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Migration as Catalyst for Learning

Learning Experiences of Young High-Skilled Latin American Women migrants in Austria and their Labor Market Integration

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Diese Arbeit untersucht die Bildungsstrategien hochqualifizierter junger lateinamerikanischer Frauen, die nach Österreich migriert sind, sowie ihr Integrationsprozess in den österreichischen Arbeitsmarkt. Sechs Frauen aus verschiedenen lateinamerikanischen Ländern wurden im Rahmen einer qualitativen Methode semi-strukturiert zu ihren Erfahrungen befragt. Die unterschiedlichen Narrative offenbarten die Gründe für die Migration, die Bildungs- und Berufsvorstellungen, die Herausforderungen des Migrationsprozesses im Zusammenhang mit Bürokratie, kulturellen Unterschieden, Sprachbarrieren und dem Aufbau einer beruflichen Zukunft in Österreich sowie die verschiedenen Bewältigungsstrategien, die die Teilnehmerinnen anwenden, um diese Herausforderungen zu navigieren. Die Ergebnisse illustrieren zudem, wie informelle Lernerfahrungen einen zentralen Prozess der Migration darstellen und sowohl die Entwicklung neuer Kompetenzen als auch eine Identitätstransformation fördern.

This research explores the learning strategies of young high-skilled Latin American women who migrated to Austria and their integration process into the Austrian labor market. Six women from different Latin American countries were interviewed using semi-structured interviews following a qualitative methodology. The different narratives revealed the drivers to migrate, the educational and professional aspirations, the challenges of the migratory process tied to bureaucracy, cultural differences, language barriers and building a career path in Austria, and the different coping strategies the participants use to navigate those challenges. The findings also illustrate how informal learning experiences are a key process of the migratory journey, fostering the development of new skills as well as an identity transformation.

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1 Introduction

Migration has become a predominant phenomenon shaping the lives of individuals and different spheres of society, including the economic sector, labor markets and sociocultural behaviors. In recent decades, the various migratory flows have attracted scholars to understand better migratory routes, the drivers of migration and the processes of adaptation to host societies. The development of migratory flows between Latin America and Europe has not been the exception; these two territories share a long history of migration traceable to the 15th century with the first arrival of Europeans to the Americas, however, more recent migratory waves from Europeans moving to the Americas took place by the beginning of the 20th century following the economic development of the region (Pardo, 2018, p. 74).

Not long after, the migratory flows shifted due to the political instability, economic crisis and the search for new professional opportunities, leading Latin Americans migrants to move to Europe, specifically to Southern European countries such as Spain, Italy and Portugal (Bayona-i-Carrasco & Ávila-Tàpies, 2019; Pardo, 2018; Solimano & Pollack, 2004). Although research on this topic has been expanding to other European countries, there is a gap in official information about the Latin American population living in the region (Bayona-i-Carrasco & Ávila-Tàpies, 2019, p. 200). An example of this is Austria, where research on migration has been focused primarily on larger migrant groups, leaving Latin Americans underrepresented in the national data (Statistik Austria, 2025) as well as in academic studies.

Furthermore, recent research has addressed the growing participation of women in migratory processes, motivated by the search for new educational and professional opportunities abroad. This process has been defined as “feminization of migration”, term that highlights not only the dimension of gender in migratory waves but also brings the focus on the specific challenges women face during the migratory journey, experiencing labor market

segmentation, discrimination and often difficulties in the recognition of qualifications (Ghosh, 2017; Lehtovaara & Jyrkinen, 2021; Pardo, 2018).

Besides, the studies on migration and the challenges of the process tied to gender reveal the informational gap on the experiences of Latin American migrants, specifically women who have migrated to European countries. There is insufficient data to help us understand the scale of Latin American women's presence in Austria, nor is there information on the specific details of these women's migratory experiences. Some authors have noted possible stereotypes and situations of discrimination that women may face during the migration process (Ghosh, 2017; Pardo, 2018); however, there is no concrete evidence that these assumptions apply to most cases.

The literature used in this research serves as a starting point for further exploring the topic of migratory experiences, specifically among Latin American women living in Austria, thereby contributing to closing the information gap about this minority group in Austria and to understanding the learning experiences of their migratory journey. As the main subjects of this study are women, high-skilled migration is an important component to consider, given the influence of academic and professional aspirations in the feminization of migration, which positions education and professional plans as important motivators for pursuing a life abroad (Rao, 2010; Solimano & Pollack, 2004). Hence, this research aims to understand the skills young Latin American women have acquired in their academic and professional journeys, and how professional education, the degrees they obtained in their countries of origin, and expectations of for acquiring new skills and qualifications in Austria have influenced their migratory trajectories.

Therefore, the concept of Learning plays a crucial role in this research, not only to understand the skills and qualifications young high-skilled Latin American women acquired before moving to Austria, but also their learning experiences and coping strategies throughout

the migratory journey, focusing on the challenges permeated by their gender and nationality. With that in mind, this research aims to answer the question of what are the learning experiences for young, high-skilled female professionals from Latin America during their labor market integration in Austria. Nonetheless, considering that the process of learning and the migratory journey are multilayered experiences (Bernhard, 2024; Schwarz, 2020), this study seeks to answer the following secondary research questions: 1) What are the migratory experiences of young high-skilled Latin American women living in Austria? 2) Which learning and coping strategies did young high-skilled women from Latin America developed during the migratory experience? 3) What are the chances and challenges tied to gender, language and cultural background of young high-skilled Latin American women living in Austria?.

To answer these questions, this study has a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews, facilitating the narratives of the participants about their learning experiences during the migratory journey and the different emotions that emerged from the process. The main actors are six Latin American women living in Austria, specifically in Vienna. The participants were found and selected through snowball sampling and at the time of the interviews their age range was between 25 and 35. Additionally, these women are defined during this research as high-skilled individuals, as all of them hold post-secondary qualifications or university degrees (Chaloff & Lemaître, 2009, p. 11; Solimano & Pollack, 2004, p. 6), obtained in their countries of origin or in Austria.

The motivation to investigate this topic and interview these women lies in the academic relevance, but more importantly, in my personal trajectory as a Latin American woman who migrated to Austria. My own experiences in navigating different dimensions of migration, from bureaucratic processes, language barriers, to professional uncertainties have led me to meet other women with similar yet diverse experiences. These encounters had been strongly significant to bring more visibility to my community as they provide a platform for those young

Latin American women whose narratives have not been heard. More importantly, this research also aims to contribute to academic discussions about migration from an educational point of view, highlighting how learning experiences are a key layer influencing the migratory journey of individuals and how diving deeper into them can allow a better understanding of the multiple complexities of migration.

2 Theoretical Framework

This aim of this chapter is to present an overview of the historical process of migration and the different motivations according to academics. It becomes relevant to understand the connection between Latin America and Europe in terms of migratory flows, and the role of gender in the adaptation process and the integration into the labor market for high-skilled migrant women, as well as the different challenges and opportunities that arise during the process.

Moreover, this chapter will clarify the concepts of migratory experience and learning strategies, both being multidimensional concepts that encompass physical, psychological and emotional aspects. The former refers to all the steps of the individual journey of migration beginning from the idea of moving abroad and continuing during the arrival and adaptation process in the receiving country (Burgha, 2004). The latter, understood as the acquisition of skills and knowledge through the subjective experience (Morrice, 2014), involving coping strategies (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004) to tackle challenging situations, eventually leads to the individual's identity transformation and development.

Nonetheless, the concepts explained throughout this chapter focus on bringing a theoretical background to consider those experiences of young Latin American high-skilled women, who moved and integrated into the labor market, as an individual journey filled with complexities and particularities, that like any other minority in Austria, deserves to be acknowledged.

2.1 Migration: Drivers, History & Multidimensional Experiences

Migration is one of the main topics of this work; therefore, to understand all the different challenges and opportunities this process brings to young women professionals, it's key to begin with the definition of this concept. When looking for a definition of migration, it can be found that different authors describe it according to their academic background,

however, throughout this research, migration will be understood as a process in which individuals or groups move from their country of origin to a different place that is geographically distant (Delgado, 2008, p. 15; Schwarz, 2020, p. 218). This process entails an extensive number of events that occur before the movement (Burgha, 2004, p. 243) and after the arrival in the receiving country, impacting every individual differently.

Migration can be a voluntary or involuntary process, as framed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2025). The definition of voluntary migration can be understood as a process executed "knowingly and willingly", meaning that the individual makes a conscious decision about moving and settling in the host country, following the migratory regulations imposed by the authorities. Voluntary migration can be seen in the form of labor migration, family formation or reunification, and educational migration (OIM, 2025).

On the other hand, involuntary migration is defined by the IOM (2025) by the movement from the sending to the receiving country involving "force, compulsion or coercion", for example, those individuals or groups looking for refuge in a different country, or what the OIM calls as "internally displaced persons", often involving the movement of people due to environmental disasters or development projects in their regions. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this research, the focus will remain on voluntary migration.

Bhugra (2004, p. 243-244) described the migratory experience as a heterogeneous process, as individuals experience it in different ways, starting from the series of events prior to making the decision upon arrival in the host country and begins the process of settling down. According to the author, these "push and pull" factors not only have an influence on the migratory experience but also on how the individual adapts and integrates into the new context. Besides, "it is likely that the longer the distance, the more reality change may occur". A process of preparation is required prior to migration, as Bhugra (2004, p. 244) emphasized, since the postmigration can lead individuals to experience stress in different ways. Therefore, being

prepared and having flexibility to manage the new circumstances are key factors in helping the individual with the transition and adaptation into the receiving country.

The factors leading to voluntary migration can vary according to the context in which every person is embedded. Solimano & Pollack (2004, p. 4-10) studied the different factors influencing the decision to migrate and mentioned the relevance of the political and economic situation of the sending country when making the decision to move, which they named as "pulling factors". An example used by the authors was the massive migration of professionals, including scientists and intellectuals, who fled from Latin America during the late 1960s and 1970s due to the repressive military regimes in some of the countries of the region. During these times, universities were targeted to identify those who were opposing to the governments and eventually doing an "ideological cleansing" as Solimano & Pollack called it.

On the other hand, the role that educational, professional and personal development plays in the process of migrating was defined as "pushing factors" by Solimano & Pollack (2004, p. 9). The authors highlighted how these factors motivate professionals to search for academic institutions with a high reputation for further knowledge acquisition or simply to pursue a "successful career abroad". Pursuing academic studies and/or a professional career in a foreign country is strongly influenced by migratory policies resulting from the diplomatic relationship between the sending and receiving countries, the job opportunities in certain fields and the different individual skills. Nonetheless, the push and pull factors for migrating are a key topic for this research, as understanding the participants' motivations to migrate facilitates the analysis of the learning experiences of young high-skilled Latin American women living in Austria and their integration in the labor market.

2.1.1 Migration flows: Latin America and Europe.

The topic of migratory flows between Latin America and Europe has been studied by scholars who were curious to understand the migration trends in the second half of the

nineteenth century and early twentieth century, as there was a wave of European migrants arriving in Latin America, mainly driven by the development of the 'new continent' (Pardo, 2018, p. 74). However, as it will be shown during this section, migration trends shifted their direction with Latin American migrants moving to Europe from the beginning of the twenty-first century, especially to Spain, Italy and Portugal.

Different studies have shown Spain to be the country with the highest amount of Latin American immigrants (Bayona-i-Carrasco & Avila-Tàpies, 2019; Pardo, 2018; Solimano & Pollack, 2004). Among the main nationalities that Spain has received by 2024, according to the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), were Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Argentina, Honduras & Ecuador, with the number of immigrants reaching approximately 108,200 (INE, 2004). Nonetheless, different studies have shown that the migration flows have been expanding beyond Southern European countries to other countries as United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Germany, which have been receiving an increasing number of migrants from Latin America due to growing job opportunities for international professionals (Bayona-i-Carrasco & Avila-Tàpies, 2019; Pardo, 2018).

The migration route from Latin American countries to Europe has had, up to this decade, about three migratory waves according to Bayona-i-Carrasco & Avila-Tàpies (2019, p. 199). The first wave occurred from the 1960s to 1980s and was mainly carried by migrants coming from Cuba, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, among others. This wave was motivated by the political situation in those countries, as the main regimes were highly unstable and oppressive dictatorships. The majority of migrants were educated professionals, technicians and academics. The second wave occurred by the end of the 1990s and late 2000s. This trend involved migrants from South American countries such as Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru who moved to Spain and were motivated by the opportunities in the labor market. Although the migration flows decreased during 2008 due to the recession, there has been a

third wave as a “response to economic recovery and the worsening of Latin American countries”. This wave began around 2014 and was influenced by the prospects of better-paid and stable jobs and financial support for entrepreneurship (Bayona-i-Carrasco & Avila-Tàpies, 2019, p. 199).

Although the migration flows explained above have been widely studied, there is still a gap in “official statistics on international immigration in European countries”, according to Bayona-i-Carrasco & Avila-Tàpies (2019, p. 200). An example of this is Austria, which has placed the focus on collecting the data from the largest groups of foreign nationals arriving from countries such as Germany, Romania, Türkiye, Serbia, Hungary, Syria and Ukraine (Statistik Austria, 2025). As Latin-American citizens living in Austria do not constitute a significant migration group in contrast with the total population of Austria and other groups of migrants, there is currently no reliable source from which the official numbers can be retrieved.

However, according to the Integration Report 2024 (Expert Council for Integration, 2024), the groups of migrants arriving in Austria searching for opportunities in the labor market are increasing, especially from outside the European Union. The report also mentions the acquisition of the German language as one of the main criteria for integrating into the labor market, suggesting the importance of learning the language even before the individual arrives in the country (p. 71). Is it possible to infer from this report that Austria is still working on building a definition of the skills and professions needed in the country to develop programs to promote those professions inside the country and attract foreign nationals to move to Austria to cover the demand.

The Integration Report has only an initial representation of the analysis of the high-skilled migrants in Austria. An important part of this analysis is that the migrant group with the

lowest labor market integration seem to be women coming from third countries[1], yet due to the gap of official numbers from migrants coming from third countries that do not represent the largest migration groups, it becomes challenging to interpret where the women mentioned in the report come from, and what's more, what was the context in which they had to leave their countries of origin, what type of preparation they had before moving to Austria and what are the main motives for migrating.

The report (Expert Council for Integration, 2024, p. 78) also mentions the insufficient German language skills as one of the main reasons why skilled migrants struggled to find a job. Therefore, this research aims to close this informational gap and contribute to understanding some of the motivations to migrate to Austria, focusing on Latin American high-skilled women. Additionally, this work seeks to comprehend what learning strategies were used throughout their migratory journey as well as in the process of integrating into the Austrian labor market.

2.1.2 Feminization of migration.

Although this research doesn't focus on gender studies, the main subjects are Latin American high-skilled women who migrated to Austria, and it becomes relevant to have an overview of how academia has understood the connection between migration and gender. Gosh (2017, p. 47-59), for instance, addressed the process of migration as highly gendered, due to the differences between men and women when making the decision to move to another country as well as the adaptation period in the receiving country[2]. Gender becomes then a key factor to understand the different experiences of individuals as well as the different migration flows. Moreover, Pardo (2018, p. 87) addressed in his work that a big part of the migrants that Europe

[1] Third country nationals are defined by the Integration Report 2024 as "persons who are neither EU citizens, citizens of other EEA states (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway), nor Swiss" (Expert Council for Integration, 2024, p. 97).

[2] The literature found during this research about gender migration is mainly binary, hence only men and women are mentioned as genders.

has received from Latin America over the past decades have been women, referring to this process as 'Feminization of Migration'. The research from Pardo becomes meaningful when considering that during the history of internal migration in Latin America, women have been the most predominant actors in the process by moving from rural to urban areas inside the countries of the region (Cerrutti, 2023, p. 161).

Many young women who migrated from the countryside to the cities were motivated by the job opportunities, especially in the field of domestic labor, which allowed them not only to have a source of income but also to provide for their families that stayed in rural areas (Cerrutti, 2023, p. 161). However, nowadays the motivation to migrate internationally corresponds to different factors, as according to Pardo (2018, p. 87), many Latin American women are confronted with an "unequal access to employment", leading them to take on informal jobs as a way of getting access to economic means, which leaves them in a disadvantaged position in their countries of origin.

Furthermore, according to Ghosh (2017, p. 47-59), women are more likely to be a minority of the total number of skilled migrants, often taking jobs in the domestic or care sector, leaving them in disadvantaged positions in comparison to men. In some of the literature, the reasons given for women to take on service jobs and be the gender with lower market integration are the educational levels received (Lehtovaara & Jyrkinen, 2021, p. 13). An example of this is shown in Ghosh's (2017) theorization about the disadvantages between genders in the process of migration. As the author suggests, these disadvantages occur mainly due to the type and level of education they have received in their home countries (p. 50), which is rooted in the colonial history of domestic and care occupations, that, according to Cerrutti (2003, p. 161), had represented the "subordinated role of women".

Nevertheless, the differences between genders during the migratory process and the migration flows should be understood not only in historical terms but also in the present context

of the sending and receiving countries. According to Cerrutti (2023, p. 162), “feminization of migration varies according to national and economic factors”; these factors are considered as the migratory regulations in the host country, the demand for certain professions, and whether the migration is done voluntarily or involuntarily, among others. Acknowledging all these different factors is key in the process of understanding the migratory experiences of young Latin American high-skilled women who have migrated to Austria and their integration into the Austrian labor market.

2.1.3 Finding new academic & professional pathways.

As explained above, this research will focus on voluntary migration, especially on Latin American high-skilled women who migrated to Austria with the goal of expanding their educational and professional paths, therefore this section dives into understanding the main motivations for high-skilled professionals who migrate, why studying abroad is a door opener for building a professional path and the complexity of describing the concept “high-skilled migrants”.

One of the motivational factors for individuals to migrate voluntarily is to pursue studies or training in other countries. According to Solimano & Pollack (2004, p. 9), students aiming for international mobility can leave their countries for different motives: the opportunity of studying in high-quality educational centers, acquiring some ‘international recognition’ while interacting with peers, and the possibility of developing a career somewhere else. After the completion of studies, some of the individuals return to their countries of origin, some others decide stay in the host country as due to the acquisitions of qualification from local universities, the opportunities of getting a job in their field increases, allowing them to permanently stay (Rao, 2010, p. 137; Sollimano & Pollack, 2004, p. 7, 18). Yet, educational migration often carries costs and risks that in many cases do not result in improving the level of education or training (Rao, 2010, p. 137).

Nonetheless, following Rao's theorization, migrating becomes a route for many young people to "aspire to social mobility and status enhancement", it is not only a way to acquire financial means but also to seek new experiences and skills. In countries where obtaining higher education qualifications are not a guarantee of participating of the local economy by getting formal jobs, many young people opt for migrating as a way of dealing with the lack of opportunities, and in the process, be willing to take "lower-status jobs at a distance from their locality and community, in the anonymity of an urban metropolis" (Rao, 2010 p. 137-139). It can be inferred that even with the challenges a migratory process brings, migrating for educational purposes becomes an alternative to acquire qualifications and more job opportunities. However, in many cases, individuals make a strong financial effort to receive an education abroad, without eventually fulfilling the expectations of having the qualifications recognized internationally or being able to access more professional opportunities.

Nonetheless, understanding the meaning of 'High-Skilled Migration' requires first focusing on the term 'skill', which is a rather abstract concept when it comes to the context of migration. The term presents variations of its definition that are linked to how each country describes skilled labor according to the demand for certain professions (Solimano & Pollack, 2004, p. 6). Hercog & Cangià (2021, p. 1) emphasized the challenges of defining the word 'skill' in the context where an individual needs to adapt and sometimes "reshape personal and professional competences in a new environment". Solimano & Pollack (2004, p. 6) addressed the complexity of not having a generally accepted definition for 'skill' as this gap may represent problems "regarding the recognition of qualification across countries". However, with globalization, the market has opened for high-skilled individuals, making the "international recognition of professional qualification" even more relevant for the debate.

For the purpose of this work, the definition of 'high-skilled migrants' will be understood as *individuals with post-secondary qualifications, such as university degrees, or even vocational*

or technical qualifications, whose duration is shorter than a university degree (Chaloff & Lemaître, 2009, p. 11; Solimano & Pollack, 2004, p. 6). Nevertheless, it is important to clarify that taking this definition brings challenges for understanding the full picture of skilled migrants, as according to Solimano & Pollack (2004, p. 6) the experiences made in the receiving country can also contribute to acquiring certain skills, and what's more, the term skilled or unskilled will vary according to the profession that's being performed.

The concept of "high-skilled migrants" may sound rather abstract due to the variations in between countries, however, for this work it's relevance lies on understanding that a professional skill can be obtained by a formal education or training in a certain institution, as well as through informal education made with the experience of migrating and learning to adapt and integrate to a new environment and labor market, enabling a better comprehention of the migratory experiences, and especifically for this research, the migratory experiences of young Latin American high-skilled women who migrated to Austria.

2.2 Host Country Adaptation & Labor Market Integration

From Bhugra's (2004, p. 243) perspective, migration is a process that can be described as "extremely heterogeneous", meaning that not one experience is equal to another. As we explored in the previous parts of this theoretical framework, the decision to migrate can be motivated by different reasons, such as seeking better educational and professional opportunities or simply because of the individual's desire to improve the quality of life by leaving the home country, in which they are vulnerable to inequality and disadvantages. This section will then dive into the different challenges and opportunities that arise through the adaptation process and how the migratory experience can be defined and understood, especially for the Latin American high-skilled women who migrated to Austria and went through the process of integrating into the labor market.

The process of adapting to a new country is not an easy task. According to Bhugra (2004, p. 244), not only push and pull factors will play a key role in the adaptation process, but also in how the individual responds to the different challenges and opportunities that they are exposed to in the host country. What's more, the job opportunities accessible to the individual, the housing conditions, and connections in the host country will also influence how the person will settle down.

Another key factor Bhugra mentions about the adaptation process is the preparation of the individual in their home country. The preparation prior to migration doesn't correspond only to the educational qualification the individual acquires prior to the move, but also the 'individual preparation' to manage expectations and be flexible to adapt to the changing circumstances. This means that if the individual has done research about the bureaucratic requirements to stay in the host country, the acquisition of the local language, if the search for educational or professional opportunities begins before the move, and if the person has contacts in the new country that can help them navigate the first steps after arrival. Even though the challenges through the adaptation process will eventually arise, the prior preparation allows the migrants to anticipate possible future situations that come with the migratory experience.

Educational qualifications and professional experience have a strong influence on the adjustment process after arriving in the host country (ibid, p. 245). However, the recognition of those qualifications can be a challenging process for some individuals. In the particular case of Austria, the title recognition is often a challenging process for third country migrants, not only due to the bureaucracy that revolves around the process and often delays it but also due to lack of action towards the acknowledgment of professions with shortage of skilled workers, as mention by the Expert Council for Integration (2024, p. 72-75).

Moreover, in the case of Latin American women migrating to Austria, language plays an important role in the adaptation process, as the exposure to the German language is not as

common as the exposure to languages such as English or Portuguese. According to the Integration Report 2024 (Expert Council for Integration, 2024, p. 76), the lack of German skills represents one of the main challenges for third-country migrants to find a job, reinforcing the idea that the acquisition of German language is not only a major part of integrating into the job market but also into the Austrian society.

2.2.1 Possible challenges and opportunities of migration.

The process of migration can entail challenges and opportunities that vary according to the sending and receiving countries. Migrants are often facing situations of vulnerability in which they represent a minority in the receiving countries, in many cases being exposed to exclusion and discrimination (Bailey, 2009, p. 76). Besides, the exposure to such situations brings psychological stressors that can appear as isolation, identity crises, and in some cases even the development of anxiety and depression (Bhugra, 2004, p. 244; Delgado, 2008, p. 17). Thus, this section expands on the different challenges that high-skilled migrant women undergo at the moment of integrating into the labor market, at the same time, recognizing how the learnings of dealing with those situations create new opportunities for learning and developing skills personally as well as professionally.

High-skilled migrants are prompted to encounter barriers with the recognition of their qualifications, difficulties in finding a job and different bureaucratic challenges (Chaloff & Lemaître, 2009, p. 9; Expert Council for Integration, 2024, p. 72-75), which can be worsened if the person lacks knowledge of the local language. Furthermore, the factor of gender can also have an influence on the migratory experience. Research has shown that migrant women are more prompt to experience exploitation and discrimination (Ghosh, 2017, p. 48) and in many cases, struggle with the job market integration, due to the challenges on the recognition of their educational qualifications (Lehtovaara & Jyrkinen, 2021, p. 16), what according to Ghosh (2017, p. 50-52) eventually forces them to work in “jobs that are well below their level of

qualification o expertise", such as domestic and caregiving roles, what are very often undervalued and poorly remunerated.

For young professionals, migration can bring different advantages and benefits such as the acquisition of know-how, being involved in a socioeconomic exchange with the receiving country (Chaloff & Lemaître, 2009, p. 11), as well as having experience of participating of academic collaborations, and in some cases even promoting the economy via entrepreneurship and innovation (Pardo, 2018, p. 38; Solimano & Pollack, 2004, p. 9;). Moreover, in terms of gender, the migration process also brings different opportunities for women, as such an experience can allow them to have financial independence and gain pride and autonomy (Cerrutti 2023, p. 165; Ghosh, 2017, p. 54;), and generally to build a professional path that strengthens their newly made skills and networks (Lehtovaara & Jyrkinen, 2021, p. 21).

It can be inferred that the challenges on acquiring recognition of educational and professional qualifications have a strong connection with the lack of an official definition for 'high-skilled migrant", which may bring difficulties for Latin American high-skilled women who don't dominate the German language at the moment of migrating, and who in order to have a source of income recur to informal jobs in the domestic or care sector. Nevertheless, for those women who learn how to navigate those challenges in a resourceful manner, the experience of adaptation to the new environment and integration into the labor market becomes significant for skill and knowledge acquisition and professional growth.

2.2.2 Migratory experience: the multilayered process of moving abroad.

As we have been exploring throughout this chapter, the migratory experience is strongly subjective and dependent on different factors. According to Schwarz (2010, p. 218-220), in academic studies, migration has been considered as a linear process that consists mainly of the relocation from the sending to the receiving country. However, the migratory experience is influenced by the trajectory of the individual, who makes certain decisions, has different coping

mechanisms and is embedded within a certain context. Therefore, it can be said that the migratory experience is a complex process that involves much more than the act of moving from one place to another.

To migrate is then to adapt, to learn, to experience transitions, as Bernhard (2024, p. 290) illustrates. The author mentions how migrating leads a person to "navigate new social, educational, and professional contexts through practical, informal experiences" (ibid, p. 284). The emotional and psychological factors also play an important role during the migratory experience, as migrants go through a complex process of adjusting to their new environment (Schapendonk et al., 2020, p. 212), while dealing with the feeling of loss of "relationships, assets and support" (Bhugra, 2004, p. 244). Consequently, the migratory experience is often a paradox, as Pardo (2018, p. 37-38) described it, due to the complex process of dealing with loss of the sending country while learning and integrating into the receiving country.

Although the migratory process comes with a significant number of challenges, it also brings different opportunities for individual growth and empowerment. The migratory experience not only can allow the individual to grow their networks (Bailey, 2009, p. 76) but also to boost the acquisition of skills such as resilience and adaptability (Bhugra, 2004, p. 245). The migration experience also becomes an opportunity for financial income, the opportunity to explore new places and learn about different cultures, allowing the individual to acquire skills (Rao, 2010, p. 138) that in most cases can only be obtained by migrating.

According to Bhugra (2004, p. 243), the experience of migrating can bring different stressors, as the mechanisms to cope with challenging situations can vary for every person. As Bernhard (2024, p. 283) points out, migrating can also help a person to learn new strategies that are important at the moment of arriving and adapting to the new setting, and what's more, migrating can also help develop a part of the identity that is directly related to the whole migratory experience.

Consequently, the term ‘Migratory Experience’ is understood throughout this research as a multidimensional process that goes beyond the physical move from the sending to the receiving country. This concept aims to encompass the experiences of Latin American high-skilled women before, during and after their move to Austria, including emotional, psychological and social aspects, and the identity transformations shaped by the individual trajectories.

2.3 Learning Strategies

Due to all the changes the migratory process entails, the experience of migration brings with it a great amount of learning. This research defines the concept ‘Learning Strategies’ by following Morrice’s (2014) theorization, who describes learning as a holistic process and a key part of an individual’s life, that not only consists of acquiring skills and knowledge but also represents the involvement of “body, mind and emotions” in the different experiences of human existence. It is then through the process of transformation that the individual constructs their identity (Morrice, 2014, p.151).

Learning, according to Morrice, is a life-long process that consists of transformation and evolves throughout the contexts in which a person is embedded, “this occurs within the social, political and public discourses in which the individual is located” (Morrice, 2014, p. 152). Therefore, defining migration as a movement that goes beyond the physical act of going from receiving to sending country is an important point to dive deeper into the transformations that occur throughout the migratory experience, encompassing multiple layers required to be analyzed for a better understanding of the learning experience in the context of adaptation and integration into a new environment.

It can be said that the migratory experiences are different for every person; however, the process holds certain similarities that could be analyzed as a common experience between migrants. Morrice (2014, p.150-151) mentions that migrants are often confronted with

transformations in their identity and most aspects that move around it, such as work, family, community and leisure activities. This occurs not only due to the change of location, but also because those ways of living and behaving they had in their home countries are no longer aligned with the new context, forcing the individuals to reshape their lives, and therefore, their identities.

An important idea of Morrice's (2014, p. 152-153) theorization is the recognition of identity formation as a key factor to understand the learning strategies acquired during the migratory experience. The author explains how the path to comprehend the learning strategies of an individual going through a migratory process is to dive into their story and their different social and cultural experiences that led the person to be a migrant. Therefore, the skills and knowledge a person has acquired throughout their life would influence the coping strategies in the challenging moments and how the individual takes advantage of the opportunities the migratory experience gives them.

Recognizing that the learning strategies used throughout the migratory experience are unique to every individual journey, even within the similarities that a voluntary migratory process may hold for those who decide to walk that path, is a crucial approach to subjectivize the experience of the Latin American high-skilled women who migrated to Austria and eventually analyze the coping strategies used throughout the challenging situations they faced during the adaptation to Austria and integration into the labor market.

2.3.1 Informal learning & coping strategies.

To understand the definition of informal learning it is key to highlight the concept of formal learning. Following the theorization of Bernhard (2024, p. 292), formal learning can be understood as the "expectation to be taught, rather than learning in a self-directed way". Thus, formal learning can be taken as the active process of participating in a course, training, lesson or workshop in which the person acquires skills, knowledge or lessons, and often but not

always, receives a certificate of those qualifications. On the other hand, informal learning was described by Marsick & Watkins (2001) and Marsick & Neaman (2018) as a spontaneous process that occurs when a person is confronted with challenging situations, leading the individual to acquire or modify certain skills, behaviors or attitudes. The authors also defined informal learning as an "organic" and intentional process. The main difference with formal learning lies on its unstructured ways and lack of clear goals.

Moreover, the process of informal learning should also be understood within the context that an individual is embedded, and it's dependent on the interpretation that the person makes out of a situation (Marsick & Neaman, 2018, p. 56). The act of interpretation becomes highly relevant for informal learning, as it will lead an individual to take action about a situation:

> These choices are guided by recollections of past solutions and by a search for other potential models for action. Success in implementation depends on drawing on capabilities that are adequate to the task. If the solution calls for new skills, the person needs to acquire these. Many contextual factors influence the ability to learn well enough to successfully implement the desired solution. (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 30)

Those factors that influence informal learning are strongly related to the resources a person has, such as money and time (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 30), or in the case of this research, migration, in which learning plays a significant role throughout the migratory experience (Morrice, 2014, p. 153). In the process of migration, individuals are often confronted with learning new social behaviors and deprioritizing those that were valuable in the past but no longer serve them. They are also confronted with the remaking of their identities and all the challenges and opportunities of living in a new country (Morrice, 2014, p. 157). However, according to Morrice (2014, p. 254):

> What learning might take place and what identities might be enacted will be dependent on the new social space or field in which migrants are located, and most especially, the

policies, social and political discourses concerned with immigration, integration and lifelong learning.

It can be said that the concept of informal learning is shaped not only by the context but also by previous experiences an individual has had throughout their life, and the resources available during the decision-making process in specific situations. Furthermore, connected to the concept of Learning Strategies, this research adopts the term Coping Strategies from Lazarus & Folkman (1984; cited in Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004) to describe the behaviors and thoughts that appear during challenging situations. Such situations bring stressors that can be either internal or external.

Following this theorization, coping can be understood as a complex process that activates in different ways according to the environment, the situation and the personality dispositions, making the resources for coping subjective to every person and linked to emotional regulation during the challenging situation. Therefore, the concept of Learning Strategies used during this research aims to highlight the skills and knowledge acquisition resulting from the migratory experience, as well as to recognizing the different coping strategies used by young, high-skilled Latin American women living in Austria, considering that their individual ways of handling different challenges are tied to informal learning obtained in everyday situations, particularly during the setting of migration where they learn to adapt to a new environment, culture and labor market.

3 Methodology

As presented in the previous chapter, there are no official statistics from Latin-American citizens living in Austria, creating an informational gap to obtain a better picture of this group of migrants, as well as further invisibilizing immigrant minorities and their migratory experiences. Therefore, this research aims to help close such an informational gap by bringing the focus to the migratory experiences of young, high-skilled Latin American women living in Austria and entering the labor market by acknowledging their learning experiences, gathering their narratives as a tool to re-create their migratory journeys.

As presented in the previous chapter, there is a strong informational gap from the official numbers of Latin American immigrants living in Austria, especially young high-skilled women who have moved to Austria to find new professional opportunities. This lack of data tends to make invisible migrant minorities as well as their experiences and migratory journeys. Therefore, the focus of this research lies on the experiences of the participants and their narratives about their migratory experiences and learning strategies throughout their integration into the job market.

As the narratives and experiences of the participants lie at the center of this research, the most suitable method for this work is qualitative research, especially the semi-structured interview. According to Hammarberg et al. (2016, p. 499), qualitative research methods are most appropiate to use when the research aims to answer questions about “experience, meaning and perspective”, thus, being the semi-structured interview the right approach for this research to dive deeper into the individual journeys of the participants while focusing on the research topics by creating a questionary beforehand that will guide the interview. During the interview, other topics and follow-up questions can appear, helping not only to build a better picture of the personal story of the participants but also to keep in mind that even with similarities, every narration is in itself unique.

3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews: Gathering the Narratives

The application of semi-structured interviews can be perceived as a "versatile and flexible" method for data collection, according to Kallio et al. (2016, p. 2955). This is due to the structure that is brought throughout the interviews, leaving space for discussion at the same time. The authors highlight the importance of the different levels of the questions, dividing them into questions focusing on the research subject, and the follow-up questions that appear from the narration of the personal experiences, allowing the participants to speak openly about what they would like to share (p. 2960). Another characteristic of the semi-structured interviews pointed out by Galletta (2013, p. 45) is that this method has not only open-ended questions but more theoretical questions as well, which drive the participants to share their experiences while staying within the subject that is being researched.

Consequently, the semi-structured interviews are a highly relevant method to gather the participants' narratives and facilitate the understanding of learning experiences from young high-skilled Latin American women who have migrated to Austria and have gone through the labor market integration process. Due to the interview structure, the focus topics of this research will be addressed by diving into the learning experiences and migratory trajectories of the participants, while opening the space for other emerging topics that might be relevant for this study.

3.2 Who are the Participants?

As stated above, this research is conducted with a qualitative methodology, using semi-structured interviews to analyze the different migratory experiences and learning strategies of Latin American women who migrated to Austria and their process of integration into the Austrian labor market. Therefore, the sample for this work is women from Latin American countries, in between the ages of 25 and 35, who migrated voluntarily to Austria before or after finishing their university studies in their country of origin, and continued their education in an

Austrian university, and eventually integrated into the Austrian labor market. These women come from middle/middle-high social classes from their countries of origin and have previously obtained a cultural capital that motivated them to look for professional opportunities abroad. None of the participants identify with specific ethnic groups, however, the Latin American origins can be understood as a shared cultural background while acknowledging the high cultural diversity of the region.

The method used to find the participants was snowball sampling, that is based on "identifying respondents who are then used to refer researchers on to other respondents" according to Atkinson & Flint (2001, p.1). This method was especially useful for this research as the Latin American women on my social network shared the contacts of other Latin American women who fulfilled the criteria to conduct this research. As a result of that, I interviewed 6 women from 4 different countries (Argentina, Honduras, Colombia and Mexico), who either had qualifications in social sciences or humanities, or at some point in their migratory process, worked in the social field or caregiving jobs. Throughout the selection criteria, there was the assumption that they had the resources to move abroad, even if after arrival they had to look for financial income in Austria. The question about socioeconomic status at the country of origin was not directly mentioned during the interviews, yet this variable emerged with the topics of educational qualifications obtained, formal and informal jobs before and after the move, and financial income and support. Although the respondents had common traits and somehow similar approaches to migration, their experiences and learning strategies should not be taken as a generalization of Latin American women who migrate to Austria and integrate into the labor market.

Name (Pseudonym)	Nationality	Age	Highest Qualification	Current Job	Migration Motivation	Migration Status	Years of living in Austria
Ana	Mexico	31	Bachelor's degree	Service /Recreation Sector	Partner	Student	4 years
Fernanda	Argentina	33	Master's degree	Grant Officer/ Non-Profit Sector	Studies	Family Reunification	+ 5 years
Luciana	Colombia	29	Bachelor's degree	Service /Recreation Sector	Studies	Student	10 years
Patricia	Honduras	28	Bachelor's degree	Business & Marketing	Studies / Family	Student	7 years
Paula	Colombia	27	Bachelor's degree	Project Manager	Family	Family Reunification	3 years
Sandra	Colombia	27	Bachelor's degree	Kindergarten Assistant	Family	Student	+ 4 years

Table 1: Participants' overview.

To protect the participants' identities and privacy, their names were changed as well as the names of family members, friends or companies. The participants were asked at the beginning for their consent to record the interview, which was then recorded with an iPhone and transcribed with a transcription software. To provide a better picture of every participant's journey, their stories are here presented:

3.2.1 Ana: Mexico, 31 years old, 4 years in Austria.

Prior to moving to Austria, Ana lived all her life in Mexico, and although she learned English and French as foreign languages, she never imagined leaving her home country. After obtaining a degree in Literature (Licenciatura en Literatura), she consolidated her professional experience working in a school as a French teacher. During those years, Ana established a romantic relationship with Julian, who is an Austrian citizen. They had a long-distance relationship, and she visited him in Austria a few times. Julian motivated her to pursue a master's program in Vienna.

Her initial plan was to move to Vienna only for two years, study her master's and be close to her boyfriend. However, three months after arriving in Austria, Julian and Ana finished their relationship, leaving with the confusion of staying or leaving. Despite the challenging situation, Ana decided to stay and continue her studies. During that time, she started working informally in a restaurant, and due to the low wage, she decided to look for a different job. A friend suggested she apply for a part-time job in the escape room she worked at, and she got a service job in customer support.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a lack of classes taught for her master's degree, which forced her to stay for more than two years. During her stay, Ana has applied for different jobs in the social field without succeeding, demotivating her to stay in Austria after finishing her studies. At the time of the interview, Ana was still working in the escape room, parallel to writing her master's thesis and had no clear plan of leaving or staying.

3.2.2 Fernanda, Argentina, 33 years old, 5 years in Austria.

Fernanda is the second child of 6 siblings. She attended a German school in Argentina, where she was first exposed to the language. She obtained a degree in International Relations (Licenciatura en Relaciones Internacionales), and after a few years of collecting professional experience in Argentina and seeing the financial instability of the country, Fernanda began to consider the idea of going abroad to earn more money while working in the service sector. Back then, her older sister had migrated to Germany and built up a life there, which motivated Fernanda to make the decision to move abroad. Initially, Fernanda's plan was to move to Germany, obtain a working-holiday visa that allowed her to stay for a year, save some money and be close to her sister. Due to the high number of requests for that type of visa, she couldn't get an appointment to request it; however, she considered Austria as an alternative and the visa approval process went very fast.

Fernanda moved to Austria, fully proficient in English and with a basic knowledge of German, and she began working in a vineyard in a small town close to Vienna. She soon realized she didn't like the job and quit to start working informally in the care sector as a babysitter. During that year, she also met her partner, David, and decided to prolong her stay in Austria. She was accepted to study a master's degree, which allowed her to stay in the country, do her studies and work up to 20 hours. Right after, she obtained a job in a non-profit organization in the position of Team Assistant. A few years after meeting David, they obtained a registered partnership, which change her residence status to family reunification, giving her access to the labor market without limitations. At the time of the interview, she obtained her master's degree and was promoted within the same organization to the role of Grant Officer.

3.2.3 Luciana, Colombia, 29 years old, 10 years in Austria.

Luciana is the eldest of two sisters. She studied in a German school in Colombia and from a young age, she was exposed to the German language and culture. During her last school years, she was clear she wanted to pursue her professional studies abroad, and right after graduating, she studied one semester of cinematic arts (Cine) while doing the visa process to move to Germany. Luciana was fluent in English and during her stay in Germany, she focused on further learning German. After less than a year, Luciana moved to Austria as the bureaucratic process to study a bachelor's degree was easier than in Germany.

Luciana started her studies, parallel to working a few hours a week as a babysitter and as a tutor to other students at university. Luciana obtained a bachelor's degree in journalism and communication sciences (Publizistik und Kommunikationswissenschaft), and she looked for jobs in her field without success, which led her to continue studying a master's program to keep living in Austria with a valid residence permit that allowed her to study and work for 20 hours a week. However, she did find a job in the recreation sector as a Tourist Guide, while still working a few hours as a tutor. As there were new regulations from the university,

international students were not allowed to work for less than 10 hours anymore, what led her to leave that job and focus on her role as a tourist guide. At the time of the interview, Luciana was studying her master's program with the plan of taking her time to finish it and extend her stay in Austria and she was actively looking for jobs with the hope of finding something in her field of study.

3.2.4 Patricia, Honduras, 28 years old, 7 years in Austria

Patricia is the eldest of two sisters who were always very close. After finishing high school, she studied Anthropology (Licenciatura en Antropología) in Honduras for two years. During that time, her sister also finished high school and had the dream of studying art. As the universities in Honduras didn't offer professional education in Art, her sister and a friend started looking for universities abroad and found Vienna as a potential place to study. Patricia was then motivated by her sister and a friend to also look for a program in Vienna to do her studies, with the intention of migrating together. Patricia was accepted into the same program she was studying in Honduras, obtained a student visa with the help of her sister, and she soon moved to Vienna, followed by her sister a couple of days later.

Patricia was fluent in English and French prior to moving to Austria. She didn't have a clear plan on how much time she would stay in Austria, but learning German was a prerequisite to start her bachelor's program. Once she had the required proficiency, Patricia began her studies in Anthropology all over again, but this time in Vienna. During her studies, she tried obtaining a job, and for a couple of months she worked in the care sector as a babysitter, however, she was motivated by her parents to entirely focus on finishing her studies, as they were financially supporting her and her sister.

After completing her bachelor's education, Patricia started applying for jobs as her parents reduced their financial support. She soon obtained a position in a law firm; however, she had difficulties with acquiring a residence permit that allowed her to work full-time,

situation that led her to begin a master's program to continue with a student visa that allowed her to work up to 20 hours. At the time of the interview, Patricia was writing her master's thesis and working as a part-time employee in the law firm, with the goal of obtaining a residence permit once she obtained her degree.

3.2.5 Paula, Colombia, 27 years old, 3 years in Austria.

Paula is the eldest of two daughters of a Colombian family. Her parents taught her from a small age to aspire to migrate and look for professional opportunities outside Colombia, her country of origin. While Paula was studying her bachelor's degree, her parents migrated to Germany, which motivated her to seek an academic exchange in Germany. At that time, the COVID-19 pandemic started, forcing her to stay in Colombia and finish her degree in Production Engineering (Ingeniera de Producción). Three years later, she went to visit her parents and realized she wanted to stay in Europe close to them and after exploring different routes, she found out staying as an au pair was the easiest option to obtain a residence permit, stay initially for one year and learn German. However, it was not possible for her to obtain the residence permit in Germany while visiting the country as a tourist, situation that led her to explore Austria as an option, and soon after, she found a family in a small town near Vienna that hosted her for a year and supported her during the bureaucratic process.

During that year, Paula met Florian, with whom she started a romantic relationship and offered her to officially register their partnership, that way it would be easier for her to stay after the au pair visa expired. Paula moved to Vienna, and in the midst of deciding how to proceed with her academic and professional path, was offered the position of Project Manager in a company in the service and entertainment sector. Parallel to that, Paula tried to begin her studies in a master's program, and although she was proficient in English, due to her lack of proficiency in German, she only studied for one semester and decided to focus on her job. At the time of the interview, Paula was no longer with her Florian, though they stayed as friends

and her residence permit continued to be one of family reunification; she was promoted in her job and looking for the right opportunity to begin her master's studies again.

3.2.6 Sandra, Colombia, 27 years old, 4 years in Austria.

Sandra is the youngest of two daughters of a Colombian family. Sandra obtained a degree in Psychology (Psicóloga) in Colombia, and after obtaining her degree, she began her professional path in an institution from the state, where the wages were very low and the work was tough. Sandra was motivated by her sister to go to Germany as an au pair, as her sister had lived for a while there and had built a company supporting young women to do the program, thus, Sandra was from an early age exposed to the German language and her sister's migratory experience; additionally, she was already fluent in English. Sandra spent a year in Germany as ab au pair without a clear plan of staying or leaving, rather enjoying her time in Europe by traveling and partying. Due to her lifestyle, she realized at the end of that year she hadn't really learned German, which motivated her to look for alternatives to stay. Before the year was about to end, she found a host family in Austria to extend her stay as an au pair.

After her year in Austria ended, Sandra moved back to Germany to do a year of volunteer work, but the Austrian family who had hosted her previously asked her to go back to work with them. They supported her financially to obtain a study visa and move back to Austria. She stayed with them for a year and a half, all while studying, and after she stopped working for them, she started a position as a Spanish teacher in a Kindergarten where she stayed for some months, until she found her current job as a Kindergarten Assistant. At the time of the interview, Sandra was promoted in her job, and although she was studying her master's degree, she had a plan to change her studies and begin a pedagogic education to be more aligned with her professional goals.

3.3 Positionality as Researcher

Concerning research-ethical considerations, it is important to recognize how my position as a researcher influenced not only my view on the topic of migration and learning strategies but also the approach to the interviews. As Holmes (2020, p. 2-3) highlighted, the researcher acknowledges their preexisting conceptions and constructs of the social world by reflecting upon their positionality, displaying their direct or indirect bias (influence) on the research. Therefore, acknowledging my position as researcher is a key part of this work to better understand how it could have influenced the focus of this research as well as the way of conducting the interviews, and subsequently the analysis and discussion.

I was born and raised in Colombia and I am the first generation of women from my immediate family who finished higher education, learned two foreign languages and migrated to Europe. My decision to migrate was driven by two factors: my perception of limited professional opportunities for young graduates and the relationship with an Austrian partner, which shaped my choice of destination country. Moving to Austria involved an adjustment process with different challenges linked to the acquisition of the German language, navigating bureaucracy and aligning career expectations with the reality of the opportunities in the country. Those experiences required me to develop coping and learning strategies that are closely intertwined with the subject of this research.

At the same time, I consider it important to acknowledge the privileges that shaped my journey: being a white, middle-class, educated Latin American woman with different means of support from my family and partner. Over time, I also built a support network of Latin American women in Austria, whose experiences have been an inspiration to conduct this research. These women also contributed to the snowball sampling process, as many of them referred me to respondents. Therefore, my positionality inevitably influences how I access, interpret, and represent the voices of Latin American migrant women in this study.

3.4 Data Analysis

Before moving forward with the data analysis methodology, it is important to recognize the limitations that the semi-structured interview has for collecting comprehensive data about the experiences and learning strategies of Latin American women who migrated to Austria. As the participants were interviewed once, it's challenging to access all the different layers of their trajectories and migratory pathways. Therefore, understanding this limitation becomes a clue to focus on the collected data relevant for this work, acknowledging the subjectivity of the experiences of every participant.

After finalizing the interviews with the participants, the interview recordings were initially transcribed using the tool Transkriptor; later, the audio and transcription were manually checked to make sure the information from the interviews was not lost[3]. Once the transcriptions were ready, the method used to analyze the data was the Thematic Analysis[4] by Braun & Clarke (2006), following the 6 steps proposed by authors: 1) Transcription and familiarization of the data, identifying the possible patterns; 2) Creating a set of codes driven by the data results, but keeping the focus of the research topic; 3) Sorting the codes in case of overlaps and grouping them to form potential themes; 4) Refining the themes, making sure they are congruent with the research focus and reviewing that the codes are coherent to each theme; 5) Naming the themes and proposing the definition for each theme in accordance to topic they belong to in accordance to the codes and the focus of the research; 6) analyzing the data in relation to the literature review and the research questions.

Consequently, six themes emerged from the participants' narratives, while keeping in mind the research focus: 1) Migration decision and expectations; 2) Arrival and structural

[3] The transcripts of the interviews is not included in this work to maintain the confidentiality of the participants, however this research contains literal quotes from the interviews that were manually translated to English, staying as true as possible to the original meaning of the quote in Spanish.
[4] During the analytical process AI Tools were used as an auxiliary resource to support the possible approaches to organize the data, however all the research, creation codes and themes, and overall, the analysis was done manually and critically by me (the researcher).

adaptation; 3) Educational and professional trajectories; 4) Emotional challenges and coping strategies; 5) Gender, nationality and social relations; 6) Profiles of identity transformation through migration.

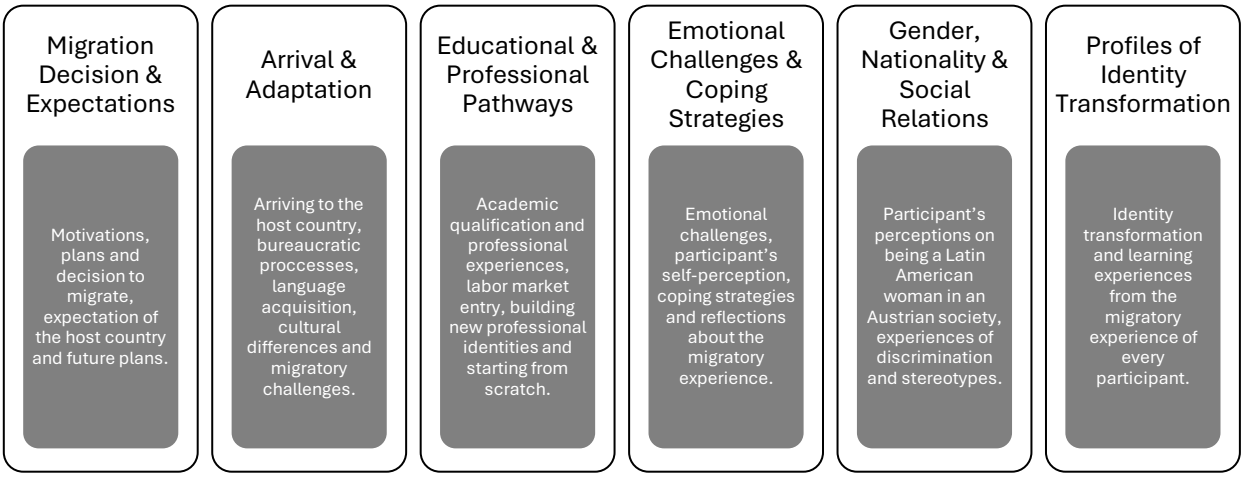

Figure 1 Thematic map, showing six main themes and a short description of what each of them contains.

4 Analysis of the Learning Experiences

Throughout this chapter the different migratory experiences of young high-skilled Latin American women living in Austria will be analyzed based on the narratives from the participants. The semi-structured interviews conducted revealed various dimensions, divided into six main themes guiding this analysis: Migration Decision and Prior Expectations; Arrival and Adaptation; Education and Professional Trajectories; Emotional Challenges and Coping Strategies; Gender, Nationality and Social Relationships; and Profiles of Identity Transformation Through Migration.

The women interviewed during this research share certain common characteristics that are key to better comprehend the analysis of the narratives. All the participants are young women from different Latin American countries who migrated to Austria, most of them after obtaining a degree from undergraduate programs with an average duration of 4-5 years. These women come from middle to middle-high class families and possess cultural and linguistic capital, although Spanish is their native language, all participants were proficient in at least one foreign language prior to migration.

Therefore, by exploring the mentioned themes, the aim on this chapter lies on exploring how structural, cultural and personal factors influence the migratory experience of the participants, providing a comprehensive understanding of the different layers of the migratory experience and the learning process that such journey entails, acknowledging the similarities, yet highlighting the uniqueness of each experience.

4.1 Migration Decision & Expectations: Drivers, Destination and Day by Day Experiences

This theme explores the different phases of the migratory process, beginning with the motivations leading the participants to migrate, including the different aspects that influenced the final decision to leave their countries of origin and the reasons behind choosing the country

of destination. Moreover, the analysis of this theme includes those initial plans and expectations before moving to Austria, and how the plans and expectations transformed throughout time. The motivations or driving factors of young Latin American women when deciding to migrate to Austria are one of the key topics of this research, as it is the starting point to better understand the full picture behind the different experiences of integration into the job market in Austria and the learning strategies used and acquired throughout the process.

4.1.1 Drivers to migrate: relational ties, new experiences & opportunities.

Understanding the experiences of women who have migrated from Latin America to Austria requires diving into the different factors that influence the decision to migrate, beginning with the personal, professional and even socioeconomic context in which they are embedded. Although the different backgrounds of the participants became evident throughout the interviews, there were some similarities found in what triggered the decision to migrate, such as the *economic instability* and *limited career opportunities* from the country of origin, as well as *emotional factors* tied to either romantic relationships or influenced by family living abroad.

The economic instability of the country of origin can be illustrated with the case of Fernanda and Sandra, who due to the uncertainty of their professional future, made the decision to migrate, even if their preference was to stay in their countries of origin:

> "The situation in Argentina, the economy in Argentina, the instability (…) if it was up to me, I would live in Argentina." (Fernanda)
>
> "I decided to leave Colombia because of the wages, because honestly the wages for a graduate in psychology were very low (…) but my wish never was to leave Colombia" (Sandra)

Similar to Fernanda and Sandra, Ana's preference was to stay in her country of origin, Mexico; however, her decision to migrate was primarily motivated by her relationship with an Austrian partner:

> Back then, I had an Austrian boyfriend, and he told me why don't you come to Austria and study a Master's… and I thought the idea was fantastic and I moved to Austria (…) if it wasn't because of the emotional factor, most likely I wouldn't have migrated (laughs). (Ana)

For Ana, the possibility of studying a master's degree in Austria meant upward mobility in her educational path as well as the possibility of closing the distance with her long-distance partner. The emotional factor being a driver for migration was also expressed by Paula; in her case, her parents promoted the idea of moving to a different country while she grew up. Paula's parents taught her she should aspire to migrate, and they migrated to Germany, which somehow facilitated her decision-making process:

> They always taught us to go out and seek other opportunities, that the world is very big and you can go out and explore it... And let's say that they left first, so I already had explored that path a little bit, but it was always about seeking opportunities abroad (Paula)

Relational ties can then be considered as a key factor in making the decision to migrate, even more when other family members have migrated and shared the experience, which in the case of Paula, created a positive perception of migration. However, other participants were clear on wanting to leave their country of origin and study somewhere else. For Patricia, the motivation to move abroad emerged from the curiosity of exploring new places: "I always knew I wanted to study somewhere else, I didn't know where… but it was more to go and see something new, to have new experiences" (Patricia).

For Luciana, on the other hand, the motivation to leave her country of origin was strongly related to the cultural aspect and the perception of how women are treated poorly, especially by men:

> I always thought I didn't want to stay in Colombia because I feel like I've always had a lot of conflicts with the mentality of many people. Especially as a woman, I feel like

> I'm not taken seriously, generally by men, and Colombia is a very macho country in general. (Luciana)

Unlike Fernanda and Sandra, who addressed the *economic instability* of their countries of origin as one of the key drivers for migration, Luciana mentioned an important aspect regarding the external factors influencing the desire to move somewhere: *gender inequality*. The analysis of stereotypes and gender differences will become relevant during the analysis of Theme 5. Gender, Nationality and Social Relations, however, the quote above represents an important point to understand the motivations behind making the decision to migrate. This perception of inequality allows us to get a broader picture of how social and cultural settings can strongly influence a person's experience, to the point of driving them to migrate.

Anyhow, as seen previously in the examples from Paula and Ana, *relational ties* can in some cases be the strongest driver to move abroad. *Five out of the six women* interviewed had at least one sister, and most of them related how their *sisters* played a key role during the decision-making process. In the case of Sandra, she was still very young when her older sister moved abroad to Germany, and due to their bond, Sandra was familiarized with her sister's migratory experience from a young age:

> My sister left the country a long time ago, so it was practically her, she encouraged me to do a master's degree abroad and that I had to leave. There was also the possibility of learning German, which she could teach me. So, I had an introduction to the language from a young age, which meant that it wasn't so difficult. (Sandra)

Similarly to Sandra, Fernanda's older sister moved to Germany some years ago, and what finally influenced Fernanda's decision was her experience of studying in a German school combined with being familiarized with her sister's migratory experience: "My older sister had moved to Germany, my idea was like, okay, so I kind of know the language, I can improve it there, who knows" (Fernanda)

It could be said that even if Sandra and Fernanda were not planning on moving abroad initially, the fact that their sisters had already gone through the path of migration gave them the confidence to make the decision to leave their countries of origin, and the security of having their support and guidance throughout their own process. Moreover, Patricia moved to Austria together with her sister, who was involved in making the decision to move abroad, choosing a destination, as well as going through all the bureaucratic processes: “I'm terrible at all the bureaucratic processes, my sister did all the translations of all the paperwork. I hardly lifted a finger” (Patricia). In this case, her sister was not only one of the main drivers to migrate, but also her safety net while going through a process full of uncertainty and unknown experiences. With that said, the examples of Sandra, Fernanda and Patricia are helpful to illustrate the *relevance of the relational ties* during an important decision-making process such as the one of migrating.

Overall, these narratives showcase the different factors that influenced the decision to migrate, such as structural pressures or personal relationships. The experiences of the participants show how a decision that can seem very personal is often embedded in shared relational stories that shape the possibilities for moving abroad. It can then be said that for some of these women, migration is a strategy to seek new opportunities as well as a response to sociocultural contexts that hinder personal and professional development, especially in Latin American countries.

4.1.2 Austria as the (un)chosen destination.

As seen in the section before, there are many different factors influencing the decision to leave the country of origin. For some participants, the idea of living abroad was clear even for years before moving, for some others, it was more of a decision motivated by someone close to them. Either way, a common feature between the participants is that they chose the same country of destination: *Austria*. Throughout the interviews, choosing Austria as a

destination emerged as a combination of opportunities shaped by *personal networks* and *accessibility*. Therefore, this section becomes relevant as it allows us to have a better picture of the migratory experiences of the participants, focusing on the factors that influenced the decision of selecting Austria as a place of migration.

Luciana admitted that she knew from a young age she was going to migrate. Her initial plan was to go to Germany as she studied high school in a German school in Colombia, although she did go to Germany first, there were some difficulties with bureaucratic processes, situation that motivated Luciana to look for another destination:

> "I feel like I was very young when I made that decision. I feel like at 19 you're a little less serious about life, so it was like, well, let's go to Vienna, that's where I want to study". (Luciana)

Similarly to Luciana, some of the participants had the initial plan to move to Germany. Paula was initially motivated to move to Germany as her parents had been living there for 3 years before she decided to migrate. She even tried to do an exchange program with her university in Colombia, but due to COVID-19 pandemic, she had to postpone the plan due to the lockdown regulations and the borders between countries being closed. Once the borders reopened and Paula was able to visit her parents, she went to Germany with the plan of looking for options to stay. Paula found it was possible to apply for a visa in Austria that allowed her to stay as an au pair to simultaneously learn the language and work:

> Once I came to visit them (her parents), I said I wanted to stay here, and to stay here I needed to learn German. What is the easiest and most affordable way to learn German? So we got to the topic of babysitting and au pair... Because in Austria you can come here as a tourist, and I still had those 90 days of tourism left, so I came here. First, I found a family... I came here as a tourist, applied for a visa to be an au pair for a year, and then I just stayed. (Paula)

In contrast, Sandra moved initially to Germany as her sister had an au-pair agency, she stayed in Germany for a year and before her time was up, she began the bureaucratic process to become an Au-Pair in Austria and get a visa that could allow her to stay:

> When I was in Germany at the end of the year, I realized that I hadn't learned German because I had been partying all year. Yes, and I made the decision (to migrate somewhere else). Luckily, I was on a tram and I saw an advertisement for vacations in Austria. I didn't even know where the place was, but I said, well, I'll give it a try. I went to the website (to find a host family), and in less than a week, I received lots of interviews, and one family said, we'll pay you to come for a personal interview. So I came to Vienna for the interview and said, well, I'm moving, and I came. (Sandra)

Although Paula and Sandra had both a bachelor's degree obtained in their countries of origin, they both saw the opportunity of *moving to Austria as Au-Pairs* as a starting point to move abroad, as it allowed them to learn the local language and culture, create a network, have a financial support and stay legally in the country for a year while figuring out the different possibilities to stay indefinitely.

Moreover, Austria was not the first destination choice for Fernanda. She initially wanted to apply for a Working-Holiday visa in Germany as her sister was already living there. Due to the high demand, Fernanda wasn't able to get an appointment to apply for her visa, which motivated her to look for another country in which German was the primary language:

> I wanted a working holiday visa because in Argentina this program is very common, and I thought it would be great to have an experience abroad for a year and then see what happens. Well, I never got the appointment... So I said, okay, plan B, what other language is spoken in another country besides Germany... Suddenly I realized that there was a program that had started that same year in 2019 between Argentina and Austria for working holidays, and I said, this is it. I got the appointment super fast. They gave me the visa in a week, so it was super easy. (Fernanda)

The narratives from Fernanda Paula, Sandra and Luciana illustrate how the destination choice is often exploratory and more dynamic than fixed, which means that *Austria* as a

destination *was not the first option*, it emerged as an alternative and a result of consequential processes shaped by the wish to begin or to continue the migratory journey. A different experience can be seen in Patricia's narrative, as she was motivated by a friend of her sister, who was looking for different places to study abroad. Patricia and her sister explored the possibilities of moving to Austria and Patricia found out in the process that she could keep studying her degree in Anthropology while her sister studied art. They both decided to apply simultaneously to their studies and eventually created a plan to move to Vienna:

> A friend of my sister's was applying to several places, and it turned out that she wanted to apply to Vienna. My sister is studying art; she already wanted to study art. There is no art university in Honduras. So the opportunity came up (…) Well... I was studying anthropology in Honduras, but at that time it was also a very new degree program, so I said yes, why not? So we both applied at the same time. (Patricia)

Another example appears in Ana's trajectory, she had an Austrian partner who proposed to her the idea of moving to Vienna to study a Master's. Before Ana made the final decision to move, she had previously visited the city a couple of times, which facilitated the creation of her migratory plan:

> I had already been here (in Vienna) four times before deciding to move. I mean, I already knew the city... so I think it wasn't that difficult for me because I was very sure of the decision I had made... I already knew, and it was something I had been planning for so long. (Ana)

It can be said that in the cases of Ana and Patricia, moving to Austria was a collective decision made with a significant other (Ana's partner, Patricia's sister), such a process involved in both cases an educational plan that emerged as a functional path to enable migration, education and relational closeness.

For some of the participants, Austria was not the initial or primary choice, and their decision was shaped by a mix of structural and relational factors such as visa accessibility, prior knowledge of the German language, family and personal relationships. Having explored the

different backgrounds behind choosing a destination country, it's important to mention that every migration experience is different and giving the conditions in which young high-skilled Latin American women migrate to Austria is a key part to understanding their integration processes.

4.1.3 Initial expectations and migratory plans: uncertainty & unpredictability.

An important part of the migratory process is the ideas and expectations of the host country prior to the move. Those expectations play an important role in how the individuals prepare for the move and later adapt to the receiving country. Hence, a key topic explored during the interviews was the initial expectations of the participants and how those expectations transformed throughout their stay in Austria. Some of the women had a defined plan to work or study, while others approached the move with flexibility, allowing those initial plans to evolve according to the opportunities and challenges they encountered.

Across the interviews, different types of expectations emerged; on one hand, some of those expectations were optimistic about what Austria could offer in terms of education and job opportunities. On the other hand, some of the women expressed how they had low or no expectations about Austria, yet those ideas were eventually shaped with the experience of creating a life in the host country, allowing them to reshape their migratory plans influenced by the everyday life and the challenges and opportunities of living as migrant women in Austria. One of the expectations revealed during the interviews was the idea of going to Austria to study a degree. For example, Ana had a fixed plan to study a master's degree in Austria for two years and go back to her country of origin after finishing. By the time of the interview, Ana had been living in Austria for five years and working towards finishing her degree. Her initial plan didn't occur as she would have expected, creating *uncertainty* about her future in Austria:

> I came here with a very clear plan... but things didn't turn out the way I expected, so now I'm kind of stuck, not knowing what to do next in terms of work, I can plan for the

> next three months because, well, I don't know, I mean, I don't know what my next step will be (laughs). (Ana)

Ana's experience illustrates the *unpredictability* of migration, even with a goal and time-oriented plan, the circumstances disrupted this linear projection. Staying in Austria for longer than expected, with a prolonged uncertainty about staying or leaving, meant Ana could be in a constant limbo of not fully settling but also not clearly returning. Similar to Ana, Paula's experience didn't go according to the initial plan. Her initial expectation was to learn German and be able to study a master's degree:

> The goal was to go and study a master's degree near Hamburg, where my parents live, but then I fell in love, I literally fell in love with the city (Vienna) and I fell in love here and got married… The plan is still the same (to study a master's degree), it has just been extended a little. But let's say that I've gained a lot of experience that will help me when I do my master's degree. (Paula)

Although Paula's initial plan converged from what she initially expected, she had a positive perception about her migratory process: "I feel that my expectations of living abroad have been very much fulfilled" (Paula). It could be said that for Paula, the disruption of her initial plans meant to prolong her goals as a way of expanding her personal and professional path, even throughout uncertainty, she was able to find a grounding space in Vienna and with her partner.

Contrary to Ana and Paula, who had clear and structured plans prior to migrating, other participants had a more open-ended view of the move. The low expectations of the life in Austria can be described as a key part of the adaptation process, which influenced the plans and expectations to stay in the host country. For example, Sandra moved to Austria without an initial long-term plan, it was rather a process of finding out what to do momentarily, which eventually transformed into a solid idea of staying in Austria for a while:

> It was very spontaneous, I didn't see it as a life project, neither studying nor finishing, or finding a job I liked, whatever life threw at me it didn't affect me... I'm going to let

> things happen, I'm going to stop swimming against the tide, and... start to see what happens, until I reach the point where I said, I don't see myself in Colombia right now, but perhaps in a few years' time. (Sandra)

Moreover, Patricia also expressed low expectations for the migratory plans. She moved to Austria to study a bachelor's degree and later she opened up to the opportunities of the country, allowing her to acquire a stronger idea of how to continue studying and living in Austria:

> "I didn't have any expectations, honestly, I didn't have many expectations. Yes, so it's day by day, honestly, I didn't think I would do a master's degree like this straight after my bachelor's, which is what I'm doing right now. I'm still thinking about whether there might be a career in academia, I don't know yet. So I think that has changed, right now I'm more likely to do it than before." (Patricia)

Similarly, Luciana didn't have a fixed plan, for her it was clear she wanted to leave her country of origin, yet the expectations and migratory plan began to be shaped by her daily life experiences:

> I didn't want to live in Colombia, but it wasn't like I'm going to Austria because I'm going to study there and get a job there and build my life there. I just feel like it was something that developed over time. (Luciana)

Additionally, Fernanda expressed her low expectations about a life in Austria, it was only after experiencing life in the host country that she was able to create a plan to stay and have higher expectations about her life as a migrant in Austria:

> If you had told me in Argentina that this was the life I was going to have, I wouldn't have believed you… Now my expectations are sky high... I had a relatively comfortable life in Argentina, but here I've achieved a much more comfortable life, and my expectation was really like, well, I'm going to... I'm going to have a slightly comfortable life. (Fernanda)

Throughout the different narratives, it was possible to observe how those initial expectations and migratory plans evolved beyond the initial ideas about the migratory process.

Although Ana and Paula had fixed and defined educational plans, their experiences reflect how the migratory journeys can *transform* throughout the process and unfold in more *unexpected* and *spontaneous ways*. In contrast, Sandra, Patricia, Luciana, and Fernanda had low initial expectations, allowing them to have an open attitude towards the incoming opportunities. In their cases, having low expectations was crucial for their adaptation process; the lower expectations reduce the pressure of succeeding, making flexibility a key trait to navigate the uncertainty that the migratory process brings.

Therefore, the aim of this section is to highlight that even with high, low, or no expectations and fixed plans of the migratory process, the journey of moving to a different country is filled with uncertainty and situations that cannot be controlled beforehand. In the process of reshaping those plans and expectations, there are traits such as flexibility and resilience that emerged during the participants' narratives, as they constitute a cognitive learning experience, as the process of migration led them to reconstruct their initial expectations and plans while adapting to a new context, requiring them to learn about a new system and social dynamics.

4.2 Arrival & Adaptation: Ambivalence, Hierarchies and Language as Tool

An important part of the migratory experience is arriving in the host country and adapting to the new place, new culture, language and ways of living. Therefore, during this section, the topics analyzed relate to the different challenges and opportunities experienced through the adaptation process, the bureaucracy and visa limitations, the cultural differences experienced after arriving in Austria, the advantages and disadvantages of being originally from a Latin American country, the acquisition of the German level, and further topics related to the integration and adaptation to Austria.

4.2.1 Arriving in Austria: “what am I doing here?”.

For some of the participants the arrival in Austria represented not only a physical move to a new place but also an emotional transition:

> I arrived at the end of August 2021, yes, so it was hot, people were outside and everything… At first I was like, oh, how wonderful, how beautiful, I'm finally here, wow! And then it was like, damn it, I want to leave, I mean, I want to go back. (Ana)
>
> When I moved, I moved alone... It was my first time in Europe, my first time traveling alone, so it was a bit like, wow, what's going on?... There was a moment that day (the day after she arrived in Austria) when I cried. I was like, fuck, I have to go back to... I have to go back. What am I doing here?. (Patricia)
>
> It was very difficult because obviously you come here and you don't have family, you don't have friends... So at first it was also very difficult because I lived in a village, and I grew up in a city, so that contrast was also like, wow... There was just a church, a school, and the house, so it was also like looking for activities to keep yourself from going crazy. (Paula)

These narratives reveal how the first days after arriving in the host country can often be filled with *feelings of ambivalence*. There are moments where the participants were surprised and perhaps stimulated by their new realities; at the same time, there were moments of questioning their decision or simply being challenged emotionally. The moment of arrival breaks with the imaginary of what it means to be in an unknown setting, although there is excitement for the new experience, there is also a feeling of vulnerability, the new reality becomes tangible and since there are no social networks formed yet, a sense of isolation may appear.

Moreover, for some of the women interviewed, the *weather adaptation* represented a significant part of their experience of arriving in Austria. Here, it’s important to consider that due to the geographical position, the climate conditions of most Latin American countries do not change in the same intensity as European countries, or do not change at all. Therefore, the process of adaptation to a country such as Austria, experiencing four climate seasons

throughout the year can highly influence the perception and mood of a person who has not experienced a particular weather before.

> It was the middle of winter, when everything is blue, everything is sad, everything is dull, there isn't much to do. So it was difficult, it was difficult to integrate myself into that, yes, into that structure they have here, into that sadness in one way or another. (Sandra)
>
> It was hot, people were outside and everything, and then you arrive. I had only been here once before, in winter for Christmas, but obviously there were the markets and then when March came around, I said, for God's sake, I want to leave, I don't want to be here anymore (laughs). (Ana)
>
> So, the first day was interesting. My first memory is that I don't have clothes for this weather, literally... It's so cold here, and you're like, 'What the hell, man?' and you feel really uncomfortable in your clothes, like, what the hell, man? I don't know what the hell to wear. (Fernanda)

The narrations from Sandra, Ana and Fernanda are an example of how the migratory experience is an embodied emotional, cognitive and social process. In their cases, experiencing continental winter was not only a change in climate temperature, but it meant a restructuring of daily life, energy levels and social activities. The cold temperatures and reduced daylight can intensify those feelings of isolation and uncertainty, making the weather adaptation a new topic of contrasts between the sending and receiving countries.

4.2.2 Navigating bureaucracy & resident permits as third-country nationals.

The process of arrival in the host country not only involves the physical change of place, but also the encounter with a new way of living. The adaptation to a new society involves the recognition and acquaintance with a system of public and private institutions, labor regulations and social hierarchies. Immigration policies in Austria name "third-country nationals" those individuals whose countries of origin are outside the European Union[5]. Therefore, this section

[5] (Expert Council for Integration, 2024; Statistik Austria, 2025)

pays close attention to how the bureaucratic processes and legal frameworks in Austria not only influence the integration of young high-skilled Latin American women but also create similarities in the experiences linked by the conception of third-country citizens.

It was possible to observe during the interviews how some women went through the process of requesting the residence permit in their countries of origin and they arrived in Austria with a valid permit. For others, their process began while visiting or living in Germany, which somehow facilitated their understanding of the bureaucracy of a European and German-speaking country. What becomes relevant for this research is how these women experienced *bureaucratic processes* and *encounters with immigration authorities*. In the case of Ana, she obtained her residence permit to study before relocating to Austria, and she expressed how the process was relatively straightforward. However, after arriving in Vienna, Ana still had some doubts regarding her right to work with her student status:

> I was not sure if I would be able to work legally while I was a student. I mean, I didn't have all the information, and since I didn't speak German at the time, it wasn't very clear to me. So I thought, since I need to have enough money to support myself during my master's degree, everything else is a plus (Ana)

This quote is an example of how going through a formal process of obtaining a residence permit doesn't mean there will not be uncertainty about particular topics influencing everyday life decisions. Furthermore, the limited German proficiency adds a layer of complexity to the process, restricting the capacity to interpret the regulations and limitations of her stay in the country. A similar situation appears during Fernanda's narrative. Although the Working Holiday visa facilitated her arrival in Austria, her transition to a different type of visa exposed the inconsistencies in the system, with the official translations of immigration authorities being different in the German and English versions:

> I remember thinking, ugh, I have some doubts because I don't quite understand some things and I remember that at that time the English and the German part were very

> different part (on the website of immigration authorities). Like, super different, so of course I said, oh, let's look at the German part, David (her partner) read it in German, and I used the translation, and we were like, okay, let's see what we can do between the two of us. (Fernanda)

Both cases exemplify how access to bureaucratic information can be strongly tied to language and social networks. Although immigration regulations are accessible to the public, the forms of distribution target a population that speaks the local language, excluding the non-native German speakers who don't dominate the language yet. A similar situation can also be observed in Paula's experience. Throughout the process of obtaining a Family Reunification visa, she experienced difficulties obtaining information relevant to the process from the immigration authorities due to the lack of German skills, yet when her Austrian partner called, he was given all the information:

> I was on the phone and needed to do something, I can't remember what, related to the marriage, and if Florian who was Austrian wasn't calling, and in his language, they wouldn't answer my call... But I feel like it's also part of their culture. They're not so open to immigrants, and they have a lot of immigrants from all over the place (Paula)

Paula's experience can be interpreted beyond the language barrier, while the regulations should apply equally to applicants, there is a clear asymmetry when interacting with the authorities, making linguistic skills a topic of credibility when going through a bureaucratic process. In this sense, rather than being a tool of communication, language becomes a way of gatekeeping information from those who can't speak the language or don't have the social networks that can support them throughout the process.

Nevertheless, bureaucratic processes are not only experienced with immigration offices, but they can also be needed for applying to universities and getting a formal job. The challenges of obtaining a formal work confirmation as a third-country student became relevant throughout the interviews. Luciana and Patricia expressed the obstacles when handling the bureaucratic process at the institution regulating the labor market in Austria. Due to their status

of '*third-country citizens'*, the regulations for changing from student to residence permit became a matter of frustration when their qualifications and experience are subject to a deeper level of scrutiny, a situation that doesn't apply equally to Austrian or EU citizens:

> We obviously have this obstacle that we cannot be hired just like any other European, but rather they have to say this person is better than any other Austrian who could do this... and I have to pay for that person to be here. So obviously it's a huge obstacle that obviously puts us at the bottom of the list for any other job that any other European could do. (Luciana)

> I think at some point the question came up as to why they (her employer) had to prove that there wasn't an Austrian person who could do the job. So I was like, so my qualifications aren't worth as much as those of an Austrian person, of a European person. Then those moments start when you feel like you're worth less and all that, but in the end I always had the support of my boss and the people in my office. (Patricia)

These statements from Luciana and Patricia showcase the *hierarchy* within the labor market access, evidencing how the system evaluates residence status and nationality as decisive factors in contrast to prioritizing skills. Superficially, this situation can be observed as an obstacle in the migratory process; however, the rejection for not being eligible for a work permit due to the nationality can influence their sense of professional value. Hence, rather than just being an administrative procedure, bureaucracy can also mean a process that reinforces hierarchies and influences the identity transformation that occurs during the migratory experience.

Additionally, bureaucratic processes can be understood in the migratory experience as the mechanisms to regulate mobility, in parallel shaping emotional responses by creating often stressful experiences. For example, Luciana narrated the uncertainty she felt before the encounters with the immigration authorities during the first years after arriving in Austria:

> I do remember that the first few years were a little more stressful, like making phone calls or going to appointments, I don't know, at the health insurance company or going

> to renew my visa, because those were things that caused me a lot of stress because people just... You didn't know what you were going to get. (Luciana)

The feelings Luciana relates are not tied to the paperwork, instead, they reflect the *uncertainty* around the interaction with immigration officers and their possible treatment towards her. This situation illustrates how the possibilities of being subjected to questioning and different treatment place the migrant person in a position of *vulnerability*, not only physical but also emotional. In contrast to individuals holding a citizenship, third-country nationals must not only confirm but also *justify their right* to stay in the country they have been inhabiting under legal legislation; thus, the outcome of the interaction with the immigration authorities can bring significant consequences for an individual's legal stability. Nevertheless, Luciana also mentioned how over time she became more confident, and the stress levels went down in those encounters.

Altogether, it can be said that the process of adapting to the host country is structurally grounded on legal frameworks and institutional encounters with immigration authorities, shaping not only the conditions to stay in the country but also the access to employment and qualification recognition. The narratives also reveal how the variable of language proficiency emerges as a tool to navigate those systems efficiently, at the same time, generating a sense of *vulnerability* and *uncertainty* towards the formal process required to stay in the host country.

4.2.3 Language as threshold of integration: self-protection & confidence.

During the last section, German as a foreign language was explored in the context of bureaucracy navigation, and how not being proficient can represent a barrier to receiving support from local institutions, where the bureaucratic processes are often unknown to the migrant person. This section aims to dive further into the acquisition of German skills and how this process influenced the integration of young high-skilled Latin American women who migrated to Austria.

All the women selected for this research had Spanish as mother tongue, however, before learning German as a foreign language, Paula and Sandra had prior knowledge of English, Ana and Patricia had prior proficiency in English and French, and besides Luciana and Fernanda, who graduated from a German school and simultaneously learned English, most of the participants learned German as their third foreign language. The fact that all these women had prior knowledge of other foreign languages shows that there was already *linguistic capital* before moving to Austria. However, in contrast to other languages such as French or English that often function as a global language, German appears as a local requirement granting access to institutions, employment and social recognition.

During the first months or years after moving to Austria, some women experienced a mismatch between the language learned in classroom settings and the spoken language used in everyday life. Ana started learning German in Mexico before moving to Austria, yet when she arrived, she struggled to understand the local dialect: “The German you learn in Mexico has nothing to do with the German spoken by people on the street here” (Ana). Similar to Ana, Patricia learned German primarily as preparation to begin her studies, even with an advanced level of German, she expressed how the language taught in academia didn’t prepare her for everyday life usage:

> If you ask me to speak German right now, sometimes I feel like my... The phrases I'm going to use or the way I speak is very academic, very specific to anthropology. So what they teach you in the course doesn't help you much, really (Patricia)

The examples of Patricia and Ana illustrate how, despite investing time into formal language acquisition, there can be a gap between the formal language and the everyday usage of dialect, revealing that language proficiency is not only a matter of academic vocabulary and being grammatically correct, but is also connected to the ability to understand a different social and cultural setting that translates into dialect. Furthermore, the interviews highlighted another important language dynamic: the role of English in the integration process.

The prior proficiency of English was for some of the women a bridge that supported them during the initial stages of the migratory experience, as it was a skill that enabled the communication and participation in academic environments, professional contexts and social networks, where German was not an initial requirement. What's interesting about this mix of languages is that English appeared as a parallel layer in the integration process, allowing the women to feel certain confidence in social interactions. For example, Patricia learned German for a year before starting her studies, yet at the moment of selecting her courses, she would rather choose them in English mainly due to the uncertainty of the experience of studying in German: "I love learning languages, so it's not that I was afraid of it, but it was going to be a totally different experience" (Patricia).

From Patricia's narrative, it can be interpreted that English was a resource to maintain academic performance while adapting to the German-speaking environment, showing that language functioned as a skill boosting *confidence* and created a security net to enhance participation and motivation during the integration process. For Fernanda, on the other hand, speaking English was somehow an ambivalent dynamic. She studied her master's degree in English, her job was in an international company with English as the main language, and with part of her social circle she was speaking in English, hence she would look for other opportunities to practice her German in everyday life situations. However, Fernanda described how in those limited interactions a mistake would encourage the other person to switch to English, creating in her a sense of linguistic self-consciousness:

> In the end, I have very few situations where I can use my German because I make a mistake or pronounce something wrong or hesitate, and that's it. That caused me a lot of anxiety because suddenly it's like I make a mistake and they're going to switch on me. (Fernanda)

A similar dynamic can be observed in Ana's experience, although in her case, the mediating factor was not only English but also the presence of her partner as a linguistic intermediary:

> Since I arrived with my ex-boyfriend, he was my translator for everything. I already knew some of his friends, several of them, well, most of them speak perfect English, some spoke Spanish, and I spoke French with others. So, at first it wasn't that hard, but it became harder on a day-to-day basis, you know, when I wasn't with him anymore. (Ana)

Ana's experience shows the influence that a partner can have throughout the early stages of the integration process, as having this linguistic support reduces the pressure to navigate social settings primarily in German. At the same time, this situation delayed the encounter with everyday contexts, and the challenges emerged once she was no longer accompanied to manage those daily interactions on her own.

Moreover, beyond the function of communication, German also emerged throughout the interviews as an emotional dimension. During some of the narratives it was possible to evidence how the linguistic skill was also tied to self-perception and confidence in a context of being a non-native speaker within a German-speaking society. The experiences of some of the women illustrate the shift from emotional distance to the language to a gradual acceptance and even a strategic empowerment. Ana's reflection on her experience of learning German shows a form of emotional distance towards the language, as she does not perceive the language as a tool with which she can fully express herself, even though she can communicate in German:

> It isn't a language I feel comfortable with or feel I can express myself in, you know? No, I'm not there yet, but I don't know how much of that is because of the way I absorb the language or... Because I see it as something that's temporary and then maybe it won't be useful to me, I don't know, really. Whatever the reason, it's a language that, well, I have no choice. I speak it if I have to, but I don't like it. If I can speak another language, so much the better. (Ana)

This narrative is an example of how language proficiency brings a feeling of belonging; in this case, German is rather a necessary tool to communicate and integrate into the Austrian society. As Ana was still uncertain about her future in Austria, the lack of long-term projection in the country could explain the lack of attachment to the language, creating a higher barrier to emotionally connect with the language and therefore, be able to express herself. Similarly, Fernanda acknowledges her German proficiency as sufficient for everyday interactions:

> "My German is good enough to speak in a store and say things... I don't feel like I can't talk to people, but I think it's also because if you really want to get by 100% in English, you can do that in many areas here" (Fernanda)

Fernanda's experience is an example of how the perception of a place can shape the perception of needing to speak a language; in this case, she sees Vienna as a city in which it is possible to speak only English, which reduces the pressure to fully immerse in German, at the same time influencing how she linguistically integrates. In contrast to Ana and Fernanda, other participants described how they have gradually accepted their non-native status. Luciana, for example, explained how she learned to coexist with the reality of not being a native German speaker and making mistakes, what has helped her in the process is to be confident:

> I feel like I've learned to live a little more with the fact that I'm not from here, and that even though it's okay for me to make mistakes because I didn't learn German from birth, if you know what I mean, but I feel like, in general, and again, it's a little bit of self-confidence. (Luciana)

With this narrative, it is possible to observe how Luciana instead of putting pressure on herself to communicate as a native speaker, acknowledged her immigrant status, *normalizing linguistic errors*, and *developing self-confidence* in the process. In parallel, Paula associated her linguistic immersion with the support she had from her partner at the time. When she started the relationship with her former partner, they initially communicated in English, later switching their language of communication to German and accelerating her exposure to the language:

> It helped me a lot with the language (having an Austrian partner), I mean, I feel like I have very good German and people have told me so, but that's because when you live with that partner 24/7, you basically have to know German... So it's part of the whole process of integrating and being here, and that helped me a lot with the language in everyday life, in absolutely everything. (Paula)

Paula's experience highlights how romantic relationships can facilitate linguistic integration. In comparison to language courses, cohabitation with a partner requires constant interaction, exposing the individual to expressions tied to culture and dialect. Moreover, for some participants, language functioned as a *bridge* for integration or even a tool for building confidence. The narrative from Sandra introduces another dimension worth mentioning about linguistic integration. She was motivated to acquire a proficiency in German not only to be able to communicate but also to position herself within an environment that she perceived as socially demanding: "To be honest, I learned German so I could defend myself, to fight with everyone, because here, if you don't fight, they'll eat you alive" (Sandra). In this case, language functions as a mechanism of *self-protection* and as a tool to navigate power relations. German seems to be needed in a context perceived as confrontational, transcending its communicative function to a matter of positioning within the host country. As previously seen with Fernanda navigating social interaction mainly in English, Sandra's narrative confirms how the perception of a place can shape linguistic motivation.

Altogether, the experiences described throughout this section showcase how language operated as a central topic of the migratory experience and as a driver of new learning experiences. Beyond the grammatical proficiency, learning German as a foreign language functions as an institutional requirement parallel to being a social boundary and an emotional challenge, and even though English functions as a facilitator of participation in some settings, it also shapes the immersion into the local linguistic environment. In this sense, learning the host-country language not only responds to a cognitive process but it also involves the learning

of a sociocultural dynamic, that can eventually lead to feelings of belonging to the new environment as well as to an identity transformation that broadens the migratory experience.

4.2.4 Cultural differences & integration challenges: comparison & identity fragmentation.

Another important dimension that was brought up during the interviews was how the participants experienced the cultural differences of the host country in contrast to their countries of origin. During this, section we will explore how the social and cultural dynamics in Austria are perceived by the participants and how they acknowledge the contrast by learning to navigate the new sociocultural environment. It is important to highlight that these comparisons are a key part of the adaptation process as they allow the individuals to understand the newness of the situation by contrasting and reinterpreting what they already know, all while making their way to integrating into the new context.

Some of the participants described the Austrian society as socially *reserved* and *emotionally distant*, in contrast with the relational warmth they associate with the Latin American context. It can be said that the integration experiences of these women were shaped by the perceived closedness, particularly when building friendships and social networks:

> “In general, Austrians are much more reserved in their relationships, and I feel that this was something that I struggled with at first, but now that I have Austrian friends, I feel like I've managed to overcome it.” (Luciana)

> They're not angry with you, they're angry with life, and they're going to walk down the street with a sour look on their face all day, all the time, everywhere, but don't take it personally. But I did go through a process of fighting with myself about why I'm coming to a society that is so unfriendly and so unsupportive. (Sandra)

The narratives from Luciana and Sandra are not simply a description of cultural traits, they reflect the expectations on social interaction that are strongly shaped by the countries of origin and somehow become a framework to interpret the daily encounters in Austria. In this case, social integration is not an immediate process, it needs effort, or as Luciana expressed:

“When you really want to have friends, it's like a full-time job”, which can be interpreted as a challenge to build friendships in spontaneous settings. In addition, Sandra’s reflection brings an emotional layer to the topic. Her experience suggests that the perceived social distance of the Austrian society generated feelings of *frustration* and rejection, yet in the adjustment process she learned to distinguish between personal hostility and *forms of interaction embedded in the culture*, making this interpretation a part of her *adaptation* strategy.

The perception of the participants from the Austrian society becomes relevant for this research as it showcases how they interpret different ways of being and how they position themselves within it. Some of the participants not only described their perception of the cultural differences, but they also reflected on how such contrast influenced their *sense of identity* and the ways they expressed themselves in the new place. In the case of Fernanda, she framed the sensation of developing “*two personalities*”, and throughout her reflections it’s possible to observe the performative dimension of the integration process, as trying to fit into the new context doesn’t mean erasing her identity, rather it introduces a new layer of presenting herself in a different context, with other social expectations. Fernanda dives deeper into her narrative by acknowledging her discomfort with some aspects of her adapted identity:

> There are things I don't like as much... Like, I find a part of myself that I don't want to be, you know? It's like changing your own identity. But then again, on the other hand, I say, sure, I'll go to Argentina and come back to being myself, you know? And I'm cool with people. (Fernanda)

This statement reflects the emotional aspect of the adaptation process, and how the identity Fernanda developed in Argentina stays latent, highlighting a possible fragmentation that her case appears as a strategy of integration, as new ways of self-positioning in the host society appear, while navigating multiple cultural codes without fully abandoning the previously developed identity. Another perspective can be observed in Sandra’s narrative, as she reveals how her cultural integration was shaped by comparison and resistance:

> Personally, I clashed more with the culture, because I am constantly comparing what is happening or what I have experienced with the principles I have in my head and what the culture does, which is normal for them. (...) But there are cultural things that I have that make me reject the idea of fully integrating into the culture. (Sandra)

Sandra's narrative is an example of how integrating into a new society can be an active process of constant reflection, as in her case, rather than fully internalizing Austrian social norms, she selectively adopted practices that are locally reinforced while maintaining a distance from those social behaviors. Similar to Fernanda, Sandra's case reflects an active effort to preserve her identity developed in her country of origin, by maintaining cultural principles that she considers central to her self-concept. Conversely, Luciana's narrative reflects a gradual path for integration, even though she acknowledges how the cultural differences are characteristics to be accepted, even if there are parts of the Austrian social interaction that she cannot fully comprehend:

> There are certain things that I don't get. I don't agree with them. I don't agree with them (Austrians) and I don't understand them either. I feel like there are just things you accept, you say, 'Oh well, that's just how they are' like they're a little more, um, everything is very polite, everything is very formal, everything is 'good morning', 'have a nice day', 'have a good day' so nice, 'have a good day' But at the end of the day, it's all very superficial. (Luciana)

It's possible to interpret from Luciana's experience how adapting to the new society is done through reinterpretation, differently from Fernanda with the internal tension, or Sandra with the selective rejection. In Luciana's case, her adaptation strategy can be understood as a flexibility to navigate cultural norms without fully internalizing them. Nevertheless, in parallel with Fernanda and Sandra, Luciana's experience illustrates the emotional component of integration, and how the cultural differences do not need to be resolved or even understood, rather it's an individual process of coexisting with the difference.

Conclusively, the comparison between the different sociocultural frameworks can be understood as a tool for orientation in the adaptation process. Through the cultural contrasts, the participants were able to reinterpret social norms and redefine what felt acceptable or negotiable for them, while developing strategies to navigate the unfamiliar environments. For these young high-skilled Latin American women, cultural integration emerges in their narrative not as a passive but as an active process of reflection, that it's often complex and multilayered in accordance with the individual migratory experiences, involving continuous learning, not only of language or institutional rules but also of social codes, relational expectations and self-positioning within a new cultural landscape. Thus, the cultural differences become a central topic to understand the evolution and development of a sense of belonging in Austria.

4.3 Education & Professional Trajectories: Informality Versus Recognition

Throughout the analysis, the topics explored had an emphasis on the experiences of the participants prior to their move to Austria and their process of settling after their arrival. As this research aims to understand the integration into the Austrian labor market of *young high-skilled Latin American women*, the focus of this theme is the analysis of the educational and professional journeys of the participants, their experiences in continuing their educational plans, the labor market entry and the challenges and opportunities they have encountered throughout that process.

4.3.1 Educational & professional pathways: reshaping trajectories.

It can be said that for most of the women interviewed, the migratory experience *reshaped* the *educational* and *professional trajectories*, as their paths were influenced by the interruption of studies, reorientation of their career plan and the adaptation to the Austrian institutional context. The participants' narratives reveal how processes of recognition or non-recognition of qualifications, as well as the need to redirect professional goals, became central elements in their migratory experience. An example of how the career path was disrupted by

migrating to Austria can be found in Sandra's narrative. In Colombia, obtaining a degree in psychology means studying the program for five years and doing an internship in the field, entitling the graduate to fully work as a psychologist. In the case of Sandra, after she completed her studies in psychology, she started obtaining professional experience establishing a professional identity prior to moving to Austria. However, in the process of integrating into the host country she encountered institutional barriers recognizing her qualifications:

> My degree is not recognized as psychology as such, so I cannot practice it here. But it does give me access to certain types of jobs for which I am qualified, such as teaching, as an assistant, as a Spanish teacher, and in some social areas as a social worker. (Sandra)

Although Sandra's degree is not fully recognized within the Austrian professional system, it grants her access to other professional fields with a different structure. This means that even if not fully recognized, her qualifications possess certain value, allowing a professional readjustment. However, the topic of partial recognition of qualification can also be observed in Ana's experience. In Mexico, studying a professional education literature can last up to four years, due to the program's curriculum, entitling the person to work in different fields. Although her academic degree was formally recognized by an Austrian university, this validation didn't translate into formal access to employment within her professional field. As she explains:

> The issue was trying to find a job in my field, but they didn't recognize my qualifications, they didn't validate my studies in Mexico. The university validated them, meaning they count as a bachelor's degree, but when it comes to finding a job in my field, it's not enough, you know? So I would have to start from scratch, and I don't have the energy or the desire to do that, to be honest. (Ana)

This narrative reveals the importance of distinguishing between qualification validation and labor market recognition, as her degree, even with academic validation, lacked practical equivalence in professional terms. For Ana, the thought of having to start her studies from

scratch meant not only a downgrade in her professional path but also emotional and motivational costs. In this case, the migratory experience is not only influenced by the bureaucratic adaptation to the system but also shaped by the reconstruction of the professional path.

Moreover, other participants encountered different forms of educational restructuring. In Luciana's case, migration didn't interrupt a professional career, but it shaped the path of higher education, as she only studied in Colombia for a short period of time, with the plan of pursuing her academic studies in Austria. Despite obtaining a bachelor's degree from an Austrian university, the main struggle for Luciana has been finding a job in her field:

> I feel that the difficult thing now is eventually finding a job in my field. I also feel that this is why I am kind of putting off my master's degree and not doing it as quickly as I could, because the faster I finish, the sooner my student visa will expire. (Luciana)

In comparison to Sandra, Luciana was able to avoid the formal barriers of qualification recognition by entering the Austrian educational system from an early stage. Nevertheless, her experience also illustrates that in the Austrian context, *educational integration is not a synonym of labor market integration*, making access to labor opportunities dependent on the country's labor market structures. A different experience emerges from Fernanda's narrative; in her case, continuing her academic development functioned as a strategic adaptation, as her initial plan was to move abroad to work in the service sector and with low professional expectations of the Austrian labor market. Unlike Sandra's experience of partial recognition, Fernanda's academic qualifications in International Relations (Licenciatura en Relaciones Internacionales) were fully acknowledged within the Austrian system, which facilitated her to obtain a position within an international organization: "I have to say that it worked really well... But yes, they recognized my university degree when I submitted everything, and they recognized it all without any drama" (Fernanda). Fernanda's trajectory illustrated how education can become a strategic resource in the adaptation process. Even though prior to her arrival in Austria she

didn't have many expectations regarding her professional path in Austria, Fernanda was able to position herself within the Austrian labor market. In this case, the recognition of qualifications became a tool to accelerate the integration into a stable professional environment.

This situation can also be seen in Paula's experience, as she highlights how prior education and professional experience are key tools of successful professional integration within the host country:

> I also feel that the university I graduated from literally trained us very, very well to deal with academic issues and also teamwork... I feel that the education and work experience I had also helped me here to sell myself well enough to get the job I have today and perform the way I do in my day-to-day work. (Paula)

In comparison to the cases where the professional path is somehow interrupted, Paula's experience illustrates how prior qualifications can translate into labor market access. What she expresses as the "*ability to sell herself*" can be analyzed not only as a performative act to obtain a job, but also as a skill to present herself in an unfamiliar environment, in such a way that her confidence and adaptability are important factors for integrating and navigating the Austrian labor market.

Altogether, it can be said that these trajectories demonstrate how prior qualifications are often *filtered* through professional *regulations* and *labor market hierarchies* defining the value of certain professions in the context of host country. Some of the participants encountered a partial recognition that forced them to look for new alternatives throughout their migratory experience, while other participants were able to achieve the recognition of their educational background and position themselves within the Austrian labor market, suggesting that educational integration is not a linear process, and it has multiple levels of recognition as well as different professional opportunities. Finally, the relevance of this section lies in understanding the different perspectives of the women interviewed about the Austrian labor

market, and the learning strategies they used to integrate into the new academic and professional environment.

4.3.2 Labor market entry: between professional downgrading & recognition.

The educational trajectories of the participants illustrate how prior qualifications acquire *new meanings* and, in some cases, *different levels of recognition* in the Austrian context. However, access to employment also appears as a process that is barely linear or immediate; instead, it was shaped by visa regulations, the need for economic stability, and in all cases, entering the labor market through informal work. Hence, this section aims to further analyze the challenges and opportunities from the process of integration of the participant into the Austrian labor market. An interesting common pattern across the narratives was the entry into the labor market through informal and temporary work. For many of the women interviewed, the first step of employment in Austria was not tied to their educational background; instead, it reflected the immediate need for economic stability. Ana, for example, decided to look for *informal jobs* in restaurants when her social network encouraged her to do so. These informal jobs allowed her to maintain financial stability while continuing her studies. She also reflected upon an interesting phenomenon within certain migrant communities:

> Being here, I think we've all had jobs that we would never have accepted in our home countries, right? I mean, all or almost all of us (high-skilled migrant women) have ended up cleaning or something like that, because obviously people here don't want to do it. At least the people I know from Latin America, all of us, all of us, we all have at least one degree, if not more. (Ana)

Her perspective highlights the *normalization of occupational downgrading*, as many individuals, in this case, high-skilled Latin American women, take on jobs they would not have considered in their countries of origin. This situation reflects how accessibility to the labor market is often determined by the positioning of the migrant person within the host-country

economy. Similarly, Fernanda described how, before securing a stable position, she performed multiple informal jobs, including childcare and ice-skating lessons:

> Of course, at first I was doing odd jobs because the visa (Working-Holiday) didn't allow me to have another job, but of course, when I got the new one, the new residence permit (student visa), that's when I got this job (the current job). (Fernanda)

These experiences reveal how *informal work* often functions as a mechanism of *transition*, allowing the migrant individual to sustain themselves while navigating all the different bureaucratic and institutional challenges before successfully integrating into the local labor market. Moreover, Fernanda's narrative also highlights how certain visa regulations structure labor market participation, conditioning employment choices to the legal conditions attached to residence permits. Another element that emerged in the narratives was the sectors through which labor market entry became possible. These entry points were mainly concentrated in the care sector and domestic occupations that were immediately accessible to migrant women:

> "So, at first I did a lot of babysitting, which is the easiest thing to do, and I did it pretty regularly, say about 10-15 hours a week" (Luciana)
>
> "For a while I was babysitting, which I think is what everyone usually does, but the truth is that I was always babysitting the same person" (Patricia)
>
> "I formally started as an au pair with a family, then continued with that family as a babysitter for a year and a half... I also cleaned houses informally" (Sandra)

Across these narratives, it's possible to infer that working in care-related sectors is an accessible entry point for migrant women, particularly when the recognition of previous academic qualifications is not yet achieved. These types of jobs provide an immediate source of income, at the same time allowing the flexibility for academic commitments, language acquisition, or bureaucratic procedures. Nevertheless, experiences such as the one from Sandra illustrate how the entry into childcare later evolved into more stable pedagogical roles,

suggesting that those initial informal jobs can also function as a transition phase before leading to a professional reorientation.

Informal work provided a point of entry to the labor market for all the participants. Yet the integration into the formal labor market in Austria was obtained for most cases through personal networks and gradual professional repositioning. This means that access to more stable employment didn't occur only through formal application processes, but it relied on social connections and referrals. Ana, for example, described how a friend informed her about a weekend job at an escape room, encouraging her to apply, and even though this position had a limited financial return, it was important for her to demonstrate to future employers that she was active:

> A friend who worked at the escape room told me, hey, we're looking for people. It's only on weekends, so you won't earn much, but it's something, right? And I said, well, I want someone to hire me, so it looks like I'm doing something, you know? (Ana)

Ana's experience reflects how temporary employment can be facilitated through social networks and it some cases it has a symbolic function of integration, allowing the migrant person to accumulate experience and signal motivation to work. Similarly, Luciana explained that her current job was not the result of an active job search, but it was suggested by a friend who was also working there at the time. It can be inferred that employment opportunities are not only found through formal recruitment channels, but they can often be found within social circles. Moreover, Fernanda's narrative underscores her perspective on the influence of referrals to facilitate entering the labor market:

> In fact, it's something I've recommended a lot to people, like if you can get someone to refer you, you know? Because that carries a lot of weight, and I see it now in my work too... Referrals are super important in my job, for example, they're super important, and it's very difficult to get in without a referral. I realized that practically everyone in my office is referred. (Fernanda)

This experience illustrates how having a contact who recommends you to employers can facilitate entry into certain organizations. During the interview, Fernanda also described that even though she found a position at her current employer through a known recruitment channel, it was the father of her partner who played a key role in securing her position by "*moving his contacts*", as she framed it. In this sense, labor market integration is not a process only dependent on qualifications and visa regulations, but also on proximity to *social networks* that can facilitate the entry and informally validate the qualifications of the migrant person. Additionally, Patricia's and Paula's narratives further illustrate this pattern. Patricia was invited to apply for a position by the founder of an organization she was previously connected to, and Paula had a personal connection with the employer's family during her au pair year, she was invited to visit the company, which eventually led to obtaining a long-term position:

> It's not that I was looking for a job, really... But the person who was my boss at the time, he had an organization that helped you apply to universities, helped you with the visa process when you first arrived. He started this NGO and then he said to me, hey, I'm looking for people and I said, OK, he said, yes, I'll see you at the interview, ... I went to the interview and everything worked out. (Patricia)

> One of my friends at the time was my boss's au pair, taking care of my boss's child. He's really nice, very friendly, and he let her invite her friends to his house. So once we were there, he's the owner of the company, and we were just chatting, and he asked me, what did you study? What do you do? So I told him, and he said, you see, I don't have that in my company. Why don't you come next week? You can see what we do, and if you like it, you can start. That's how it was, and now it's going to be two years soon. (Paula)

Taken together, these experiences illustrate how access to the labor market can be shaped by relational proximity, as in both cases employment opportunities emerged from spaces of familiarity, with both women invited to participate in professional spaces. In this sense, the value of social networks is reinforced as those networks function as an important resource to reduce the status of being an outsider. Particularly important for this research is to

consider how for young high-skilled Latin American migrant women navigating an unfamiliar institutional environment can be a challenging process; however, establishing social relationships in the host country increases the possibilities of being hired. At the same time, relying on referrals to obtain a position also suggests that for some immigrant groups, the integration into certain professional spaces may remain partially closed due to the lack of accessibility to those established networks.

Overall, the narratives presented throughout this section reveal the *multiple layers* of the labor market integration process, as the entry into employment rarely corresponds directly to prior qualifications, but is often shaped by immediate financial means, visa restrictions, gendered occupational channels and social networks. For all the women interviewed, informal and care-related work functioned as starting points, while referrals and social networks enabled the transitions into more stable positions. It can be said that the integration into the Austrian labor market emerges not as linear but rather as a gradual process shaped by challenges and opportunities, enhancing the learning of new factual knowledge tied to local regulations and laws, all while acquiring the skills to handle bureaucracy.

4.3.3 Professional identity & positioning: new alternatives in a German-speaking market.

As explored above, the process of entering the formal labor market in the host country reveals the influence of structural and relational dynamics. However, it is equally important to examine how the participants perceived their professional positioning and future trajectories within Austria. Throughout the interviews, the participants reflected upon their employment status and their achievements and barriers during their integration process. Although some of the participants had achieved a certain stability, others described the persistent challenges that shaped their professional paths in Austria. Examples of such barriers can be found in the narratives from Ana and Luciana:

> Now that I'm approaching the end of my studies, I'm obviously looking for a job in a more serious way, even if it's only part-time for the moment, and I've sent out more than 100 applications, I think more than 100, and the few who have replied have all said no. I mean, either because you don’t speak German or because you don't have a permit to work in Europe or for a thousand different reasons. (Ana)

> I feel that what I'm studying is quite demanding in the workplace, so I feel that there are a lot of people who can do the same thing I studied without having studied it. I feel like there are a lot of people looking for the same type of job, so I haven't had any opportunities like that. (Luciana)

Despite Ana having a degree in Literature (Licenciatura en Literatura) and Luciana in Journalism and Communication Sciences, both women struggled to find employment opportunities in their field of study. Ana encountered numerous rejections, often linked to language requirements and residence status; her narrative reveals the frustration with the difficulties of getting a chance within the formal labor market. Luciana, on the other hand, described the difficulties in finding formal employment within her field due to the competition in the sector, as many candidates with similar qualifications can be found. Taken together, both cases showcase that the professional challenges encountered throughout the integration process can disrupt the professional plans, leading the individuals to look for other alternatives to enter the labor market.

Moreover, Patricia’s narrative highlights some of the difficulties of entering the Austrian labor market, in her experience, she observed that even Austrian citizens struggle to secure employment without a postgraduate degree:

> In general, in the job market, not only Latin American women, but also European women, have a degree and cannot find work because I think the job market is such that now you have to get a master's degree, and if you don't get a master's degree, your degree is not enough. (Patricia)

Although her narrative should not be taken as a generalization of all women in search of employment opportunities in Austria, her experience acknowledges professional barriers

during the job search, not only tied to the migratory experience, but also a phenomenon that even Austrian citizens may experience. Patricia reflected further on how she has experienced the job search process:

> I'm applying for several things, sometimes you don't hear anything. Sometimes they tell you, no sorry, we found someone else... So I think it's also luck, it's knowing how to sell yourself... Well, I think it also depends on the person... Whether they speak German or not, luckily I speak German and I had to learn it. (Patricia)

With this narrative, the importance of language proficiency to integrate to the host-country society reappears, in this case language functions as a key tool to access professional opportunities. Similar to Patricia, most of the women interviewed perceived German proficiency as an asset to obtain a position in Austria. As seen before, Ana described how the *lack of German proficiency* partially influenced the job applications rejections. Fernanda, for example, identified her German skills as a point to consider for future job changes:

> Like, if I had to say, for example, that I wanted to change jobs today, that would be like my biggest obstacle or struggle, you know? Like a challenge, of course, my level of German, which I don't know if I'll ever reach a native level. (Fernanda)

In addition, Sandra's reflection on language proficiency in her workplace led her to reflect on the discrimination she felt at the beginning in the kindergarten where she worked as a Spanish teacher, as there was the perception that being a non-native German speaker would decrease her skill to be a good teacher:

> I believe that at first there was discrimination among colleagues in the sense that you are a foreigner, and you won't be able to teach well or give good lessons. It's not your native language, so you can't teach children without making grammatical mistakes. (Sandra)

In contrast, Paula reflected the stereotypes of being a non-native German speaker and not being able to adjust to the local professional processes, as going through the migration path

allows the individual to start a life from scratch in a different language, developing even more skills than those who had never migrated:

> That your native language is not German because it will complicate the work processes, I feel that this is a prejudice, yes, because if we were able to leave our country and make a life for ourselves in another place with a completely different language, it would not be appropriate to say 'They will not understand this process, they will not succeed', when they (native German speakers) are in their comfort zone because it's their country, their language, their everything. So, rather than a prejudice, I would say that it is an honor to have a person with those abilities. Someone who can solve problems in a language that is not their own. (Paula)

It can be highlighted from Paula's reflection how *multilingualism* can be reframed as a form of *resilience* and *adaptability* rather than disadvantage. However, the different narratives showcase how *German* functions as a criterion of *professional legitimacy* as well as a source of *exclusion*, and while some of the participants perceive proficiency as a key skill to increase competitiveness, others experienced it as a recurring obstacle to integrating into the labor market.

Furthermore, the participants also reflected on the emotional and symbolic dimensions of their professional trajectories, as entering and navigating the Austrian labor market involved not only bureaucratic procedures and linguistic adaptations but also acquiring a new sense of their professional identity and belonging. An example of this can be found in Sandra's trajectory, as she described how painful it can be to transition from being someone in the country of origin, but being no one in the host country:

> It's like pain, like you're something there and here you're nothing, so you start from scratch with some kind of job where you say, "But I don't have to go through this because in Colombia I did something else or I'm something else," and then the ego struggle begins over everything you were doing, everything you weren't doing (Sandra)

This narrative brings the attention to how the professional identity previously achieved can be fractured during the migratory experience. Moving from occupying a recognized

professional role in the country of origin to perform informal care work in Austria generated what she framed as an ego struggle. In this sense, migration not only reclassifies qualifications but also challenges the existing forms of self-recognition and social status. Contrarily, Paula expressed how her sense of professional growth was encouraged by the trust placed in her by the employer:

> I feel, let's say, extremely lucky that I have them (her bosses), that I met them, which was kind of unexpected. And also the part where I can learn so much more, because when I start my master's degree, everything I learn I can apply in the company. (Paula)

In Paula's case, professional integration evolved into a space of empowerment, where the support from her employer has contributed to building confidence within the host-country context. Nevertheless, all the narratives explored throughout this section demonstrate that professional integration is often a process shaped by language, structural barriers, social networks and self-positioning in the host country. It's possible to observe how for some participants, entering the labor market creates frustration and even a sense of downgrading, while for others, their narratives show empowerment and growth within their professional environment.

It is possible to conclude from this theme that the migratory experience is a process in which professional journeys are often reshaped in complex and layered ways. For these young high-skilled Latin American migrant women, integrating into the Austrian labor market involved the navigation of bureaucratic systems and visa limitations, as well as overcoming linguistic barriers and relying on social networks to obtain professional opportunities, and what's more, the resignification of their professional selves. All these experiences revealed how labor market integration doesn't translate into financial income, but it's a symbolic process through which belonging, recognition and future aspiration are continuously restructured.

4.4 Emotional Challenges and Coping Strategies

As seen through the previous themes, the migratory experiences of the participants were often filled with numerous challenges that were not limited to bureaucratic obstacles, labor market restrictions, or cultural and linguistic differences. Rather, the process of migration also brought with it a layer of emotional processes shaped by insecurity, resilience, frustration, acknowledgment of privilege and disadvantages, as well as moments of empowerment. Therefore, during this section the focus lies on the narratives about the emotional experiences and internal world of the participants throughout their adaptation process, particularly in relation to their labor market integration in Austria.

4.4.1 Emotional insecurities and self-perception: frustration, anger and feeling less.

This section aims to focus on the emotional responses of the participants throughout their migratory experience, especially to the feelings of insecurity that emerged from the process. Across the interviews, some of the women expressed feelings of insecurity in relation to their professional skills and self-worth, these insecurities are particularly important for this research because they reveal how self-perception can be often shaped by external conditions, including bureaucracy, facing challenged with the recognition of academic degrees, or simply the fact of having a certain migrant status. With that in mind, migration influenced how the participants saw themselves in relation to others, and exploring how they perceived themselves across the process allows a deeper understanding of how the migratory experience influences the reconfiguration of identity.

Luciana illustrates her positioning as a qualified migrant woman in an Austrian context; at the beginning of her job search, she hesitated to apply to job opportunities, not based on a lack of qualification but on the assumption that, as a foreigner, she might be perceived as less suitable than Austrian candidates:

> You tend to feel a little less than the people here, simply because you're not from here and you're a little different. So I feel that suddenly, in my case, it may be that I stopped, let's say, applying for certain things or stopped, for example, presenting myself for certain things, thinking, well, how are they going to take me instead of someone from here?. (Luciana)

This narrative shows how doubt influenced her behavior, as instead of confronting possible rejection, she excluded herself beforehand. In this sense, it can be said that external hierarchies influence her self-perception of professional competencies. A similar dynamic can be observed in Paula's reflection on language and professional performance, in professional settings the gap between her abilities in Spanish and her performance in German created feelings of frustration and not being able to fully express her potential: "Many times I came home feeling extremely frustrated. It's as if they knew how smart I am in Spanish, I wouldn't leave the way I did at that fucking meeting" (Paula).

In Paula's case, the insecurity was not due to the lack of skills, but it emerged from the challenges of working in a *third language*, a situation that influenced her confidence in professional settings and created inner tension between her capacities and her interpretation of her employer's expectations regarding performance. Moreover, Patricia described feeling insecure especially in moments of uncertainty regarding her housing situation. At some point, she had to find a new place to live before finishing her studies, and the fear of not finding a new apartment led her to start considering what would happen if she had to come back to her country of origin:

> It was a moment when I said, 'Fuck, we're not going to find an apartment. What do we do? We're going to have to go back to Honduras', and then you might find yourself thinking, Fuck, I'm going to go back to Honduras before I graduate. I'm a failure, what the fuck!.(Patricia)

It's possible to infer from Patricia's reaction that structural difficulties, in this case, the housing uncertainty, can create inner narratives of failure due to the levels of stress such a

situation can create for an individual, especially a migrant in the early stages of the process. In her case, not finding a new place was a symbol of failure in her migration project. However, these inner insecurities and self-questioning could also be observed in Ana's trajectory, as her original plans of staying for two years in the country didn't go as she expected:

> I think that many times it has been like regret, there has been frustration, definitely anger. But many times also as a reproach to myself, because in the end, I mean, no one forced me to come, you know? It was a decision I made without perhaps calculating everything that it entailed or everything that could result from it. I came with a very specific plan... it didn't turn out the way I expected it to, so now I'm kind of at a loss as to what to do. (Ana)

The feelings of *frustration* and *self-reproach* described by Ana reflect how certain decisions can be evaluated in retrospective through a sense of success or failure, especially since her migratory experience unfolded in ways she didn't initially expect, leading her to place the responsibility of her migratory challenges on herself rather than acknowledging the structural complexities of the migration process.

Altogether, insecurity was a recurring feeling that appear within the migratory experience of the participants, whether they expressed hesitation in professional settings, or frustration linked to language, or sense of failure for unmet expectations, all these emotions reveal how migration can disrupt previously established senses of competence and directions and is often shaped by the adaption to new systems and structures while going through an inner exploration of the meaning of self-worth within the host country. It must be acknowledged that having feelings of insecurity does not define the entirety of the women's experiences; rather, they marked significant moments where they re-evaluated not only their identity but also their expectations and future projections. Therefore, the following section will further explore the strategies used by the participants to cope with the challenging situations of the migratory experience.

4.4.2 'What do I do now?': desperation & isolation.

The previous section examined how migration influenced the self-perception of the participants, especially during the moments of insecurity due to external constraints. However, their narratives also illustrate how the emotional challenges emerging throughout the process were managed through their trajectories. A common pattern that emerged across the interviews was the *emotional load* in challenging circumstances, especially during circumstances in which the sense of stability was disrupted.

For example, the experience of Ana illustrates how the feelings of *isolation* and *personal loss* can intensify emotional distress. In her case, after the relationship that brought her to Austria ended, she struggled with being in alone in a foreign country on top of the emotional weight of the breakup: "Emotionally, I felt like I would never get out of it. One day felt like seven weeks, nine weeks. It was horrible, right? Now I look back on it and say, yeah, it was awful" (Ana).

This narrative not only shows how her perception of time expanded through the challenging moments, but it also suggests that those overwhelming moments, rather than defining her trajectory, are now acknowledged as part of it. Moreover, A moment of uncertainty and intense emotional load appeared in Sandra's narrative when reflecting upon the moment she left the host family where she was working as a babysitter. Sandra had to leave the family due to a conflict with the father; however, she was emotionally attached to the child of the family as they spent a large amount of time together. While describing the situation, she expressed the feelings of desperation and uncertainty of not knowing what to do next:

> At that moment, I was desperate about the situation.... But I think that was the most distressing moment, not knowing what I was going to do or how I was going to do it. I was about to get a new visa, I was about to, without a job, I had just moved in with my partner at the time, so it was like that. There were quite a few factors that led me to think, What do I do now?. (Sandra)

This situation is an example of how the accumulation of different challenges can destabilize an individual. In Sandra's case, the emotional overload appeared when the legal and economic uncertainty was present, simultaneously with the recent change in her relationship at the time, leading her to question the continuity of her migratory project due to the feelings of uncertainty. Furthermore, Luciana's narrative reflects another form of emotional constraint, in this case linked to professional and academic continuity, as after finishing her bachelor's degree, she described feeling trapped by what she perceived as a lack of alternative:

> I feel that especially when I graduated from my bachelor's degree... it was like, oh, let's keep working and let's keep studying, and it was a bit like I felt a little trapped because I didn't feel like I had a choice, I didn't feel like I had another possibility to choose from, but it was simply like, do you want to stay here? There's only one way out. I'm better now, but a year ago or so, I felt pretty stuck because of that. (Luciana)

Luciana's experience reflects how the decision to continue studying and working was not necessarily made as an active choice, rather as the only viable path to remain in the country. This perception of having only one alternative generated a sense of limitation, suggesting that the migration process can sometimes narrow, rather than expand the perceived possibilities. A different emotional challenge was reflected in Patricia's narrative, as she described how experiencing the loss of a relative while living abroad created a form of grief marked both by sadness and emotional distance:

> I think that the worst moments we've (she and her sister) had here are when we're not in Honduras. For example, when someone in your family dies and you're here... That's when I felt sad, but at the same time, I think that because you're physically distant, you're also emotionally distant... So we experience things very differently because we're here and not there. (Patricia)

Patricia's reflection is an example of how the *physical distance can reshape the experience of loss*, as being physically absent during a family death generated feelings of *ambivalence* during the grief process, as she experienced feelings of connection with her family

due to the sadness a loss can create, at the same time, feeling the distance during mourning time. Nevertheless, the different experiences presented are not what define the trajectories of the women interviewed, they are turning points that allowed the participants to go through processes of adjustment and reflection. It is precisely within these *periods* of *uncertainty* and *emotional tension* that coping strategies become particularly significant, as they reveal how the participants actively responded to and managed the challenges inherent to their migratory processes.

4.4.3 Coping strategies: emotional expression, catharsis & seeking guidance.

So far, it has been possible to identify that the migratory experience brought emotional load to the participant along with the various structural and institutional challenges, yet they didn't remain static during such circumstances. The narratives from these young high-skilled Latin American migrant women reveal various coping strategies, such as seeking guidance from peers, expressing their emotions and reflecting upon them, and obtaining professional psychological support, allowing the participants to continue their migratory projects and outgrow the challenges of navigating such a complex process. During this section, the focus lies on exploring the coping strategies that the participants used through the period of loneliness, frustration, tension or uncertainty, allowing a better understanding of how emotional regulation becomes a key part of the broader integration process shaping the individual experience

Although coping strategies have a common element: the active engagement with emotional challenges rather than avoiding them or giving up on their migratory project, they cannot be uniformed due to the *subjectivity* of every experience. One of the strategies observed across the interviews was the construction of support networks, particularly among other migrant women. For example, Ana described how she found *guidance* from people in similar situations who could offer orientation and reassurance:

> I try to get support from people here who might also be able to guide me, right? Like if I were you, I would do this or look here (…) I think seeing myself reflected in other people makes me feel that at least I'm not so alone in this process. You know? That there's still hope. (Ana)

In this case, sharing the frustration with others can reduce the feeling of isolation and allow for a reinterpreting of the struggles as a part of a shared experience rather than a personal failure. Similarly, Sandra highlighted the importance of building a support network based on shared life experiences, noting that by acknowledging the frustration in a collective way, the adaptation can be facilitated: "Building a support network based on shared experiences was what helped me adapt better to the moment" (Sandra). Moreover, for Patricia, sharing the migratory experience with her sister and living with her in Austria functioned as an anchor, providing mutual emotional reinforcement: "I think the fact that my sister is here has been the best support because we have each other, so we are both going through the same thing at the same time. We support each other" (Patricia).

Through the different experiences, collective support functioned as more than emotional support, it became a strategy for dealing with the challenges of the migratory process. Through the shared conversations and mutual guidance some of the participants were able to take away some of the weight from their struggles. In this sense, support networks contributed not only to the emotional relief but also to restoring the sense of direction within the participant's migratory journey. Furthermore, during the interviews the emotional expression itself emerged as an important regulatory practice. Rather than suppressing the emotional distress, many of the participants described allowing themselves to fully experience and release emotions while going through a rough time:

> "Cry it out and then, okay, let's get our thoughts together. There are things I don't understand. What do I have to look for, where do I have to ask for help?" (Paula).
>
> "I cry a lot and share my frustration" (Ana).

> "I cry for three days (…) feel it, live it, experience it, get it out however I can, then I say, okay, plan of action, resilience, creativity, and the resourcefulness of the moment. This is what needs to be done" (Sandra).

These reflections show the importance of the *emotional expression* as a key step for coping with challenges. In this case, *crying* is a way of releasing accumulated frustration before reorganizing the thoughts and identifying concrete action steps, as seen in Paula's and Sandra's narration. In addition, Sandra brings an important concept: resilience, which in this context can be interpreted as the capacity to move through difficult moments. For these women, resilience appears as a repeating process that allows emotional release before rebuilding their direction, acknowledging negative emotions to enable internal and external movement.

Another coping strategy that was a common pattern during the interviews was a pragmatic approach to *problem-solving*. Fernanda, for example, described a shift from constantly seeking external opinions and instead *reflecting* more independently to *build her position*:

> Before, I used to talk to a lot of people about my 1000 dramas, and now I'm much more like... Well, no. I think about it more to myself, you know? And it's like I don't really have to rely on other people, gather all their opinions and then form my own opinion. (Fernanda)

Fernanda's reflection suggests a shift towards *emotional autonomy*, moving from relying on external validation to developing her own internal criteria for decision-making. In her context, this independence can be understood as a pragmatic adaptation that reinforces self-trust and stabilizes her position in the host-country environment. Luciana and Paula, on the other hand, when answering the questions about the coping strategies they used to deal with challenging situations, they both replied:

> "Therapy (laugh)" (Luciana)
>
> "Therapy is really important" (Paula)

In this context, the short but immediate reference to therapy in both women suggests that professional psychological support became a normalized and intentional coping strategy, acknowledging therapy as part of their emotional regulation development. Therapy can be understood in these trajectories as a proactive approach to seeking support while navigating the complexities of the migratory experience. Nevertheless, coping is showcased throughout the narratives as a process that doesn't disregard vulnerability, rather, it recognizes it and creates mechanisms to move through it. All the coping strategies highlighted throughout this section demonstrate that emotional regulation is a central point of the migratory experience.

Overall, the exploration of the emotional experiences throughout this theme reveals the similarity of human emotions even within the particularity of every journey. The participants' narratives are a good example of how the internal dimension and the emotional regulation influence their migratory trajectories, as facing emotional challenges enhanced the learning experience of accepting that difficult emotions can still be present during the decision-making process that challenging situations demand, as well as recognizing the value of support networks, including psychological therapy to obtain new emotional skills to cope with those emotional challenges. Once more, this learning experiences highlight the *multilayered process of integration* in which the inner aspect of the person cannot be ignored, understanding that these emotional dynamics are therefore essential for grasping the complexity of the migratory experience beyond the structural and institutional frameworks.

4.5 Gender, Nationality & Social Relations

Throughout the analysis, the migratory experiences of the participants have been explored from a focus on understanding their motives to migrate, their integration into the system, the bureaucratic processes, the entry into the Austrian labor market and the different strategies for coping with challenging situations. This theme shifts the focus towards the social dimension of the migratory experience, to examine how gender and nationality shaped the way

in which the participants were perceived in Austria, particularly how the preconceptions about their country of origin from the host society influenced their integration process, and therefore, in the women's labor market integration.

4.5.1 Positioning shaped by nationality: being a Latin American woman in the Austrian society.

During the analysis, it has been possible to illustrate how the integration process is often embedded within a social context. The experiences of the participants also showcase how, within the new social environment, they were not perceived as neutral individuals but as subjects permeated by gender and nationality. Moreover, the narratives revealed that to be a *Latin American woman* integrating into the Austrian society is to acknowledge the stereotypes and categories from everyday interaction, especially within professional settings and institutional encounters. Therefore, this section highlights how the participants experienced the stereotypes from the host society, if they experienced discriminatory situations, and generally how nationality influenced their integration process.

The interviews revealed how the positioning of the participant within the host country was rarely perceived by them as explicit discrimination; rather, the *stereotypes* assigned to Latin American women emerged in subtle and often normalized ways. A recurring topic across most of the interviews was the experience of Latin American identity as *culturally attractive* and even desirable. An example of this can be seen in Ana's narrative, she reflected upon the stereotype of Latin Americans depending on the host country, as in Austria, in comparison to Spain, there was not a negative stereotype, on the contrary, Latin American origins mainly trigger curiosity:

> Overall, I think that Mexicans, Latinos, etc., don't have such a bad stereotype as we do, for example, in Spain, you know, that we're lazy, that we don't work, that we steal, and so here we are so invisible that when they arrive it's like, "Oh, wow, how cool, South America, the beach! So they always bring up some topic of conversation... but on the

> other hand, I also feel that they see us as if we still live in villages and have just come down from the coconut tree. (Ana)

Interesting about Ana's experience is the *ambivalence of her narrative*, even though Latin American identity is not framed through negative stereotypes, it is reduced to an *exoticized image*. The geographical distance and the cultural difference can create curiosity to learn more about it; however, the association with "the beach" reaffirms the assumptions of underdevelopment from Latin American countries, suggesting a lack of knowledge from the individuals with such perception. In this sense, Latin America becomes culturally attractive yet symbolically positioned as a backward society. Similar to Ana, Sandra and Luciana highlighted how for them, the perception of Latin Americans currently holds a certain symbolic appeal:

> "In general, being Latino is still trendy, so they don't see it as a bad thing yet" (Luciana).
>
> "Being Latina is a trend, and for that very reason, those of us who speak Spanish and come from certain countries will be given a position and status in the migratory process" (Sandra).

These narratives illustrate how being "Latina" can function as a facilitator of social integration in Austria, due to the differentiation from other migrant groups. However, these conceptions about Latin Americans also show the hierarchy in which Latin American women may be perceived more favorably in comparison to other migrant groups, while remaining in a position below Europeans. In addition, Patricia described how her supervisor attributed certain characteristics to her due to her origins:

> I think my boss, does that what it's call positive discrimination or whatever, that as a Latina you have this fire, so I think my boss has picked up on that and sees that I'm a determined person and that I'm not going to let anyone talk badly to me. (Patricia)

From Patricia's narrative, it can be observed how personality traits are attributed through stereotyping. What Patricia framed as *positive discrimination* reflects how the preconceptions of certain cultural traits are seen under a favorable light due to the lack of hostility in the stereotype, leading the person to normalize such comments. In this case, there

is a reinforcement of the cultural differences without recognizing the individual as a unique being, generalizing that all Latin Americans have the same character traits.

With that said, the professional identities of the participants are replaced by cultural labeling, even if the stereotyping experiences are often described as beneficial. The case of Fernanda shows how her former supervisor would introduce her as "Fernanda from Latin America", in comparison to her colleagues who were introduced by profession and qualifications:

> "I introduced myself as Fernanda from Latin America, and I was like the diversity quota, you know? Fernanda was that, and the rest were people with degrees and everything, and I was Fernanda from Latin America" (Fernanda)

Back then, Fernanda was working as a Team Assistant in the organization, a role that for some employers can be represented in a lower level of the corporate hierarchy. However, in the experience of Fernanda, being a high-skilled woman, with an academic degree and professional experience obtained in her country of origin, the fact that her superior was reducing her to her origins was a symbolic way to mark the difference, creating in Fernanda a sense of discrimination rather than acknowledgment and recognition.

Furthermore, the previous examples illustrate how Latin American identity can be perceived as positive stereotypes due to the cultural attractiveness they represent for the host society. Yet, these narratives also reveal a more complex dimension of the participants' positioning within the Austrian society, as the preconception of their origins in educational and professional contexts can reinforce the implicit hierarchies that downplay the value of a migrant person. For example, Ana's narrative emphasized the lack of knowledge from the Austrian society regarding the Latin American educational systems:

> They are so poorly informed about how things work in terms of education in our countries. I say 'our' because Chile, Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico are countries with very good universities, Brazil has super good universities. And they think that it's

> like you've studied, you know, high school, and what I see here, what the university demands of us, is nothing compared to what they demand of us in our countries. I mean, I feel like it's a joke, or even demotivating, you know, having to go through all this to get a master's degree that I would have already obtained in my country, and two with many more requirements. (Ana)

In Ana's experience, education in Latin American universities is perceived in Austria as *academically inferior*, despite her personal experience of higher academic demands in her country of origin. Such perception reflects the *asymmetry of valuation of knowledge*, where educational credentials obtained outside Europe are implicitly positioned as less valuable, promoting the misconception that the knowledge produced in the Global South lacks legitimacy. Similarly, Sandra described her experience with certain Austrian hierarchies, in her case, not in educational settings, but rather with the migratory status:

> "You are much better than someone who has asylum or someone who comes from certain countries, but you are not as good as a European" (Sandra).

This comparison between migratory statuses illustrates how the host society can create *hierarchical groups between migrant groups*, depending on the preconception of the countries of origin. In her experience, Sandra acknowledges how her positioning as a Latin American woman, even if positively perceived, was not fully equal to European citizens. A similar perception could be found in Fernanda's narrative, as she described how her physical appearance softened the conception of otherness due to the racial proximity to European origins:

> "I heard this a lot, like suddenly I say I'm from Argentina, 'Ahh, that's why you have European features'... there are some who see you as a fake Latino" (Fernanda).

Fernanda's experience brings a new layer to the complex process of the migratory experience, and that is how *physical appearance* can permeate the integration process in the host country. In her case, the physical similarities to European physical features suggest that stereotypes bring along not only personality traits, but also racial expectations. What Fernanda

mentions as '*fake Latino*' can also be interpreted as an expression that facilitates the acceptance of Latin American immigrants by making them seem not so different from Europeans, while at the same time discrediting their roots and ignoring the ethnic and cultural diversity of the region.

In contrast, Paula's narrative introduces a more explicit form of *stigmatization*, she described how introducing herself as a Colombian citizen frequently triggered immediate association with drug trafficking:

> At first, when you're going through all the visa processes and everything, the first thing they see is a Colombian passport (...) so it was really difficult because when you show up and they ask, 'Where are you from?' and you say Colombia, the first thing they think of is Pablo6, and they associate that with cocaine. (Paula)

Paula's experience is a clear example of how nationality perception can carry stigma and be a burden through the migratory experience. What can be highlighted from her narrative is how in her experience, being a Latin American woman, specifically Colombian, influenced her visa processes making them even more complex. Moreover, it can also be inferred from her narrative that stereotypes operate differently even within the broader category of "Latin American", making some national identities more romanticized, others more validated due to the proximity with European physical features, and others stigmatized. This dynamic reinforces the existence of differentiated hierarchies not only between Europeans and non-Europeans, but also among Latin American migrants themselves.

Overall, it can be said that during the migratory experiences of the participants, nationality appeared as a variable permeated by ambivalence, due to the curiosity emerging from the cultural distance to the host society, while at the same time reinforcing hierarchies and stigmatization. Even if in some cases stereotypes can be framed as positive, the

[6]Paula references Pablo Escobar, a drug trafficker from Colombia, who became known internationally due to his crimes. However, different television shows portrayed his image in a romanticized way, leading to the association of Colombia with his image, even if the consequences of his actions are still tangible in the Colombian society.

professional skills and credibility are still linked to the country of origin, leading Latin American women to occupy an intermediate position within the Austrian society, where they're not fully excluded but also not fully equal, reinforcing the premise that nationality functions as an additional layer of the integration process.

4.5.2 Perceptions on gender, stereotypes and discrimination.

The previous section of the analysis focused on how the participants perceived their national identity within the Austrian society. As the main subjects of this research are women, it is equally important to analyze the variable of gender and the participants' perception of being a woman within the host society. The aim of this section is to explore the narratives revealing how the participants experienced any advantage or disadvantage because of their gender, and how their perception of discriminatory situations during the migratory experience.

Most of the participants explicitly stated that *they did not experience discrimination or stereotypes as women*. For example, Luciana, Patricia and Paula emphasized that they had not personally encountered any discriminatory treatment related to gender. Paula also specified that in professional settings, her experience was having the same opportunities as men:

> I haven't had the feeling that, as a woman, at least in my case, I'm not saying it doesn't happen, I imagine it does, I've felt excluded, that for certain things they're looking for, let's say, more a man. (Luciana)

> Well, I feel like I had the same opportunities, because I was on the same level whether I was a man or a woman. I feel like I had the same possibilities and opportunities. Here, I feel like it's not so... so drastic. Did being a woman and an Au-Pair help me because it brought me to that situation where I met my boss? Yes, I can say yes because there are very few male Au-Pairs. But otherwise, I feel like it's been the same. (Paula)

The experiences of Luciana and Paula reveal an interesting position on addressing the advantages or disadvantages of being a migrant woman. Although during her narrative Luciana stated she had not felt any exclusion or discrimination for being a woman, later she describes how her entry into the informal labor market as a childcare giver was facilitated by her gender:

> As a babysitter, these are things that women mostly do, so let's say that in that sense I had an advantage in that I was able to get a job more quickly, informally, when I had no idea what it was going to be. (Luciana)

Additionally, during her narrative, Paula raised the question to herself: “Did being a woman and an au pair help me because it brought me to that situation where I met my boss? Yes, I can say yes because there are very few male au pairs.” This quote highlights, how in her context, there is an acknowledgment of the advantages she had as a woman, since not that many men take on positions as Au-Pairs, yet during her experience as a childcare giver, she was able to create social networks that facilitated her entry into the formal labor market. At the same time, Sandra addressed how, in the childcare sector, men have been excluded due to the stereotypes about care roles:

> I have met some very good people who work with children, but they are not given the opportunity simply because they are men and because of many stereotypes and clichés that exist. In fact, in my line of work, it is impossible for a man to become a teacher or assistant. (Sandra)

This observation shows how *gender stereotypes structure access to labor markets* in different ways for women and men. Fernanda, on the other hand, reflected on the topic of gender inequality by acknowledging the pay gap between men and women:

> It also happens that you know men earn more, okay, but as a woman I can't ask for that much money, you know? (…) On the other hand, there are also jobs that women can do just as well as men, like... Maybe there are people who feel more comfortable having a female babysitter, for example. You know what I mean? Things like that. But anyway, those are also less qualified jobs. (Fernanda)

Although Fernanda is not describing an *explicit* experience of *discrimination*, her analysis shows the *wage disparities between genders*. There is a reflection on discriminatory practices through internalized gender expectations and the perceived limitation to earn a higher salary that can emerge from an anticipation of gendered discrimination in the labor market. What’s more, similar to Luciana, Paula and Sandra, Fernanda highlights how *caregiving jobs*

may be socially associated with women and even preferred by employers, recognizing that these occupations are often '*less qualified'*. It can be said that these narratives reveal how professional opportunities are often permeated by gender, and for women, these opportunities are often located within sectors with lower status and remuneration.

Moreover, Patricia stated how she didn't encounter stereotyping or discriminatory treatment: "Personally, I have not experienced any kind of stereotyping or discrimination for being a woman, or Latina". However, as seen in the previous section, her supervisor addressed her as "fiery" due to her *Latin American origins*. Her boss's preconception of Latin American women having a strong and reactive character is a stereotype that Patricia has normalized due to her own trajectory, and perhaps, due to her self-identification with such a description. The *normalization of those comments* suggests that in cases where stereotyping is framed positively or as admiration, it may be *internalized or even reappropriated as a personal strength*, illustrating how subtle forms of gendered and nationalized differentiation can operate without being perceived as discriminatory by those experiencing them.

The narratives explored throughout this section illustrate how gender is not a variable or exclusion in the participant's migratory experience. On the contrary, it functioned as an anchor of integration for most of them to enter the labor market, either formally or informally. The experiences of the participants cannot be taken as a generalization of the experiences of inequality and discrimination towards women, but it's an example of how gender continues shaping professional positions, wage negotiation and access to specific sectors according to gender expectations. Nevertheless, the absence of explicit discrimination does not imply the absence of gendered challenges that often appear embedded within normalized practices and cultural assumptions.

Overall, the analysis of this theme showcases how nationality and gender are key dimensions to understand the migratory experience. Even though none of the participants

reported explicit forms of discrimination throughout the trajectories in Austria, their narratives reveal how subtle forms of differentiation continuously shaped their integration processes. In this theme, it was also possible to observe how nationality emerged as an ambivalent marker, functioning as a source of cultural attractiveness, and at the same time, as a mechanism reinforcing symbolic hierarchies between Austrians and Latin Americans. Similarly, gender didn't appear as a factor of exclusion, rather as a factor granting access to a specific labor market sector, shaping wage expectations and normalizing occupational segregation. In this case, the absence of explicit discrimination doesn't imply the absence of inequality in the professional integration, yet the experiences of the participants illustrate how nationality and gender operate through normalized practices with implicit hierarchies that influence professional recognition and credibility. It can be said that both variables function as social categories embedded within the migratory journey, permeating the positioning within the host society, as well as the supporting the learning experience of reflecting about their own experience in relation to their gender and nationality in a country like Austria.

4.6 Profiles of Identity Transformation Through Migration

Throughout the analysis of the participants' trajectories, the focus has been on structural and cultural adaptation, labor market integration, aspects influencing how the host society perceived them, and the emotions that emerged through their migratory process. However, this theme shifts the analytical focus towards the transformation and the learnings of each of the participants, highlighting the subjectivity of the learning strategies the participants used in the migration process, the skills they learned, and finally the identity transformation emerging from their migratory experience.

4.6.1 Ana: persistence through doubts.

It can be said that the migratory experience of Ana was shaped by a constant process of learning to endure uncertainty. Her transformation doesn't follow a triumphant trajectory, but

it emerges from emotional confrontation and sustained self-discipline. While reflecting on her early years in Austria, one of the clearest learning she identifies is in regard to her capacity for adaptability:

> I think my ability to adapt, which was non-existent, had to become enormous (laughs), because you're forced to... swallow a lot of things many times in order to move forward, right? I mean, you say, oh well! That's right, I'm no longer in my country. Here there are different rules, different customs, many other things, and in the end, it was my decision. (Ana)

Her narrative captures the tone with which she narrates her experience: half ironic, half resigned, yet deeply aware. In Ana's case, adaptability is not described as a personal virtue she always possessed, rather as a skill that emerged from the migratory experience. It can also be interpreted from this quote how her process involved "swallowing" frustration, disappointment and discomfort, while at the same time learning to take accountability for her decision of migrating, a decision that for her became a commitment with consequences that had to be assumed. Moreover, one of the most significant moments of Ana's learnings emerges through the following reflection: "The Ana of five years ago never imagined she would still be here, much less go through everything, many things that I thought I would never be able to overcome" (Ana)

In this statement, Ana makes a split between two versions of herself: the Ana of the past, who doubted her capacity to cope with challenges, and the Ana of the present, who narrates from a position of survival. This growth Ana mentions is purely internal, as migration forced her to be confronted with situations she never imagined, at the same time allowing her to learn new skills to cope with such situations. In this case, Ana's transformation lies on learning how to develop her self-perception about her capabilities and skills. What's more, the present Ana embodies a resilience that the past Ana could not foresee, staying in the country, enduring those challenging situations and continuing even though uncertainty, which in

retrospect evidences the strength of her journey. Migration not only reshaped her circumstances but also allowed her to learn how to be more confident.

Nevertheless, from Ana's narrative, it is possible to observe a recurring tension in her perception of her professional path: "Outside of German, I feel like I'm not learning anything, you know? I feel like I am wasted talent, that I could be doing things that are much more proactive and efficient" (Ana). This phrase reveals a persistent frustration of her professional journey, although language becomes a tangible gain, it doesn't compensate entirely for her sense of being undervalued.

Besides, the self-imposed discipline can be described as a strong element that allows her to continue her migratory experience: "On one hand, I forced myself... It was like being a little more demanding of myself, like, you wanted this, now you're going to do it... I'm going to finish my master's degree and then we'll see what happens" (Ana). This quote reflects how migrating can be, in many cases, a contract with oneself, where persistence becomes less about optimism and more about coherence and not leaving things unfinished. Even when doubts arise, Ana frames continuation as an obligation toward her own decision.

Ultimately, Ana's migratory lessons can be summarized with the following quote: "More than knowledge, I would say it is a great lesson in humility". Humility encapsulated her transformation, as migration did not deliver the imagined narrative of success, but it exposed vulnerability and required resilience due to the complexity of the process. Learning, in this case, lies in the capacity to *adapt, reassess and continue despite uncertainty*.

4.6.2 Fernanda: two identities & two homes.

Fernanda's trajectory reveals how her migratory experience was initially conceived as temporary, which characterizes her transformation is not a crisis per se but a strategic adjustment, as her learning process centers on adaptability, awareness and the gradual acceptance that not everything can or should be controlled. She frames her experience in terms

of moving forward: “I feel like I was pushing forward, you know? ... and it was also the reality that I'm not in my country and I don't have many options” (Fernanda). This narrative reveals a disposition to take action rather than staying static. In her case, the migratory experience didn’t unfold as a passive endurance but as continuous adjustment, as the awareness of limited options triggered initiative without immobilizing her. Over time, Fernanda developed a strong sense of belonging, describing Austria as her “second home”:

> When I go to Argentina, after a while I say: well, it's time to go back to Vienna... and you kind of feel it... I have my main residence here and a secondary residence in Argentina, maybe... yes, it's like I have two homes... and two identities. (Fernanda)

What Fernanda describes can be interpreted as a form of expansion, where instead of replacing one home with another, she constructs a dual identity and therefore a sense of belonging in both places, the country of origin and the host country. At the same time, this duality required adaptation, a process that Fernanda acknowledges by expressing the difference in her identities depending on the context she is in. Moreover, Fernanda reflected upon another important dimension of her learning process through her migratory experience: “How to become even more independent... In Argentina, since you know so much... you always rely heavily on other people... It's like making yourself stronger, saying that in the end, you're on your own” (Fernanda).

In this case, independence can be understood as a source of empowerment, signaling a strengthened sense of competence and highlighting how growth emerged from being forced to rely on herself rather than on others. However, the most profound learning she reflects upon is about control:

> Not everything is under our control... one can have a lot of plans, but then... We have to see if it's the right time, if it's the right place (…) There are so many things in life that I cannot control and... are in the hands of others. (Fernanda)

From this narrative, it can be interpreted that her sense of tolerance toward uncertainty expanded, and in her case, adaptation included letting go of rigid control and aligning plans gradually. Additionally, Fernanda further reflects on her earlier expectations and how the perception of the migration process has been shaped throughout her experience of living in Austria: “If you had told me in Argentina that this was the life I was going to have, I wouldn't have believed you”. This reflection reveals how migration allowed Fernanda to create a life she once could not imagine, one with stability, mobility and autonomy, and although during the interview she reveals that Argentina remains an option to come back, her overall narrative reflects both attachment to the host country. Finally, Fernanda summarizes her migratory lessons by saying: “In the end, you bring out an incredible side of yourself”. In her case, migration became a space for self-expansion, and her transformation reflects a form of learning linked to flexibility, self-reliance, adaptation and the capacity to embrace the different layers of her identity.

4.6.3 Luciana: developing self-confidence.

Luciana’s experience through the migratory journey reveals an internal transformation. In her case, learning can be observed in the development of her self-perception, confidence and a gradual deconstruction of an internalized sense of inferiority for being an immigrant. Her learning process unfolded a reconstruction of how she sees herself in relation to others, particularly within the Austrian context. In her narrative, Luciana described how she perceived her growth: “I feel it more internally, more than anything else, like seeing myself as one more person and not one less, like seeing myself as more equal to other people”.

This statement captured the essence of her development, as migration confronted her with a hierarchy in which she initially positioned herself as “less”. Over time, she learned to perceive herself as equal, suggesting progress in how she perceives her worth. Another

important lesson from her migratory experience was detaching from comparison and accepting that her process and experience in an individual journey with its own pace:

> Basically, a mixture of okay, don't compare yourself to others... just because your friends are all professionals doesn't mean you have to be a professional now... As long as I can make a living doing what I do, that's fine, and I have my time... I feel like I've taken everything much more calmly because of that. (Luciana)

This shift of mentality can be described as a key moment of her experience, as it releases most of the pressure that might come due to the comparison to peers, and it allows her to define her own standards and timing. Moreover, Luciana reflected how he migratory experience in Austria also allowed her to feel more direct and confident:

> I feel that Austria has made me more confident in general, and a little more direct too... I feel that you adapt to the culture... I grew up in Colombia, so I have my Colombian ways... but at the same time, I have my ways that are very much from here. (Luciana)

This quote is another example of how identity adaptation can look in the migratory journey, not abandoning the previously developed identity, rather integrating the new learned Austrian traits to facilitate her integration into the host society. The confidence Luciana mentions can also be associated with adapting to a cultural environment that pushes her to develop firmness as a quality that signals self-respect. This can also be seen in the following reflection: “I feel like I'm a little more confident in myself... I know I'm doing well without having to ask myself 300 times whether I'm doing it right or not” (Luciana). This narrative represents that Luciana no longer requires constant doubt and reassurance to take action, reaffirming how her self-confidence and her perception of competence have also expanded throughout the migratory experience. Furthermore, Luciana links her sense of integration to a feeling of belonging to Austria, as well as the desire to deepen her social connections:

> Well, I could tell you that right now I would like to stay here indefinitely... It's not 100% certain, but at least right now that's more or less what I'm aiming for... But it's not like

> something super strict... but for now I feel like I've formed certain bonds that I would like to maintain. (Luciana)

In Luciana's case, rather than her professional path, the emotional factor of maintaining her bonds can be interpreted as the driver of staying in Austria. Ultimately, Luciana summarizes her migratory lessons as a growth in her self-respect: "So that has helped me learn... to respect myself more as a person". It can be said that in Luciana's journey, migration has enabled a transformation from insecurity, comparison and internalized inferiority to learning to develop confidence, self- respect and a more stable sense of equality.

4.6.4 Patricia: re-interpreting experiences.

From Patricia's migratory experience, it is possible to observe that learning is reflected in reflexivity, intercultural awareness and adaptive skills. In her case, migration emerges as a process of overcoming internal insecurity and in learning how to navigate social, cultural and professional complexity. An interesting point during her reflection is how she described the migratory experience as a skill:

> I think the migratory experience is also this, as they call it here, intercultural capability... because I can speak several languages... I can speak English, Spanish, German, French if you want. So that, but you can also say that you can see things not only as a migrant, but I also see it from my perspective as an anthropologist. (Patricia)

Patricia described migration primarily as a capability, rather than a struggle, and her reflection suggests that her experience has generated skills that extend beyond linguistic proficiency. Her academic background allows her to observe the host-context from multiple angles, yet her positioning as a migrant allows her to understand other aspects of the cultural contexts that can only be acquired through empirical experience: "Being a migrant and having moved to another city gives you the ability to adapt quickly" (Patricia). Adaptation can be understood in Patricia's narrative as an essential skill in the migratory process, suggesting how in her case, being a migrant increased her agility in facing challenges. Hence, Patricia's growth

lies in the flexibility to view situations from multiple perspectives, in comparison to individuals who have not left their home and therefore may not have challenged normalized cultural behaviors. Moreover, Patricia also described how uncertainty has become a part of her experience, and how she had adopted a sense of openness to what the migratory experience can bring her:

> Don't take anything for granted... know that anything could end tomorrow... that everything can change in the blink of an eye... if tomorrow they tell me they won't renew my visa, then I'll have to go back, and what can we do about it?. (Patricia)

This quote illustrates acceptance of the unpredictability of the migratory experience, as well as emotional regulation. It can be said that this awareness, combined with uncertainty, has allowed Patricia to develop a strong sense of self-efficacy: “One of the biggest lessons I've learned is that... I can accomplish things, that I am capable”. This affirmation anchors her flexibility, as she centers her migratory lessons on skills. Nevertheless, Patricia’s understanding of home reflects more about her flexibility: “For me, home is where my sister is... and right now she's in Austria”. In her case, her sense of belonging is not defined by geography but by the bond with her sister, revealing how her stay in Austria depends on the relational attachment, allowing Patricia to be more flexible to adapt to the host-country environment, since regardless of where she is, she would find her sense of belonging in the proximity of her sister.

Finally, Patricia acknowledges how the migratory experience allowed her to develop a sense of empathy: “Empathy that comes from living different experiences... it's something I've gained through my migratory experience”. In this case, Patricia’s main learning experience can be understood as the strengthening of her intercultural skills, expanded empathy and the reinforcement of self-efficacy. Her experience also highlights how migration not only reshapes circumstances; it reshapes the way reality itself is interpreted.

4.6.5 Paula: new language, new sense of belonging.

The migratory experience from Paula reveals how learning in certain cases can be connected to self-reflection and an active orientation towards skill acquisition. Her transformation throughout the migratory process can be described learning how to communicate, tolerate uncertainty and remain optimistic despite the frustration within the migratory journey. During the interviews, it was possible to observe that one of the lessons from her experience of moving to Austria was about communication beyond the grammatical competencies; in her case, communication skills were improved from a social perspective: “I learned how to deal with... how I have to communicate with different points of view or dialects” (Paula).

In this case, flexibility to adapt to a new environment led her to expand her communicative skills as she was forced to engage with different perspectives, dialects and styles of interactions. Moreover, another dimension found in her narrative, related to flexibility to adapt as well, was how she kept her goal in mind even during uncertain times:

> The goal remains the same, plans can be adjusted... understanding that there are many questions that I don't have answers to right now... that I don't have to understand everything right now... that I'm not going to achieve everything right now... everything... every project has its phases. (Paula)

Paula’s reflection illustrates migration as a long-term process rather than an immediate one. It can be said that she learned to accept uncertainty, on the contrary of demanding instant stability. Paula then uses the new environment to learn day by day, tolerating ambiguity and allowing development to unfold at its own pace. Paula’s experience is an example of what can be called psychological maturation, as she develops the capacity to hold uncertainty without collapsing into frustration. However, she doesn’t deny that there can be frustration at certain times, on the contrary, she integrates it into her learning narrative and frames such disruptive times as purposeful:

> Although it was extremely challenging at first, we have survived until now. Because every day we learn something new, we unlearn... that we don't know everything, that we can ask for help... that we can raise our hand and say, hey, I'm drowning. (Paula)

This quote is particularly strong because it connects learning to vulnerability. In her case, learning is not only about becoming stronger; it is also about recognizing limits and legitimizing the need for support. Paula frames asking for help not as failure, but as part of maturity. Migration, then, becomes a setting where she learns to unlearn rigid self-sufficiency and accept interdependence. Alongside these internal shifts, Paula articulates a clear sense of belonging toward Austria. Her attachment is emotionally explicit and framed as gratitude: "Yes, I consider it my home... I love the country as such, and it gave me the opportunity to be who I am today and... the sense of belonging that one develops" (Paula).

Ultimately, Paula's migratory lessons can be summarized through the impact that the migratory experience has had on her personal development:

> That personal aspect of facing being a person in a country that is not your own also helps you a lot to get to know yourself... to get to know your roots... to understand many things that you may never have understood before. (Paula)

In Paula's case, her learning experiences are reflected in the communicative flexibility, navigation of uncertainty and the grounded sense of belonging that don't require a full social recognition.

4.6.6 Sandra: developing reasons to stay.

Sandra's migratory experience reveals how transformation can be multidimensional, in her case, the main lesson was reflected in resilience, autonomy and professional redirection. Migration can be understood in Sandra's context as a process of structured personal and professional growth, requiring responsibility, open-mindedness and a continuous reshaping of her identity. One of the strongest dimensions of Sandra's transformation emerges through her narrative as autonomy and redirection of her path: "I believe that autonomy... having the

freedom to pursue something that interests me... redirecting myself toward where I saw myself in the future and not just limiting myself" (Sandra).

Migration allowed Sandra to learn how to rethink her professional identity beyond the path she initially envisioned, this redirection is not understood as loss, but as expansion, strengthening her sense of value: "Work... gives me status... experience... that translates into money... into confidence, self-esteem, feeling valued... hearing positive words from my bosses... that fills you up and gives you a reason to stay" (Sandra). Here, professional recognition becomes a source of stability and self-affirmation, suggesting her evolution from a migrant navigating precarious spaces to a professional acknowledged for her contribution. Sandra's learning experience can be reflected in feeling seen and validated within the host context as developing further social skills as she Sandra emphasizes: "It's impressive the skills you acquire... social skills... having to integrate cultures... you make a much bigger circle, so your social skills are totally improved". Migration forced Sandra to step outside pre-established social networks, expanding her relational capacity. In this case, social integration is described as a learned skill rather than a spontaneous outcome from the migratory experience. Nevertheless, one of the most explicit transformations, appears when she described the lessons of her journey, emphasizing resilience and responsibility:

> Resilience. Knowing that you can do it... If you put in a lot of effort. Autonomy, and that all autonomy comes with responsibility, and that it's okay to have responsibilities, not seeing them as something negative but as part of the process. (Sandra)

In Sandra's migratory experience, resilience resides in the belief of effort and autonomy is seen as responsibility embraced as part of adulthood. In her case, navigating the challenges of migration requires self-confidence and being hands-on to tackle responsibilities. Finally, Sandra synthesizes her migratory experience in the following words:

> Personally, I feel that it builds self-esteem, it gives you perspective, helps you get organized... It brings order to your finances, responsibility... It's like a whole process...

> being so far from home makes you grow in a way that you have to in order to survive. And it's a very beautiful process. (Sandra)

Sandra presents a holistic way of understanding the lessons from the migratory journey, as it restructures not only identity and profession, but also financial habits, organization and long-term planning. What's more, migration in her case reflects not only survival but acknowledgment that autonomy, responsibility and adaptability are not accidental skills, but central lessons of her migratory journey.

4.6.7 Summary.

All the narratives explored throughout this research demonstrate that, even though the participants share certain characteristics, being young high-skilled Latin American women navigating integration in Austria, their migratory journeys cannot be reduced to a single description of trajectory. Clearly, some common elements of their experiences are present across the interviews, such as uncertainty, adaptation and professional redirecting; however, the way each woman experienced and interpreted these processes was deeply subjective. For Ana, migration was primarily a lesson of perseverance and humility; for Fernanda, it was an expansion of flexibility and the reconstruction of belonging to two different places. For Luciana, it was an internal development of self-worth and confidence. For Patricia, it was a development of intercultural awareness and the capacity to reflect upon her own experience. For Paula, it was a process of psychological maturation and developing communicative skills. Finally, for Sandra, it was a consolidation of her autonomy, resilience and professional validation.

Moreover, different experiences highlight that transformation in the migratory experience unfolds in different ways depending on personal histories, emotional contexts, professional expectations and relational ties. This means migration may generate shared challenges, but the meaning attributed to those challenges and the lessons learned from them remain individual. It can be concluded that integration is shaped by structural opportunities and

constraints as well as by subjective interpretation and the unique ways in which each woman experiences her positioning within the host society. Therefore, the recognition of this subjectivity is an essential part of understanding migration as a diverse set of lived experiences shaping informal learning.

5 Discussion

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the main findings according to the research questions: What are the learning experiences of the labor market integration of young high-skilled female professionals from Latin America living in Austria? To answer this question, the results are interpreted through the lens of what other authors have proposed about the migratory experience while highlighting the role of gender and the development of learning strategies throughout the journey.

During the previous chapter, the themes analyzed emerged from the content of the interviews; this chapter is divided into three sections focusing on the discussion of secondary research questions proposed at the beginning of the study: 1) What are the migratory experiences of young high-skilled Latin American women living in Austria? 2) Which learning and coping strategies did young high-skilled women from Latin America developed during the migratory experience? 3) What are the chances and challenges tied to gender, language and cultural background of young high-skilled Latin American women living in Austria? Additionally, a fourth section discussed a key finding of this research linked to the lessons of the migratory experiences and evidencing the identity transformation of the participants throughout the process. These sections intend to discuss the findings about the common aspects of the migratory experiences from the young high-skilled Latin American women interviewed, while acknowledging the uniqueness of their journey.

5.1 Migratory Experiences of Young High-Skilled Latin American Women Living in Austria

Throughout the interviews, the different experiences of the participants revealed how the decision to migrate to Austria was driven by a combination of factors. Some of the women were motivated by the lack of professional opportunities and economic instability in their countries of origin, while others were motivated by personal relationships, either romantic or

familiar. These motivations to migrate resonate with the theorization from Bhugra (2004) and Solimano & Pollack (2004) about the motivation for migration relying on 'push and pull' factors. In this research, the pushing factors can be seen in the lack of professional opportunities, low wages and economic instability from the country of origin; and the pulling factors were the possibilities of acquiring new skills and social networks, entering the labor market and developing a professional path in Austria.

However, an important finding from the analysis was how Austria was chosen as a destination to migrate. In most of the trajectories, Austria was not the primary migration goal, rather, it appeared as a destination that allowed the participants to prolong their stay in Europe or as a country that, in comparison with others, facilitated the bureaucratic process of obtaining a residence permit for Latin American nationals. In this sense, the participants' narratives suggest that migration policies were relevant pull factors influencing the decision to move to Austria.

Alongside the motivations for migrations, the participants described their expectations prior to moving to Austria. For some of them, the expectations were often shaped by the idea of better possibilities for academic and professional development, for others, the expectations were framed in terms of experiencing a new cultural environment or acquiring financial means. Yet, the different trajectories of the participants show how these expectations were shaped by the reality of living in the host country, in addition to the different challenges of the migratory experience. Such challenges emerged in the narratives as difficulties to obtain the recognition of qualifications, language barriers, bureaucratic procedures, and for some of them, struggles to enter the Austrian labor market. For some of the women, these initial expectations were transformed through everyday experiences in Austria, evidencing the argument from Bhugra (2004, p. 244) about the adaptation process requiring flexibility from the individuals to respond to new social and institutional conditions within the host country.

The analysis of the different experiences illustrates how the migratory process is an ongoing journey. Although some of the women moved to Austria with specific plans related to educational or professional development, those plans were often shaped by the opportunities and constraints that emerged along the adaptation journey. However, most of the women also described approaching their migratory experience as an explorative process, allowing their plans to evolve according to the circumstances they encountered in Austria. Therefore, the migratory experience emerged in the interviews as a gradual adjustment to the professional and academic path within the possibilities of staying long-term in the host country. This process of adaptation and response to the new context also required the participants to develop strategies to cope with the challenges of navigating uncertainty and frustration while integrating into the host society, which will be explored in the following section.

5.2 Learning and Coping Strategies Developed During the Migratory Experience

The migratory experience often appeared in the narratives as a process enabling learning through everyday experiences in Austria. The participants were exposed to a variety of challenges that were initially expected to appear as common characteristics of the migratory process due to the type of focus group of this research: young high-skilled Latin American women who voluntarily migrated to Austria. However, this section aims to understand how the participants responded to various challenges such as language acquisition, job market integration, bureaucratic procedures and cultural differences; and more importantly, the skills they learned and developed during the journey of moving abroad and adapting to a new context. The findings discussed here are seen through the lens of the theory of informal learning proposed by Marsick & Watkins (2001) and Marsick & Neaman (2018), understanding informal learning as an organic and spontaneous process in which an individual learns and develops new skills by being exposed to challenging situations.

One of the most recurrent forms of learning that emerged from the narratives was developing adaptability as a key skill to navigate the uncertainties of the migratory experience. This can be observed in the adjustment of migratory plans, as some of the women had clear expectations about the process, but the reality of living in Austria forced them to change them. For example, Ana readjusted her initial 2 year-plan of studying a master and stayed longer; Fernanda initially expected to work in service jobs for a year but stayed studying a master program, obtained a job and got married; Luciana and Patricia wanted to study their bachelors and enter the labor market, yet after finishing their studies they had to continue with a master program to prolong their stay in the country; Paula wanted to study a master's program, instead she obtained a position in a company and postponed her studies; Sandra was not clear initially what to do after her Au-Pair, in the process of adjusting her plan she obtained a job and continued her academic journey. These narratives confirm the observation from Marsick & Watkins (2001), as even with the similarities of the migratory process, the action taken to face challenges would depend on the interpretation of the individual and their capacity to adapt to the circumstances.

An important learning of the migratory process of the participants was the skill acquisition in navigating the social environment in Austria. During bureaucratic procedures, some of the women described experiencing feelings of stress specially in the encounters with immigration authorities; others expressed how the informational gap was often a barrier to fulfill the requirements for applying to residence permits, additional to the difficulties of not being proficient in German, the latter emerging as a strong barrier when communicating with immigration authorities, finding professional opportunities, or even making Austrian friends. Nevertheless, according to Marsick & Watkins (2001, p. 30), new skills will be developed according to the context and what's needed from the person to successfully find a solution to a challenging situation. With that in mind, the interviews revealed how the participants learned

new skills by being regularly exposed to interactions with the immigration authorities, acquiring higher levels of German proficiency, and being acquainted with the new social and cultural dynamics. All these led the participants to reduce the stress levels and adjust their approach for facing those everyday situations from a place of self-confidence and autonomy. In this process, the participants learned to search for different resources, build new support networks and ask for help when needed.

Moreover, the participants not only developed competencies to navigate procedures and the new sociocultural context but also adopted different strategies to cope with the uncertainties of the migratory experience. Beyond seeking information through online resources, learning new communicative skills and relying on social networks to obtain advice, many of the women emphasized the importance of not suppressing their emotions, on the contrary, cry if needed, share the frustration, and dedicate the time to reorganize their thoughts before taking action. From this finding, the importance of emotional regulation as a coping strategy can be highlighted, following the theorization from Folkman & Moskowitz (2004, p. 747-754) about coping as an individual response dependent on the environment and the individual's internal resources. During this research, it was reaffirmed that emotional regulation led to the positive outcome of challenging situations in most of the women interviewed, as it allowed them to take a step back and reassess how to move forward. Nonetheless, not all the women reflected on emotional regulation as a main coping strategy, once more confirming the subjectivity of coping as a dynamic and individual process.

Additionally, some participants mentioned seeking psychological support as a coping resource to face the emotional demands of the migratory experience. In previous studies, it has been found that the migratory experience can negatively impact some individuals, increasing the chances of developing mental disorders, especially during the adaptation process (Bhugra, 2004, p. 244-245). Therefore, psychological therapy as a coping strategy emerges as a highly

relevant finding for this research, extending the understanding of coping beyond using internal resources and including professional forms of support that help individuals interpret their experience and confront challenges with more clarity. In this case, therapy can be interpreted in relation to the participants' learning experience as a proactive strategy to process and regulate the different emotions throughout the migratory experience.

Nevertheless, these findings portray the role of the migratory experience as a catalyst for informal learning, as the participants developed emotional as well as practical competencies to adapt to the host society and face everyday challenges. As proposed by Morrice (2014, p. 151), learning is a process involving mental, physical and emotional dimensions, leading to internal growth and therefore identity transformation. In this sense, the learning emerging from the migratory experience involved the physical move to the country of origin to Austria, the mental load of adapting to a new culture, new language and new structures, and the emotional impact of leaving behind their families and friends and creating a new social network, in addition to the uncertainty of not entering the labor market as initially expected, and reacting to the challenges in assertive ways to create positive outcomes.

Therefore, the learning experiences of the participants can be observed in their capacity to adapt to the host society and learn to interpret the demands of the unknown context to respond to the challenged and take advantage of the opportunities. Besides, the acquisition of practical knowledge served as a key learning to navigate all the different bureaucratic processes and institutional encounters, all while learning a new language and forms of communication of the Austrian society, all while learning how to emotionally regulate to cope with the different challenges arising during their journey and eventually learning to reflect upon their own experiences. Conclusively it can be said that the learning and coping strategies collected from the narratives are a crucial part in better understanding the influence of informal learning on identity transformation when experiencing a migratory process, and in this case, specially

important to understand the experiences of young high-skilled Latin American women who migrated to Austria.

5.3 Chances and Challenges Tied to Gender, Language and Cultural Background

Before continuing with the findings on identity transformation, it's important to bring attention to another important dimension: gender. Although the theoretical framework of this research is not grounded in gender studies, focusing on the migratory experiences of women makes it crucial to consider how gender shaped the participants' experiences in the host country. Understanding the participants' perception of the influence of gender is relevant to recognizing the different challenges and opportunities they had throughout the journey of migrating to Austria. Therefore, this section explores the findings on how the participants interpreted their position in the host country as Latin American women, and how they navigated stereotypes and possible discriminatory behaviors towards them.

Across the interviews, the topic of cultural stereotypes associated with Latin American women emerged as certain preconceived ideas about the participants' personalities, appearance and even professional capabilities. Some participants were confronted with situations within professional and social settings where those stereotypes appeared in subtle forms, such as assumptions about Latin American women being warm, socially outgoing, and "fiery" as framed by one of the women. Other participants were confronted with the question of their capabilities to perform their professional duties due to their German skills, even if they were reaching a high proficiency in the language that allowed them to communicate in professional settings. Although these perceptions did not always translate into explicit discriminatory actions, they revealed how gendered and cultural representations can influence how migrant women are positioned within the host society.

An interesting finding from this research was that despite the encounters with stereotypes, most participants did not explicitly frame their experiences as discrimination. Most of the women expressed being treated respectfully or having a generally positive experience in comparison with women of other migrant groups. However, throughout the interviews it was possible to observe the awareness of the participants about subtle hierarchies linked to migratory status, where Latin American migrants were sometimes perceived as a more acceptable community by the Austrian society in comparison to other immigrant groups, yet still not fully recognized as equals within the host society. However, these reflections were not linked to stereotypes of gender, but of nationality, in addition to not being interpreted by the participants as an experience they underwent themselves, rather, understood as a part of a broader dynamic of migration and cultural differences.

This observation resonates with the academic discussion about migration and the persistent stereotypes surrounding female migration. Ghosh (2017, p. 46) described female migration as a process often shaped by assumptions about women migrating as companions to male partners, or young women migrating with the purpose of marrying abroad. However, as also stated by Ghosh and seen throughout the trajectories of the participants, there is a more complex reality to such stereotypes. The women in this study migrated independently, voluntarily and often with clear education and professional aspirations, even if Ana chose Austria as a destination to be closer to her former partner, and Fernanda and Paula married to Austrian partners, the primary goal was to pursue an academic and professional path, challenging previously established notions about female migration. Hence, it can be said that this research illustrates how young high-skilled Latin American women actively shape their migratory projects, even while navigating cultural stereotypes and subtle hierarchies in the host society.

Another pattern that emerged across all narratives was the participant's integration into the Austrian labor market through informal employment, especially within the service and care sectors. Even if most of the women had educational qualifications before migrating or they obtained them already in the host country, all the women described engaging in some point in informal work as a step to achieve economic stability and integration. Many of the participant also reflected on how their gender facilitated entering care and service sectors, as they are commonly associated with female competencies. An important observation about domestic and care work is made by Ghosh (2017, p.52), as these sectors are often lacking from labor protections rights, fostering environments that may involve precarious conditions forcing the employees to be underpaid while working long hours, while experiencing discrimination. Even though the participants didn't explicitly frame these experiences as exploitative, their narratives reveal their ability of perceiving these jobs as strategic steps to restructure their migratory plans and transition into other professional pathways, highlighting not only the determination and perseverance of young high-skilled Latin American women during the navigation of labor market challenges regarding gender, but also the relevance of reflecting about their positionality as a key outcome of their learning experiences.

5.4 Migration as a Catalyst for Identity Transformation

As discussed throughout this work, the migratory experience is a complex process that not only requires the participants to adapt to a new system and sociocultural environment but also it triggers skill acquisition and a reconfiguration of how the participants perceive themselves within the host society. Although identity transformation was not a focus topic of this research, it emerged throughout the interviews as a central aspect of the participants' learning experiences. According to Morrice (2014, p. 152), the process of learning involves a constant evolution and transformation of identities, and in the case of the migratory experience, identity is continually shaped and adjusted through daily interactions and practices. Thus, this

theorization is highly relevant to understanding the participants' identity transformation, focusing on their perceptions about their learning through the migratory journey.

One dimension of identity transformation that emerged from the narratives was the development of autonomy and independence, especially in situations involving bureaucratic procedures, job search, or even the navigation of unfamiliar social and institutional settings. In most cases, this evolution can be reflected in the participants' encounters with immigration authorities, which at the beginning was a cause of stress, but later became a procedure they could manage on their own, in addition to handling challenging situations using the resources available. Moreover, some of the women also started living alone for the first time and managing their finances, a process that allowed them to grow into a new role of adulthood. Developing autonomy and independence during the migratory process reinforces Morrice's (2014, p. 150-151) theorization about the common aspects of the migratory experience, even with the subjectivity of each journey, migrants build a new life in the process of learning and shaping their identity.

Moreover, the author's observation can be further proven by the flexibility and resilience developed during the migratory experience, these traits also became central to coping with the different challenges of the process. Across the narratives, the challenges that emerged were mainly related to language barriers, delays in entering the Austrian labor market, difficulties in obtaining the official recognition of qualifications and accepting positions below their experience and qualifications. Although the participants used different strategies to tackle those challenges, one commonality was their capacity to adapt to the new setting and adjust their expectations and plans over time, rather than abandoning their aspiration to pursue a life in a foreign country. Additionally, some of the women described how periods of uncertainty and difficulties allowed them to remain open to look for alternative pathways, illustrating how resilience is not only reflected in the capacity to cope with difficult situations, but also in the

ability to remain committed to a personal and professional objective despite the challenges. Once more, these experiences confirm Morrice's (2014) perspective about migration being a constant process of learning throughout transformation.

Besides the development of new skills, the participant's narratives revealed how the migratory experience contributed to the construction of their identities in relation to the new sociocultural context. Another common aspect of the migratory experience of the participants was the adaptation to different cultural norms and social practices. Most of the participants described becoming more aware of cultural differences in the communication styles, social interactions and expectations of certain behaviors in professional and personal settings. For these women, the process of building new social networks confronted them with linguistic barriers and different social dynamics, leading them to improve their German skills as well as to consciously adapt new behaviors related to the new environment while leaving behind certain social practices associated with their country of origin.

However, although all women reflected on this behavioral change associated with the new environment, not all women embraced such a transformation in a positive way. Even after building a life in Austria and feeling adapted and integrated, some of the women expressed the challenges of fully accepting the cultural differences, especially regarding social interaction. In such cases, the participants described the formation of a dual personality, one maintaining social practices learned in the country of origin, and one displaying the learned behaviors expected in the host country. These experiences further reflect Morrice's (2014, p. 150-152) theorization on identity transformation in different aspects, mainly in those related to social roles, in addition to migration, forcing the individual to learn not only a new language but also new behaviors that align with the sociocultural rules of a different environment.

Nevertheless, the narratives also revealed how the migratory experience reshaped the perceptions of belonging and the participant's understanding of what is called "home". Some

of the participants described Austria as a place where they have built stability, they have professional opportunities to grow and they had developed meaningful social connections; Other participants described developing a sense of belonging to both their country of origin and to Austria, without fully identifying with either context; Another participant expressed her sense of 'home' in relation to family ties, independently of the country she was located. According to Morrice (2014, p. 157), the migratory experience leads the person to rethink their sense of identity, belonging and ways of existing across all different dimensions of life. This reinforces what has been found during this research about the participant's experiences being an individual path, that doesn't translate into a singular sense of transformation or belonging, rather showcasing how even through the similarities, reshaping and developing the identity has been an individual journey coming from each woman's reflective process.

6 Conclusion

Throughout this research, it has been possible to illustrate the learning experiences of young high-skilled Latin American women in their migratory journey through Austria. What has emerged from the narratives can be described as deeply personal stories marked by courage, uncertainty, resilience and transformation. Each of the narratives revealed how migration is not simply the process of moving from one place to another, but a multilayered process instead, shaped by hopes, challenges, sacrifices and growth. From the initial decision to migrate, diving through the factors that influence the adaptation and integration process, until the participant's transformation, it has been possible to identify the importance of understanding the migratory experience as a dynamic and ongoing journey, shaped by personal motivations, structural conditions and everyday experiences.

The crucial findings of this research rely on the role of migration as a catalyst for learning and identity transformation. Although the participants were exposed to various challenges in their process of adaptation and integration, their strategies to tackle such challenges allowed them to learn skills that were only generated through the migratory experience. These can be illustrated through the different processes these women underwent by leaving their home countries, learning a new language, adapting to an unfamiliar system and new social norms, building new social networks and confronting the uncertainty throughout the process.

Moreover, this research revealed the emotional dimension of migration, as leaving the country of origin entails a separation from the families, friendship and communities, as well as being confronted with the loss of no longer being who these women once were. Building a life in a host country is not only filled with moments of loneliness, uncertainty and vulnerability, but also moments of discovery, empowerment and personal growth. The narratives explored in

this study reflect that building a life somewhere else requires perseverance, adaptability, and even hope, to face structural and emotional challenges without giving up.

Therefore, this research not only makes an academic contribution, but also acknowledges the stories of migrant women who left their countries of origin to look for a better life, and in the process of starting from scratch, they rebuilt their careers, their identities and opened up to the exploration of new environments and new ways of being. Embarking on the migratory journey is the proof of emotional strength, because to migrate and build a life away from home requires much humanity and courage to face the unknown, the everyday challenges and to learn how to cope with fear, rejection and discrimination all while accepting that regardless of the place, learning is a part of the process, and certainly, a part of life.

Ultimately, the narratives of these young high-skilled Latin American women who, illustrate how migration is a catalyst not only for building a new life, but also serves as a bridge to acquiring new skills and competencies that would probably not have been developed in the same way without the experience of migration, with the learning experiences gained along the way leading to a transformation of identity. Due to the time restriction of this research, it was not possible to make follow up interviews with the participants, further research on the topic could focus on studying the learning experiences of migrants over the years observing their ongoing learnings and transformations. Additionally, a comparative analysis of migration experiences of Latin American women living in different European countries could provide a better understanding about how different social contexts can shape learning experiences and therefore, migratory journeys.

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