

Latin American immigrant women in Canada:  
A gender perspective on integration processes

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## **Abstract**

Conditions such as cultural shocks experienced by Latin American immigrant women upon arrival in Canada, linked to the challenges of reconciling more patriarchal traditional structures with Canadian culture, and the persistence of discrimination practices, shape a different dynamic for Latin American women immigrating to Canada compared to males. These women face the need to advance in their integration process into the host culture while their family organizations and culture are still permeated by traditional patriarchal models that impose on women the household tasks main responsibility and make them put on hold their careers and their individual projects, among others gender-related issues. The fact mentioned above severely impacts Latin American women's professional development and mental health, especially in an environment where integration into Canadian society poses specific challenges to immigrant women, such as discrimination based on race and gender, among other facts which deserve to be analyzed through an intersectional lens.

## **Keywords**

Latin American immigrant women. Immigrants in Canada. Gendered migratory processes. Cultural differences. Integration. Immigrants' discrimination. Gender-unbalanced relations. Female immigrants' integration. Immigrants in Canada.

## **Introduction**

Like most social dynamics, migration is a gendered process; therefore, immigrant women experience migration challenges differently than men. This paper aims to examine how the literature on immigrant women has evolved to identify and analyze some of the particularities that Latin American women who have emigrated to Canada encounter during their integration process and the possibilities of exerting their agency under those conditions.

Latin American immigrants are characterized by migration conditions well identified by scholars such as Mata (2019), who states that the reasons for the arrival of these populations to Canada are related mainly to economic causes: “Latin American immigration presented a fairly balanced composition in terms of the immigrant entry classes. About 39% of the inflow members arrived in Canada under the family class, 35% under the economic class and 26% under the refugee class.” (p.21)<sup>1</sup>. With respect to gender composition on Latin American immigration influx to Canada, the number of women exceeds that of males, since among 674.460 persons of Latin American origin registered by the 2016 census, 51.8% are women, and 48.2% are men.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The subject related to refugees is a particular one because they confront even more complex integration challenges than economic immigrants. That is a distinct case since protected persons are in a position where migration was not a planned or desired process; on the contrary, this is a situation forced by the risks these individuals were facing in their countries of origin. That being said, and acknowledging refugees' susceptible and vulnerable position, this paper will not explore that issue which deserves more investigation addressed to that group's specific conditions.

<sup>2</sup><https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=PR&Code1=01&Geo2=PR&Code2=01&SearchText=Canada&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=Ethnic%20origin&TABID=1&type=0>

Regarding female immigrants, gendered relations have caused women to play a different role than men in the productive and reproductive spheres during migratory movements, both at the origin and destination societies (Parella, 2005 in Monreal, Cardenas and Martinez, 2019. p.6). Once in the receiving society, Baitubayeva (2017) suggests that economic and social isolation is common among immigrant women due to traditional gender roles, which impose on women the primary caretaker role, and “prevent them from economic integration because they sacrifice their own prospects for meaningful employment for the well-being of their families by not taking language classes and professional trainings (Tastsoglou & Preston, 2005, p.52).” (p.22). Issues such as unequal household responsibilities and the difficulties to enter the labour market, show how gender-related questions produce differentiated integration processes among Latin American immigrant women compared to men.

The gendered reality experienced by women in the course of their migratory process has been investigated by De Billy Garnier (2015), who has concluded that:

“(d)ans leur parcours migratoire, les enjeux auxquels font face ces femmes sont de taille. Non seulement doivent-elles apprendre à composer avec les traumatismes pré-migratoires et les pertes qu’elles ont vécues, mais elles doivent aussi relever les défis de l’adaptation à une nouvelle culture par l’apprentissage d’une nouvelle langue, des nouveaux rôles et des nouvelles habiletés, le tout en étant gardienne de l’harmonie familiale, de son bien-être et de ses traditions“ (p. 14).

Latin American immigrant culture still shows persistent patriarchal structures that compel and expect women to take the family's primary caregiver role, among other household tasks. At the same time, they must make a leap towards integration into Canada to ensure economic and family stability, which also demands a rapid entering into a labour market that poses numerous challenges for immigrant women.

Latin American women's migratory dynamics can be framed in what feminist theory has defined as a lack of understanding of the power balance among women and men in an immigrant household, as identified by Nawayin (2010):

“Feminist migration scholarship has uncovered the conflict and tension within migrant households emerging from gendered power relations, using what I and my colleagues refer to as a critical household lens. Through this lens, scholars have revealed the ways in which the migration process (from the decision to migrate through the period of settlement in and adaptation to the host society) is intricately tied to gender relations.”  
(p.4).

Patriarchal relations tend to remain after immigration (Giourguli and Angoa, 2016), involving some internal conflict in the households for women who try to conciliate the new reality in the host country with their cultural practices. Even if nowadays Latin American men tend to be much more involved in childcaring and household tasks, their participation in the domestic sphere is still perceived as a “collaboration” to women and not as a shared responsibility; also “household tasks associated to families` self-reproduction are seen as “external” to males, except by those ones which reinforce dominant masculinity, such as

those implying physical work and management of household finances.” (Herrera, Aguayo and Weil, 2018. p.4)

This paper will focus on immigrant Latin American cisgender women with male partners and children. It pursues to delve into how the literature on gender and immigration has uncovered the differentiated gender conditions present in the integration processes of those women who have migrated to Canada. It also seeks to investigate how the literature has explored the correlation between practices of the countries of origin and the host country environment, which, in their relationship, cause women to develop integration processes under different conditions from those of men. A final purpose is to look at if those women’s possibilities of agency under gender-unbalanced conditions have been identified enough and highlighted in the midst of what Pessar and Mahler (2003) have identified as “gendered geographies of power.”.

## **Methodology**

This MRP has taken the form of a Stand-Alone Paper (SAP) looking forward to “summarize prior work, test hypotheses, extend theories, and critically evaluate a body of work” (Xiao and Watson, 2019. P.16), in this particular case on gendered realities experienced by Latin American women who have immigrated to Canada under the economic class permanent resident program, applying the narrative synthesis method (Popay et al.2006).

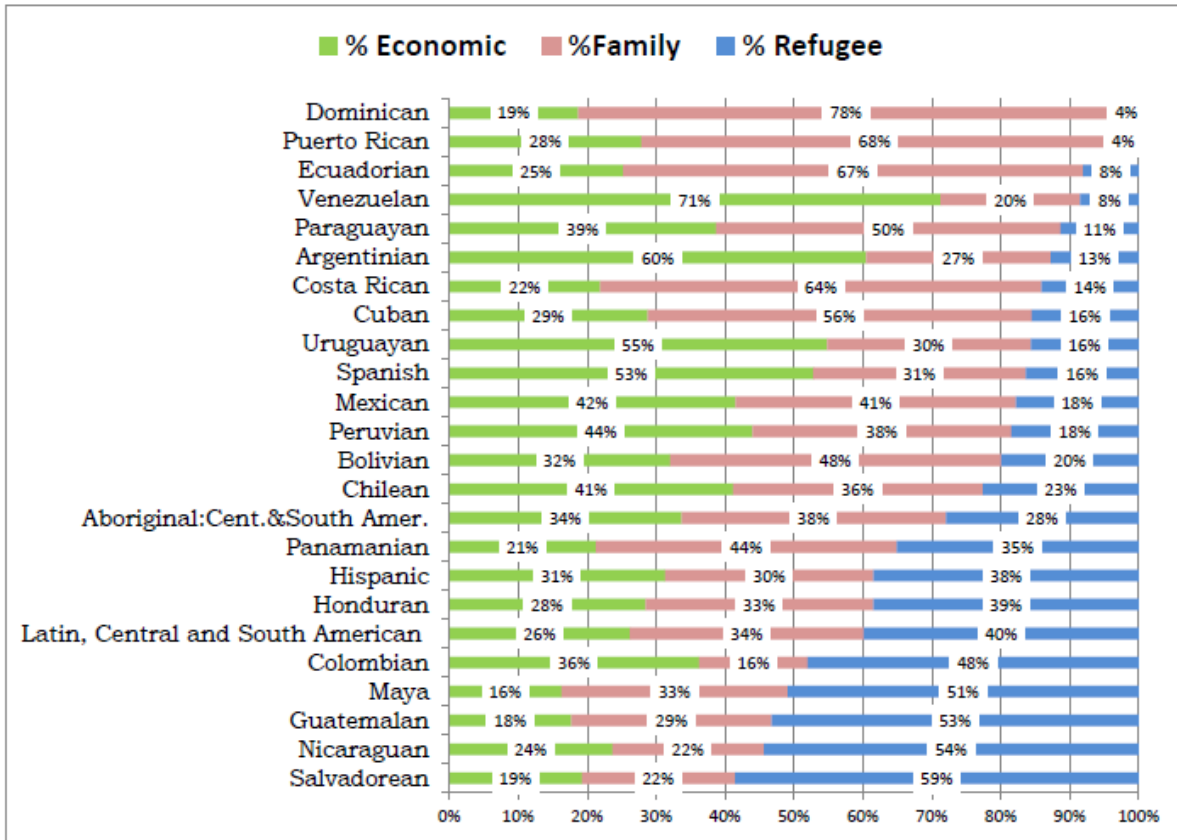
The MRP focuses only on secondary sources, and no interviews or fieldwork were performed. The emphasis is placed on literature that has studied challenges experienced by female immigrants in Canada, and specifically Latin American immigrant women, and works related to how Latin American cultural traits impact the development of an unbalanced-gender integration process. Likewise, literature on how immigrants in Canada face difficulties in having their academic degrees recognized in Canada, the specificities of entering the labour market, and the salaries gap among these women, immigrant men, and Canadian-born population was reviewed. Also, Literature on gender and immigration theory was consulted, along with studies on unequal power migration relationships among women and men.

### **Latin American, women and immigrants**

Latin American immigration to Canada can be traced as early as the post-Franco period, where immigrants from Spain arrived in Canada followed by the “Eurolatino” wave during the 1960s, the “Andean” wave during the 1970s, and the major refugees’ inflows during the 1970s and 1980s (Mata, 2019).

The main reasons for Latin American immigration influxes in Canada relate primarily to economic and security motives, as presented by Mata (2019, p.10) in the following graphic:

Chart 6: Admission Class Mix of Ethnic Immigrant Inflows\* from Latin America to Canada, 1981-2016



\*Comprises single and multiple ethnic origins. Source: Custom Tabulations EO2695, 2016 Census of Canada

According to the 2016 Census, out of 35,151,728 people in Canada, 674,640 were Latin American or of Latin American origin. Among that population, 51.8% were women, and 48.2% were men<sup>3</sup>.

Latin American immigrant women come from a culture that still entails persistent patriarchal structures that require women to take the family's primary caregiver

<sup>3</sup> <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=PR&Code1=01&Geo2=&Code2=&SearchText=Canada&SearchType=Begin&SearchPR=01&B1=All&TABID=1&type=0>

responsibility and recognize men as the primary providers. As described by Herrera, Aguayo, and Goldsmith Weil (2018, p.4), “51.6% of women in Latin America are at home and not working, and the main reason is childcare... Many men feel that their major responsibility is to provide economically and that it is the mother’s one to be the caretaker. Many women feel that childcare is their primary task.”

While facing patriarchal cultural constructs, these women must advance in their integration process in Canada; still, they experience a gendered reality in the course of the migratory process due to the interaction of household relations with four primary gendered institutions: “the global labour market, norms of care work, social networks, and violence.” (Nawyin, Reosti and Gjokaj. 2009. pp.3,4).

Immigration theory has made significant advances in analyzing and studying the influence of issues such as division of family care work, changes in social status, identity-reshaping related concerns, family dynamics’ rearrangement, and the configuration of a transnational family immigrant household. However, there is still “a significant portion of migration scholarship, which tends to treat migration as a gender-neutral phenomenon.” (Timmerman, Fonseca, Van Praag, and Pereira, 2018. p.262). Academic works need to be further deepened in this aspect since topics related to immigrant women end up being consumed in the generalities of migration studies, literature on immigrant families, and in immigration history, as stated by Gabaccia (2012):

“Those who study immigrant women continue to analyze them within a family context for many reasons, but the greater possibility is the overwhelming evidence of family identification and loyalty they find in immigrant women’s written and oral sources. These sources suggest that immigrant women, past and often present, generally identified with their families; they did not think of themselves as individuals”. (pp.18,19)

Immigration and integration theory and policies are somehow insufficient because women are not always considered as independent subjects facing their own gender-related challenges, beyond a general vision of “immigrants” as a homogeneous group, or only as mothers or caretakers. “(M)igrations are a gendered phenomenon that cannot be thought of or studied without considering this dimension. Juliano (2006) also pointed out that migration is not an asexual process but is conditioned by gender relations, which are generally thought of from a male perspective.” (Padilla, 2013. pp.2,3)

Furthermore, “too often, representations of migrant women are based on a homogenized image of uneducated and backward migrants as victims of patriarchal cultures.” (Kofman, Saharso and Vacchelli. 2013, p.9), which in the specific case of Latin American immigrant women in Canada has been proved incorrect by Mata (2019. p.16) with reference to the “uneducated” feature. Latin American women show, between 1981 and 2016, in average, higher rates of education than their male counterparts, as can be seen in Mata’s chart:

Table 1: Highest Level of Education Attained\* Ethnic Inflows from Latin America to Canada 1981-2016

Gender/ Class	Total	High School or Less	Trades	Non University	University
<b>MALES</b>					
<i>Economic Class</i>					
Spanish	100%	16%	7%	23%	53%
Colombian	100%	13%	4%	20%	63%
Mexican	100%	30%	5%	14%	51%
Salvadoran	100%	45%	15%	15%	24%
Peruvian	100%	16%	6%	21%	56%
<i>Family Class</i>					
Spanish	100%	34%	13%	26%	27%
Colombian	100%	43%	10%	22%	25%
Mexican	100%	54%	11%	15%	20%
Salvadoran	100%	62%	13%	16%	9%
Peruvian	100%	36%	17%	26%	21%
<i>Refugee Class</i>					
Spanish	100%	35%	14%	27%	25%
Colombian	100%	38%	10%	25%	28%
Mexican	100%	52%	10%	19%	18%
Salvadoran	100%	53%	15%	16%	16%
Peruvian	100%	34%	20%	26%	20%
<b>FEMALES</b>					
<i>Economic Class</i>					
Spanish	100%	13%	4%	26%	57%
Colombian	101%	13%	2%	22%	64%
Mexican	100%	22%	3%	17%	58%
Salvadoran	100%	40%	8%	24%	29%
Peruvian	100%	12%	5%	30%	53%
<i>Family Class</i>					
Spanish	100%	25%	6%	30%	38%
Colombian	100%	24%	7%	30%	38%
Mexican	100%	33%	6%	26%	35%
Salvadoran	100%	57%	11%	19%	13%
Peruvian	100%	31%	10%	28%	31%
<i>Refugee Class</i>					
Spanish	100%	30%	9%	34%	27%
Colombian	100%	28%	8%	30%	35%
Mexican	100%	43%	10%	27%	20%
Salvadoran	100%	44%	9%	27%	20%
Peruvian	100%	29%	18%	28%	25%

\*Population aged 25-54 with some employment income in 2015. Comprises single and multiple ethnic origins. Source: Cust Tabulation E2860, 2016 Census of Canada

Source: Mata, 2019.p.16

We suggest that migration scholarship should advance in constantly bearing in mind the predominant androcentric bias and opening more spaces to Global South feminist migration theory scholars, mainly because nearly 60% of migrants in the world come from

those regions <sup>4</sup>. Hence, Global South immigrant women studies should include the non-white feminist perspectives to incorporate an additional understanding of this topic, different from that produced by white feminist scholars from the Global North.

Global South women who immigrate to the Global North perspectives, with regard to distribution of household work, and the recognition of immigrant women as political subjects, are examples of issues raised by the Global South for feminism (Gandarias 2015) that deserve to be further developed. Also, “there is an emerging literature on “South-South migration” which focuses on transit and host states in the Global South in an effort to move beyond conventional expectations of migration from poorer to richer countries in Europe and North America (Nawyin 2016; Short, Hossain, and Khan 2017; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2018).” (Adamson and Tsourapas, 2020. p.5), which indicates how feminist migration scholarship should keep on being decolonized by including even more the Global South feminist scholars` voices.

Concerning integration, it is pertinent to question if some concepts such as the following by Peter Li (2003) are valid and applicable to Latin American immigrant women in Canada:

“The term implies a desirable outcome as newcomers become members of the receiving society, by which the success and failure of immigrants can be gauged and by which the efficacy of the immigration policy can be determined. In reality,

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<sup>4</sup> Migrants from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. World Migration Report 2020. International Organization for Migration (IOM)

the assessment is often based on a narrow understanding and a rigid expectation that treat integration solely in terms of the degree to which immigrants converge to the average performance of native-born Canadians and their normative and behavioural standards.” (p.1)

This kind of conceptions of what integration is, poses several questions due to the fact that it idealizes integration processes and imagine them as efforts based on “une volonté linéaire, dans un objectif sans ambiguïté et sans interruption, tendant vers la réussite économique inéluctable. Cette conception de l’intégration laisse supposer qu’une performance positive des immigrantes dépend principalement de leur propre volonté.” (Ben, 2017.p.3), without taking into consideration that to “integrate” requires much more than the individual’s will. As mentioned by Wiebe (2013), Da Lomba (2010) suggested that seeing “integration” this way equals to demand immigrants to “adapt to the host society, with little clarity about the role and responsibilities of the host society in the integration process.” (p.17)

For Latin American immigrant women, integration has a profound relationship with the fact that “(t)he migration experience did not shatter the gendered division of housework... Being housebound also provides little opportunity for these women to learn or perfect English and it hinders the development of deep and diverse connections with the receiving community.” (Wilson-Forsberg, 2014. p.16). Due to some cultural traits in Latin America, patriarchal relations tend to prevail during and after immigration process. One of the earliest researchers to investigate this situation was Lawson (1998). She stated that “for this sending community, patriarchal authority plays a clear and distinctive role in

women's mobility as compared to men. This authority is exercised over women through arguments about morality, sexuality and the need for male protection of women migrants.”

(p.5)

A crucial element for women to advance in their settlement and integration processes is their incorporation into the workforce. However, the labour market entering for immigrant women in Canada poses numerous challenges. Preston, Damsbaek, Kelly, Lemoine, Lo, Shields and Tufts (2010), in reference to the participants in their study, have described this situation affecting female immigrant in Canada where “immigrant women who were high-skilled knowledge workers experienced unemployment or pressure to work in unskilled positions. Of the 86 female immigrants interviewed, 40.6% had a post-secondary education, and 62.8% of those with a post-secondary education were unemployed.” (p.4). The former led many immigrant women to accept low pay jobs not accordingly to their qualifications, adding this element to the general dynamics of unbalanced power within their families.

Some characteristics of Latin American culture induce women to put on hold their careers to benefit the family settlement process, including their male partners'. In Latin America, “(t)he common social construct used to premise the ideal family is upon division of labor: The husband is the principal wage-earner, and the wife a stay-home mother. In some cases, the wife also works but earns a lower wage than the husband.” (Burbano, 2016. p.16).

What has been previously described also has a crucial effect on the redefinition of immigrants' identity as one of the sub-processes involved in integrating into the host country (Osorio and Orjuela, 2009). As stated by Amelina (2009, p.46), gendered relations "strongly influence the dynamics of ethnicization and declassing and slow down the upward class mobility of women migrants in the country of destination"; these women tend to accept, due to cultural traits like those formerly mentioned, less resistantly than men, the social status downgrade brought about by migration. On the other hand, men are more likely to recover or to get closer to the income level and position they had in their countries of origin before immigrating to Canada, which is shown by statistics and studies, such as De Billy Garnier's one (2015), where it is clearly stated how immigrant women salaries are below that of immigrant men in Canada.

Bearing in mind the particularities mentioned above and the importance of acknowledging that migration is not a gender-neutral phenomenon (Timmerman, Fonseca, Van Praag, and Pereira. 2018), it is key to explore how Latin American women can exert agency from *inside* those conditions to overcome them. In order to identify these possibilities and the ways to promote and strengthen them, the analysis of power-unbalanced relations between genders on the basis of feminist theories (McNay, 2016) is a major starting point.

Agency is not only exerted through economic independence; it also relates to "the access to resources, ... and the exposure to new gender ideologies at the destination are also seen as mechanisms that may change the position of women within the household" (Giorguli and Angoa, 2016. p.2). Hence, Latin American immigrant women who interact

with the Canadian system can claim their role as meaningful participants in it, not only as spectators but also as producers of new or improved resources and actors influencing policymakers, aiming to reduce gender inequalities.

Agency's exerting is affected by several barriers (Bhuyan, 2017), among which six major ones can be highlighted:

- “ 1. Precarious employment and/or low incomes
2. Lack of affordable and accessible childcare
3. Lack of affordable and adequate housing
4. Language skills
5. Lack of credential recognition
6. Lack of community supports.” (Women's Economic Council, 2011. p.3)

Regarding language skills, Adamuti-Trache, Anisef and Sweet's work (2018) indicate that this subject is one of the most critical barriers immigrant women face in their settlement process beyond labour-market integration. “(P)ost-immigration barriers, opportunities and incentives (Beiser & Hou, 2000; Chiswick & Miller, 1992; Espendshade & Fu, 1997; Stevens, 1994) that encompass situational, social and dispositional factors are also crucial in understanding gains in official language proficiency.” (p.21). Therefore, other gendered post-migratory issues such as the caregiver role assigned to immigrant women deserve more development when acting as an exacerbation element of immigrants' language training difficulties, due to the time-consuming feature of that task.

The link between language proficiency and entering the labour market proves even more important when the fact of women having access to their own economic resources and by acting as providers, produces an agency exert possibility by providing them with a broader negotiation role in the family (Monreal, Cardenas, Rodriguez, and Martinez. 2018) which the sole reproductive / caretaking role does not involve.

Immigrant Latin American women's empowerment process and social integration (Castro and Villeneuve, 2017) is also linked to finding support networks and developing a sense of belonging. "Building community was not something that happened easily, quickly or automatically... Feeling part of a community was not only related to the time shared with friends, but also had to do with exercising solidarity to others" (Wiebe, 2013. p.127). This community-building process has also evolved through support networks integrated not only by immigrant women aiming to guide new immigrants but also including Canadian-born women. These networks are established from a vision "of the other as not only different, but profoundly unequal: migrant women look at native women from the awareness of being situated as inferior and, at the same time, native women are very aware of their position of superiority" (Royo, Cabrera, González, Linares, and Suarez. 2017. p.16). Consequently, more scholarship work regarding how to generate support networks with Canadian-born women, aiming to overcome what Royo et al.(2017), have identified as the complexity of establishing sorority relationships between women in unequal positions of power, is necessary.

The networks mentioned above undoubtedly require working in including a specific offer of professional mental health support, due to the fact that some cultural beliefs and behaviours (Godoy, Toner, Mason, Vidal, and McKenzie. 2015), and the lack of financial autonomy, among other challenges, generate mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and a deep sense of sadness and solitude (Castro and Villeneuve, 2017) among Latin American women. Mental health resources do exist; nevertheless, Latin American women who have a limited language proficiency cannot easily benefit from them and do not feel confident enough to appeal to those resources. Bearing in mind that immigrant parents struggle “with language barriers that exacerbated their capacity to find effective support from providers.” (MacDonnell, Dastjerdi, Bokore, and Khanlou. 2012. p.5), at this point, we can emphasize again the importance of support networks and of the development of more resources provided and promoted in Spanish to help Latin American immigrant women’s settlement process in the initial stages.

Support resources that facilitate agency exert also need to address domestic care (Phan, Banerjee, Deacon, and Taraky, 2015) because even if Latin American women have the interest of being more proactive in their settlement process, not as passive recipients of social and institutional aid, but as active members of the receiving society, for instance by volunteering (Wilson, 2014), gendered conditions and childcaring responsibilities have a profound incidence in the development of agency when they become obstacles. At this point, it is key to question the traditional role played by Latin American men regarding childcare and to advance in co-responsibility family structures (Herrera et al., 2018), not seeing men’s participation as a “help” to women but understanding it as a responsibility

at the same level as that exercised by mothers. Studies on how Latin American immigrant women assert their agency would benefit from further research on promoting more significant involvement of men in caregiving tasks and institutions that have to do with services for children, such as health and education.

One central point in the process of becoming an active member of the Canadian society is the development of a political awareness that brings women to see themselves as “subjects with capacity for action (and to) value their contribution to society as a whole” (Royo et al. 2017. p.15). At this point is essential to refer to the relationship of political awareness and political participation and their link to citizenship, understood as “a set of practices, where migrants “negotiate” with state and non-state actors to access health care and social services, challenge labour violations, or lodge human rights claims (Basok, 2004; Bhuyan, 2012; Isin, 2002; Stasiulis & Bakan, 2003; Villegas, 2013).” (Bhuyan et al., 2016. p.10).

Canada, just like the U.S, is considered a liberal, open and tolerant host country; however, colonial, white, and patriarchal interests persist (Nichols and Tyyska. 2015), and “the processes of creating a “citizen” through structural mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion are well established. These processes show no signs of disappearing and, as we have demonstrated in this chapter, marginalize immigrant women.” (Nichols and Tyyska. 2015. p.16). Immigrants do not have the same status as nationals, i.e., on arrival, they are *non-citizens* (Bosniak, 2017), which means they cannot exercise a series of rights, and even after acquiring citizenship, there are forms of discrimination and exclusion that go in the

opposite direction to the integration discourse presented to immigrants. This issue also has a relationship with some views from the white feminism that still considers immigrant women as linked “to a single simplified cultural origin, ultimately connected to a “tradition” that was opposed to the model of the modern western and urban woman, to which she should ideally tend to emancipate herself.” (Ciurlo, 2015. p.5). Therefore, immigrant women’s political empowerment through community and institutional support networks and information to resources access is key to overcoming exclusion and providing tools that contribute to asserting these women’s agency.

### **Household unbalanced responsibilities and loss of independence**

As mentioned before, unequal power-relations are a crucial factor to be considered when studying migrations, because failing in doing it would imply ignoring the unbalance in power between women and men in an immigrating household (Nawyin, 2010) and “rely upon the assumption of women dependency” (Nawyin, 2009. p.177)

Immigrant households have been identified by authors such as Nawyin (2010) as gendered-power relations’ structures that are reproduced among different social and geographical scales (Pessar and Mahler, 2003). “Migration doesn’t dissolve family structures but redefines and challenges the established codes that organize and give them meaning.” (Bernhard, Landolt, Luin, and Goldring 2008. p. 4). The migratory process can reinforce “gender divisions of labour, gender identities and access to material and discursive power for various household members.” (Lawson, 1998. p. 9).

Those gendered power relations are embedded in the migratory process of cisgender Latin American women with male partners and children due to the persistence of cultural patriarchal traditions.

Latin America has evolved in social practices related to gender-related issues such as men's involvement in childcare and domestic responsibilities, understood as a fundamental subject in advancing gender equality (Herrera et al., 2018). However, the social constructs associated with gender, still present in Latin American culture, and the fact that gender has a simultaneous value as a social construction of inequalities and as a structural component of social relations (Ciurlo, 2015) continue to pressure women to take on the role of main responsible of childcare and domestic chores, while men play the part of providers (Monreal et al., 2018). As a consequence of the former, the unequal public / private spheres' structure associated with gender is perpetuated.

“At home we didn't do anything, it was my mother who did it, my sister complained that we didn't help her in the house, that we didn't do the cleaning, and we said no, that's for women. But here it's up to you to become a woman, to become like in the middle”. Pedro points out his dissatisfaction with these changes: “They apply these laws to us who come from another culture. It is as if they were applying the laws of hell to us, for heaven. It is as if they were taking away the management of money from the Latino man, it is as if they were taking away his balls”. (Osorio and Orjuela. 2009.p.11)

In recent years, some Latin American countries have advanced in co-responsibility legal policies, such as in Chile (Herrera et al., 2018) and Colombia, where parental leave can

be shared between women and men. Nevertheless, those legal measures' implementation contrast somehow with studies showing that in Latin America, "a pronounced sexual division of labour still persists in the region. While men spend more time in paid work, women spend more time in unpaid domestic work" (Herrera et al., 2018. p.3)<sup>5</sup>. The most orthodox Latin American cultural traits linked to childcare and family continue to pressure women not to seek satisfaction of "les besoins d'un « je », mais à répondre, à travers les rôles qui leur sont assignés, aux exigences concrètes en lien avec le bien-être de la famille." (Garnier, 2015. p.23).

Garnier (2015), in reference to Colombian families, describes a situation not unknown to other Latin American countries when she discusses the so-called "sacrificed generations" understood as parents, especially women, who by facing deskilling, personal losses and social status declassing brought about by migration, set their hopes and their efforts in their family and their children's success in the Canadian society.

Latin American women's roles as primary caregivers and responsible for household chores are not necessarily relieved when they enter the labour market<sup>6</sup>. For most women, childcare and household chores are what Phan, Banerjee, Deacon, and Taraky (2015) have referred to as "the second-shift" in women's daily activities after paid work (Hochschild and Machung 1990)" (p. 9), "because of women's traditional care work

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<sup>5</sup> Herrera et al. (2018) make a valuable contribution related to how "construction of care also limits the possibilities for exercising and living parenthood" (p.2) and a possible scenario where feminization of caring has contributed to invisibilize men's experience of caring.

<sup>6</sup> The conditions for entering the labour-market by Latin American immigrant women will be further discussed in the next part of this document.

responsibilities, they must negotiate care work responsibilities in ways that men do not.” (Nawyin, 2010, p.184).

The fact that caretaking relations are still seen in many cultures as gendered ones (Brotman, Silverman, Boska, and Molgat. 2020) adds to the fact that caretaking, housework, and cleaning are the most common work options for immigrant women. Those tasks, considered low-wage labour, are a good example of the most common paid work options for migrant women in destination countries. The former also raises questions about the gender division of labour (Lawson, 1998) and demonstrates that these tasks are an extension of the domestic work that migrant women, due to patriarchal traditions, carry out in their homes as the first responsible for it.

Regarding another topic on immigrant mothers, as stated by Nichols (2015. p.259), “a key reason for migration is often the desire to improve children’s lives”, and this also refer to women who migrate without (or without some of their) children; that is the case of transnational families. Household responsibilities, when referred to transnational families, also have a gendered component. While analyzing the family in the context of migration should not only be seen as a space of feminized duties but also as a place of negotiation of roles and relations between men and women (Ciurlo, 2015), the case of transnational families shows even further the gender inequalities in the migratory process.

“Families who are spread out across nation states and whose lives cross national borders are known in the social science literature as “transnational”<sup>7</sup> or “multi-local” families” (Bernhard et al., 2005. p.7). In Latin America, families living together are composed of parents and children and often by grandparents. Hence, the scenario of multi-local families can imply children and grandparents staying in the countries of origin. Among Latin American immigrant women is common to find that their migratory projects involve providing financial support to their children and their parents, especially to their mothers (Ciurlo, 2015), even in cases of women with no children. The former has been widely documented by studies and statistics showing the importance of international remittances to Latin American countries, where personal remittances reached 2,425% of the GDP in 2020.<sup>8</sup>

Due to the culture in Latin America, where the primary responsibility of childcaring is imposed on women, immigrant mothers who cannot emigrate with their children often face stigmatization and suffer from mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. In regard to mental health problems among mothers who had to leave their children in their countries of origin, Meraj (2015) suggests that there is a lack of research on the situation of “transnational mothers who face the challenge of staying away from their children in addition to bearing the difficulties of migration.” (p.95).

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<sup>7</sup> We are not focusing on the reasons or consequences of transnational families’ phenomena, which can be further studied on the works by authors such as Bernhard et al (2005), Bernhard et al (2008), Pessar and Mahler (2003), and Monreal et al. 2019.

<sup>8</sup> [Personalremittances, received \(% of GDP\) - Latin America & Caribbean. World Bank. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?end=2020&locations=ZJ&start=1979&view=chart](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?end=2020&locations=ZJ&start=1979&view=chart)

The role transnational Latin American mothers must fulfill implies the development of the so-called “care chains” in which the responsibilities of caregivers fall on other female family members, such as grandmothers or aunts of the children. The former generates a situation in which the migration project goes from being something individual, to being one shared with the extended family (Monreal et al., 2019), in which caregiving roles are carried out by migrant women who “keep their role as primary caregivers in the imaginary of the family” (Giorguli et al. 2016. p.17), as well as by those female relatives who remain in their countries.

Even if Latin American immigrant women in many cases must accept low-wage jobs for which they are often overqualified, the economic independence (Monreal et al., 2019) they reach also influences their agency’s assert. Despite the guilt and shame that transnational mothers often feel for not being physically close to their children (Bernhard et al. 2008), frequently, women gain some agency exert among their families through the international remittances they can send (Pessar and Mahler, 2003).

Transnational families and the gendered realities affecting Latin American women’s integration in Canada should be studied not only in cases of Latin American women with Latin male partners but also concerning binational couples and families from a perspective of South-North migrations (Pavajeau, 2017).

Two particular cases can be found under this category:

1. Women sponsored by a male Canadian partner (Ezguerro, 2020), and
2. Women with white male partners (Pavajeau, 2017).

“Although women make up a growing proportion of economic immigrants, the majority of women immigrants continue to enter Canada as a spouse/partner or dependent (i.e., through family sponsorship or as dependents of an economic migrant) (Hudon 2013); in 2015, 58% of sponsored spouses/partners were women while 41% were male.” (Bhuyan, Korteweg, and Baqi, 2018. p.9).

Concerning women who migrated to Canada as part of the family sponsor program, it implies “a “dependent incorporation” (Roca Girona, 2009) of the sponsored person into the destination country” (Ezguerro, 2020. p.1), which generates three kinds of dependencies identified by Ezguerro (2020) as follow:

1. Legal dependency: It is directly linked to the legal process, which is developed in English or in French, and even when the woman speaks one or both official languages, the Canadian male partner takes charge of the full process, bringing women to not fully understand the legal consequences and rules surrounding a sponsoring process. The former poses a problematic situation when sponsored women don't know “les conditions s'appliquant si le parrain décidait de mettre fin unilatéralement au contrat, ou les effets qu'une séparation ou un retrait de parrainage pourrait avoir sur leur vie. ” (Ibidem, p. 5).

2. Economic dependency: According to Ezguerro's (2020) study, nine out of ten participants experienced an economic dependency on their male partners. Rules related to the work permit granting process are essential to improve sponsored women's conditions since lack of "access to the labour market for spouses disproportionately affect immigrant women's labour market integration prospects." (Desiderio, 2020. p.55). Furthermore, gendered division of work tends to compel sponsored women to perpetuate the stay-at-home mom structure while reinforcing the control of the financial resources by men (Ezguerro, 2020).
3. Social dependency: Sponsored women arrive in Canada completely under their partner's legal and financial care. Moreover, it is also male partners who know the social conventions and culture, and they already have their social network where women are automatically bounded to at their arrival; therefore, those women also are highly socially dependents on men. Furthermore, some of them do not speak English or French, causing that in cases of domestic violence or abusive behaviour, all those factors generate a perverse cycle where women find themselves in extreme isolation. "(M)ental health of immigrant women is disproportionately affected by difficult journeys, separation from close family members left at origin, overwhelming family-care responsibilities and social isolation at arrival, disillusion, and discrimination." (Desiderio, 2020. p.54).

The conditions previously portrayed have a relationship with what Meraj (2015) has described as the "trailing spouses" situation. Those women who experience a high degree of dependency do not have the same decision-making power that their male partners.

These conditions are aggravated by the fact that these women, who are often not in control of their own migration process, are unaware of the requirements to have their academic degrees and professional experience recognized in Canada (Meraj, 2015), which intensifies deskilling conditions, delays their entry into the labour-market and the achievement of economic independence, and deepens isolation and mental health problems.

Latin American immigrant women who have not necessarily migrated as sponsored spouses but have male partners in Canada also encounter challenges related to their integration process, their professional qualifications, suspicion on their migration reasons, and racism.

“It was a shock for me to get here and find out that he is white, and I am Latina, and that has implications. It was a shock for me to think of the world in terms of whites and non-whites. Today I know that Canadians are not white, whites are part of Canadians but there are more than just whites. For me, living these years here has led me to a reconfiguration of what I thought of social classes, of race, of what I thought race was in the 21st century.” (Pavajeau, 2018. p.5)

Facing bias related to the “authenticity” of their marriages or common-law arrangements is also an issue for Latin American women involved in couple relations with Canadian partners. “(T)he deterrence of marriage fraud through structurally embedded borders regulates racialized immigrants in exclusionary ways that disproportionately impact women” (Bhuyan et al., 2018. p.5). There are common misconceptions that relate migrant

Latin American women in affective relations with white men from the Global North to situations of false marriages or unlawful arrangements addressed to obtain a permanent residence or work permits. The former tends to place these women, who were independent of their partners and enjoyed total autonomy in their countries, under a suspicion (Pavajeau, 2018) expressed both in the legal instances related to migration procedures and in the social circle of the couple.

Pavajeau (2017) presents an outstanding work in which she highlights the impact of geopolitics on the migration processes of Latin American women to countries in the Global North. The above foster the perpetuation of stereotypes about “Latina” women that make them be classified under categories that generate surveillance and control over their transnational couples and their racialized bodies.

In this case of skilled women, who do not link their migratory project their partners’ legal or financial support, who have high levels of education and qualifications, and who are also economically independent (Pavajeau, 2017), discrimination and colonialist perspectives pose difficulties which were not envisioned by these women when they initiated their migratory process:

“The first thing that the women’s stories make clear is that qualification alone does not open doors across borders because when trying to find a job in a country in the global north, above and beyond qualifications is the geopolitical place of origin and where they came from and where they did their studies, as described by Carla, who migrated to Canada in 2013.” (Pavajeau, 2017. p.5).

As mentioned before, immigrant women are commonly seen as “uneducated and backward” (Kofman et al., 2013, p.9), causing them, despite their high qualifications and experience, which may exceed that of their Canadian peers, to be undervalued as “third world women”<sup>9</sup> (Pavajeau, 2018) because of their skin colour or accent.

Those difficulties face women with serious decisions bearing in mind that they did not *need* or specifically *wanted* to migrate but did it to pursue a joint project based on the affective relation they established with their Canadian male partners. For these migrants, feeling “labelled” as “third world women” and “brown” people implies a migratory experience that begins with having to discover their racialization and deskilling because they are people with academic degrees and professional experiences from the Global South (Pavajeau, 2017), not easily recognized or valued in the host country.

Deskilling of Latin American immigrants to Canada and the difficulties of having academic titles and professional experience recognized are two main challenges related to what is supposed to be one key factor for these women’s integration process: Entering the Canadian labour market.

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<sup>9</sup> On the discussion of the term “third world women”, see Mohanty, C. (1984). Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses. *Boundary 2*, 12/13, 333-358. doi:10.2307/302821

## **Integration into the labour-market**

Concerning the most recent migration flows from Latin America to Canada, Mata (2019) states that individuals between the ages of 25 and 54 from countries such as Colombia, Venezuela and Brazil are among the most educated migrants; moreover, his work shows that all waves of migrants from that region have generated significant benefits to the Canadian economy.

Nevertheless, the promotion of immigration policies based on points aimed at professionals, where individuals are evaluated based on their French or English proficiency, work experience and educational credentials (Meraj, 2015), is not necessarily coherent with the reality immigrants encounter when in Canada, where employers and professional bodies often do not recognize foreign credentials. Therefore, it is paradoxical (Meraj, 2015) (Dietz, Joshi, Essses, Hamilton, and Gabarrot, 2014) that this same point system that favored them to be admitted as immigrants to Canada has no value in the labour-market incorporation process.

“Feminist scholars have exposed the gender biases inherent in the point system. Most women immigrants enter in Canada under the family class category and are sponsored by their partners. As well, there are no points allotted for women’s essential but unpaid domestic labour and this devaluation of their work further inhibit their ability to qualify as independent immigrants (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002). As a result, their immigrant status often depends on the status of their partners, and they usually belong to the category of dependent immigrants (Liversage, 2009).” (Meraj, 2015, pp. 28, 29).

Institutional barriers (Desiderio et al., 2020) (Phan et al.,2015) affect equally Latin American immigrant women and men; still, women might be more impacted. Some programs aimed at facilitating the settlement of immigrants do not take into account the particularities of women but are designed assuming immigrants as a homogeneous whole (Kaushik and Walsh, 2018). These general programs that do not consider gender factors affecting women, as in the case of Latin American migrants concerning the sexual division of domestic labour, may not effectively support women's integration. On this same line, Kaushik and Walsh (2018) identified that an intersectional approach had not been sufficiently integrated into immigration studies and policies in Canada; consequently, not a complete understanding of differentiated elements has been incorporated to scholarship and policymaking efforts aimed to contribute to skilled women immigrants' settlement and integration in Canada.

In relation to credentials recognition, the hindrance of the process (Meraj, 2015) (Dietz et al., 2014) (Premji and Shakya, 2017) adds to the difficulties for Latin American immigrants to effectively enter the Canadian labour market. "Canadian employers value education from European countries more than education from some other countries, mostly from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America (Ferrer & Riddell, 2008; Guo, 2009; Ngo & Este, 2006)." (Meraj, 2015.p.27), showing how racism and discrimination affect in a differentiated fashion Latin American and other racialized communities (Premji and Shakya, 2017), particularly immigrant women who face those barriers more persistently than men and other Canadian-born racialized women.

The Women's Economic Council (2011) highlighted some women immigrant women's suggestions about credential recognition:

- "Review people's credentials before they arrive in Canada so they know whether they will qualify in the Canadian labour market.
- Require recruiters to offer realistic information about the challenges of credential recognition in Canada.
- Work towards more international cooperation on measuring qualifications.
- Offer many more credential assessment and recognition programs.
- Offer incentives to employers to offer on-the-job training opportunities (e.g., paid internships for professionals who are working to earn Canadian credentials).
- Greatly simplify the certification/upgrading process.
- Eliminate duplication of services by centralizing the assessment process.
- Recognize immigrant's degrees without discrimination.
- Create a national system that sets standards for foreign education.
- Eliminate duplication of services through improved national coordination.
- Make pre-immigration credential seminars mandatory." (Women Economic Council, 2011.p.8).

Those recommendations add to the most recent Government of Canada's report on "Evaluation of the Foreign Credential Recognition Program" (2020). The study states that even if "(t)here has been some progress towards addressing these barriers faced by internationally trained individuals, particularly around long and complex processes, lack

of Canadian educational credential, financial barriers, and the lack of recognition foreign qualifications and experience by employers” (Evaluation Directorate Strategic and Service Policy Branch, 2020.p.17), women belonging to racialized communities encounter additional difficulties to the complexity of the recognition of their qualifications and professional experience, such as the gender roles traditionally imposed on them and the insufficiency of social networks to help them integrate into the labour market.

In the Women Economic Council study (2011), it was found that most of the participants expressed that, once they arrived in Canada, the expectations they had during the pre-immigration process were dashed by the difficulty of having their credentials recognized. Even if retraining courses are an alternative, their costs make them unaffordable for many immigrants. For women, this situation is aggravated by the lack of social networks and the social capital they had in their countries of origin, which allowed them to combine domestic work with the development of their professional careers.

The importance of social networks as an element contributing to socio-professional integration of immigrant women is studied by Gauthier (2013). As noted at the beginning of this paper, social and support networks play an essential role in the integration process of migrant women who encounter challenges related to discrimination (Liu, 2019) (Ben Soltane, 2017) because of their dual status as migrants and women. Gauthier (2013) argues that having or not having certain social networks and social capital could influence how employers value the academic background and work experience of migrant women.

By analyzing how men and women face up to the challenges of integration, we see how women generally interact more with the structures of the host society because, as primary caretakers, they “come into contact with a whole set of institutions through their children health and educational systems, for example” (Jones-Correa, 1998. p. 393) (see also Dick and McLaren (2004)). The above does not mean that women face fewer barriers than men; in fact, authors such as Fleras and Li (2013) identified in the work of Liu (2019) have found that immigrant women are more affected than men by factors such as “learning a new language, securing employment, lack of political power, integration, isolation and lack of foreign credentials” (Ahmadzai, 2015, p.12).

Cultural traits induce Latin American women to put their careers on hold to benefit the family settlement process (Delgado, 2018) (Herrera et al., 2018); hence they tend to submit, more than men, to social status declassing brought about by migration. Elements such as racialization (Liu, 2019) and the unequal household responsibilities affect their pathway to career-building in Canada, even if among Latin American immigrants, education rates for women were higher than men’s between 1981 and 2016, as presented by Mata (2019).

Deskilling, understood as the situation when “the credentials of professional immigrants are not recognized in the country to which they migrate, and consequently they lose access to the occupations they previously held in their countries of origin (Bauder, 2003)” (Meraj, 2015.p.65), has been extensively identified (Nichols et al., 2015), (Meraj, 2015),

(Liu, 2019), (Dietz et al.,2014), (Kaushik et al., 2018), (Mojab, 1999) as a problem for immigrant women trying to enter the Canadian labour market.

That situation, affecting women and men likely, has been investigated by Dietz et al.(2014) through their proposal of the “skill paradox,” which takes place when skilled immigrants are victims of employment discrimination. In a study of 2011 (Banerjee and Verma in Meraj, 2015), 61.4% of participants reported having held medium-high professional positions in their country of origin, while only the 29% informed having their credentials and work experience recognized when in Canada. This situation is even more complex when official statistics reveal that unemployment rates among landed immigrants<sup>10</sup> reached rates up to 9,5% in 2020.

Skilled-related discrimination against immigrants, identified as “the devaluation of immigrants’ foreign academic education, foreign professional training, and foreign work experience” (Dietz et al., 2014.p.5), intersects with gender-bias discrimination. The situation formerly described generates even more complex circumstances for Latin American women who, as referred previously, are commonly classified as “third world women” because of their colour (Pavajeau, 2017) and their accent. Also, because of their physical characteristics, immigrant women are seen as “the desirable group to accept casual, fixed term or insecure employment (Das Gupta, Man, Mirchandani, and Ng 2014).” (Liu, 2019.p.9)

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<sup>10</sup> Government of Canada. Labour force characteristics by immigrant status. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410008301&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.1&pickMembers%5B1%5D=3.8&pickMembers%5B2%5D=4.2&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2016&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2020&referencePeriods=20160101%2C20200101>

Having university degrees and professional experience, on occasions superior to the Canadian-born population, might be perceived as less relevant than being a brown “third world country” woman with Global-South credentials. An official report from the Government of Canada (2020)<sup>11</sup> showed that in 2019, 83,3% of Canadian-born women of ages from 25 to 54 years old were employed, and only an average of 70.33% of immigrant women had jobs, while an average of 87.23% of immigrant men were employed.

**Employment rates by immigration status, population aged 25 to 54**

	Employment rates						Difference with Canadian-born counterparts					
	Census				LFS		Census				LFS	
	2001	2006	2011	2016	2016	2019	2001	2006	2011	2016	2016	2019
	percent						percentage points					
<b>Men</b>												
Canadian-born	85.7	86.4	85.1	84.1	85.2	87.0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New immigrants	77.2	80.8	79.5	81.9	83.1	84.1	-8.5	-5.6	-5.5	-2.2	-2.1	-2.9
Recent immigrants	83.2	86.1	85.9	86.0	85.7	89.5	-2.5	-0.4	0.9	1.9	0.5	2.5
Long-term immigrants	87.5	87.4	85.5	86.1	86.6	88.1	1.7	1.0	0.4	2.0	1.4	1.1
<b>Women</b>												
Canadian-born	76.4	78.5	79.2	80.0	81.2	83.3	0	0	0	0	0	0
New immigrants	56.5	59.3	59.3	61.1	57.8	60.1	-19.9	-19.2	-20.0	-19.0	-23.4	-23.2
Recent immigrants	66.9	68.6	68.2	68.5	67.6	72.4	-9.5	-9.9	-11.0	-11.5	-13.6	-10.9
Long-term immigrants	75.8	76.1	74.9	75.9	75.3	78.5	-0.6	-2.4	-4.3	-4.1	-5.9	-4.8

**Source:** Government of Canada. “Are the gaps in labour market outcomes between immigrants and their Canadian-born counterparts starting to close?”

<sup>11</sup> Government of Canada. Are the gaps in labour market outcomes between immigrants and their Canadian-born counterparts starting to close? <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2021004/article/00004-eng.htm>

It is important to emphasize that even if those women were effectively employed and that immigrant women commonly find full-time jobs faster than men, that does not mean they are employed in positions equivalent to their academic degrees or former professional experience.

Immigrant women tend to be employed faster than men, but in many cases, in jobs for which they are overqualified because they must assume economic obligations. Latin American women with male partners and children incline to put their personal plans very strongly aside in favour of their partners' professional development and childcare, so it is not difficult to find high-skilled Latin America female immigrants working in low-paying or part-time jobs that allow them to fulfill their financial responsibilities at home. Due to patriarchal traditions, these women are "willing to provide cheap labour alternatives and accept any job as a mean of survival." (Liu, 2019. p.9).

Official statistics show how employment rates differences among the Canadian-born population and immigrant women are not the only ones, but also those related to income levels. While Canadian-born men had an average weekly income in 2019 of CAD1.205, immigrant women had an average of CAD806,66, meaning that immigrant women earned in 2019 only 66,94% of what their Canadian-born male counterparts were paid, and 83,59% of the CAD965 Canadian-born women earned in average.

**Average weekly earnings by immigration status among employees aged 25 to 54**

	Average weekly earnings						Difference with Canadian-born counterparts					
	Census				LFS		Census				LFS	
	2000	2005	2010	2015	2015	2019	2000	2005	2010	2015	2015	2019
	2015 constant dollars						percent					
<b>Men</b>												
Canadian-born	1,256	1,299	1,386	1,461	1,205	1,205	0	0	0	0	0	0
New immigrants	1,003	959	1,092	1,108	890	955	-20.1	-26.2	-21.2	-24.2	-26.1	-20.7
Recent immigrants	1,022	1,128	1,252	1,239	985	1,060	-18.6	-13.1	-9.6	-15.2	-18.3	-12.0
Long-term immigrants	1,298	1,285	1,359	1,411	1,150	1,170	3.3	-1.1	-1.9	-3.4	-4.6	-2.9
<b>Women</b>												
Canadian-born	871	912	1,025	1,075	925	965	0	0	0	0	0	0
New immigrants	709	685	812	806	670	735	-18.6	-24.8	-20.8	-25.0	-27.6	-23.8
Recent immigrants	754	804	931	908	710	765	-13.4	-11.8	-9.1	-15.6	-23.2	-20.7
Long-term immigrants	916	934	1,043	1,088	865	920	5.2	2.5	1.8	1.2	-6.5	-4.7

**Note:** LFS refers to the Labour Force Survey.

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, 2001, 2006 and 2016 Census of Population; 2011 National Household Survey; and 2016 and 2019 Labour Force

**Source:** Government of Canada. “Are the gaps in labour market outcomes between immigrants and their Canadian-born counterparts starting to close?”

Latin American women face challenges related to cultural traditions that make them principal responsible for household tasks during the post-migratory process, impacting their capability to advance in their careers due to the domestic overload. They also confront various elements that fall under the scope of an intersectional approach, such as skin colour, gender, and even their migratory status. Those elements have a significant impact on the type of work available to them (Hanley, Larios, Salamanca, Cardona, Henaway, Dwaikat Shaer, Ben Soltane, and Eid, 2017), minimizing the importance of their academic credentials and work experience.

“(F)or immigrants in Canada, I get the message that you should use your hands, not your minds<sup>12</sup>.” (Mojab, 1999.p.3)

<sup>12</sup> Peruvian biologist, she was 29 years old at the time of Mojab’s study.

Integrating into a new culture is not a simple undertaking. It implies the uprooting process, which is difficult and, in many cases, entails a highly emotional component that comes from leaving family and friends, abandoning everything one has known until then and switching from being at home to becoming a *newcomer*, a *stranger*.

Under that scope, the loss of social and economic status (Dyck and McLaren, 2004) racialized immigrant women confront because of the obstacles found by the deskilling reality once they arrive in Canada, among others, also affects the redefinition of the individual identity (Osorio and Orjuela, 2009). This notion is deeply linked to professional attainment since it contributes to immigrants' perception of inclusion (Moffit and Nardon, 2019) and *belonging* as another one of the sub-processes involved in integrating (Osorio and Orjuela, 2009) into the host country.

### **Identity reshaping: *Becoming an immigrant***

The study of identity-reshaping issues related to migration processes are associated with mobility (Dyck and McLaren, 2004) and, therefore, with the territory.

This identity-territory relationship has three components (Reyes and Martinez, 2015):

1. The way in which individuals subjectively appropriate the territory of the host place;
2. The structuring by the migrant of a new geographic identity heritage; and
3. The constitution of units of territorial significance.

Transnational mobility implies that migrants rearrange their sense of belonging to new cultural and social groups (Comanaru, Noels and Dewaele, 2017) while they establish relations with the receiving society, creating a connection (Velasquez, 2021) between the culture of origin and that of the host country, or as Reyes and Ruiz (2015) propose, the lived space (context of origin) and the idealized space (context of arrival).

One of the best-known researchers to investigate this topic is John Berry, who in 1980 developed the bidimensional model of acculturation. Berry's proposal was built in relation to the strategies assumed by individuals located at the encounter of two cultures due to the level of contact and commitment that such individuals want to establish or maintain with their inherited culture and the new one (Comanaru et al., 2017). Depending on the above, four different situations<sup>13</sup> may arise:

1. Assimilation: it means the break with the culture of origin and the adoption of the host country's one.
2. Segregation or separation: It is the detachment from the new culture, privileging the inherited culture.
3. Deculturation or marginalization: It is the rejection of both cultures.
4. Integration: It is the establishment of a commitment to the new culture while preserving the inherited one. According to Berry, this is the most common situation.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Berry's work has been further developed by researchers such as LaFramboise, Coleman and Gherton (1993), Amiot, De La Sablonniere, and Smith (2008), Roccas and Brewer (2002), among others.

<sup>14</sup> "Although the notion of integration in the context of acculturation and bicultural identity has its roots in Berry's work, the manner in which people experience the combining of cultures is not fully articulated in this model." (Comanaru et al., 2017.p.3)

Migration causes the relationship established by individuals between the values, traditions and behaviours accepted and functional in the place of origin, and the new ones (Velasquez, 2021), to develop through the establishment of links between the two. Such a relationship, as Berry stated, can be one of complementarity between the two cultures, or of rejection of one or both. However, they can also be “reconstructions or translations of certain cultural forms or experiences that are inserted in the movement of the imaginary or perception to new places” (Reyes and Martinez, 2015.p.5) and begin to structure what it means to *become* a migrant.

Comanaru et al.(2017) have built up their work on former studies, contributing to understanding further how migrants establish their bicultural identity orientations during the adaptation process to the host country; by doing so, they proposed five orientations of bicultural migrants:

“(C)onflicted (a perceived discord between the two cultural identities), monocultural (identification with only one of the two cultures), alternating (the shifting of identities according to the cultural context), complementary (compatibility between the two distinct identities) and hybrid (the blending of two cultural identities from which emerges a new identity)” (p.14)

Velasquez (2021) work adds up to migrants’ identity discussions by proposing an innovative approach through the study of immigrant Latin American cisgender couples to Canada, by demonstrating that “l’integration des identites culturelles favorise l’integration de l’identite du partenaire dans le soi qui, en retour, aura un impact positif sur le bien-

être.” (p.50). We suggest that Velasquez work can be a key piece to further develop on gendered specificities on Latin American women’s well-being.

Pertaining to Latin American women’s identity construction as immigrants, the family, social and individual contexts have a crucial impact in what Reyes and Martinez (2017) describe as the way immigrants shape new ways of living in and from the transnational movement, through the interaction with the territory, understood as the key factor that determines the new direction of the person who has become a migrant through this movement.

From an intersectional perspective of migrations (Kaushik and Walsh, 2018), migrant women are affected by the superimposition of different exclusion factors such as race, nationality, and age, which leads them to suffer experiences of marginalization (Guizardi; Lopez, and Nasal 2017) that are exacerbated when patriarchal contexts are maintained, or even accentuated by the migration process.

The territory habited by women is a gendered one due to the relations of power established before, during and after the migratory process; “(s)paces and places at various geographical scales are not simply neutral backdrops to action, but are socially constructed arenas of contested power relations, constituted within global flows of people, capital and information, and constantly in process (Massey, 1994; Silvey & Lawson, 1999).”(Dyck and McLaren, 2004.p.6). Immigrant women “act-out” (Myers, Riveros and Duggal, 2020) their identity in a performative practise by interacting with their partners,

and the new culture from the starting point of their own culture and expectations, but also in the midst of categories such as class, race and gender which bring them to explore and question different identities (Dyck and McLaren, 2004) as mothers, wives, professionals, and immigrants.

As described before, one of the main reasons for individuals and families to migrate to Canada is improving their children's quality of life, which according to participants in several studies (Garnier, 2015, Cortes, 2019, Baitubayeva, 2017, among others), is effectively accomplished. In relation to childcaring, among Latin American immigrants has been comprehensively explained how cultural traditions compel women to be the main ones responsible for that task and household chores; therefore, an essential part of identity reshaping is related to that situation. Many professional Latin American women who were able in their countries to have family support to take care of their children, or to hire employees to carry on domestic labour, find themselves without family support in Canada, forcing them to assume a different role for which they were not necessarily prepared during the pre-migratory process.

Skilled Latin American women face a new reality where they shifted from being independent professionals to become stay-at-home mothers without necessarily having planned or *chosen* that course of action, and at the same time to start being dependent on their male partners due to their migratory status and the hindrances of entering the Canadian labour market.

Immigrant women's economic dependence and the challenging entering the labour market in Canada affect women's identity reshaping, and their sense of belonging to the hosting culture. Federal and provincial policies are insistent that belonging to Canadian society is closely related to how immigrants contribute to the economy (Jenson and Paquet, 2019), such that the reconfiguration of women's identity from a sense of belonging is impacted by the riddle they face when cultural and institutional obstacles impede them to fully develop their professional capabilities.

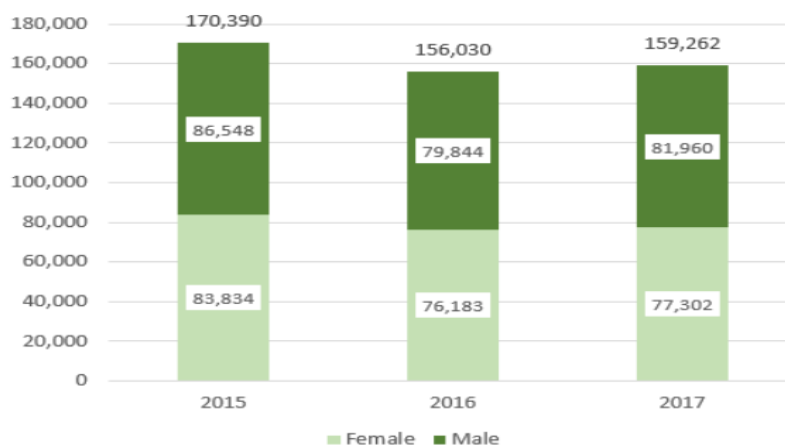
Integration into the labour-market and the hegemonic neoliberal rationale that privileges *homo oeconomicus* as responsible for contributing to the economic growth of the society in which they live (Brown, 2017) should not mean a great difficulty to Latin American immigrants, given that this rationality is not a strange reality in that region where, like in Canada, domestic labour and childcare task are not remunerated or recognized as economic contributions to society. However, hindrances previously described do not facilitate Latin American women to bestow their efforts to become those *productive* members of Canadian society at the same level they were in their countries of origin.

Professional practice in the country of origin and previous academic training do not necessarily find continuity in Canada; consequently, the reality experienced by immigrants marks not only their personal identity but also their work and class identity (Osorio and Orjuela, 2009). For women who are faced with domestic roles that do not offer them many different options, the loss of socioeconomic status and their financial independence, and the racialization that generates forms of discrimination they did not

know in their countries, are part of this process in which “individuals come into conflict with what they were and what they are becoming.”(Osorio and Orjuela, 2009.p.7)

The definition of identity in this context is very complex and also concerns women’s migratory status. Official statistics show how in the Federal Economic–Skilled category most of principal applicants are men. While migration in the category of Skilled category involves the planning and structuring of a process where women actively participate or even initiate (Guizardi et al. 2017), statistics show that in Canada, men are “overrepresented as the principal applicant (the person making the immigration application) in the economic class, due to the tendency of men to be primary breadwinners” (Nichols and Tyysa, 2015.p.6). In 2017, 56% of principal applicants under the Economic Class Category were men, and 44% were women, showing a persistent gap of 12% in the last years, according to the Government of Canada’s <sup>15</sup> graphic:

**Economic Permanent Residents Admitted to Canada (2015–2017, Principal Applicants and Immediate Family Members)**



<sup>15</sup> Government of Canada. 2018 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/annual-report-parliament-immigration-2018/report.html#plan>

With 35% of Latin American immigrants entering Canada under the Economic Class category (Mata, 2019) based on the points system, scholars as Meraj (2015) highlight the gendered characteristics of it and the gendered migratory practices (Baitubayeva, 2017).

Women who enter as dependents are not taken into account as contributors to the calculation of the points, because due to traditional division of household labour (Liu, 2019), even when domestic and childcare work is essential for the functioning and settlement (Baitubayeva, 2017) of the family unit, it is not taken into account as a contribution to the score. As a result, Latin American immigrant women become dependent on their male partners (Nichols and Tyyska, 2015) (Meraj, 2015), not only in financial terms but also in their migratory status, constituting what was Meraj (2015) has identified as “trailing spouses”, as mentioned before, who are legal dependents of the skilled principal applicant, even if they are skilled as well.

The migratory status dependency also contributes to women deskilling, delaying their own settlement process’ advance (Baitubayeva, 2017) by forcing them to stay at home, becoming responsible for household tasks and accepting low-pay jobs (Meraj, 2015) often below their qualifications and previous experience and by preventing them to gain “Canadian experience” in their field of work.

As explained above, the levels of academic training and professional experience among Latin American women are not low; hence, it is not only in the cases of highly qualified women where a particular situation emerges. In that situation, immigrant women who

enter under the status of dependents, see their economic independence reduced or lost, must accept jobs below their educational and previous experience levels (Meraj, 2015), and face isolation (Baitubayeva, 2017) (Bernhardt et al., 2008), a feeling of inadequacy (Wilson, 2015), and the loss of social status (Castro and Villeneuve, 2017).

The former situation, and the immediate problem of identity reshaping, impacts mental health among female immigrants (Baitubayeva, 2017) (Meraj, 2015), which can be worsened in cases of intimate partner violence (IPV). The most common kinds of IPV among Latin American immigrants are verbal or psychological “in the form of insults, name calling, and putting a woman down, telling her she was a bad mother, unfaithful, “worthless” or insulting her appearance. For example, one woman indicated, “He would insult me horribly, saying that I was garbage” (Susana).” (Godoy-Ruiz, Toner, Mason, Vidal, and McKenzie 2015.p.4). The former is also influenced by the persistence of “machismo” (Ciurlo, 2015) (Herrera et al.,2018) (Burbano, 2016) in Latin American culture. Relating To IPV among Latin American immigrants and its impact on women’s mental health, in particular to depression, the work of Godoy et al. (2015) achieves an important contribution as the first one addressing this specific subject and by raising attention to the former in relation to unemployment, underemployment, migratory status, and lack of language proficiency.

Depression, low self-esteem, and a general feeling of sadness (Meraj, 2015) (Castro and Villeneuve, 2017) are common among Latin American immigrant women in Canada. These feelings derive in mental health problems which, when combined, aggravate the

process of identity reformulation as immigrants while making the process of integration (Meraj, 2015) in Canadian society more complex, particularly in scenarios of domestic violence and lack of adequate support networks (Royo Prieto, Silvestre Cabrera, González Estepa, Linares Bahillo, and Suarez Errekalde, 2017).

“moi je me sentais como, moi je suis devenue **dépendante**’/je suis devenue:(...) **fragile** et puis j’étais como **déprimée**’ j’étais mais comment ça se fait que je, comment j’étais en Colombie’ maintenant **je ne me connais pas**’.” (Allemand, 2013.p.34).

Having established the relationship between the possibility of working and developing their professional careers (Meraj, 2015) (Liu,2019), with the redefinition of the identity of Latin American women in Canada as migrants, the loss of independence and their careers (Wilson-Forsberg, 2014), as well as being compelled to remain in their homes as responsible for domestic chores, when regularly in their countries of origin they had not only more support networks, but the possibility of having domestic workers, affect the personal situation and mental health of these women, by triggering feelings of isolation, loneliness, sadness (Wilson-Forsberg, 2014), and disappointment in themselves (Meraj, 2015) as competent professionals (Allemand, 2013) capable of integrating effectively.

The professional activities immigrants had before arriving in Canada are closely related to their professional identity and socioeconomic status (Osorio and Orjuela, 2009), which are transformed in the post-migration process according to the new conditions. The

difference between gender roles played in the societies of origin and the host country's ones (Monreal et al.,2019) also influences this transformation.

It is precisely because of the traditional gender roles predominant in Latin American culture related to caretaking, it is primarily women who directly develop relations with state services in Canada (Osorio and Orjuela, 2009) (Myers et al.,2020), such as health, children's education, and social services, among others. As a result, when in contact with these dynamics, women also relate to practices in which gender relations are understood in different ways (Monreal et al., 2019) in Canada.

Being confronted with situations such as becoming housebound and deskilled, but at the same time having to come into direct and permanent contact with new influences in Canada in contrast to what in Latin America are traditional gender roles, can trigger agency in these women. It is precisely incapacitating and debilitating situations that can drive the desire and new forms of action in the face of the individual and collective obstacles (De Billy Garnier, 2015) that women encounter. Alternative solutions to such situations involve not only individual action but also collective action in the form, for example, of establishing, joining, or improving formal or informal support networks (Adamuti-Trache and Swett, 2018) (Gauthier, 2021) (Veronis and Walton Roberts 2017) (Bernhardt et al.,2008), since the exercise of agency develops within a social context (McNay, 2016).

In this process, women's identities, which have already been confronted with redefining as immigrants, racialized individuals (Bhuyan et al., 2018), mothers, wives (Dyck and McLaren, 2004) and professionals, continue its process of reconstruction due to the continuous cultural shocks (De Billy Garnier, 2015), they encounter. Those cultural shocks are assumed with compromise, negotiation (De Billy Garnier, 2015), resistance and adaptation (Myers et al., 2020), in the development of processes identified as "developmental crises", that is to say, "transition periods, which momentarily entail a certain imbalance" (De Billy Garnier, 2015.p.145 ) in the face of which agency operates.

In these gendered contexts where Latin American women develop their family and social practices, an opportunity to assert their agency is configured, not from the already known spheres of identity referred to what women can do with respect to what they already *are*, but through the design of new ways of being (McNay, 2016). Thus, women find ways to exert agency by initiating, reinforcing or improving spaces defined from gendered geographies of power (Pessar and Mahler, 2003) where the ways of exercising that power between women and men are also changing and generate spaces for resistance against gender oppression.

## **Conclusions**

Latin American cisgender women with male partners and children who migrate to Canada are affected by hindrances posed by gendered particularities embedded in the migration process. Therefore, studying immigration through an intersectional lens

would be beneficial in better understanding the challenges of gendered relations and unequal power relations.

Economic and social isolation and mental health issues are common among Latin American immigrant women due to traditional gender roles, which impose women to assume the primary caretaker role and triggering a gendered situation of uneven distribution of household tasks that cause delays and setbacks in their integration process into Canadian society.

Literature on gender and immigration has revealed and studied the differentiated gender conditions present in the integration processes of Latin American women who have migrated to Canada and has made an important contribution in highlighting the challenges those women face. Based on that body of literature, scholarship on immigration from a feminist perspective would benefit from further incorporating immigrant scholars' perspectives and proposals.

Global South women who immigrate to the Global North perspectives have raised specific issues for feminism that deserve to be further developed in an effort to deepen feminist migration scholarship' decolonization by including even more the Global South feminist scholars' voices. Viewpoints of Global South and migrant feminist scholars are key to advance feminist migration theory with the purpose of questioning some Global North common views of Latin American immigrant women as uneducated and backward individuals.

The gender perspective regarding what it means to integrate immigrants into the host society implies that the analysis of immigrants' particularities should be part of women's studies. Therefore, academic studies need to be more deepened in this aspect since topics related to immigrant women end up being consumed in the generalities of migration studies, literature on immigrant families, and immigration history. Always considering immigrant women as independent subjects facing their own gender-related challenges, beyond a general vision of "immigrants" as a homogeneous group, and migration as a gendered process would serve the interests of continue advancing in immigration and integration theory and public policies.

Latin American female immigrants' integration into Canadian society depends not only on the individuals' will but also on the responsibilities of the receiving society. Some examples of that involvements are policy-making advances designed from a clear gender perspective and the development of more specific support networks that take into account power relations among genders and among immigrant women and Canadian-born females.

Support networks are also useful for overcoming mental health problems common among Latin American women, such as depression and anxiety, caused by difficulties during the integration process. The lack of language proficiency worsens those situations because women do not feel confident to try and access the available resources, which configures a downward spiral. Hence, more investigation on that

group's specific issues among Latin American women and specifically on transnational mothers could be helpful to develop additional and more efficient resources.

Regarding identity reshaping among Latin American women as immigrants, racialized, and in most cases deskilled, housebound and financially dependents, this paper suggests that additional investigation on this issue, linking it to mental health problem occurrence, would be of benefit in establishing possible courses of action for federal, provincial and private policymakers. The formed could contribute to advance in overcoming the difficulties that situation poses for Latin American women's successful and less intricated integration into Canadian society and economy.

Concerning the promotion of immigration policies based on points aimed at attracting skilled immigrants, we suggest that more investigation on the discrepancies among the immigration points system, and the deskilling and discrimination reality immigrants encounter once in Canada, would be of interest in the purpose of providing additional academic foundations for policy-making. Also, the problem of credential and previous work experience recognition, which highly impact Latin American women who, as formerly described, are even more skilled in average than Latin American men, should be further addressed. That issue affects immigrants and might configure a situation for the Canadian economy, where there is a wasteful use of human resources due to bureaucratic and administrative barriers.

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