favourable outcomes for those involved in the relationship. Grace Kao (2004) mentions Coleman on social capital as comprising three forms of resources that shape the structure of relations among individuals and groups. In terms of implications for immigrants, the three interrelated resources are i) obligations and expectations, ii) information channels and iii) social norms. Immigrant groups tend to have relationships based on the groups they are part of, which requires higher obligations, alongside expectations because of the relative isolation from the greater society that entails. The individuals communicate knowledge and understanding from within and thus, the structure of the relationship builds the type of information being shared amongst themselves.

The immigrant members have lower access to information that is easily available to the natives, thanks to language barriers and limited contact. This limits the access to information available to the group communications. Milroy (1987) shares that the social network one has is broadly of two categories: closed and open networks. In the closed network, many people recognise others and have high interaction while having lesser contact with what is beyond defined connections. When it comes to the open network, people move beyond their territorial boundaries. Milroy also added two factors that define these networks: high and low density. In a high-density closed network, the group is likely to offer equivalent help when in need, since exchange and obligations are crucial in these networks. In contrast, the open network does not necessarily expect the reciprocity of these offers and help (Wei, 2020). However, the onset of globalisation and developments of technology in telecom, have challenged the idea of physical social networks within a community or territory. Moreover, contributing to this phenomenon is transnationalism amongst individuals, allowing them to connect and communicate across nation-state boundaries (Wei, 2020).

A study done by Pereira (2022), mentions that Nepalese migrants negotiate their sense of belongingness and respond to racial discrimination by the adoption of diasporic identity of

themselves while building transnational social aspects between Nepal and Portugal. This diasporic identity is maintained by a connection to the country of origin, people and history which causes incomplete integration into Portugal. Moreover, developing group identity conscience and staying close to members of other EU communities from Nepal leads not only to conforming to their norms but also to withdrawing from the host country. They leverage highly on their social capital.

In another study by Pereira et al. (2022), they analysed the establishment and consolidation of the formal (intermediary agencies) and informal (friends and acquaintances) networks that influenced the Nepalese immigrants working in farms and agriculture. Their paper highlights that most Nepalese working in the southern farms of Portugal arrived in the country via contracting or recruitment agencies. Later, the stronger ties between them made an impact on their job and employment capacity.

Unfortunately, most of the responses in this study highlighted that they were deceived and had not been delivered what they were promised upon arrival while facing tremendous struggles to do paperwork and bureaucratic issues. Meanwhile, this also meant that the sources of arrival were not credible and were exploiting these people, many of which transnational human trafficking networks. However, people tend to accept this tendency as their fate and play along to pay for their debts/financial burdens and enjoy Western life. In their paper, even if there were diverse Nepalese migrants mostly from middle-class families with good education levels, were relegated to agriculture in Portugal even though they worked in the services industry in the past Pereira et al. (2022).

2.3 South-Asian Immigrant Women in Europe

This section of the literature review gives an outlook on the experiences of migrant women in Europe. It covers the determinants of labour force participation, the nature of work and challenges faced by the migrant women addressed in the literature. It also gives a perspective on the gender norms that impact immigrant women from Asian communities, including Nepalese women. It is crucial to study this perspective so as to understand the present situation of Nepalese women in the Portuguese labour force from a socio-economic perspective.

Moreover, there is a stark difference between how men and women are treated and impacted when they come to the West, especially from countries like Nepal, India and the rest of South Asia. Boyd and Grieco (2003) emphasise that the post-migration stage and integration for men and women are profoundly different, as both experience resettlement quite differently from each other with the influence of three major factors: 1. The Impact of the entry status alongside

the reason for entry influences integration 2. The patterns of incorporation in the labour market and 3. The impact of migration on the status of men and women.

2.3.1 Labour Force Participation Determinants & Challenges

Migrants face many barriers while integrating into the host economy's labour market. In the beginning, there are multiple barriers including language, cultural skills, verification of their qualifications and experience from the origin nation, limited social networks, limitations posed by individuals and systematic discrimination prevalent in the host country even though these barriers narrow down as the period of stay extends (Rendall et al., 2008).

Another challenge is the lack of access to social services and support for South Asian women, which prevents them from being stronger for themselves mentally, socially, and economically, as well. The language barrier is also another factor contributing to their lack of access to services since healthcare, education, and legal services because these require them to speak the local language. Family separation has also emerged as a challenge for these women, as they travel to support their families financially. The prolonged separation from family can lead to emotional stress and a negative impact on their mental well-being.

Even though the integration policies for immigrants in Portugal are much more open as compared to other EU nations, the bureaucracy and legal status multiply the risk of exploitation of these women by employers and authorities, especially in case of a lack of documentation or work permits. Schieckoff and Sprengholz (2021) studied the disadvantages for female immigrants on two fronts: nativity and gender; and the interrelation between the two. The study by Rubin et al. (2008) indicates that the age of the youngest child and the years of the arrival of migrant women in the receiving country determine their labour force participation rates.

When it comes to skilled migrant women integrating into the labour force, they are doing worse than their male counterparts. Even with similar skills they pose surrounding medical, upper-level management, engineering, IT and physical research, there is a large disparity when individuals with better skills are often men.

2.3.2 Double Disadvantage for Migrant Women

Migrant women are challenged with double the disadvantage of gender and the fact they're migrants in the labour market. Rubin et. al (2008) emphasise unemployment, part-time work, and temporary contracts to explain the labour market's double disadvantage for being a woman and a migrant. Native-born women are much better in terms of employment as compared with migrant women from third countries. Throughout the EU, the unemployment rates of third-country

migrant women are almost 3 percentage points higher as compared to their male counterparts. A similar outcome was found by Rendall et al. (2008) where temporary contract employment is high among immigrant women in Southern European nations, while making it difficult for them to have maternity leave and childcare leading to difficulty in staying in the labour market. In terms of Portugal, in 2008, a quarter of migrant women had part-time employment status and above half in Spain. The third-world migrant women's unemployment rates are 6% higher than those of EU-born migrant women suggesting the play of other factors than migration is essential to fully grasp the labour market disadvantage to the prior group. The study by Rubin et al. (2008) also considers under and short-term employment as the most common employment disadvantage to migrant women in Southern European nations. This disadvantage is, again, higher for third-country migrants than EU or native-born.

Moreover, underemployment is also more common among migrant women than migrant men. This heightens the gender disadvantage aspect of the double disadvantage for migrant women in migrant-receiving countries. The reason behind this underemployment faced by migrant women in old migrant-receiving countries and Nordic nations is primarily due to their third-country migrant status rather than being a female in a third country.

Another aspect that has caught a lot of attention in academic research on understanding gender and racial inequalities in the labour force is the occupational segregation and concentration of migrant women. Occupational segregation in any labour market is the differentiation of professions based on gender while concentration occurs when there is a higher proportion of certain groups in particular types of occupations and sectors of employment as compared to the others in the labour market. Research done across the world suggests that migrant women employees are mostly concentrated towards certain service sector employment such as cater, domestic work, healthcare, and manufacturing. In the service sector, the demand for migrant women workers is higher in jobs that are low-skilled such as cleaning, childcare, waitressing, and housekeeping and in some high-skilled jobs such as health care workers and nurses. Hence, these are mostly low-skill-requiring sales and elementary services occupations that account for two-fifths of all these women's occupations.

Unfortunately, there are also cases where these women are involuntarily involved in prostitution because of trafficking and sexual exploitation. All this concentration in occupation limits the rights of these women as workers and decreases their mobility in the labour market as well as the probability of enhancing their career progression and perspectives.

2.3.3 Structural Challenges and Disadvantages

With regards to the level of education of migrant women, compared to EU-born migrant women and native-born counterparts, Rubin et al. (2008) suggested that having a higher level of education fosters integration into the labour force when analysed based on participation rates, employment, and unemployment rates. However, the circumstances for the third-country immigrant women are systematically traumatic compared to the other two counterparts such that, even if they are highly qualified, the unemployment rate is higher among third-country migrant women. A 2005 data portrayed that migrant women with higher qualifications are employed in low-skilled sectors than native-born counterparts and have a higher risk of unemployment. This de-skilling of third-country migrant women suggests systematic disadvantage in the EU labour force and demands the importance of measures of underemployment of these women about their skills.

Moreover, Rubin et al. (2008) suggest that, even if third-world migrant women hold a tertiary degree, the issue with recognition of foreign degrees along with attitudes towards the country of origin of these women, barriers in language and immigrants easy access to public sector jobs, lead to a lower rate of employment. Moreover, in 2007, the study of Brekke and Borchgrevink (2007) mentions the initiation of Minister of Integration Mona Sahlin to further investigate the different forms of structural discrimination in Sweden given her confirmation of the existence of structural racism in Sweden causing discrimination of immigrants.

2.3.4 Migrant Integration Policies

Addressing the labour mobility in this century, the increased flow of immigrants to the EU Member states has posed many challenges to the societies of the states. The European Commission in its Action Plan of Integration of Third Country Nationals 2016 addresses employment as a crucial element in the integration process such that inclusive labour markets are to draw on the skills of all talents.

The labour market integration has emphasised appropriate legal frameworks, increased investments considering the levels of skills of immigrants/refugees and the time taken for effective integration. Moreover, keeping an account of the multitude of public and private sector stakeholders and their coordinated efforts for sustainable results for addressing the need to integrate immigrants into the workforce.

There are many Institutions involved in the integration of migrants that help in the prosecution of policies: CNAI, Nepalese Consulate in Lisbon, NRNA and ACM, etc. Unfortunately, we cannot focus on all of them. From a political and Public Administration point of view, the bureaucratic hurdles have been a constant depiction of Portuguese Public

Administration, especially when it comes to migration. While Partido Social-Democrata has been implementing new policies in several areas (from Economy to Education and Health, for instance), and has inherited a SEF extinction and transference of certain capabilities (from ACM and administrative) towards AIMA (Cordeiro et al., 2024). Amidst political turmoil and new elections in late March have led to the renewal of many general directors and Governmental agencies such as IAPMEI and AIMA itself (Público, 2024). These effects are still being felt by immigrants, main change of which is the abolition of the Expression of Interest. The moderate right-wing government has presented an Action Plan with many measures to deal with Migration¹, including the attraction of qualified immigrants and strengthening. This plan also acknowledges Portugal's need for migrants, and problems women have in accessing public services such as health (PCM, 2024) but fails to give more detailed support to any specific diasporas, while also giving what some call privileged treatment to PALOP countries.

Rendall et al. (2008) note that the labour market integration of women in the host country depends also on whether their political environment is “migrant inclusive” or “migrant exclusive”. For instance, it is exclusive in France, that migrant women have less access to public sector jobs because of citizens only and age restrictions.

From a down-up perspective, what we see when we look at the type of female and gender-based NGOs collaborating with Immigrants is that some have a Nationality or ethnicity basis. Sometimes both. That might be related to the cultural specificities of each Diaspora. But there also appear to exist generalist ones, such as the Lisbon Project and Mulher migrant - that give more transversal support. The role of NGO's leadership also seems important, especially in terms of descriptive representation and atonement with realities and many of these leaderships are female (As far as we're concerned, the only ones that haven't got a female leadership are the Bangladeshi Association).

As predicted, there are plenty of NGOs from PALOP countries: Cabo Verde, Brazil, and Guinea-Bissau, but also newer NGOs that try to support Immigrants from newer Immigration waves, like South Asian. Especially when there's little Diplomatic support from their countries, like it's the case with Nepal and Bangladesh (in this country there's no consulate, but in Portugal, there's an embassy), these NGOs do very important work advocating for these Communities interests, while also trying to solve their problems and raise political attention, whilst lobbying for reforms (Duarte & Pimenta, 2024). *Casa da India*, NIALP (Intercultural Association Lisboa,

¹ Presidency of the Council of Ministers (2024). Can be accessed at:
<https://www.portugal.gov.pt/downloadficheiros/ficheiro.aspx?v=%3D%3DBQAAAB%2BLCAAAAAABAAzNDEysQAASnPtQUAAAA%3D>

Portugal) and *Associação Comunidade do Bangladesh* are examples of grass-roots NGOs that work on migrants' integration into the labour market through a set of strategies, communication, advocacy, and policies.

NIALP, which is more relevant to this study, has existed since 2019. It was created during the Pandemic, hence later when compared to the other two South-Asian NGOs (Borelli, 2021). According to its website, the objectives are to “Promote and celebrate Nepali and South Asian cultures, religions, and practices within the Nepalese community residing in Portugal”².

The most recent PPDM's report (Silva & Fernandes, 2020), which aggregates 29 Women-focused NGO's, concludes that budgets are insufficient and limited and funding is unpredictable and unreliable. These organizations offer a whole services like legal and psycho-social support to women in situations of human traffic, prostitution, violence); Safe houses and specialized support in crisis; Lobbying and political pressure and also dedicate to Research and knowledge production. NGO's have the right to participate on the definition of the big guidelines of legislation in the promotion of women's rights (Silva & Fernandes, 2020).

Specific to Nepalese-women-centred NGOs and communities, one of them is the Nepalese Women Association Portugal (NWAP). After reaching out to one of the active members, it was clear that the organisation is trying their best since their establishment in 2014 to organise events and support programs for Nepalese women in need during their unemployment period, organising events for children and for celebratory events. However, they have not been able to progress in supporting or connecting with highly educated women individuals and groups. One of the issues they also presented was political interests and divisions within the organisation that prevent unity towards achieving a higher goal. However, with new leadership coming forth in 2025, the organisation aims to include and reach out to educated women and initiate programs centred on employment.

2.3.5 Nepalese Immigration and Integration

Before the 1970s, Portugal was a country of emigration. With the independence of its colonies and the arrival of people from countries such as the Republic of Cabo Verde, Guinea Bissau and Angola, the picture changed. Presently, it is a popular destination for immigrants all over the world. In the 21st century, immigrants from Asian nations including China, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal are significant. Apart from the similarity in the origin geographically, these nations have similar socio-economic integration. This comprises a range from small and micro

² Can be accessed at: <https://nialp.pt/introduction/>

enterprises, self-employment in services and hospitality to working in low and medium-skilled enterprises and agriculture.

Going back to the year 2000, only two Nepalese were granted permanent residence permits, the trend has been rising ever since. The most significant rise in the number of residence permits granted can be observed in 2006 and 2008, the reason for immigration laws that facilitate. However, there have been recent changes by *Partido Social-Democrata* in regulations and laws, namely about the interest manifestation, as we've mentioned.

Historically, most of the arrivals were from China, India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, however, in 2012, Nepal with fourth largest community instead of Bangladesh. With more recent historical statistical data for Nepalese residing in Portugal, their population has risen from a total of 797 in 2010 AD to 23,839 by 2022. The highest years of inflow were in 2011, 2012 and 2014.

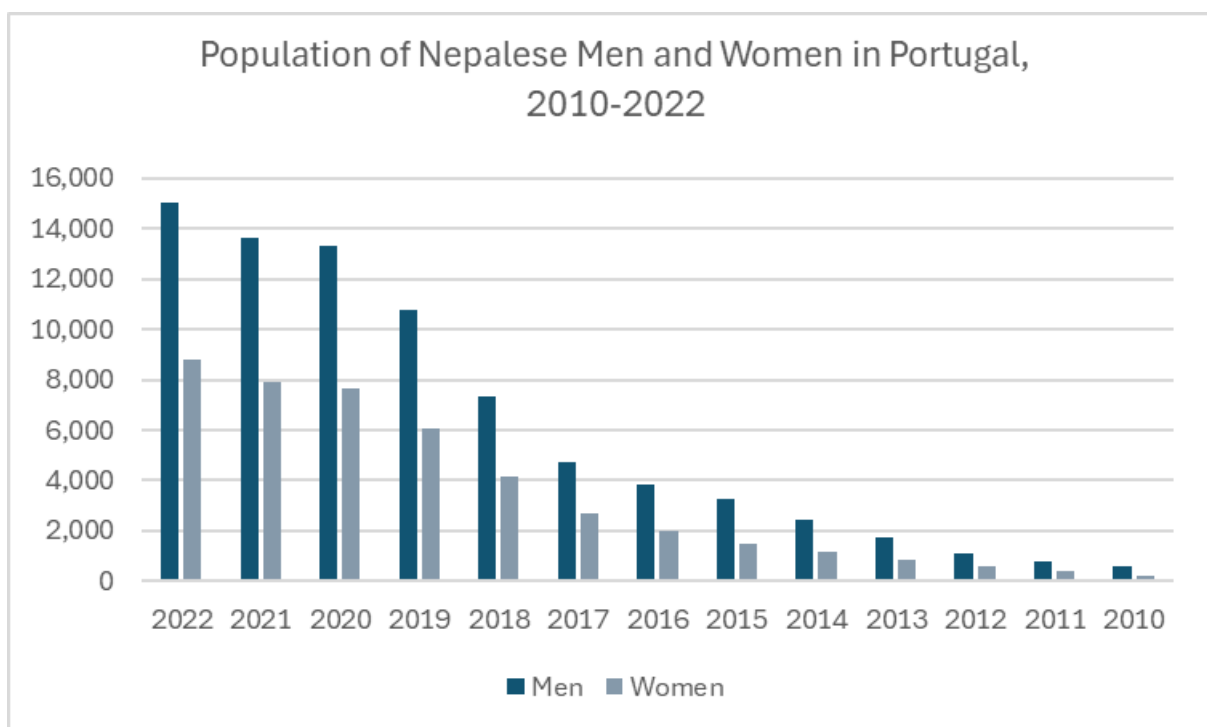


Figure 2: SEF Data, Population of Nepalese Men and Women Residing in Portugal 2010 - 2022

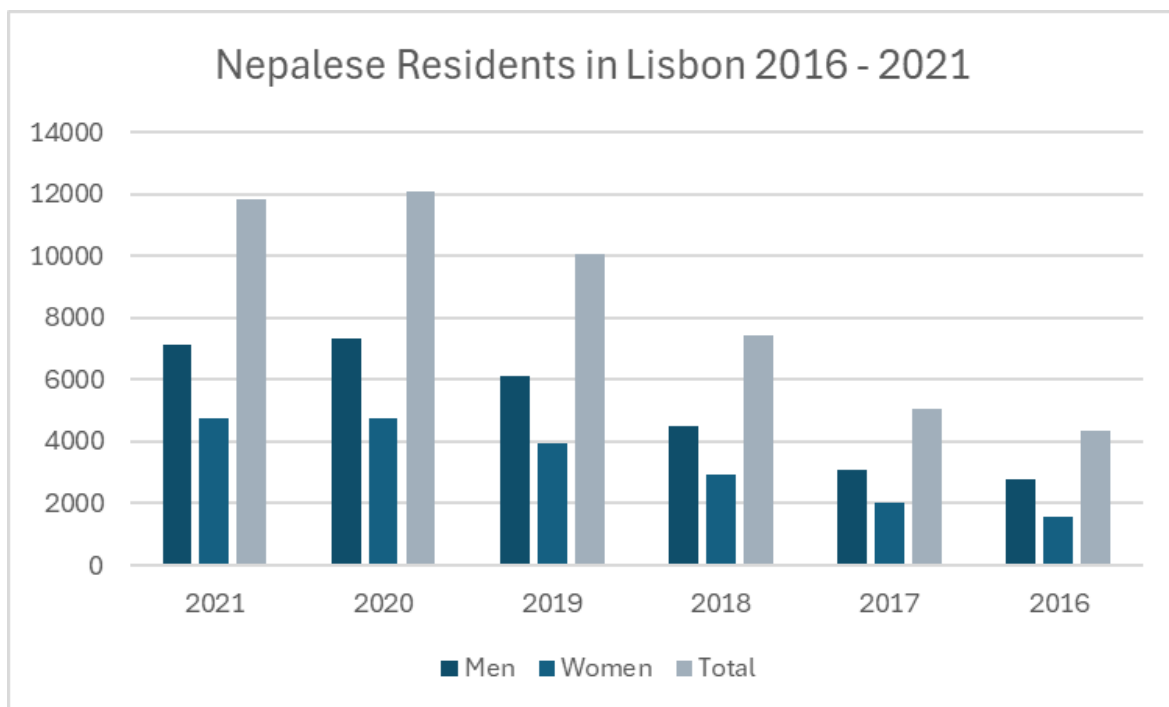


Figure 3: Number of Residents Residing in Lisbon between 2016 to 2021

	Total	Male	Female
Total	8312	6208	2104
Professions of the Armed Forces	1	1	0
Representatives of the legislative branch and executive bodies, direct	178	129	49
Specialists in intellectual and scientific activities	39	31	8
Intermediate-level technicians and professions	128	102	26
Administrative Staff	156	112	44
Workers in personal, protection and security services	2444	1831	613
Farmers and skilled workers in agriculture, fisheries	1541	1221	320
Plant and machine operators and assembly workers	86	68	18
Skilled workers in industry, construction, and craftsmen	344	252	92
Unskilled workers	3395	2461	934

Table 2: Data of Nepalese women being recruited in the following categories of employment

2.4 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is the background of any study. It is crucial to understand that developing a conceptual framework is a process rather than a product. It means that building this framework

is a sense-making process that does not follow linearity. As the conceptual framework generates the focus of the research as it is informed and shaped by the study itself (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). A conceptual framework comprises the guiding theories and assumptions that lead to clarity and contextualisation of the focal topics of the research. A conceptual framework is a guiding map that allows researchers to locate themselves during the process of the study while catering to different epistemological, ontological, and axiological considerations. This allows the researcher to shape their methodological choices as they progress through the research.

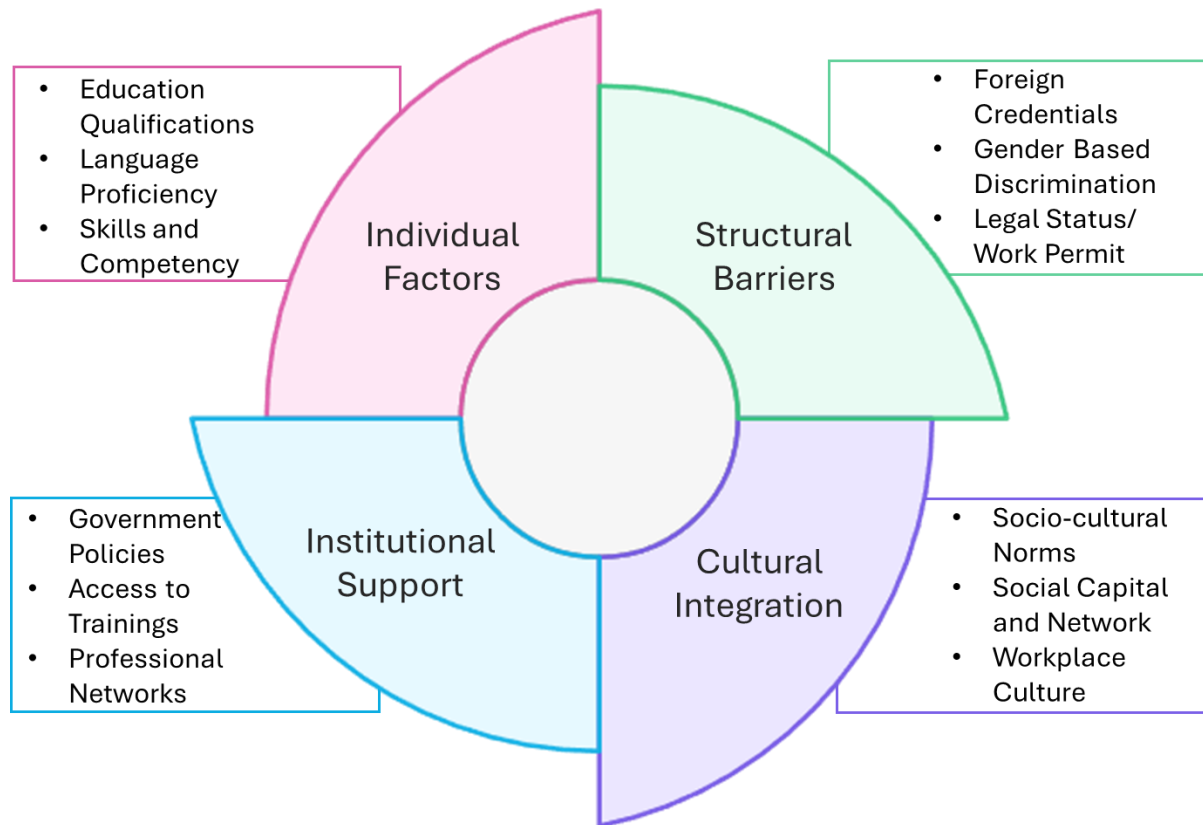


Figure 4: Conceptual framework of the thesis

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction and Research Strategy

This research uses a qualitative approach to understand the labour market integration of Nepalese women residing in Portugal. The concrete, but not sole purpose, is to understand whether these highly educated women have mobility within the labour market. These women have arrived in Portugal for many varied reasons including family reunification and a better life standard. They have had diverse experiences when it comes to work and share different expectations, from the contact they've had with the labour market's reality.

This chapter details the research strategy for this study. It starts with an explanation of the research strategy and the reason for selecting the strategy. This is followed by a population sampling strategy and the rationale. Third, there is a research design to give a high-level view of the study from the beginning until the end. Fourth, there are data collection methods comprising primary and secondary data. To assess the integration process, it is important to understand the qualifications of these women along with their current scope of work. This study takes into secondary data analysis and exploratory interviews with the women. Then, the chapter highlights the data analysis tools used to interpret the findings. It is also important to discuss the ethical considerations alongside the limitations of the study.

3.2 Population and sample

The data that comes closer to this study's population is the 668 Nepalese women (INE, 2021) who, by 2021, had University Education and were based in Portugal. This number is far away from the total number of women that reside in the country. Since the study is trying to grasp and understand the perceptions of educated women that, in some shape or form, are integrated into the labour market, the population will be very much smaller than the total number of Nepalese women residing in said country (8817 as per the SEF data 2021).

Bryman and Bell (2003), in a qualitative study, mention snowball sampling as a technique where the study participants give access to the future participants amongst their friends and acquaintances. This is specifically advantageous when the study involves studying networks among hidden populations or groups with defined characteristics. This allows to save time and cost for the study. However, it does contradict the sense of randomness such as this is a non-probability method. The other issue is the probability of homogeneity. To mitigate this issue, the researcher also reached out to other favourable sample populations through LinkedIn with whom there was no prior potential relation, and the randomness is ensured with the willingness of the women to agree for the study.

For this study, we have taken 7 participants who are Nepalese women residing in Portugal. These women have, at least, completed their undergraduate degree within or outside of Europe, while also having some form of work experience in or out of their field of studies. Women interviewed for the research purpose are between the age of 23 to 40 years living in Portugal for, at least, 3 years.

These women live in various parts of Portugal and not just in Lisbon. They engage in different fields of work aligning to their studies and some of them in the process of finding a job while being employed in another field. These women have fluency in different languages including English, Nepalese and some European language including intermediate Portuguese to

some extent. These women I used my network, who introduced me to these 7 women, and their data were collected through in-depth interviews. The length of interviews ranges from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours.

3.3 Research Design

The study begins with the introduction to integration theories and concepts followed by a literary review on South Asian women residing in distinct parts of Europe, assessing their level of integration in the respective societies. This is then narrowed down to the relevance of Portugal based on the limited data and studies done on Nepalese diaspora and women. There is not much research conducted specifically for Nepalese women; therefore, a trickle-down approach was adopted.

The reports published on the SEF website and specific requests for data on Nepalese women were collected. The purpose of the statistical data is to understand the history and patterns of Nepalese immigration to Portugal and the socio-demographic features of Nepalese residing in Portugal. Aligning with the literature review, the questions for semi-structured interviews are designed. The empirical data was taken from the in-depth interviews with the population sample.

As a Nepalese immigrant woman in Portugal, the researcher shares some but not all circumstances with the participants. This makes it easier to communicate openly and honestly with them as the researcher is someone, they can relate with often. The interviews recorded with permission from participants are dominant in the Nepalese language as it gives ease and comfort to express the experience. These interviews are transcribed, and relevant data is then translated into English.

3.4 Data Collection

This research relies on both primary and secondary data collection. Bryman and Bell (2003) have emphasised the importance of primary data, in this case semi structured interviews, as it allows access to the thoughts, experiences, knowledge and perspective of the participants. This allows the researcher to navigate and adjust the questions as per the conversations/responses, ensuring flexibility to adapt to the flow of the interview.

For this research, the primary data is collected from the one-on-one virtual interviews with the participants, via online platforms such as WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Zoom and Google Meet, as all the participants are not in close spectrum to the researcher. With the duration of each interview ranging from 45 minutes to 2 hours, the focus of the questions included: labour market participation, entry to the labour market, perceived barriers, strategies of overcoming the carriers,

and future career aspirations. The interviews are also recorded with the consent of participation and ensuring anonymity for accurate data collection.

Often, the role of interviewers while narrating interviews is to guide the journey from the perspective of the interviewer and interviewee (Atkinson, 1998). Chowdhury, (2016) notes that the role of the interviewer to be a good listener, including not to interrupt them often or shape their answers in any way that can influence their perspective. For this research, the researcher conducted the interviews in English and Nepali, as it made sense for the study in hand, and later transcribed them in English, while maintaining the story plots and structures of responses. As Chowdhury (2016) comes across in her studies, interviewer observed from the perspective of Nepalese to Nepalese, Nepalese to Portuguese migrant and a researcher trying to make a sense out of the life stories of the participants³. This ensured a sense of proximity amongst the researcher and participants, allowing a sense of trust and honesty when sharing their stories.

In terms of secondary data, the advantage is that, when taken from a credible source, resources and time are save, as there are less hassles compared to collecting raw data (Creswell, 2014). Often, these data are either peer-reviewed or previously studied to ensure they are theoretically grounded. However, the difficulty lies when these may not be specific to the essence of the research question (Bryman & Bell, 2003). The sources of secondary data are often from pre-analysed or existing documents in the form of published articles, documents, and reports from diverse sources. Another advantage of secondary data is that it can inform and conform to the validity and development of interview questions and support the primary data collection. The secondary data also benefits the study when it is necessary to highlight the gaps that can be fulfilled or adjusted by the primary data in the existing literature. The combination of primary and secondary research allows for robust analysis and cross checking.

For this study, the secondary data is received from various datasets. For the numerical data and representations, the national statistical sources were referred, including SEF, MIPEX and INE.

3.5 Data Analysis

Creswell (2016) refers to data analysis as understanding of the qualitative data, obtained through various sources, by evaluating different meanings, themes or even patterns. With the goal to build a rich, extensive understanding of the research topic and retrieve meaningful conclusions, The author credits this to organisation of the data in distinct categories or themes, further clarified

³ As in similarity to the original quote: “The researcher was listening from a perspective of Bangladeshi to Bangladeshi, Bangladeshi to Australian migrant and also a researcher trying to make a sense out of the life stories of the participants” (Chowdhury, 2016, p.13).

to reflect perspectives of the participants. Bryman and Bell (2011) support this, as they emphasise data analysis via patterns identification and themes orientation for successful interpretation. All the authors agree this is an iterative process, where collection of data and its analysis is conducted side by side, making it possible for the researcher to refine the questions as they go.

In the analysis of this study, the understanding of the context of the data is important in terms of individual, cultural, institutional, and structural is quintessential for finding interpretation allowing for situational and contextual evaluation (Bryman & Bell, 2016). The Nepalese woman sample we used, had its criteria so we had women with more work experience. For this study, 7 women were interviewed. The fact that the interviews themselves were recorded in Nepalese and that fewer women met the requirements, made the use of software unnecessary. So, the analysis was curated manually, through sections that we utilized in the 4th Chapter: Demography and Motivation of participants; Background and Individual factors, Cultural factors, Structural Barriers, Institutional Support, and lastly, Female Entrepreneurship. The questions and interviews are shaped to cover the eight identified factors. In terms of analysis of data obtained from semi-structured interviews, Murray (2003) suggests two spectrums: descriptive and interpretive. On one hand, the *descriptive* represents the stories emphasizing on the accuracy of the content and structure, and on the other hand, the *interpretative* helps decipher the stories from the view of theoretical literature (Chowdhury, 2016).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

There is also a need to consider some ethical practices during the various stages of the study, mostly involving semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2018). Below are some considerations for this study:

- To protect the identity of the participants and respect their privacy, they are given pseudonyms in this research and only industries of their employment are considered.
- Any specific names of the organisations are avoided that could potentially give away their identity.
- Participants were made aware of the purpose of research and assure their participation is voluntary.
- Leading questions or thoughts from the researcher were avoided to remove possibility of influencing their answers or views. Moreover, contrary thoughts were shared to understand diverse perspective.

3.7 Limitations of the study

According to Creswell (2014), the interviewer herself is the instrument by which the data are measured. As we wrote before, the researcher shares a lot of similarities with the women we're interviewing. Being in the same condition, she understands the struggles they're facing but tries to disassociate her experiences from theirs. It's their experience that matters for the study which, of course, cannot be representative of the 668 women that figure in this study's population because these women's experiences are subjective and cannot be extrapolated.

We have encountered setbacks while trying to systematize and gather all the educated Nepalese women with work experience based in Lisbon but it's very hard to do so for several reasons: lack of verifiability of data since we know the majority of South Asian immigrants don't want to stay in Portugal (Pereira et al, 2019). And those include women; the fact that University student's profile data is created yearly and doesn't encompass students who finish their courses but only those who are enrolled. And the fact that this data is not available for all Universities publicly.

Questions were provided early on to interested participants with the aim to establish rapport and increase dependability of the research (Bryman & Bell, 2020). The answers were recorded in most of the cases and later into transcribed notes, researcher also created notes simultaneously during the interview. However, one of these times, the recorder stopped recording and half of the interview depended on the notes taken. Moreover, because of the semi-structured nature of the interviews, it is necessary to adapt questions based on the respondents and at times it can introduce bias because of their own beliefs and perspectives. The conducting of interview alongside transcribing and analysing takes longer time, therefore only 7 participants were involved. Ideally it should be 10 or more, however, 5 to 25 number of participants is acceptable.

Chapter 4: Findings and Data Analysis

This chapter starts with the findings from the semi-structured interviews and simultaneous data analysis. To this research, the findings are divided according to the initial factors derived from the literature review and conceptual framework. Then there are further discussions that are not entirely covered by the 4 factors, but necessary agendas. This is to ensure the important instances mentioned by the participants are demonstrated as well. Furthermore, the chapter will highlight patterns seen amongst the responses of the participants. In qualitative research, Creswell (2016) mentions that the analysis of multiple forms of data is a challenge, ranging from organising the data, pre-liminary readthrough of the database, to the presentation of the data, which is usually helped by the not mandatory use of software. Creswell (2016) presents the difficulties in terms of identifying codes, themes and how to represent the data.

4.1 Demography of Participants & Migration Motivation

The women interviewed for this research are between the age of 23 to 35 years of age. The minimum level of education they own is a bachelor's degree and the highest is a PhD. These women engage in varied professions. Subina is focused on marketing, Aabha, and Arju are within hospitality and tourism, Sami is focused on immigration and social work, Reeya is working on mental health, Shivi is within Research Industry and Prabina is focused on journalism and industrial engineering.

Sabina, Reeya, and Arju are in Portugal with a priority to their families in mind, be it with their spouses or their parents. For Aabha, Sami, Shivi, and Prabina, the primary reasons revolve around building a career or continuing to work in their current field of studies. Aabha is doing freelance work while looking for a full-time position that matches her qualifications in terms of position and pay; Reeya is working as a manager in her family business, while initiating her own jewellery online store and pursuing further qualifications to work within a mental health spectrum; Sami is an established social worker and entrepreneur with multiple degrees and a double PhD; Subina has arrived from Denmark and is working as a babysitter while looking for marketing-associated positions; Arju arrived in Portugal from Denmark with her spouse; Shivi arrived from Denmark as well and is working remotely as a researcher in a Swiss company while working for a Pastry Store in a 5-star hotel in Lisbon; Prabina, on another hand, is a PhD candidate.

It is known that many Nepalese perceive Portugal as the port of entrance to other European countries (Pereira et al. 2019), especially when compared to the Nordic countries. However, contrary to widely held belief, for the demography of women in this research, it is observed that most of the women have arrived here after being a resident in other EU nations primarily as a student. Throughout the Portuguese political speech and even across its Public Opinion, it is clear that South-Asian immigration is described and perceived as low-skill and labour-intensive, forgetting to address the new role that has been acquired in Nepalese society by women in recent decades, especially by 2nd generation women (Pereira, 2023a).

4.2 Individual Factors

When it comes to the individual factors, the participants have received their degrees from international universities. Most of them have European degrees achieved in the English language, hence proving their proficiency in the language. When it comes to the Portuguese language, all the participants agreed that lacking fluency in the language has become a barrier to, not only integrating within the community but also getting ahead in terms of job opportunities, and ideas which align with the assimilation theory. As an example, Aabha mentions that she was positively

interviewed for a position aligned with her studies and experience but got rejected because of her lack of fluency in Portuguese. Understanding the language, however, has made it easier for some of them to be familiar with Portuguese society and allowed the opening of doors for further opportunities, be it for social integration, enhancing their job opportunities, or flourishing their business, especially in the cases of Sami and Arju.

Regarding the background, most women interviewed have an education in the fields of social sciences: Marketing and Immigration law, and Psychology, with some having attained a PhD or even a double Master's. From the 7 interviews, all had moved extensively in and out of the EU. The international student aspect also is a transitional element on a longer-run plan of obtaining citizenship or establishing better legal hold in the EU. This is not new since other European nations such as the UK and the Nordics have unfriendly immigrant laws even though, these nations are the destinations for most of the women because of opportunities in the English language, higher pay, and the economy's own need.

When asked about their views on factors that help or do not help in the integration of educated Nepalese women in the Portuguese labour market, all the interviewees agree that it is mostly the mindset that originates from individuals and the mindset they are surrounded with. The mindset of individuals means that they are not willing to take the risk to bring a change in their lives; that woman, even though highly educated, tend to lower their self-esteem and believe they are inferior without even trying.

Another part of this is their own family and society around them. The male counterparts, who still, even after coming to Europe stick to the traditional gender roles deeply rooted in patriarchy (Pereira, 2023a). Those depictions about the sentiments of inferiority go very much aligned to what is described by highly educated Portuguese women in Academia, for example (Torres et al., 2024), making it a more generalisable aspect of female workers.

On the question regarding if their nationality or ethnicity made an impact on their job prospects, only two participants mentioned that it has been the case directly or indirectly that they are stereotyped such that their capabilities are already blurred. Subina mentions that, as soon as perceived as a Nepalese, people perceive her differently, while Shivi gets looked down upon because of language restrictions. Alternately, Prabina has such ambitions and was also the only respondent that managed to get the certification of her degree. She is currently enrolled in Nova's Faculty of Sciences and Technology finishing her PhD fellowship she applied to and is also a part time lecturer at a Polish university. Her career plan makes her to want to finish her Doctorate and pursue a career in Academia:

“My career growth has been good actually; I always knew that journalism would lead me to PR and from PR it would lead me to teaching and consulting opportunities and it has. I chose to do my master’s in management because I want to diversify my career path.”

“Well, I'm learning the language, because I feel it opens more avenues, as I want to be able to teach once I complete my PhD, I believe it will add to my resume positively” (Prabina).

Of the seven women interviewed, some have studied in Denmark, France, Spain, or other EU countries. The majority of which they had to pay astronomical tuition fees that are always disproportional to what a national must pay. Two women were enrolled in Portuguese Universities, one through an Erasmus program and the other through a PhD fellowship. This is relevant when we look at data and realise that there’s a difference that comes out of that factor: “In almost all OECD countries, immigrants who graduated in the host country are much more likely to be employed than immigrants with foreign degrees” (OECD, 2023, p. 105).

4.3 Cultural Factors

Understanding the cultural factors of integration and more importantly contribution to the mobility of women, revolves primary around the socio-cultural norms from both Nepal and Portugal, the social network in Portugal, and the workplace culture of these women. The responses on this aspect have been varied:

4.3.1 Double Disadvantage or not?

When asked about whether the participant experienced disadvantages as a woman and as an immigrant, coined as double disadvantage, only Subina and Reeya agreed to have faced this. Both participants are working either partly or not fully to their scope of education. Moreover, both shared their own accounts of being sexually harassed at work since they’re easier targets with weaker legal status (Reeya) and being perceived through comments made by the current employer, as to be only capable of unskilled work (Subina).

On the other hand, Shivi, Aabha and Arju agree they felt disadvantage as an immigrant because of lack of paperwork’s in the initial stages. But when it comes to being a woman, that variable didn’t seem to make any difference: They were perceived as better than their colleagues, which can also be attributed to the quality of their work.

Prabina and Sami have had completely opposite experiences to the above participants' responses. They both felt accepted and respected in their respective fields even when they were working to build their business or career. Both participants hold a PhD or are PhD candidates. Moreover, Sami is a social worker and entrepreneur in the Algarve region.

It should be understood that we're speaking of a labour market that is very much saturated and has a non-qualified business class (Marques et al, 2024) Open borders policy has been advocated for the last 8 years of socialist mandate precisely to welcome low-skilled labour very much needed for certain economic activities like tourism and agriculture. With that said, low skilled immigration should be studied separately from highly-skilled one, so Nepalese women should be approached through a completely distinct lens, making them more proximate, possibly to Digital Nomads policies than to "working visas" and subsequently, the rest of their fellow Nepalese citizens that migrate to Portugal.

We learn from Pereira et al. (2019) that the fact these women are highly educated doesn't guarantee they will not be affected by networks of human trafficking like the ones which occur mainly with low-skilled workers. In her study, Pereira et al. (2019) tell us that 10 interviewees (from the 29 that made up the sample of the study) were highly educated, which didn't prevent them from getting entrapped.

4.3.2 Responsibilities in Nepal and Portugal: Its Impact

Another part this study explored amongst these women was their sense and reality of responsibilities in Portugal and how that has impacted their involvement as an employee or not: Subina and Reeya feel the burden of responsibilities being higher as time passes. For Subina, it also entangles with the family expectations, when she moved from Denmark to Portugal with her fiancé. And sometimes, this pressure is paralyzing such that it is more of a source of anxiety than motivation. For Reeya, it's mixed emotions because there is support on certain parts and some freedom but unlike in Nepal, she couldn't fully focus on her graduation while trying to manage a family business, her own startup, internship, and social life. The burden is exhausting to them, but they both showed great zeal and hope for better results in time.

However, in the case of Aabha, Sami, and Shivi they all mention that it is much better and further independent compared to Nepal. Moreover, they have started working and becoming responsible for themselves since late teens and early 20s, therefore, their sense of responsibilities revolves more towards building meaningful work in their lives. For Aabha, her savings and support from scholarships allowed her to focus on building her skills while not necessarily helping family back home, while having the privilege of family support (Ahmad et al, 2007). For Shivi, there is higher sense of freedom and confidence to make decisions and explore while taking care

of some responsibilities for family in Nepal. Sami laughs at this question. To her, work and being workaholic has been her life, so changing places doesn't necessarily impact the level of responsibilities, however, she does feel her "calling" in Portugal to be resourceful and do meaningful work with the elderly, youth and animal care.

For Arju and Prabina, the support from their spouses in terms of shared household responsibilities, including baby duties, has effectively helped them to explore more options and be also focus on their jobs, as well as to be in a better position over time and effectively make time to build skills. Even though the duties of being a mother are a challenge, even the range of responsibilities feels normal, as something that needs to be done (Ahmad et al, 2007). Arju also mentions that usually Nepalese men do not help women in their households. If she must speak out of observation of wider social network, women have it difficult here. On top of that, Arju herself, needs to abide by the traditional gender roles in case her parents or in-laws are visiting. So, to avoid chaos and risk offending the elders, she abides by the "rules" temporarily in their presence.

"There are some educated families that do not allow women to get a job and restrict them. They fight when it comes to the topic of the wife being employed, it is like a trigger for them."

This quote sheds light on the forces these women need to push against, mainly when we encounter the idea that men from the first generation (exactly the case of established businessmen in Portugal) have trouble dealing with the new female freedoms (Pereira, 2023b).

4.3.3 Social Network's Role in Labour Market Integration

As mentioned in the literature review, the association with social networks, especially from the native nation, impacts the overall integration experience of the immigrants. Typically, through word of mouth and engaging within one's own community, there are both benefits and drawbacks. While there is a sense of belongingness and support to some extent, studies have shown that it also limits one's openness and horizon to engage with the locals of host nations. Similar cases have been reported for the Nepalese community by Bajracharya, 2015; Maharjan (2020) and Pereira et al. (2021). For most of the Nepalese communities in Portugal, a sense of segregation has hindered them from fully getting along with the locals. This can be clearly measured with the proficiency of Portuguese these people have, even after spending a decade in the country, and not being able to speak fluently as they come from Nepal to another version of Nepal. That could be another repercussion of the amount of South-Asian immigration in the country and the sense of familiarity.

When it comes to the source of opportunities, the most common answer from all the participants revolved around online platforms and social networks, as being the most useful. Only in few instances has help or support from institutions have been mentioned: by only two participants. Firstly, when it comes to finding positions relevant to the education, online job platforms and media including LinkedIn are popular. There are also job portals, both national such as IEFP and international/country specific that the participants rely on to apply for. When it comes to understanding the laws and policies relevant to migration and employment, however, the participants are divided into self-research and relying on the information circulating within social media such as TikTok reels, where digital creators and people share information.

Noticeably, when it comes to the benefits of relying on word of mouth or Nepalese community as social network, all participants agree information that travels is mostly for low-skilled jobs, such as restaurant serves, kitchen helpers, cleaning, housekeeping, and similar jobs. It is rare that there are opportunities for highly skilled workforce shared this way. Usually, these communities and support groups are there to celebrate festivals and for entertainment purpose or to share information on changing laws (among other things) within the community (Wei, 2020). The major disadvantage is, then, that there is a bigger gap between the Portuguese counterparts and Nepalese communities.

“I need to make a comparison here; I lived in Denmark and the UK before coming to Portugal. In Denmark, the social security, the systems, and official things were much organised and close to perfection, but the people are reserved and very closed. You feel like an outsider. But in Portugal, there are a lot of bureaucratic hassles, but the people have been warmer and friendly. I have even managed to make some Portuguese friends here” (Arju).

4.4 Structural Barriers

The structural barriers as demonstrated and derived from the literature review refer to the equivalency of foreign credentials into Portuguese grading scale, any gender-based discrimination or issues arising from the legal status or type of visa during the stay. Potentially, with SEF/AIMA, once an immigrant opens an economic activity in the country with their NIF or fiscal identification number, it typically takes around 2 years to get the first valid card for stay. During this buffer period of application for temporary residence card (TRC) and receiving it, there are undoubtedly challenges to immigrants. These challenges are further complex in the context of being a woman, which has been shown by some of the participants in the study.

One of the reasons addressed in the literature that help to explain why very few women manage to be self-employed and/or in positions of leadership within migration, is the lack of daycares and nurseries (Pereira, 2023a), which is something this data approaches:

“I think Portugal has made it easier for women to go back to the labour market. If you have a child, you can put them in kindergarten from as early as 6 months old from 8 to 5, making it possible to have a job. I did the same. There is of course a lot of emotions and crying, I cried, my child cried, but it was needed. Likely there are more avenues that need to be explored but people are unaware including myself” (Arju).

The United Kingdom Migration Observatory, for instance, quantifies having 120,000 Immigrants from outside the EU working in its public sector (data from 2022). In Portugal, the foreign-born employment most reliable data can be traced to OECD.

In a country who had a Prime-Minister with South-Asian roots for 8 years, the Portuguese General Law of Public Functions Law (article 17) and Constitution won't allow foreign citizens to pursue jobs in Public Administration (Tavares, 2023). It is estimated that, until 2018 however, that 3000 Nepalese have gained Portuguese nationality (Maia & Barra, 2018) which makes female Nepalese workers in the public sector a possibility, even in theory (OECD, 2023), given that nationality and qualifications is the only criteria that might, *a priori*, exclude them. Pereira, (2023a) notes that the majority of Nepalese from second generation had Portuguese passport. Curiously, because of that, those who decide to change nationalities, lose their Nepalese passport.

There's also this idea that Nepalese women have to be willing to go from downward positions upward, having to surpass language barriers, and even harassment in the workplace:

“I had an incident when there was a Bangladeshi business where I gave an interview to manage some of their marketing, however, the interviewer later called to say that he liked me and showed interest in growing a romantic relationship in the name of the job. This was humiliating and scary” (Subina).

According to data from Pereira (2023a), migrant women are especially vulnerable to this “widespread” kind of harassment in the workforce, when compared to women from the first generation. The latter are traditionally more conservative and perform other roles in the family, while also having a distinct status. While the former are more susceptible to these forms of aggression, Pereira (2023a) also adds that the second generation has a better relationship with

tabu topics, their own culture, bodies, and marriage, and fosters open friendships with the opposite sex, which in hand allows them to have better tools, like legal protection, to face aggressions at work.

4.4.1 Lack of information or ignorance?

The initial ignorance many immigrants possess towards the country equates to the ignorance towards policies that could benefit their livelihoods and labour market integration, namely when talking about Nepalese women with a degree. None of the interviewees related having either knowledge of Governmental policies or other mechanisms. Some of which could assist - namely internships like EstagiAP, PEPAL, or PEPAC-MNE - that, even though, was created with Portuguese in mind: so “Organisms of Public Administration can collect the fruits of knowledge renewal, transmitted by Education Institutions on the creation of qualified Portuguese”⁴, don’t exclude young immigrants from other nationalities. Another example that Nepalese women weren’t aware of was the policy created by the Socialist Party in 2023. This policy allows University students to recover their university tuition, given that they work in Portugal for the equivalent duration of their studies (2, 3, or 5 years). It applies to highly educated foreigners who come to work for Portugal, even if they have studied at other than Portuguese Universities⁵ (Patrício, I., 2024). This ignorance doesn’t come as a surprise, given their Portuguese knowledge and consumption of media (Branco, 2012) and given that their social network (within the Nepalese community) is unaware as well, probably not attuned to policies that affect highly educated women.

4.4.2 Bureaucratic Barriers versus Community Effectiveness

One of the interesting findings of this research was that all the participants shared the same burden of pain when it came to the effectiveness of receiving the temporary residence permit, the process to be followed, and the painstakingly long timeline until they received it. Aabha shares her sadness that she indeed has received noticeable attention and positive response when it came to looking for jobs to her liking and studies, however, the interviews often end at whether she has her residency card sorted out. Given that she does not have it as of now, companies are hesitant to dwell on that hassle. Therefore, she is finding other ways such as Digital Nomad visa requirements. However, that will not be enough since she will still have a lengthy wait period before she receives the card and can travel around freely.

⁴ As in *Resolução do Conselho de Ministros n.º 68/2022* that alters some rules of the second edition of the extraordinary Government-funded internships.

⁵ The policy is entitled “Prémio Salarial” and the diploma that gave it validity and regulates it is the *Decreto-Lei n.º 134/2023*, of 28 of december and the *Portaria n.º 67-A/2024*, of 22 of february.

The Vicious Cycle of Employment in Portugal

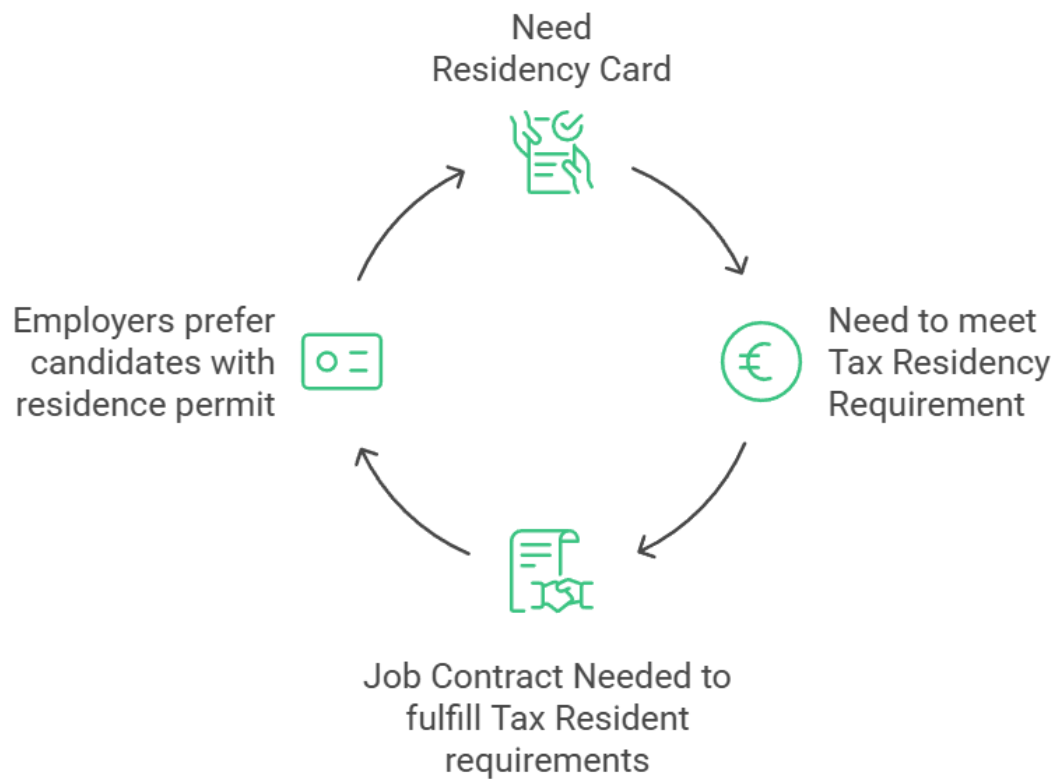


Figure 5: The vicious cycle of getting a job and needing residency

Portugal has become a place to get the papers for Nepalese immigrants (Pereira et al., 2021); a transitional nation. However, with all the delays, lack of administrative resources in AIMA, and rules that force these immigrants to stay in the country, they are left with no choice but to work to survive in most of the cases. What they seem to not be counting on are the difficulties of the labour market, which goes along with research data from Pereira et al. (2019) where respondents admit not knowing anything about Portugal:

“Usually in Portuguese companies, they hire within the network and others do not have a chance even for unskilled workers”
(Subina).

In terms of the equivalency of degree being a necessity, this was not relevant to most of the participants who have an internationally recognised or European degree. Having said so, they did share pain and stories of people around them who struggled for over 2 years to simply receive an equivalence of grades, be it for themselves or for someone they know. Subina applied for this but having limited support, she didn’t manage to complete the process and now that is a forgotten

chapter of her life here. For Prabina, she is the only one who successfully transcribed and used this to promote her career progression here, in Academia.⁶

When the participants were asked about their awareness of labour market policies that support immigrant women's employment, mobility, or even job prospects, the answers were not necessarily positive. Aabha and Sami mention they do not have an idea of this on an employment level, but they are more informed when it comes to entrepreneurship in tourism (Aabha) and social work (Sami). Reeya shared her story from a short work experience with the Lisbon Project where she researched similar policies but mostly hit a dead end with no concrete result. For Arju, however, this is a positive experience and was happy to share that by law and facility from schools, it is easier for her as a mother to get back and improve in the job market as daycare services and facilities are more common than not.

So, what is the solution? For Aabha, she thinks it would be desirable if AIMA/SEF processes could be accomplished quicker than 2 years (on average) so that immigrants who are already registered can work and travel without being illegal and locked down only in Portugal. Subina shares a similar view, adding that we need more solidarity amongst people who have cracked the code and made it work. On another thought on a national or institutional level, Reeya believes introducing a sense of quota systems such as diversity, equity, and inclusion could be extremely beneficial.

On a community level, it would be good to have a better networking initiative such that it helps integrate newly arrived Nepalese women to prepare for various aspects of socio-economic life in Portugal, the same sentiment was mentioned and supported by Wei (2020) in the study. So that they're mentally prepared, acquainted, and feel supported while working on their endeavours. Aabha gives an example of how, in Sweden, there are independent organisations by Nepalese communities that give an "Orientation Workshop" each year to newcomers in the country.

4.4.3 Limitations in Governmental Institutions

The reality of staying in the country is, far often, described as a matter of survival. In plain words, these women know how hard it is to survive in a country whose processes are so bureaucratic, and where there doesn't exist any Institution that functions as a last resort to solve issues, like in CPLP countries, with whom Portugal has agreements like the Mobility Accords, treaties, embassies and consulates. That frustration is also regarded in the literature that focuses on Nepali

⁶ Prabina also shared that she got valuable help from a mentor, which might be important for the success in the transcription. Also, the fact that she came to study offered her different incentives, which have to be considered for this.

workers based in Portugal, with some immigrants raising suspicions regarding the gains of the state and lawyers with these kinds of delays (Pereira et al., 2021):

“AIMA and SEF could process paperwork faster so that residence permits are received on time and immigrants can work and travel. Most of the time, it takes 2, 3 years to get the first card so they are almost illegal here for 2, 3 years and not having the option to move outside of the country” (Aabha).

During interviews, it became clear that Nepalese women would very much appreciate relying on a Nepalese embassy in the country:

“I am unsure where I can go ask for help.”

“There is almost no help from organisations such as IRN, Consulate.”

“[Speaking of effective initiatives/policies to address challenges of female Nepalese]: “Reopen consulate or embassy that is built with educated people and within good leadership” (Subina).

Albeit a political decision, the Nepalese government decided to establish an embassy in Portugal in November of 2023 (Kathmandu Post) which is still on paper. The Nepalese Consulate functioning in Lisbon was an honorary one, with Council Rajendra Kumar Khetan appointed to office. Mr. Sanil Nepal has been appointed the next Nepalese ambassador of Portugal.⁷ Being the opening of the embassy considered “imminent” (Fiscal Nepal, 2023). Now, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Portuguese Delegation accredited to Nepal is based in India and encompasses 7 public servants, according to the same sources, which raises concerns about the kind of support these Institutions can provide to the citizens (Borges, 2024).

Another important aspect that compromises vertical labour mobility is the obstacles of many of these women entering an Academic career or public service. Torres et al. (2024) study shows that even Portuguese women face immense challenges in achieving a top Academic career, many of those difficulties being attributed to gender stereotypes, making women only 1/3 of those reaching the top of an Academic career (Torres et al., 2024).

⁷ As declared by a press release from the Office of the President of Nepal: <https://president.gov.np/right-honble-president-has-appointed-as-the-residential-ambassador-of-nepal-to-canada/>

4.5 Institutional Support

Institutional support refers to any support that is not entirely government-associated but means a wide range of organisations, such as social work, employment agencies, immigrant associations, schools, or any institutional body likely to interact with immigrant groups such as these groups we're discussing. The questions for this section revolve around any form of assistance or support from governmental/private organisations for employment-related offers, the difference it made in their professional experience, and understanding the institutions these women rely on when it comes to receiving concrete information regarding immigration, integration, and employment. Finally, we looked for truthful depictions of professional network construction and the impact those had on career opportunities.

Aabha is building her professional networks primarily through her university seminars, mentorships, and social media. While she holds a freelancing job, she is focused on improving her Spanish skills to improve her job prospects and later learn Portuguese. For Subina and Reeya, institutional networking is mostly through employment agencies or the Lisbon project in case of Reeya. That allows them to have some doors open to apply for their choice of work. In the case of Sami, she has not really relied on institutional assistance as of now, however, she leans more on the local community in Algarve, which has been supporting her in her companies and initiatives for social work. She has bonded better with individuals on a personal level, which in return has been beneficial for her to accomplish legal aspects, like speeding up processes, accessing information, and validating information when it comes to organisations such as parishes and local municipal offices. Shivi and Prabina rely mostly on their efforts and personal searches to connect with respective organizations.

Student fees are often seen as a barrier to “social elevator.” Even if it is understandable (from a taxation point of view) that there's a difference between national and international students, especially when we are speaking of public universities, the majority of these students struggle to pay high tuition fees. The Portuguese government, however, makes no distinction between a female student who works and discounts to social security and a female who has the possibility of focusing only on her studies. Especially when we understand that “study visas” and “working visas,” as the interviewees call it, have many aspects in common and we're aware of the amount of money that immigrants discount to Portugal State offers. Changes for this could be made when we consider that “in about half of OECD countries the tuition fees for foreign and national students are the same” (Marconi & Serra, 2017, p.2).

The interview data also points to an apparent openness from international companies, compared to those of Portugal, which are described as an insurmountable “wall.” While that

reality exists, international managers can also be stereotypical towards women, regarding them as only working there to obtain visa papers. Those comments often lead to diminished women and function as a two-edged-sword, by creating leverage used for the benefit of the employers for control:

“People fear speaking up in the fear that it might mess up with their paperwork. It is expected of you to work more than what you get paid. And even though it is wrong, people do it because if you don't, then someone else will. Also, you are lucky if you find a good working environment. It has become like a stereotype that Nepalese will work more for less money” (Reeya).

This unsurmountable wall leads the women to accept jobs that pay less to survive and take care of infants, given that they possess a different level of responsibilities they wouldn't have had had stayed in Nepal. Pereira et al. (2021) describe this phenomenon when she quotes her interviewee:

“Our status also rises and people respect us more if we live abroad... I want my wife to come because when she comes here, she can work... There, she doesn't work, and I have to feed five, six people alone... so, for us, it's better if they [wives] come. (Subedi, male, 43)” (p.12).

Also, the difficulties these women face while attempting to certify their degrees in DGES are remarkably similar to those in other countries, namely Portugal's neighbour: Spain (Oñate et al., 2023). The process of certification is extremely difficult and inglorious since “processes to assess skills and recognize foreign qualifications remain complex and often lack efficiency, transparency, and universal access” (OECD, 2023, p.105). Despite that, some women say that it wasn't deemed necessary. The vast majority of them, though, are not working in their area of expertise and education. Another explanation for why these women find these structural hurdles, both implicit and explicit, (OECD, 2023) while certifying their diplomas might be related to the inherent inability of the market to view them as a highly educated labour force - and pay them accordingly. That results in an economic loss to the countries they're in (OECD, 2023). And could be attributed to the fact that their degrees are in Social Sciences and no other regulated professions such as medicine, whose accreditation of diplomas is, in that case, mandatory (Oñate et al., 2023; OECD, 2023):

“Also issues with organizations like DGES and bureaucracy do not make it easy. It takes forever to get a document transcribed” (Reeya).

The double disadvantage might be considered triple, given the fact that Nepal is a country from outside the European Economic Area. The creation of more bilateral agreements between Portugal and Nepal has been a policy recommendation from Pereira et al., (2019):

“My EU classmates have much more freedom and it is easier for them to get a job, to stay compared to me because of visa issues. I look a bit different as well - not like a regular South-Asian person “(Aabha).

Despite saying there are differences in treatment between European and Non-EU countries, the most women interviewed, unlike other kinds of Nepalese immigrants (Pereira et al., 2019), have not found discrimination directed towards their nationality or gender:

“Luckily, I have not faced discrimination as such until now because of my nationality. I have had good supervisors, and they love me because of my work. In the UK, I was dependent on my husband and in the factory, European counterparts used to get more priority over us regardless of the job levels, and in Portugal, it helps to know the language. For example, my Brazilian colleagues have more communication in terms of channel and frequency, but my work speaks for me and that is enough” (Arju).

4.6 Mindset Issue Amongst Individuals and Community at Large

One of the consistent observations on the feedback shared by the participants was the impact of an inferiority mindset amongst the general Nepalese population. They all agree it is primarily a mindset issue that Nepalese bring from their home country and is deeply rooted in patriarchy or a lower sense of self. Sami came across some acquaintances who were skilled in their IT fields, however, they were working in agriculture. When presented with an opportunity to work in their field, with resources like laptops and higher pay, they still declined the offer. In another case, when a friend asked for guidelines to go study and apply for some jobs within child care and psychology, the woman agreed and went through the process, but in the end, stepped back saying her restaurant job is secure for paperwork and would like to continue that. This case is not unique to Sami; Subina, Reeya, and Arju reported related stories as well.

Another notable collective agreement was when the legalization process was over, many Nepalese migrants chose to leave Portugal for other European destinations such as the Nordics and Benelux where there is higher pay. This has been a regular pattern over decades when we look at low wages in the Portuguese economy, elevated housing crisis, inflation, a labour market that's not able to absorb so much educated workforce, and lack of Institutional and Diplomatic support. In this regard, Reeya acknowledges:

“One needs to get out of the thought cycle to come here, work for a passport, and fly away” (Reeya).

She recognises the practice that has been adopted by many Nepalese, given that the Law of Nationality requires 5-6 years of permanence in the country to be able to apply for nationality which is lower than the average of most countries in OECD of a minimum of 10 years (OECD, 2018).

Sami adds a thought from one of her interactions with a person who came to her to ask for help to find a job:

“I work in a restaurant. As you said, I'm married. And I have kids here. I work in a restaurant. That's fine. I'll work two, three different jobs, but I won't take a risk” (Sami).

That simply shows the logic behind what drives Nepalese women, but also how these labour policies work. From a gendered perspective, this is relevant to the feminisation of migration where women take into more traditional masculine forms of gender roles while being bound with female-oriented gender norms. From a policy-making standpoint, Portuguese politicians give enormous flexibility to digital nomads in comparison to South-Asian immigrants and even high-skilled workers. That's exactly what draws the line on the type of immigration we're dwelling upon, as there's a difference from the rest of the Nepalese immigration. The type of Visa in this regard is for studies, not for work. Aabha describes:

“Usually, Nepalese people are here on ‘Working Visa’ and the work they do is unskilled or not based on specific knowledge as they are barely available, especially in Porto” (Aabha).

The view that women should start from smaller roles is not shared by all the interviewees but finds support from Marques et al. (2024), who conclude that immigrants tend to find a job faster than Portuguese residents (whether we're speaking of unemployed individuals or first-time enrolled in IEFPP ones). Precisely because of the ability to accept worse-than-ideal jobs. The study

justifies that phenomenon through the pressures immigrants suffer while also mentioning the most vulnerable are women with an education in social sciences (Marques et al., 2024).

4.7 Women in Entrepreneurship

Within the interview, it was clear that some women are already taking steps to reclaim agency (Oñate et al., 2023) regarding their lives. Faced with obstacles like low wages, housing crisis, and other difficulties in the Portuguese labor market (Pereira et al., 2021), but having high education, Sami has already three businesses running (health care, swimwear, and social work) while Aabha plans to be an entrepreneur within the culinary and wine industry. Entrepreneurial pursuits are a way to circumvent the limitations of the labour market, workplace harassment, or discrimination. Moreover, being self-employed gives a sense of reclaiming autonomy especially when Nepalese women struggle to break free from certain cultural limitations and community expectations posed by both their native and host nation.

The interviews revealed some perceptions within Nepalese society such as risk-aversion, posing inferiority complex, and lack of confidence, which are some traits that the respondents feel are impeding the growth of Nepalese women and community. For instance, Sami shares what she hears from most people “It's fine, if I earn this much, if I send this much to Nepal, it is fine.” The persistence of gender roles complicates the matters of career mobility for women, and as Sami notes, Nepalese men tend to talk a lot and do less while also restraining and not pushing their female partners (Reeya). The societal framework is preventing personal ambitions and integration of these women in the labour market such that Nepalese women are underrepresented in leadership and entrepreneurial roles compared to men (Pereira, 2023b; Pereira et al. 2021).

Respondents have also shared the need for stronger professional networks and mentorship to assist in the navigation of the competitive job market. While there are some who are like Sami working tirelessly in multiple ventures taking challenges head-on, and even supporting her British husband financially whenever needed; there are some who are looking for ways to “crack the code” in the Portuguese corporate world with the help of networks available. Pereira (2023b) highlights the role of caste and ethnicity, particularly among men, in preserving social privileges—an aspect that may not equally apply to women of the second generation, who possess more progressive views on gender roles.

Sami stated that Portugal does need more entrepreneurs for this economy and Nepalese can do that if they gather some courage and take time to get out of the regular circles of struggle, survival, long working timelines, restaurant work, paperwork, and getting stuck in what is comfortable. Sami also finds her entrepreneurial journey to be fulfilling and one of the reasons of motivation to stay in Portugal (Ahmad et al, 2007). In her words:

“After coming here, I found that Portugal needs entrepreneurs. They don't know their own laws. People can do anything here.

[...] I am a person who likes to find solutions, and who likes challenges, so I don't feel entirely that there were any factors that made it difficult or easy. I try to navigate through things, learn, and research on my own” (Sami).

The entrepreneurial drive, however, is not unique to men; women's international experiences in countries like the United States and Europe have cultivated aspirations to enter the business world, albeit with obstacles in Portugal. Pereira (2023b) also tries to understand the role of caste and social/ethnic groups, concluding that the businessmen's conduct aims to reverberate those same privileges (Pereira, 2023b) which might not be the case for the second generation of women, given that they have different views on those same privileges (Pereira, 2023a).

Despite problems with men, there are female dynamics in action, as reported by the women we've interviewed:

“Sometimes, Nepalese women suffer from Nepalese women in terms of gossip or not helping or being in competition” (Reeya).

To finish, the concept of labour market mobility takes a more vertical connotation, rather than horizontal, when we speak of immigrant feminist entrepreneurship. It is important to say that, even though there's no official data for Nepalese female business in Portugal, there is interview data from three women collected from Pereira (2023b). It is lacking in the literature, though, a proper gathering of characteristics from businesswomen. Pereira (2023b), but it's safe to say that networks of women and Associations might be the next logical step:

“If there is a network of women, Nepali women, like, I'm so excited [...]. If there is a network, they will feel a little bit lifted, Like, yes, we can do it” (Sami).

4.8 Message from the Participants

At the end of the interview, all the participants were asked to share their thoughts on mobility within the job market, if there are notable suggestions for other women and what could be potentially done to step towards a better environment and improve integration of Nepalese women. The suggestions have been interesting in this case.

Most of the participants have focused on self-reflection and change of mindset of not just women but the families that they arrive here with. Additionally, women wish to push others to dream big while keeping their motivation up no matter the situation because there is a way to make it work in Portugal. One simply needs to keep looking, keep solving problems. One needs to not be afraid, build the courage to step away from what is considered “normal” amongst Nepalese communities, and make the best of newly acquired freedoms.

To be able to think beyond working hours, survival, and paperwork hassles, and look for alternate ways other than restaurant or agricultural jobs. All the participants also agree that, since Nepalese remain in the country for years for the sake of paperwork primarily, it is best to learn the language before your arrival if possible as a preparation. This opens the doors for education or knowledge regarding related job offers. Most importantly, it makes it easier to stay informed and integrate into other social norms, resulting in further employability, etc.

“Try not to bring the Nepalese mindset and stick too much with your own community that it prevents true integration, open up with the locals more and understand them” (Aabha).

For existing Nepalese communities, especially the ones who have lived here for a while, the suggestions are to step up and involve more educated and qualified people who can hold programs and prepare newcomers for culture shock, job search, and expectations management. However, there were also responses where participants mentioned that working for 9 to 5 traditional jobs for Portuguese companies might not be worth the time as the benefits and pay are low and tied to rising inflation and housing prices.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Future Research

When the study started with a literature review covering the different viewpoints on integration and the varied factors impacting the labour market participation and mobility of highly educated Nepalese women in Portugal, it revolved around socioeconomic, cultural, structural, and institutional barriers. While these factors do have a significant role in determining the experiences and career progression, it was made clear from the participants that it mostly begins with a mindset issue amongst the Nepalese mindset; impacting one individual to another and the entire community at large. This translates to many perceptions of feeling inferior, lack of self-confidence, and risk aversion combined with staying within the community with a narrowed/limited view of the livelihood. The Nepalese community often is tangled with visa issues, waiting for their residency, working multiple jobs to make a living, and saving alongside friends and acquaintances who do not think or work beyond the conventional low-skilled jobs and

are satisfied with it. Moreover, bringing Nepalese mindset also carries to some families where women are expected to oversee traditional gender roles.

Having said so, this study also shows that the educated Nepalese women in Portugal are capable of and some of them already working in their respective fields of studies. They are a very palpable reality, even though that does not transpose to what the Public Opinion perceives, nor the Political Power, as the Nepalese immigration wave is normally and generally depicted as low skill, which, in turn, informs the lack of policymaking towards these Communities. Moreover, with the concept of feminisation of migration as mentioned in the literature review, the participants responded in similar context on whether breaking traditional gender roles and taking into masculine roles or working for independence and searching for better educational and job opportunities.

After reviewing theories in our literature with the reality of these 7 women, we can draft several conclusions. The most important ones are those related to our labour market mobility problems: there are systemic barriers that limit vertical and horizontal mobility for these women. One of these examples is the Public Sector, but it can be also traced to Academia, where the women themselves have many obstacles to face to reach the top of their careers (Torres et al., 2024). As mentioned in structural barriers literature review, the case of educated women taking lower-skilled jobs persists in the Nepalese community as well. Language barriers are more prominent in case they are looking to work for Portuguese companies (this is related to the assimilation theory aligns for immigrants to align with the host environment) but with options such as a Digital Nomad Visa, young women choose to work and opt for international companies to work for. And progress, both horizontally and vertically. The bureaucratic barriers including the vicious cycle of needing a job for residency and vice versa have led women to accept jobs and stay there as there are no other alternatives unless they have someone or savings to support them financially.

Some women mention the Lisbon Project within the data but almost no one is aware of the relevant NGOs or INGOs that work for women and empowerment. Nonetheless, NGOs advocate for a better understanding of each migrant's diaspora specificities, with the intent to knock down generalisations about each community. It is necessary to bridge this gap between the existing NGOs and educated women here, who could help each other achieve a better working environment and voice for support. Problems are, as always, financial, or even related. It is also favoured for organisations such as Immigrant Associations, catering to the more specific issues of South-Asian immigrants, and especially South-Asian Immigrant women. A desire for these Associations was an important finding in our data, so we hope there will be some in the near future if there aren't informal networks already functioning that we aren't aware of. These women,

given that they're included in a community that is majorly low-skilled, have less information when compared with nationals.

But not all is lost, especially for the women who take challenges head on and have enterprising spirit in them. They make sure that they have access to information, search for resources and people who could support them in their endeavours. For that reason, it's especially important to understand which variables affect a woman's decision to become self-employed and how we can make that a viable career choice. Highly skilled immigrant and entrepreneurship itself is important to the Portuguese economy (Perfeito, 2021) and motivating these groups seems to be a realistic idea to also promote the engagement of these women. Participants have noted that there is no such specific institutional help, but they do find their workaround, which could be an interesting take to enrich institutional support within the community and national level as well.

As there have been no specific studies done in the context of highly educated Nepalese women, this study is one of a kind. The results and observation call for a bottom-to-top approach of awareness and navigation such that capable Nepalese women have a chance to step up and work to their accord. This means that to bring a change, a sense of ownership of self is necessary, followed by a changing mindset to wait for someone else to bring a solution. Another important feedback is at the community level where the existing diaspora can take initiatives to address not only social aspects but also support economic and career oriented. It has become essential to bring together the diverse and spread/scattered women under one platform where their experiences and stories, undoubtedly valuable, are given a space to express and guide the upcoming generations as well. Moreover, it shows the lack of solidarity of women that needs to be addressed and bridged. And here the role of existing organisations such as NRN communities, women groups, community groups, etc can help establish this beyond the normal agenda of social services and entertainment.

Even if the research is one of its kind, the study has its limitations in that the sample population is low for a wide generalisation. However, the insights leave room to take the researcher further to understand the stances of the wider population group. Regarding future research, this study also does not consider the perspective or data from the spouses of the women as well as of the caste. That would be very interesting to observe and measure, especially when we take into account Oñate et al. words: "When migration occurs as a couple, this process should be understood as a product of bilateral negotiations between the partners and not as a decision of one actor without social boundaries" (2023, p.3). It would be also important to understand if the spouse has an education or if his labour market choices and reality influence those of his wife, in any shape. Observations regarding the nationality of the spouses are important for the mere fact that marriage with a national "can provide certain legal advantages in terms of residency and work

permits” (Oñate et al., 2023, p.3). At last, it’s a tricky subject from a feminist point of view, because “dependence on their husbands’ networks can be a factor that helps [women] find employment or develop certain initiatives but, at the same time, [can also be] a limitation to their own feelings of independence” (Oñate et al., 2023, p.14), a similar notion to what Boyd and Grieco (2003) mention in terms of women’s status being related to men regardless of their own independent status because of migration policies.

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Appendix 1: Interview Questionnaire:

Introductory:

1. What brings you to Portugal? What was the initial motivation?
2. What is your highest degree of education and where did you receive it? Are you working on the same field as your education?
3. Could you tell me a bit about your background and how you came to live and work in Portugal?
4. What motivated you to seek employment in Portugal, and what were your expectations for the job market here?

Experience:

5. What were the main challenges to get adjusted to Portuguese society?
6. Have you encountered any challenges or barriers in your job search or in your career development in Portugal? If so, what were these challenges?
7. What steps were taken to overcome these challenges?

Individual factors: (Language, Education and Skills)

8. What is your expectation on learning and adapting to Portuguese language?
9. What do you see as the main factors that contribute to the integration (or lack thereof) of Nepalese women in the Portuguese labour market?
10. Have you tried to improve your career progression in the same field and same level of expertise?
11. Have you tried to improve your career and gain a better position or promotion?
12. Do you feel that your nationality or ethnicity has had an impact on your job prospects or career opportunities in Portugal? If so, how have you experienced this impact?

Cultural factors: (Socio cultural norms, social network capital, workplace culture)

13. Have you ever felt disadvantages given that you are an immigrant and a woman? Explain.
14. How is your life as a woman different from Nepal and in Portugal in terms of responsibilities?
15. How do you usually find a job?

Structural Questions (Foreign credentials, gender-based discrimination and legal status or visas)

16. Are there any initiatives or policies that you feel would be particularly effective in addressing the challenges faced by Nepalese women in the job market?
17. Ask about XYZ policies that they know or not.
18. Was it done equivalent in Portuguese educational system?

Institutional Support (government policies, accesss to trainings and professional networks)

19. Have you received any support or assistance in your job search or career development from the Portuguese government or other organisations?
20. How helpful was this support, and do you feel it made a difference in your ability to find and succeed in employment in Portugal?

Closing Qs:

21. Do you have any recommendations or advice for other Nepalese women who are seeking employment in Portugal?
22. In your opinion, what could be done to improve the integration of Nepalese women in the Portuguese labour market?
23. Do you think you have market mobility and how easy is it to have?

Appendix 2: Statistics for Nepalese in Cities, SEF DATA 2021

City	# of Population	Men	Women
Madeira	96	71	25
Açores	2	2	0
Setúbal	2070	1266	804
Coimbra	496	293	203
Évora	139	97	42
Braga	214	158	56
Bragança	28	23	5
Castelo Branco	92	71	21
Porto	327	220	107
Santarém	141	103	38
Viseu	62	56	6
Vila Real	7	4	3
Beja	2815	2038	777
Faro	2683	1692	991
Leiria	319	242	77

Table 3: Nepalese Residing in Portugal, as per cities, 2021 SEFSTAT data

Appendix 3: Statistics since 2010 to 2021 for Nepalese residing in Portugal.

Years	# of Population	Change (%)	Men	Women	Total
2022	23,839	10.65	15,022	8,817	23,839
2021	21,545	2.52	13,607	7,938	21,545
2020	21,015	24.73	13,339	7,676	21,015
2019	16,849	46.65	10,761	6,088	16,849
2018	11,489	54.48	7,313	4,176	11,489
2017	7,437	27.46	4,718	2,719	7,437
2016	5,835	21.61	3,863	1,972	5,835
2015	4,798	35.38	3,292	1,506	4,798
2014	3,544	36.94	2,406	1,138	3,544
2013	2,588	52.06	1,736	852	2,588
2012	1,702	48.65	1,094	608	1,702
2011	1,145	43.66	770	375	1145
2010	797		586	211	797

Table 4: Population of Nepalese in Portugal over the years

Years	# of Population	Change (%)	Men	Women	Total
2021	11853	-2.05	7117	4736	11853
2020	12101	20.05	7330	4771	12101
2019	10080	35.67	6113	3967	10080
2018	7430	46.26	4515	2915	7430
2017	5080	17.24	3076	2004	5080
2016	4333	-	2778	1555	4333

Table 5: Foreigners resident in Lisbon SEFSTAT data