

OCCASIONAL PAPER

6

Gendering Migration, Livelihood and Entitlements: Migrant Women in Canada and the United States

by Monica Boyd
and Deanna Pikkov





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and Entitlements:**
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the United States

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acronyms

AZCADV	Arizona Coalition Against Domestic Violence
GIS	Guaranteed Income Supplement (Canada)
IRCA	Immigration Reform and Control Act (United States)
IRPA	Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (Canada)
IT	information technology
LCP	Live-In Caregiver Program (Canada)
LINC	Language Instruction for Newcomers (Canada)
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	non-governmental organization
OAS	Old Age Security Program (Canada)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRWORA	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (United States)
ROE	record of employment
TANF	Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (United States)
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VAWA	Violence Against Women Act (United States)

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SUMMARY

The United States and Canada have long histories of large-scale migration, and they continue to welcome large flows of legal immigrants. Women make up an increasing proportion of these international flows. In both countries, the majority of legal immigrants are eligible for full citizenship rights and entitlements, with rapid or automatic access to both political rights and labour markets, although stratified entitlements are present for temporary and irregular migrants, and in the realm of social provision. Formally, women partake of these rights equally with men, but gender inequality persists both in government policy and in labour markets. In both countries, moreover, recent political and policy environments are influenced by neoliberal ideological principles, contributing to changes in migration policy, labour markets and social provisions that make female migrants increasingly vulnerable to structural inequalities.

In the first part of the paper, migration regimes in the two countries are compared. Women are entering both countries in increasing numbers, though still primarily as dependants of men. Changes to migration policy that increasingly favour admissions of highly educated migrants have been enacted more extensively in Canada; entry in high-skill “economic” categories now exceeds entry through the humanitarian categories of family reunification and refugee asylum. Admission requirements that emphasize human capital penalize women who come from countries in which resources are highly concentrated in male hands. In the United States, humanitarian category entries still predominate, although high-skill temporary entry increasingly functions as a “back door” route to permanent status. In the realm of refugee admissions, changes in rules that govern refugee selection have increased gender sensitivity in Canada, but the numbers affected remain low. In both countries, numbers of migrants within temporary categories of entry have increased over the last decade. Women are present in temporary categories that encompass both high and low skill streams, with very different prospects depending on labour market location. Recent policy initiatives in both countries propose the granting of temporary status to irregular migrants; such proposals have the potential to move North American migration regimes closer to European “guest worker” models, even as these models have proved untenable in Europe.

Next, gendered work environments are examined. In the United States and Canada, deregulation of labour markets has reinforced gendered occupational hierarchies in which immigrant women often hold disadvantaged places. While immigrant women, including those from the developing world, are present among highly skilled workers, they are also disproportionately visible at the bottom rungs of stratified service, retail and manufacturing

sectors. Similar patterns are evident with respect to unemployment, underemployment, working conditions and earnings. Diminished social entitlements that emphasize private provision of care provide abundant, but also precarious, employment opportunities, while increasing women's burdens within their own families. Lack of recognition of credentials acquired abroad by licensing bodies is a serious issue in Canada, contributing to deskilling and underemployment among immigrant women. In both countries, affirmative action and employment equity legislation that seeks to oppose and redress labour market discrimination based on race and sex has been hobbled by waning political commitment, limited enforcement, and restricted reach.

Social entitlements are examined in the final section of the paper. In the realm of settlement services, devolution and decentralization of services have relocated responsibility from federal governments to state and provincial governments, which frequently partner with businesses and non-governmental organizations. Despite changes that recognize women's greater need for language instruction in Canada, funding has remained static since the mid-1990s. One area of diminished entitlements for immigrants that particularly affects immigrant women is eligibility for pensions. Although small, universally awarded pensions are given to the elderly in both countries, migrants who work at home, in informal sectors, or who enter the country late in life are frequently ineligible for government pension plans that are work-related. It is in the United States that stratification of social benefits is most marked, largely as a result of two features of US welfare state provision. The first is the largely private health care system, in which the poor are often uninsured and must rely on means-tested Medicaid benefits, or pay cash for expensive medical care. The second is changes to social assistance that deny welfare access to single, non-working mothers, limit lifelong access to welfare to five years, and deny welfare completely to legal permanent

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