

## **Abstract**

Currently 49% of the people in Vienna have a migration background; the figure is 20% at the national level (Statistics Austria) with numbers growing every year. With a constant increase in the migrating population, discrimination based on ethnicity in the labor market has also increased. Studies show strong evidence that migrants encounter discrimination before and upon entering the labor market. Migrants have to send more job applications than the average Austrian citizen and are mostly overqualified for their positions while at the same time being underpaid in comparison to the wages of people without a migration background. The reason for choosing this topic for my master thesis is, on the one hand, due to the field I work in - migration-integration, as well as my personal interest in understanding more about how the Austrian labor market works and how migrants, in particular women, are generally perceived by the host society and how migrants themselves see the Austrian market. On the other hand, my personal experience as a woman migrant striving for a successful career, coupled with the many hardships migrants encounter in the labor market, hardships so often mentioned by other migrants during many networking events, has piqued my curiosity into finding out more about the causes of these realities. I wanted to understand more about the reasons why migrants are faced with such challenges and find out what programs are available, in particular what measures are being taken to fight prejudice on the labor market. During my own difficulties to find a job after my sabbatical year in 2012, I chose entrepreneurship as a path to show my potential and abilities, but as well to be part of the solution when it comes to promoting migration as an asset to a society and economy. That is why the following thesis focuses on two groups of women migrants, those who are employed and those self-employed, making a comparison between them. Initially, my intention was to interview women migrants at the very top levels of management found in board of directors and senior executive positions within Austrian companies; however, finding them proved to be quite a challenge, therefore I decided to look for them at middle management levels. Having completed the interviews, one aspect that stood out to me, was that all the women had worked in international companies. I had hoped to find someone working in a private Austrian company, which traded locally. However, after studying the available research on migration and the labor market, I realized that such companies mostly either do not hire foreigners or foreigners do not commonly apply for jobs in such companies.

The objective of the empirical research was firstly to identify the influencing factors that have led to their successful careers and secondly, to find the similarities and/or differences in the

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challenges experienced by the two groups of women. An adjacent finding that I expected to derive from the interviews, was to be able to describe the reasons for which the self-employed women migrants wanted to become independent and to find out what the influencing factors were for choosing that path.

It is important to note that the interviews in this paper reflect only the personal opinion of these migrant women and do not reflect that of the entire society. The results from the interviews have shown little discrepancy between the influencing factors of the two groups of women migrants to achieve successful careers. Additionally, resulting from the interviews with the women in the self-employed group, was the realization that they became independent not by force, but by their own desire to manage their time and level of income as they preferred, while doing what they were best at. Only one entrepreneur found herself pushed to establish her own company due to the fact that she was unable to find a job even though she had an excellent education and the right set of skills to become an aspiring manager. She did however also mention that at this point she would not consider going back into an employment position, even though she now had the network and had built a name for herself in the real-estate industry arguing that salaries are too low on the Austrian market and migrants are most often underpaid even though they are as qualified as Austrians.

The measure the interviewees most referred to as being a solution for women to advance in their careers, was the need for a female quota in the private sector, this being the number one reason for which they are disadvantaged on the job market when it comes to high-level positions. The results from the interviews also revealed the fact that the migration background was not so much of an issue within the job market, being rather perceived as an asset at middle management levels, but it was rather an issue within society and outside of the work place. The predominant influencing factors most often mentioned by women migrants as fundamental for career advancement were **networking** and **mentoring**, coupled with a particular set of soft skills that women needed in order to cope with the work environments, such as **resilience**, **performance** and **adaptability** to the Austrian mindset which is rather conservative and traditional.

Whether from the perspective of an independent migrant woman or that of a migrant woman employed in a company, both groups have experienced similar challenges on their career path. However, one could say that as an employed woman migrant, it is much harder to acquire senior management positions than it would be for a self-employed one. Once you have a company of your own, you are already senior. You are your own boss. Needless to say, there are also differences between a nominated CEO of a corporation and a CEO of one's own company with

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two employees. Success in a career is defined by the individual perception of success and what a person associates with it: money, power, authority, self-accomplishment, “being my own boss”, career-life balance, self-fulfillment, etc. Success is so to say in the eye of the beholder.

Although the two types of migrant women groups are different in form, they both follow the same goal: to achieve a successful and meaningful career. But on their career path for self-accomplishment, both groups of women migrants pointed to one predominant obstacle when it came to advancing in their careers: that of their gender, and not, as my initial assumption was, because of their migration background.

The experiences of these women are not only remarkable but at the same time raise the issue of the lack of action to thin out the glass ceiling at the private sector level.