

Research Article

African women aspiring to decent work in a migration setting

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This paper presents an original qualitative study based on case study interviews, examining the types of work and challenges faced by semi-skilled African women in Florence, Italy, along with the opportunities and benefits gained and how women manipulate strategies to overcome subordination in work settings. The research highlights women's perceptions of decent work, their plans, and expectations. The research discusses two interrelated conceptual frames that migrant women usually find challenging: One is Gender Equality (GE) and the other is Decent Work (DW) in relation to skills building and well-being identity. The results indicated that women share different experiences and feelings; they are challenging practices of discrimination and exploitation that are imposed by employers and some colleagues. Conversely, women expressed satisfaction with child benefits and health insurance. Additionally, capacity-building programs, such as language and technical vocational training, are accessible to all migrants and are perceived as good opportunities. However, women rarely offer training opportunities or promotions in the workplace. Further, women's aspirations are constrained by stereotypical work patterns, which confine them in a cycle of poverty and gender inferiority. The resulting recommendations include enhancing capacity-building programs for migrant women and promoting gender equality in job recruitment.

Keywords: African migrant women, Decent work, Gender inequality, Women subordination**INTRODUCTION**

The flow of African women to Europe and immigration countries is escalating. According to world statistics, approximately 12.8 million African women migrated to northern countries. The reasons for this migration include extreme poverty, family violence, policy discrimination, gender-blind project planning, and persistent social norms at home (World Bank Report, 2024) as well as, the demographical changes in Europe and the globalization domination in the labor markets (Kenny and Yang 2021). Additionally, women and girls face structural factors beyond their control, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, corruption, and poor governance, which undermine their empowerment and capabilities for well-being and public participation. Literature in gender and migration studies (Kofman and Christou 2022) and theoretical analysis related to transnationalism and intersectionality (Moser 2021; Salikuthuk 2020; Anthias 2012) confirm the inequalities and disparities of the labor force in the global markets. Similarly, globalization efforts failed to establish equilibrium balance in

gender migration markets in both the South and the North globe (Badri, 2025). Nonetheless, gender disparity in the labor market is noticeably decreasing, as women in 2024 contribution to the Global North job market had reached 45.7%. But still, disparities in payment and ranking are increasing; women earn 20% less than men, with 60% working in the informal sector (Busetta et al., 2019). When employed in formal sectors, women often occupy low-ranking positions and face discrimination and harassment (Iafleur and Vintila 2020). Further, Carling and Collins 2018 found that African women and other migrant workers are less satisfied with work pattern and benefits provided. Here, the notion of decent work and gender equality is equally important to elaborate on and discuss in relation to the transformation of African migrant women's work in Europe. Some literature and UN agencies have addressed these issues from different angles, emphasizing policies and economic aspects. For example, the UN women policies challenge macroeconomic sectors for gender blindness in terms of equal

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pay, women's rights, poverty reduction, and opening full economic participation opportunities. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize gender equality (SDG5) advancing women's participation in all life equally with men in a peaceful work environment. Further, SDG8 highlights the importance of decent work as a driver for productivity and economic growth, as well as for maintaining individual and societal dignity and well-being (UN-Women Report, 2023). The ILO conventions 143, 189, and 170 emphasize migrant rights, protect women's right to decent work, promote equal opportunities, and uphold human development rights (ILO Report, 2018). Additionally, in 2007, EU policies adopted gender equality and the feminization of the labor market, increasing women's enrollment in the economy and creating better opportunities for women migrants in the EU market.

Moreover, the analysis of women's migration mobility is framed within three contexts: Globalization, which demands more migrant labor across sectors, particularly in informal and self-employment areas; the feminist movement, which encourages women's economic independence and freedom from patriarchal systems; and changes in migration policies emphasizing gender equality in work, social, and political participation (Kabeer 2008; ; UN-Women Report 2023).

African women workers in the European labor markets

The journey of African women to Europe started in the 1970's-1980's as family voluntary emigrants or as family reunions without the intention of work. However, in both cases, a few women were recorded as domestic workers. The phenomenon of African women migrating as independent workers started in the 1990s, as defined in much literature as "the feminization" of African women migrants who occupy domestic labor and elder care positions (Kofman, 2022). Further, in the 1990's women's international migration for work and education made up 30%, increased to 49% and recently reached 52% of the international migrant population (EU Stat., 2024). Women migrants to the EU and other Northern regions have brought significant changes, reflected in various actions and providing new perspectives for analyzing the phenomenon in the context of women's market demands. The shift in women's perceptions and their self-image as contributors rather than receivers has alerted stakeholders and decision-makers to take firm actions for migrant women. Although migrant women vary in education and social levels, they significantly contribute to the host labor market through tax payments and fulfill market demand for unskilled and semi-skilled labor. Additionally, migrant women workers benefit their home economies through economic remittances, improving family living standards.

Most of the EU countries pulled both experienced skilled and unskilled African women from Western African, mainly from Nigeria, Ghana, Cost de'Ivoire, Senegal, Cape Verde, and Gambia; followed by those from the Horn, including Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan. A few from the Central region, mainly Congo, Burkina Faso, and Mali. Also, women from the Eastern region are recorded from Zimbabwe and Mozambique. The OECD study in 2000, recorded that 53,400 African nurses

and 30,700 women physicians were working in the EU countries (Kutalek, 2015). A recent study estimated that African women covered 20.3% of physicians and 15% of nurses in the EU health sector (African Union and IOM Report 2024).

According to the estimation pertaining to the EU countries for the 2000–2010 period, found that African women were working in the domestic and caregiver sectors; these were in the UK (11%), France (9%), Germany (7%), Spain (6%), whereas Italy, in 2015, recorded that 4% of this sector was occupied by African women (Euro-Stat., 2024). Additionally, Italy in 2015, demanded many African women for the services and tourism sectors (Fokkema and De Hass, 2015). On the other hand, students and professional women were increasing during the period from 2010 to 2023 to about 3% and 1.7% respectively.

Nevertheless, studies related to "brain drain" and "brain gain" confirmed that women with high education and professional skills are emigrating compared to African men. A particular flow was recorded for nurses and medical doctors to the UK, France, and Germany; recently, Italy and Spain were attracting some skilled and professional migrant African women. For example, migrant nurses from Nigeria and Gahana to the UK; and Sudanese physicians to the UK and Ireland (Docquier et al., 2009).

Considering the place of African migrant women in Italy, their participation in the self-employed sector increased during the 2016–2022 period as participants, shareholders, or owners. Conversely, during the same period, migrant women in Cyprus decreased their participation in the self-employed sector from 55% to 24% (Matteo, 2020). It is also noteworthy that 40.7% of overqualified African migrant women work in low and intermediate jobs compared to 21.1% of national/native women (World Development Report, 2023). This affects their subjective well-being, implied feelings of dissatisfaction, fewer financial gains than they expect, low career development, scarce or no social relations, and social status that is disconcerted ((Fullin and Reyneri, 2011).

In this context, the paper reflects on the type of work and challenges faced by semi-skilled African women workers in Florence, Italy, along with the opportunities and benefits they derive from employment. Additionally, the research highlights women's perceptions of decent work and their future expectations.

Research objectives and questions

Objectives:

- To examine the types of work and challenges women faced during their work experiences.
- To identify their opportunities and gains during work life.
- To understand how women, perceive decent work and what expectations they have.
- To explore their future career plans concerning work life.

Questions:

- What challenges have women faced throughout their work journey?
- How do women perceive the concept of decent work?
- What benefits have women gained from work?

- What will their future careers be with such limited capacity-building programs?

The research framework is grounded in six issues that are addressed in the interviews. This is illustrated in the following Figure 1.

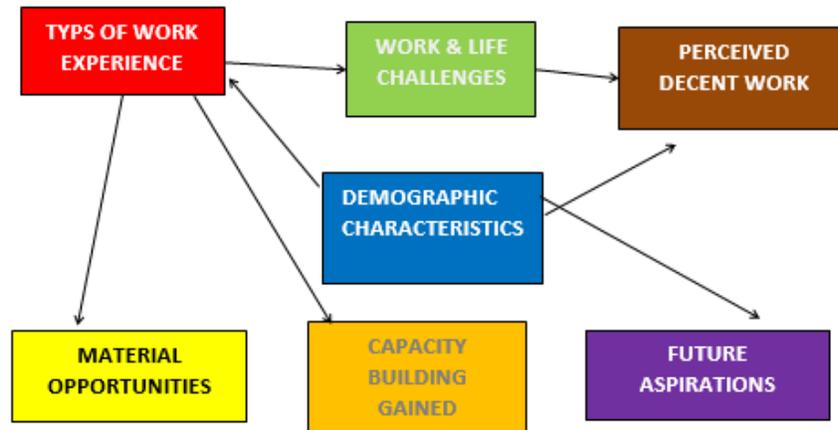


Figure 1. Research conceptual framework.

This study focuses on analyzing work opportunities, challenges, material and career development gains, the perception of decent work, and future expectations for a better career and life. Furthermore, the study explores demographic and socioeconomic factors that may influence the aspirations and work satisfaction of African migrant women. Additionally, the concept of decent work is analyzed from the perspective of African migrant women and the perceptions they shared during interviews. The aim is to reveal the extent of satisfaction, feelings, and expectations regarding their work environment, including benefits, relationships with colleagues and employers, and career development.

Hence, the research emphasizes the importance of SDG8 as a goal not only for economic growth and productivity but also for human dignity, well-being, and rights. In this context, the ILO defined decent work as "work that provides fair income for the hours spent in work, security and social protection, a good environment in the workplace, appropriate for personal development, equal opportunity for work, and that secures social integration in society" (ILO, 2018). Additionally, the OECD defines decent work as "a place where an individual can participate and make decisions, free expression, free from oppression and discrimination" (OECD, 2018). Moreover, the European Union, in its social charter and directive acts, defined decent work as:

"The collective aspirations of people in their working lives provide opportunities for work productivity, deliver fair income, security in the workplace, social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, participate in the decisions that affect their lives, and equal treatment for all

employees" (EU-Directive Act 2017).

Studies in this context are not extensive; many of them have researched DW in the context of managerial organizational aspects and implications for economic growth and the value of employers and companies. Ingebedion, 2024 in his study on the perception of decent work and employee commitment, examined the degree of satisfaction and the influences of work performance factors determining such commitment and loyalty. Nizami and Prasad 2017 summaries that DW is defined as "An aspiration statement about the quality of work that should be available to all people who seek to work around the globe, regardless of time and place." Additionally, it is confirmed that DW has qualitative and quantitative dimensions and measurements. The qualitative aspect concerns the employees' and employers' satisfaction with the work environment, performance, relationships, and aspirations for promotion and human capacity development. While, the quantitative dimension includes income, benefits, allowances, bonuses, and all other material gains. In this paper, some of both the quantitative and qualitative elements are tested.

Theoretical framework

The framework adopted for this study combines two theories that reflect the situation of African migrant women from the Global South who have moved to the Global North due to the globalization demand for labors. These theories illustrate how African migrant women extend their subordinated social norms from Africa to Europe in their places of work, how this exploitation influences their understanding of decent work, and how women invest in their personal and social capacities and resources to overcome challenges and fight against inferiority. The chosen theoretical frameworks are interrelated and reflect the

historical context of African women in society and in the workplace, as framed by socio-cultural norms. These theoretical contexts are "intersectionality theory" and the "social vulnerability." The third theory is "women's empowerment/gender equality" approaches, both of which aim to transform socio-cultural practices for the advancement of women's participation in public life. Viewing women as valuable and equal participants in the economic process should empower them as shareholders of economic resources. Both theories will be confined as pathways for determining decent work and how migrant women are experiencing such inferiority in terms of work rank position and lack of skills that have pushed them into a state of dissatisfaction and ill-being.

First, intersectionality theory is coined in 1987 by Kimberle Crenshaw, an African American woman who fought for the elimination of race, class, and gender discrimination and sought to elevate Black women to public life. She worked towards dismantling structural inequality and changing American cultural practices and attitudes regarding social power systems. Kimberle Crenshaw introduced intersectionality theory as a potential solution for migrant women struggling for equality, respect, and justice in the labor market (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality theory provides a critical lens through which to examine the overlapping and mutually reinforcing forms of disadvantage experienced by African migrant women in Europe. Introduced by Crenshaw in 1991, intersectionality highlights the ways in which multiple axes of identity, such as gender, race, class, and migration status, interact to shape lived experiences. In the context of social protection, this perspective allows for a nuanced analysis of how systemic inequalities are embedded in institutional practices and policy frameworks (Yuval-Davis, 2006), how second generations migrants are matter in issues of social inclusion and intesectionality, and how the first generation migrants are suffering for rights and inclusion (Anthias, 2012).

Second, vulnerability theories are employed to conceptualize how particular social, legal, and institutional contexts render individuals or groups more susceptible to harm. It is defined in literature (Gilodi et al., 2022) as a group of people exposed to stress or changes stemming from socioeconomic, natural, and political factors. In this paper, "social vulnerability" is emphasized, which explains the factors that migrant women face during their lives in the host country, the unexpected patterns of livelihood, work relationships, and life dissatisfaction in general. For migrant women, this includes their exposure to informal labor markets, weak legal protections, and dependence on exploitative employment sectors such as domestic and care work, and in private sectors (Hennebry et al., 2015; Kofman, 2022). Additionally, other theories related to labor, migration regimes, and social reproduction are relevant to understanding how systematic exploitation is reproduced through the intersection of state policies and global care chains. Migrant women's work is often undervalued and positioned within feminized/inferior, low-wage sectors, reinforcing their marginal position within host societies (Gilodi, 2022; Toma, 2016). These theories shed light on the structural hierarchies and legal regimes that regulate access to social protection and reinforce social stratification.

On the other hand, the global women's movement for supporting and empowering women's initiatives coincided with the Women World Conferences agenda, and many scholars spoke out for the advancement of women. Kate Young, in 1993, a pioneer in women's empowerment and gender equality, stated that "empowerment is a comprehensive process that enables women to take control of their resources and lives, set an agenda, organize to support each other, make claims and demands on the state for support, and produce societal change" (Young, 2012). She emphasized that women's empowerment is about educating women for better economic participation to improve family living standards and reduce family violence. Additionally, she viewed the women's empowerment approach as enabling women to realize their identity, power, and potential, which influences the personal, familial, economic, political, social, and cultural aspects of their lives. Furthermore, Carolin Moser insists on the gender equality that secures a place and participation of women equal to men and achieves sustainable development for the nation. She perceives a radical transformation in the structural function of societies and in policies pertaining to segregation and discrimination based on gender, fostering structural transformation in policies and project planning that bring opportunities for women's empowerment and gender equality in reality (Moser, 2021).

Nayela Kabeer and Sara Longwe concurred with these views, proposing three dimensions for women's empowerment. The first dimension is personal development capacity, including individual self-confidence and the ability to gain knowledge and skills. The second dimension is rationality for developing a deep understanding and the ability to negotiate and influence decisions regarding all matters. The third dimension is collective involvement and participation in economic, social, political, and community activities, and the ability to change existing structures based on cooperation rather than competition (Longwe and Clarke, 2024; Kabeer, 2008). These women's empowerment and gender equality approaches ascertain that women have the right to be integrated into economic development at all levels and situations, whether women are migrating to other countries or staying in their own country. Therefore, women's participation in the international labor market represents a vital asset for actualizing gender equality and for the implementation of European Union legislation aimed at promoting such equity. Literature pertaining to the gender and migration disparity in the international labor markets (Samaluk, 2016; Kofman, 2022) shows that migrant women are facing inequality in the global market and are usually pushed into the reproductive and care sectors.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This qualitative research, employing the case study method, was obtained through face-to-face interviews. A semi-structured interview sheet was prepared and tested before data collection. Colleagues in the department assisted in identifying local organizations that work directly with African migrant women. One social association successfully arranged women for the interviews. The association contacted some women and allowed the interviews to be conducted at the association's venue. The

sample was selected using both snowball and purposive methods. The interviews were conducted directly, with only one conducted online. The initial plan was to interview 12 women, but due to high refusal rates and other reasons concerning time, only eight women agreed to participate. One of the most significant challenges faced during data collection was the reluctance of women to discuss their personal work experiences. This extended the data collection process to three months. Each interview lasted 60–90 minutes, depending on the story and the language of the interviewee. The interviewed women were aged 40–60 years, with the majority having migrated to Italy as refugees at the age of 20–30 years. One woman came as an adopted child at the age of 12, and another was allowed entry on a student visa. Two interviews were conducted in Arabic, four in English, and two required Italian–Arabic interpretations. Two interviewees were Nigerian, two were Eritrean, one was Somalian, one was from Côte d'Ivoire, one from Uganda, and one from Senegal.

The MaxQDA package was utilized for data analysis, identifying five key issues as central pillars that align with the research objectives and questions. These issues include: Type of work, challenges faced during work, opportunities related to capacity building and employment, benefits gained, perceptions regarding

the concept of decent work, and future expectations and plans. Additionally, the analysis incorporated participants' demographic characteristics, such as age, educational attainment, marital status, date of entry, changes in residence permits, and number of children. Some of these variables were examined for their potential influence on opportunities for employment, the benefits gained, and perceptions of decent work.

RESULTS

In this section, the findings of the analysis related to the research objectives, and research questions are provided and discussed. Findings yielded by subjecting the interview data to content analysis supported these results and highlighted the influence of certain demographic characteristics on the primary issues under investigation. For instance, age and education levels were tested against the type of work, the benefits gained, and the perception of decent work. Additionally, the type of work experience and the number of children were found to influence their plans. Table 1 below shows the overall demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1. The respondents' characteristics.

Case#	Age	Education level	Courses/certificates gained	Marital status	Year entered Italy	Change in residence permit	Number of children	Age of children	Original nationality
1	43	B.Sc English	Lang. Level A	Separated	2013	Refugee	3 boys	6, 8, 10	Eritrian
2	44	M.Sc. Medical Nursing	Lang. Level C+National Nursery practitioner	Married Italian	1993	Citizen	2 boys	8, 12	Nigerian
3	30	Secondary ed	Lang. Level B	Married	2015	Refugee-residence	1 boy, 1 girl	2, 5	Nigerian
4	40	MA International Relations	Lang. Level C, certificate of recognition in community work	Married	2010	Student-residence	1 girl	4	Uganda
5	59	Primary ed.	---	Married Italian	1991	Refugee-citizen	1 boy	26	Eritrian
6	46	Secondary	Lang. Level B, IT certificate	Married	2003	Refugee-residence	1 girl +2 boys twin	13, 8	Senegal
7	62	Secondary	Lang. Level B	Married Italian	1986	Citizen	2 girls	30, 32	Cost De' Ivory
8	61	Secondary	Lang. Level B, certificate of recognition in social society development	Married Italian	1991	Citizen	1 girl	34	Somalian

It is clear that the study participants are diverse in terms of nationality, covering the three main regions of Africa: Specifically, the Western, the Central, and the Horn. In terms of age, they fall within the early to mid-productive stages. Table 1 illustrates that women who arrived more than 10 years ago succeeded in changing their permit status. Exceptionally, Case 1 continues to struggle with changing her permit from refugee status. Some individuals gained opportunities through marriage to Italian citizens, leading to naturalization. Regarding educational attainment, the majority of interviewed women completed secondary education, classifying them as unskilled or semi-skilled labor. All participants engaged in language courses at the early stage of their arrival in Italy, except Case 5, who

learned the language through work and family. Those with a Master's degree (Case 2 and 4) were able to improve their skills and knowledge through further certificates, which enhanced their ability to compete for professional skilled jobs. Case 4 and 8 obtained local certificates in recognition of their community development and civic engagement due to their long-term commitments and leadership capabilities in social community work.

Type of work, challenges and navigating in work

In this section, the types of work experiences are analyzed, along with the challenges faced by the women during their working

lives and how they master these difficulties. I analysed the narratives of each case as presented below for deep insight of their perceived reflections on work journey and maneuver.

Case 1: Online and onsite translator: “Currently, I serve as an online and onsite translator, effectively bridging language barriers in various contexts. Alongside this role, I have experience working as an assistant cook and in a cosmetic and textile factory for a cumulative period of eight months. Presently, I am employed as a laundry keeper. Having three young children at school age and one under school age, restricted my movement and seeking work for long hours. Managing this problem is not easy, especially since I am a single mother and I have no one to trust to look after my children while I am at work. Additionally, in the place of work, I have faced significant challenges, including exploitation, time constraints, and issues concerning fair remuneration. To mitigate these hurdles, I adapted my work schedule to align with children’s school times, thus avoiding distant workplaces with low pay and extensive hours”.

Case 2: Private elder residence: “For the past eight years, I have dedicated my efforts to a private elder residence and volunteered at a social society, while concurrently working in a public hospital. My experiences have been marred by instances of racism, yet I refuse to let such negative attitudes affect my work ethic. I maintain a steadfast focus on my responsibilities and cultivate respect and love for others, transcending racial prejudices. Through such a proactive approach, I contribute positively to the lives of those I serve while fostering an inclusive environment.”

Case 3: Cooperative association and caregiver center: “My professional journey includes a two-year tenure at a cooperative association, complemented by five months at a caregiver center and five years at an elderly home. Currently, I work as an assistant cook. In these roles, I confronted racism and dealt with the dual pressures of time and childcare responsibilities. To enhance my financial stability, I implemented rotational shifts and ventured into selling plastic bags and hairstyles as supplementary income. These efforts not only demonstrate my resilience but also illustrate my commitment to improving my circumstances.”

Case 4: Educational and mediator roles: As an “assistant educator” for a local association for two years, I took on additional roles as an assistant mediator in language classes and an educator at a Women’s Association for five years. Additionally, I served as an assistant in logistics at an American University for six months. Throughout these experiences, I faced exploitation and racism, which added layers of stress and demand to my roles. However, I harnessed my skills to confront these challenges, using them to navigate environments of oppression. By learning to either ignore or defend my cultural identity, I have managed to uphold my dignity and empower myself.

Case 5: Domestic worker and babysitter: “My experience spans six years as a babysitter for various families and four years as a domestic worker specifically for the elderly. I also engage in part-time domestic work. While these roles have not been

without their challenges, including stress and fatigue, my affection for children fuels my passion for my work. I find joy and fulfillment in the relationships I build and the care I provide, making my career as a caregiver deeply rewarding.”

Case 6: Elder care center and chief cleaner: “I spent two years at an elder care center and worked for five months in a biscuit factory. Currently, I hold the position of chief cleaner at a restaurant while also acting as a sales mediator for African hairstyles. Throughout these experiences, I encountered racism, low remuneration, and conflict arising from familial responsibilities. Nevertheless, I remained patient and learned to adjust to the difficulties presented, demonstrating my resilience and capacity to adapt to challenging environments.”

Case 7: Health worker and assistant nurse: “With an extensive 25-year career as a “health worker” in a private healthcare center catering to disabled elders, I also serve as an “assistant nurse” in a public hospital at present. This journey has been challenging, with experiences of racism from colleagues and rejection from some patients. Furthermore, I have faced exploitation by the director. To cope with these adversities, I have chosen to ignore negativity and focus on building friendships while maintaining respect and love for my patients, ensuring that their needs remain my priority.”

Case 8: Businesswoman and NGO founder: “As an entrepreneur, I have taken on the role of businesswoman in a pasta factory while also founding and presiding over a women’s society association for migrant women. Additionally, I manage the Orphan Children Association at present. My journey has been fraught with gender discrimination, alongside challenges posed by a sluggish administrative system for the registration of my association. Despite these challenges, I draw strength from the support of national and migrant women, along with my intrinsic leadership qualities and faith in God, to pursue my ambitions and advocate for whom I serve.”

It seems that each woman has a unique work experience and has faced specific challenges, which she overcame through adopting various strategies. It is noted that, three women share similar struggles in finding appropriate work that aligns with their education, ambitions, and family/childcare responsibilities, see for example (Case 1, 3, and 6). They spent considerable time seeking suitable employment to meet their needs and employed various means and resources to increase their income. They opted for part-time work that provided sufficient income to cover family needs, offered time for family chores, and respected their dignity and vulnerability as migrant women. They sought work that ensured equal pay and freedom from exploitation. On the other hand, the life circumstances of Case 2 and 7 set them apart from other cases. Both women obtained citizenship through marriage to Italian nationals, followed the education system, and gained advantages for climbing the professional job ladder. Despite spending over 20 years in the private sector, they eventually achieved their dreams of working in the public sector. Case 4 and 8 also share similarities in having strong, intelligent personalities and leadership capabilities, which contributed to successful working lives and ease in overcoming challenges and

work difficulties. Although Case 8 has secondary education, whereas Case 4 holds a graduate degree and training certificates, it is evident that Case 8 possesses two elements that facilitated her success in her work journey. One is her economic capacity as a trader and investor in Florence, which she transformed into a new pattern of work that supports migrant women. The other factor is that she began her career at a young age and married an Italian gentleman shortly after settling in Italy. Similarly, Case 5 arrived at a young age and married an Italian, but her low educational attainment and poor extended family pushed her to accept this pattern of livelihood, which she finds comfortable and claims to be happy.

These results are supported by an ample body of evidence (Fullin and Reyneri, 2011); (Fokkema and de Haas, 2015); (Tayah, 2016) indicating that African migrant workers in Europe primarily engage in semi-skilled private sector work, including domestic and elder care roles in private homes and health centers. Additionally, African women are known for their reliability in the restaurant and hotel sectors and other tourism and service industries. In contrast, some studies have indicated that skilled and highly qualified African women come to Europe through work contracts or study scholarships, often employing various strategies to adapt to challenges, continue their jobs, and settle in Europe (Fasani, 2024). In general, published data suggests that migrant women face work exploitation, discrimination, and racism across all patterns of work and at all levels of employment (ILO 2023; Ortensi and Tosi 2021; Tayah, 2016).

Opportunities and benefits

The participants explored how they found few opportunities that enhanced their capabilities from various available and accessible resources in community organizations and other channels. Thus, the analysis showed the subjective feelings and expectations with respect to their own capacity building, the benefits gained from work and different resources, and how these structure their perceived belonging and continuity in staying in Italy or might change their thoughts for returning to their home. This can be elaborated in the following explanations as perceived by each case:

Case 1: The capability gained by Case 1 is mastering the language through a free course at level A and practicing the language while engaging for 2 hrs/3 days in community voluntary work at Caritas. Also, she was involved in driving lessons and obtained a driving license, but she feels disappointed when she discovers that it is not possible to get a job involving driving while she is a refugee woman. The volunteering at Caritas, while not directly related to her employment challenges, provided her with valuable social connections, additional food supplies, and the opportunity to use her translation skills to help other refugees adapt to their settlement in the beginning stages, such as going with them for registration at the immigration office, registering their children in schools, and accompanying them to the physician. This represents a gain in social capital and community involvement.

With regard to benefits for her children's well-being, despite her financial struggles, her children receive free education and

healthcare support from the government. This is a significant gain and provides a sense of hope for their future progress. Also, at the moment, the government covers 80% of her accommodation rent, which is a flat with two rooms. Additionally, she is feeling happy that obtaining legal status as a refugee will open opportunities in the future to get a permanent job, obtain permanent residence, and facilitate applying to own a house from the council. In general, Case 1 feels satisfied with her life, she can sacrifice missing her family and home for the betterment of her children's future.

Case 2: She reached to upper stage in building her capacities as she is fully skilled in language course level C+; B.Sc Nursery; M.Sc medical nursery, in addition to a certificate in hospital nursing skills and another certificate in nursery management skills obtained from a workshop outside the hospital. All these educational gains and work opportunities allow her to easily compete in the labor market and gain social status. Additionally, her early adoption by an Italian family opened and facilitated the process of becoming a citizen and having equal rights as any other Italian, despite her African features sometimes limiting and delaying the process of applications for higher education and jobs. Moreover, her marriage to an Italian man enhanced her self-esteem to apply for a good job in the public sector to secure at least a pension. Currently, she has a full-time job in a public hospital; a good salary, and good health insurance benefits for me and my family. Hence, she expressed herself as feeling satisfied, proud, and having reached her dream. Also, she expected that all desires would be fulfilled and all challenges managed.

Case 3: She built her language capacity to level B, which is a significant achievement in mastering a new language; she managed to change her residence permit from a refugee status to a work permit, a process that can often be complicated and daunting. This transformation took a long time, about six years, during which she struggled with marginal informal work that hardly paid the bills and often left her feeling undervalued. After she obtained an IT course certificate, which opened up new opportunities in a rapidly growing field, and mastered the language in both writing and speaking, she expected to find a permanent job in various places, believing that her hard work would finally pay off. However, she feels a mix of disappointment and a little satisfaction because of the persistent discrimination she faced in the job market and the low salary offers that did not reflect her skills or qualifications. Also, she faced family role conflict due to the long hours spent at work. Nevertheless, when she compared the financial and tangible benefits that she and her husband had gained over the years, she realized that after a short time they are eligible to apply for citizenship. Therefore, she accepted the situation with a sense of resilience and felt a sense of happiness when reflecting on her progress, especially when comparing her current life to her first situation ten years ago. If she had gone back home, the challenges she would have faced could have been even greater, and this realization gives her a sense of gratitude for the opportunities she has been afforded, despite the difficulties.

Case 4: She feels proud of obtaining an MA from Pesia University; she mastered the language up to level C, attended

many different courses with certificates in social and community work, and gained good experience and skills from voluntary work while she engaged with NGOs. Her efforts to volunteer have not only bolstered her language skills but also enhanced her understanding of the cultural meaning within her new environment. She believed that, she had made remarkable progress in her integration journey, actively participating in a local community center where she has developed new friendships with people from diverse backgrounds.

Moreover, the most recognition she admired was the “Tuscan Region Prize” and “Certificate of Recognition in Social and Community Work”. Moreover, in respect to financial and subsidized benefits, she is eligible for child benefit, has obtained a sufficient salary; work permit for residence, and has benefited from the association in monthly bill payments. She expected, after all these 15 years in Italy, to find a job that met her ambitions and level of education and experience.

Case 5: She pictured that a fulfilling life encompasses a sense of security, happiness, and respect. As she entered Italy in mid-childhood, she resided with her aunt, who had endured the trials of being a refugee for the past forty years. Through my informal work and the influence of my Italian husband, I assimilated the language and culture, which empowered me to cultivate confidence, engage socially, and develop a deep affection for the Italian people, who are remarkably kind, respectful, and welcoming. My past life is tinged with sorrow, having fled my homeland alongside my family due to the war, affected the continuation of my primary education. This upheaval has profoundly affected my psychological and social well-being. Nevertheless, I held steadfast in my faith in God, believing that opportunities would arise wherever she went, even though she struggled to find avenues to complete her education. She was compelled to work to support herself, her elderly parents, and her younger siblings. Yet, she continues to aspire to learn the Arabic language, aiming to communicate effectively with friends and assist refugees arriving from Arab nations. Despite these challenges, she feels a sense of joy and pride in having, through her savings, attained citizenship and aided her husband in purchasing a home; she dedicates time to nurturing her son and her husband. Consequently, she may have sacrificed her personal development and self-esteem, yet she has achieved material aspirations and has confined herself within the traditional stereotypes of familial roles.

Case 6: When she settled in Italy at a young age, she succeeded in passing the two-year process of capacity building as a refugee. During this time, she made the conscious decision to enroll in IT courses, believing that this would open up avenues for her to secure a good and respectful job that would fulfill her personal expectations and aspirations. Initially, she was looking for work as a secretary in administration, a position that seemed promising, yet her expectations quickly went awry as I encountered numerous obstacles in the job market.

As a result, she found herself working in various low-ranking jobs that offered little financial reward, with her earnings barely covering the necessities of daily living. It was indeed a fortunate

turn of events when she met my husband, who had come to Italy as an investor in fabrics. This relationship provided her with some stability, and for several years, she devoted herself to raising the children, which was both a rewarding and challenging experience.

However, for the last five years, she has felt a strong need to resume working in order to earn some money that would meet her own needs and self-articulation. Although the salary she receives is described as tangible and provides some relief, she feels only moderately satisfied with her situation. Moreover, she has been fortunate enough to receive some financial benefits from the local council to support our children, and recently, we were able to secure a house, which has made a significant difference in our quality of life.

Despite these advancements, her desire to obtain a job as a secretary remains strong but unfulfilled. She is actively seeking justice and equality between citizens and genders, fueled by her own experiences and the challenges she has faced. Her journey reflects a broader struggle for empowerment and recognition, highlighting the importance of creating opportunities for individuals like her who strive for a better future.

Case 7: She described her feelings as overwhelmingly happy with her work life, and she has managed to successfully embrace her role as a mother. The reasons for this positivity can be traced back to her strong self-determination to achieve her goals in both education and career. Over the years, she has worked diligently to obtain her health worker license, which has allowed herself to pursue a fulfilling career in the healthcare sector. Additionally, I earned a language certificate at level C+, which has significantly enhanced my communication skills and opened up further professional opportunities. I am proud to have secured a permanent job in a public hospital, where I can contribute to the well-being of my community. Furthermore, my marriage to an Italian has enriched my personal life and broadened my cultural perspectives. All these opportunities and achievements, which have accumulated over the last thirty years, make me feel as though I have reached the pinnacle of accomplishment. The journey has not always been easy, but the rewards of hard work and perseverance have truly been worth it.

She visualized that how she succeeded to stand behind her two daughters letting them finished their high education. One has a diploma and Master in Agrarian Land and Agriculture; the other has Diploma in chemical biology, both are married and working in their professional career. This sense of passion and belonging to the family with the aim to build human resources for the betterment of society and for the dignity and actualization of the young women who are the future of our nation in Africa.

Moreover, Additionally, she likes voluntarism and community work, she is a member of the Nostoras Association, helping African young women who have experienced violation and torture during their journey to Italy or in their home village. Recently, she has been a member in establishing a new non-profit association named “Garden of women Association”, it works to help women with tax payments and exemptions from taxes, help

women and children who are suffering from health problems. The association is supported by the Local Council, the Red Crescent, and the government. She emphasised by saying: “I worked voluntarily in both associations, I feel prosperous and illustrious that I contribute to society and guide young African women to be the future leaders”. She ascertains that in Italy, voluntary community work is essential for giving oneself respect and status. This form of engagement is not just a means of helping others; it is a significant avenue through which individuals can cultivate their sense of self-worth and establish their social standing within their communities. For instance, participating in local initiatives such as helping at shelters, organizing community events, or contributing to environmental clean-up efforts allows individuals to connect with others and build valuable relationships. Moreover, these activities often lead to recognition and appreciation from fellow community members, further enhancing one’s social status. This intrinsic link between volunteerism and personal dignity is deeply rooted in Italian culture, where communal bonds are cherished and seen as vital for both personal development and societal cohesion.

Further, in a material context, she explored that there are many opportunities here to establish oneself and gain status through obtaining loans and building relationships with influential people who have power in decision-making. I bought my own house and feel happy and secured. I helped some families start their own businesses and manage revolving fund activities through official means.

Case 8: She believed in her leadership and self-esteem capacities, which not only empowered her but also inspired those around her, spreading a sense of power and capability to be a leader among her own society and the refugee women at large in Florence. This belief in her abilities was crucial, as it allowed her to take on challenges and advocate for those who might feel voiceless. She masters the language at level B, which enhances her ability to communicate effectively with a diverse range of individuals and engagement efficiently in social civic work. This is evident in her active participation in community initiatives aimed at uplifting marginalized migrant women. Moreover, she obtained a recognition certificate from the Tuscany Municipality for her impactful contributions to migrant women’s empowerment initiatives, demonstrating her commitment to fostering a supportive environment for women facing challenges in their lives.

Financially, she has no problems regarding living and social protection. She married to an Italian man since 1994 who works in the private pharmaceutical sector, a field known for its competitive environment and potential for growth. This partnership not only supports her financially but also spreads security, enriches her life with cultural exchange, and shared experiences. She has citizenship and all the material and social privileges, which in turn gives her more power and status in society.

The above scenarios that emerged from the participants demonstrate a noteworthy trend: Several women actively engaged in free language courses and technical vocational

courses upon their arrival and during their stay in the reception camps. This engagement highlights their eagerness to assimilate and improve their skills in a new environment. For instance, some women learned the language through formal education in schools take, for example, Cases 2 and 7, who arrived in Italy at a young age and thus had the opportunity to immerse themselves in the educational system. This early exposure to the language likely facilitated their integration into Italian society. On the other hand, there are individuals like Case 5 and Case 8, who picked up the language through informal means, such as interactions with family members and community members, illustrating diverse pathways to language acquisition. This variety in learning methods underscores the adaptability of these women as they navigate their new lives. Overall, these findings indicate that the majority of the women are making significant strides toward deep integration into society, as evidenced by their ability to build moderate relationships within workplaces. Such connections not only enhance their social networks but also contribute to their overall sense of belonging in a foreign country.

Moreover, the results revealed that those with higher education levels had access to better job opportunities and training, allowing them to improve their social status. In comparison, those with lower education levels and no training certificates remained in unskilled work, experienced low income, and were deprived of social integration. It was confirmed that all women, regardless of their education level, type of work, and residence status, received the same social security benefits in terms of child benefits and health insurance. However, the results also showed some differences regarding housing benefits. While Case 5, 7, and 8 bought their own houses, Case 1 and 3 received partial or full housing support. It appears that the majority of migrant women prioritize material benefits over human capital building. Still, Case 2, 4, and 7 prioritized capacity building as the first step toward gaining social and economic capital. However, capacity building seems to be limited to Italian language and vocational technical training, which the latter is an optional choice for many migrants.

Future expectations and plans

This section reveals the participants’ future short and long-term expectations and plans with respect to work, capacity building, returning home or staying in Italy, the following are the thoughts of the participants:

Case 1: She wishes to secure a full-time job that not only provides her with financial stability but also offers comprehensive health insurance coverage for herself. This is crucial for her well-being and peace of mind. Additionally, she is determined to obtain a good education for her children, as she believes that this will significantly contribute to their future prospects in both their professional lives and personal development. She is motivated by the desire for her children to have opportunities that will allow them to thrive and succeed in a competitive world, which includes the ability to hold citizenship and passports to broaden their horizons. Also, she provides Arabic and Islamic lessons to her children to be acquainted with

and to preserve their own culture without challenging the Italian culture.

Furthermore, she envisions her future as being anchored in Italy, a place she holds dear, with plans to visit her family for short stays whenever possible. This connection to her family is important to her, as it fosters a sense of belonging and support. By achieving these goals, she hopes to create a nurturing environment that will enable her children to flourish and build a promising future filled with opportunities.

Case 2: She is affiliated with her original home, Nigeria, sends money regularly to poor village women which enables them to run small businesses. Her plan is to spread and advocate for love, respect, and solidarity between migrant women and the national community. My life experience lessons reflect that fostering passion, friendship, and cooperation are key factors for the enhancement of a better quality of life and sustainable well-being. She views that money is not everything, rather respect, self-actualization, and dignity are the principles of sustainable decent work and life. Shortly, she is going to issue her Nigerian passport to go on holiday and see the progress of rural women and their village growth.

Case 3: Her main concern is getting a better job that offers not only a competitive salary but also comprehensive benefits that can support her family's needs. She has invested considerable time and effort into obtaining certificates in the IT program, website design, and app development through various online short courses, hoping that these qualifications would open the door to improved employment opportunities. However, her aspirations extend beyond mere job security; she deeply wishes for a brighter and more prosperous future, not just for herself but also for her children. She envisions a life where they can access quality education and better opportunities than she did. In the long term, she proposes to return to her village after retirement with the goal of opening a small business that could serve the community.

Case 4: She has numerous aspirations, one of which involves navigating the current experiences of migrant women and families. She is contemplating the establishment of a new center for migrant families aimed at addressing their needs and enhancing the capacities of migrants in Florence. Additionally, she is striving to secure a scholarship for Ph.D. studies, which in the long run will empower her to pursue a promising career either here or back home. Furthermore, through her network, she is considering the possibility of returning to Uganda to work for an Italian organization there. However, she remains uncertain about her precise course of action. She feels that she is at a pivotal stage in her life, grappling with the decision of whether to return and contribute to the development of her country, as she recognizes her own potential to secure a rewarding position within international organizations back home.

Case 5: Her immediate ambition is to start a business in Florence, if she finds capital for this. She knows of some associations and foreign wealthy women groups who can support migrant women in running small business, for their own

economic empowerment. These groups often provide resources, mentorship, and funding opportunities that could be instrumental for someone in her position. She is still giving thought to contacting these groups to negotiate her proposal for running her own business or engaging with some migrant women, as collaboration could lead to greater success and shared learning experiences.

Also, other short-term hope is to learn Arabic or English language. She believes this will open a venue to work with foreign families who are not mastering the Italian language. Thereby bridging communication gaps and fostering relationships within the diverse community. By acquiring these language skills, she could enhance her employability and better serve those in need of translation or cultural mediation.

In respect to going back to Eritrea, she is not hesitant to stay here in Florence as most of her extended family is in Italy and in Europe, she said: "I have no chance to study or learn something new. I am looking forward to a good future for my children to study and obtain good jobs". This implies hopelessness and little ambition, though she is a 45 years old lady. But her desire at the beginning and enrollment in an IT course, along refusal to be recruited in a secretary job, all overwhelmed her disappointment to look for education and building her skills for a good job.

The only hope she and her family have is applying for citizenship after reaching fifteen years staying in Italy. For the long term, she is thinking to start a business in African fabrics and cosmetics or might go home and start a business there. The decision depends on the reliability of loans and the market environment here. Finally, she mentioned: "we are not sure yet, whether to stay or go back".

Case 7: She has a vision of the future of a peaceful Africa and women's leadership. She said: "I want all African people to love each other, to be one union, and not to reflect conflict" "I dream for a stable and peaceful Africa". She continued saying: "I see a good future for the second and third African generations in Italy. These young individuals will not only grow up in this beautiful country but will also be educated as European Italian people, seamlessly integrating into society while embracing the rich cultural heritage that Italy has to offer. They will learn the language, traditions, and values that define the European system, which will empower them to navigate their lives with confidence and purpose. Furthermore, she wishes all African migrant women to have opportunities for education, as education is a powerful tool for personal and professional development. She encourages them to believe in themselves as powerful women who can enforce their self-esteem and strive for their dreams, regardless of the challenges they may face. It is her hope that these women will inspire future generations, creating a ripple effect of empowerment and success within their communities."

For herself, she is planning to establish an association in her country to help vulnerable and disabled children and women take care of themselves and empower them socially and economically. She is planning to stay six months after retirement in her home country to establish, mentor, and support this association, and to

spend the other six months in Florence supporting African migrants through her volunteer work in the assigned associations.

Case 8: She is planning to establish a branch of the Nostoras Association in the Netherlands with the enthusiastic assistance of her daughter, who is a citizen there and possesses a deep understanding of the local logistics and cultural nuances that will be crucial for the branch's success. This initiative reflects her commitment to expanding the association's reach and impact beyond its current borders. She stated emphatically, "Italy is my home, I will not leave it," highlighting her strong emotional ties to the people in Italy, which she cherishes deeply. Given the significance of this endeavor, she deserves a considerable amount of time, effort, and financial investment to build up this association effectively. This undertaking is not merely a professional venture; it is a labor of love that aims to foster community ties and support among people who share similar values and interests. Additionally, she affirms the ongoing commitment to fostering justice and advocating for the rights of African migrant women who are ensnared in familial subordination, a complex structural system, and pervasive inequity. Ultimately, she underscored that "African women are regarded as inferior wherever they go; we demand equal treatment and rights."

Based on the findings portrayed above from the eight cases, it appears that each woman harbors her own aspirations and expectations for the future. However, a coherent vision remains unarticulated in their minds, as they predominantly express

demands. The majority of material aspirations are linked to securing employment that provides adequate remuneration to meet fundamental survival needs. Conversely, women endowed with considerable material resources, specifically Cases 2, 5, 7, and 8, contemplate initiating new ventures aimed at benefiting other women and families, whether in Italy or in their countries of origin. Case 4 aspires to leverage her potential social capital to procure funding for establishing a social club for migrants. Nevertheless, the majority of the interviewed women exhibit a markedly limited tendency to enhance their human capacities. They perceive their sacrifices for their children as essential, enabling them to attain advanced education and better prospects in the future. Only Case 2, owing to her youthful age, aspires to pursue vocational training in information technology to secure a more promising future for her family. The preponderance of study participants intends to remain in Italy, which they now consider home; they have acclimatized to life in Europe and harbor expectations for a prosperous future for their children, as they perceive Europe as a land of opportunity. Only Cases 7 and 8, who possess extensive experience in community work, express a desire to continue in this vocation in other countries post-retirement.

Perceived decent work concept

Part of this study is to conceptualize the term of "Decent work" as understood and inspired by the participants during their working experiences and career lives (Table 2).

Table 2. Perceived decent work concept.

Case #	Perception of DW
1	"Any work that provides a good salary, fulfills my needs, and respects my work. It means work that is free from exploitation and discrimination, based on mutual respect and friendship."
2	"Being a nurse is my life to take care of my children, my family, and my parents. DW is having dignity, supporting other people, and relieving pain and weakness. I feel warmth when I touch the hands of elderly people and patients. DW means life and happiness."
3	"A job that gives me good pay and good friends. A job that respects my needs and my time".
4	"Fair payment for fair time spent on a job. Acceptance and value for the work you do. A proper, unbiased relationship with colleagues. DW allows a person to manage time between work and family affairs".
5	"Work that is good makes one feel satisfied, gains respect, less stressful and concentration".
6	"Work that must respect justice and equality in payment."
7	"No decent work if it does not provide respect and dignity. Developing a country is through improving human capacity and responsibility for enhancing society. Work in African culture is less efficient than in European culture; work is life and must be efficient."
8	"To make use of time for doing good work properly. To be honest, respect others, start small to big jobs, and finish work/projects on time."

The statements illustrated above about the women's conceptualisation of Decent Work (DW) are constructed from their personal work experiences and levels of satisfaction. Some of the women share similar interpretations of DW, including terms such as "gain respect," "enough payment," and "balanced time with familial roles." These keywords are commonly used by the majority of women who faced workplace challenges and expected better work relationships. In contrast, some individuals perceived DW differently, explaining it as "time management,"

"work is life," "give, innovate, and abide by duties," and "be honest with time and work." It is evident from the above explanations that DW is constrained to formal contractual relationships between employers and employees, which must incorporate social gains. Furthermore, DW is conceptualized within the discourse of human rights and human dignity, rather than focusing on contributions to economic growth and human development. In this regard, as mentioned by Case 7 and 4, African young generations must acquaint themselves with the

European work culture based on efficiency, productivity, commitment, and creativity. This entails that some participants conceive the objectivity of decent work, while others express the subjective side of decent work.

It is crucial to consider how these perceptions affect women's empowerment and overall societal advancement. The narrative surrounding decent work intertwines deeply with issues of identity, belonging, and community integration. For many women in this study, the fulfillment of decent work goes beyond economic stability; it embodies a pathway to self-actualization and the ability to advocate for themselves and others. Cases 1, 3, and 6 emphasize the importance of a workplace that upholds dignity and respect, indicating a desire for environments where personal worth is acknowledged and respected rather than discriminated against and subordinated.

Therefore, it seems that the foundation of women's empowerment hinges not only on economic opportunities but also on enhancing social and cultural capital. The right to decent work is inherently tied to the ability of women to navigate and challenge societal norms that often limit their potential. Case 2 articulates that decent work fosters a sense of community and responsibility, prompting women to take on leadership roles that inspire others within their families and neighborhoods.

Moreover, the integration of diverse cultural perspectives on work, as highlighted by Cases 7 and 8, can play a significant role in shaping a more inclusive dialogue on decent work. Bridging various cultural understandings of work can cultivate mutual respect and drive collaborative efforts toward workplace equality.

In conclusion, while the notion of decent work encapsulates a wide array of interpretations influenced by individual experiences, it ultimately serves a pivotal role in empowering women and advancing societal progress.

DISCUSSION

The research findings yielded here raise concerns regarding the subordination of migrant women by restricting their access to low-ranking and informal sectors only. In their study, Avola and Piccino, 2020 also conducted in Italy, found that African and other migrant women from the Global South are predominantly engaged in domestic and caregiver work, whereas migrant men are typically placed in industrial, agricultural, and construction low-ranking jobs. Hence, gender disparities in job types and ranks are evident, and women lack occupational mobility in the Italian and other South European labor markets. Additionally, women are rarely exposed to technical and vocational training in the workplace, as the work patterns do not require such training. It is clear that women are challenging and complaining about indecent work, sharing similar experiences, including discrimination and poor relationships with colleagues, suffering from unequal pay in some cases, and struggling with family conflict roles. These findings indicate that they share common feelings regardless of the type of work, the sector, and the job rank they occupy. This suggests that race and gender differences

are core problems in workplaces, affecting work performance and relationships with colleagues.

Similarly, authors of other studies in this field (Pichler, 2011; PICUM 2023; Ortensi and Tosi, 2021; Berbee and Stuhler, 2023) found that African migrant women faced three challenges while settling in Europe and in Italy: residence permits, decent jobs, and inclusion in work and society. It appears that African women rarely seek support from society and from work organizations on how to be included in society or the relevant labor market, and how to demand their social rights as refugees and as residents. This pushes the majority to remain isolated, feel depressed, and fall under male domination. In terms of challenges faced, regardless of the type and pattern of work, women experience discrimination and exploitation in the workplace, low pay, and lack of social protection if working in the informal sector. Indeed, (Salikuthuk, 2020) found that migrant women are paid 8% less than migrant males and 4% less than native women working in the same job. As part of earlier investigations, (Fullin and Reyneri 2011; and Kutalek 2015) confirmed that migrant women are usually paid less in all EU countries regardless of education level, age, job rank, and marital status. The present study, however, revealed that the participants received fair social benefits, including child benefits and health insurance. This is consistent with national legislation and local norms that follow international law, EU law, and ILO Conventions based on the principle of equal treatment in access to social security (ILO Conventions No.97/1949, Art. 6, and 143/1975, Art. 10, on the protection of migrant workers; Convention No.102/1952, Art. 68, and 118/1962, Art. 4, on social security) and in Carmen and Chamorro 2022 paper on the EU discussion of decent work for all citizen and migrants. This confirms the necessity of achieving decent work by providing social benefits to migrant laborers to reduce their vulnerability, enhance their work performance, and promote their capacities. Similarly, Lafleuner and Vinitila, 2020 found that the provision of health insurance, housing benefits, and psychological support for migrant workers improved the sustainability of the company, career development, and the well-being of the laborers.

Further, the present study showed that capacity building is directly associated with career development and aspirations for a better future. However, the accessibility of capacity-building resources and the training needed to obtain certificates/licenses that would expand their employment opportunities remain a challenge for African migrant women. This is due to limited chances, high costs of certified courses, their preference for any job that covers living expenses, and conflicts with family roles. However, capacity building for migrants is achievable through technical vocational training programs introduced by many local and international social organizations in all Italian regions. Specific training certificates for job recruitment are available for both men and women, facilitating integration into the labor market (Caritas, 2024). Inglebedion, 2024 found that a decent work environment builds a strong correlation with job satisfaction and enhances worker's productivity and positive relations with employers. However, African women who arrived in Italy 20-30 years ago found opportunities for education and/or certified training but are still struggling to be integrated into the

formal public labor market. Thus, certain factors, including original nationality, residence permit, and gender, are determining obstacles in job recruitment, regardless of educational attainment, citizenship, and marriage to a national. In their study, Berbee and Stuhler, 2023 found that second-generation refugees' children are easily integrated into the education system regardless of race and gender, but, marginalized sometimes in the labor markets.

CONCLUSION

It is noted that the social norms respected by African migrant women influence their aspirations for their children's futures. They employ compromise strategies to accept work-related struggles and low wages in exchange for the material benefits provided through child benefits, free child education, and health insurance. Additionally, in some cases, free house rent and/or supported monthly housing bills are affordable. These material benefits have pushed women to accept historical stereotypes of gender subordination, racism, and class categorization. The explanations the respondents provided for the concept of decent work reflect how these women are oppressed and feel dissatisfied in the workplace. Still, some women are optimistic and feel great achievements through their work, which has enhanced their personal capacities, changed their personalities, and gained them social status. The importance of capacity building for obtaining good jobs and salaries seems to be overlooked by both refugee and resident women, even though, in practice, better education allows women to compete for better-paid jobs.

I conclude, from a limited number of cases, that the results reflect women's perceptions of decent work, informed by their personal work experiences and aspirations for achievement. The number and age of children significantly influence women's future expectations and ambitions, irrespective of passive and subjective experience in the workplace. African women exemplify resilience and patience, demonstrating an extraordinary capacity to adapt and thrive in the face of adversity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Monitor the implementation of gender equality policies in the EU labor market.
- Secure capacity building for migrant women in relevant skills, in IT and AI skills and knowledge.
- Open innovative opportunities for business to migrant women.
- Encourage local organizations and trade unions to articulate training programs for both migrants and nationals in topics such as "multicultural solidarity," "gender equality," "decent work and rights"; "decent work, efficiency and individualism."; and "leadership and enterprise".
- Encourage refugee women to return home and work for the community development of their own villages.

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