



GENDER AND MIGRATION IN OECD COUNTRIES LITERATURE REVIEW

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Gendered dynamics in migration flows to Australia have evolved alongside policy in the last two decades. Australia's policy concentration on highly skilled workers and family reunification has led to an increase in the number of women migrants to Australia. This migration trend is also evident amongst OECD countries, as female migration appears to be almost universally increasing and migration by gender is now more or less balanced. This is a departure from historical trends of male dominated migration and reflects the rise in female education, changing economic structures, growing family reunification and selective migration policies.

Education and Deskillling

In Australia, current migration policy explicitly seeks highly skilled migrants, as their skills and educational qualifications represent a considerable positive contribution to national cultural and economic development. This policy focus represents a shift from Australia's previous policy concentration shaped by Cold War

and defence concerns and the need to fill labour supply for growing domestic manufacturing industries. Skilled migrants now form the majority of new Australian permanent settlers and also the bulk of temporary migrants (Webb 2015).

From 2001 to 2011 the number of tertiary educated women migrating to OECD countries increased by 80% (International Organisation for Migration and OECD Development Centre 2015). The share of migrant women holding a tertiary degree is only 3% below men in OECD countries, and in some countries (Italy, Canada, Sweden and Great Britain) highly skilled migrant women even outnumber men (Kofman 2012). In Australia there are almost equal numbers of tertiary educated migrant men and women and in the US 27% of immigrant men hold a tertiary degree compared to 26% of women.

Despite migrant women having on average higher levels of educational achievement than native born women in many OECD destination countries, highly skilled migrant women tend to have difficulties transitioning into labour markets. There has been an increase in unemployment rates for all migrant women between 2005/6 and 2010/11. Highly skilled women migrants face higher unemployment rates than their native

counterparts but lower unemployment rates against those with lower qualifications. After migrating, only 25% of migrant women and 46% of migrant men were employed, whilst only 70.5% of those women were able to find a job in their field of choice compared to 82% of men (Kofman 2012). Before migration, 88% of these women and 93% of the same men had worked. Deskilling rates were much higher for women from non-OECD countries migrating to OECD countries than they were for OECD-OECD migration.

Women migrants undergo a high level of deskilling. This is seen by the extent of over qualification of migrant women for the jobs they hold. Deskilling leads to two major outcomes:

1. Professional women are working in sectors other than that which they originally trained in and;
2. Professional women are working below their levels of qualification within that occupation.

This suggests that the barriers for migrant women to employment go beyond education. One contribution towards the deskilling of female migrants is the continuous demand for domestic and care work in OECD countries, although this is less of a problem in Australia where no specific domestic work visa category exists.

Qualified migrants are an underused resource. Governments and private sectors acknowledge that human capital is one of the most important assets for development, growth and innovation. Lack of a streamlined process for recognition of non-OECD or Australian qualifications is a big problem for labour integration, as is the lack of affordable, accessible and appropriate professional language courses for qualified immigrants (Institute for the

Study of Labour 2007). For women, some of these factors have greater implications than for men. Women with children may have a limited ability to attend language courses and their need to reskill may be seen as a lesser priority due to gender hierarchy within the family (UN-DESA and OECD 2013).

The increase in highly skilled female migration is surprising given that unequal access to tertiary education in many less developed countries persists. Studies suggest highly skilled migrant women are more likely to immigrate to OECD countries than highly skilled migrant men.

The share of tertiary educated women residing outside their countries of origin was found to be higher than for men, particularly for small countries and Island states. Although highly skilled OECD emigrants are at a rough gender balance, in large African countries the average emigration rate for tertiary educated women is 11% higher than it is for men. Similar significant gender differences were found in emigration rates for Latin America, Oceania, and to a lesser extent in Asia (Institute for the Study of Labour 2007).

Export of skilled labour isn't necessarily a net loss. It is important to note that there are several important benefits from such high levels of emigration from developing countries. Emigrants can positively impact their home country economy through transfer of ideas and skills learnt in destination countries, and through sending remittances.

Countries like Australia benefit from the supply of skilled human capital to fill labour gaps in the economy, and a well implemented, streamlined skill-based

immigration policy can efficiently achieve this. In the period 2010-2011, 35,717 highly skilled Australians emigrated overseas, however 107,659 skilled immigrants entered Australia through skilled visa schemes. In that period, immigration increased the relative number of graduates per inhabitant (Breda 2014).

Workforce participation

Labour opportunities are a strong incentive for migration, however evidence of immigrant women's labour market marginality is seen in their generally lower workforce participation rates, low status jobs, low earnings and poor working conditions (Bridge: Development - Gender 2005). The labour market is often gender segregated in receiving countries. This means that many women end up working unskilled jobs, as domestic or care workers. Those who are skilled typically find work in welfare and social professions.

In Australia, the labour market outcomes for migrant women compared to migrant men are relatively poor. The wage gap is substantial, with recent migrant women experiencing up to a 25% wage disparity against their male counterparts. This is marginally higher than the wage gap experienced by Australian born women. There also exists a general unemployment and participation rate gap between migrant men and women. Unemployment rates for migrant women are on average 4% higher than for men across all visa categories. Workforce participation rates are 10% lower for women in skilled visa categories, and 15% - 26% lower in family and humanitarian visa categories - depending on whether they are primary applicants or dependents (Migration Council Australia 2015).

As noted, the wage gap exists within the Australian general population already, with women migrants just experiencing it more acutely. This may be due to the higher proportion of male primary applicants in highly skilled visa categories associated with higher earnings, coupled with the over-representation of women in family migration – the lowest earning visa category. English proficiency is also a contributing factor. Whilst women migrants with English as a first language have only a 14% lower participation rate than their male counterparts, migrant women who are not proficient in spoken English experience a 26% lower participation rate than men of the same proficiency level (Migration Council Australia 2015).

The gender-segregated labour market clearly influence which professional categories are able to migrate. For example, migration flows of nurses from the less developed world to OECD countries are overwhelmingly female. The movement of other professionals such as scientists, engineers and doctors is overwhelmingly male (Bridge: Development - Gender 2005). The increasing employment of women in health and education sectors has contributed significantly towards altering the gender balance in skilled migration. From 1997 – 2004 the number of female migrant nurses in Great Britain rose by 92% (Kofman 2012).

Highly skilled immigrant women are increasingly targeted as the economic structure of industrialised countries shifts away from manual labour based market activities, increasing the potential for female economic contribution. The

increase of labour opportunities is a strong pull factor and contributes largely to the increasing number of independent women migrating to OECD countries. Growing transnational businesses are providing more opportunities for female workforce participation in low-income areas that are generally associated with female labour (i.e. garment manufacturing) and there are increasing opportunities for women to work as caregivers in OECD countries. Gender norms are also changing as a result of hiring in favour of women, additionally contributing towards an increased number of women in the workforce (Ross-Sheriff 2011).

There is still significant gender imbalance with regard to employment status within the family unit. As dual income families increasingly become the norm, there remains a significant disparity between spousal employment concerns when a family considers migrating. Families tend to move when the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs. This doesn't necessarily require a net gain for both individuals in a heterosexual marriage. Gender segregation in the labour market can lead to separate occupations with distinct structural characteristics, and opportunities that arise for women will offer lesser net gains than those that will arise for men. Married women are therefore less likely to initiate family migration and resist family moves.

Poor migrant female labour market outcomes show that the existing policy environment has room for improvement. Inefficient female labour participation rates hurt the process of settlement, economic contribution potential, and represent a cost to government revenue through lost income tax receipts. This

suggests a need for further policy consideration with regard to women migrant workers. In particular, greater attention is required for settlement support programs, English language programs, and commitment to reducing gender pay gaps (Migration Council Australia 2015).

Immigration Policy

The prevailing approach towards immigration policy is rooted in domestic concerns rather than in the interests and rights of migrants. As such, many OECD countries tend to focus on stratified entry accompanied by stratified rights with gendered implications. Typically settler countries such as Australia are admitting increasing numbers of highly skilled and business migrants on a temporary basis, a category that is globally dominated by men.

In Australia, migration policy and entry process assesses individuals as persons who possess skills and will positively contribute towards the economy. Partners are classified as secondary applicants and viewed as dependents. Although the number of women primary applicants is growing, men form the majority of principal applicants in the General Skilled Migration category at 64%. Compared to 21% of primary applicants, 37% of secondary applicants had not found work since arrival in Australia. Secondary applicants took much longer to find work than their partners and a higher proportion of female than male migrants were in part time jobs (Webb 2015). This reinforces the assumption that migrant women who enter the country as dependent do not possess any skills.

Whilst such policies are designed to be gender neutral, they can have greater negative implications for women due to gender segregated labour markets, differentiated skill levels, and ideas of gender norms in both sending and receiving countries. The prevalence of women in specific economic sectors and generally low wage awards make entry into OECD countries through highly skilled worker programmes more difficult. Restricting entry to skilled migrants may exclude large numbers of women who fall into the unskilled category. Such entry restrictions can push women into illegal channels of migration where they are vulnerable and subject to exploitation.

Entry as a dependent or family migrant is often linked to negative social misconceptions. There is a tendency to see family migrants as symbolic of a backward gender order. This is a problematic assumption given that family migration provides a major route for permanent settlement in many OECD states. Another issue with existing immigration policy frameworks is that some OECD countries use earnings as major criteria for defining a highly skilled migrant. This can negatively affect opportunities of migration for women globally subjected to gender based wage gaps.

The economic benefits of migration are often only analysed in high skilled occupations such as finance, science and technology – occupations that are heavily male dominated. As such, women migrant economic contributions tend to go largely unnoticed. Further, there is an unwarranted assumption that migrant women who aren't employed in skilled

occupations do not possess any skills. This particularly applies to women who enter the country as a dependent. There is very little theoretical evidence or empirical literature on the employment of dependents. Women dependent migrants are often dismissed as having negligible economic contribution due to their entry status and the simple fact that they were not specifically chosen for their educational qualifications and skills.

On the other hand, immigration policy encouraging highly skilled and well-educated migrants may indirectly positively favour the selection of women. Skilled migrant women now have an increased capacity for migrating based on their own merit and skill rather than depending on their partners (Inglis 2003). Increasing mobility of women has been highlighted as a by-product of selective skills based migration policies in OECD countries. This is particularly evident in Europe, where there is a growing demand for skills to correct the gap left by an ageing population.

There is a general absence of gender consideration in immigration policies. This can be attributed to the lack of accessible disaggregated data and research on links between highly skilled immigration, gender equality integration and development. Migrant women are underrepresented as principal applicants in migration labour schemes, despite high levels of education. A gender-based perspective in policy development can promote positive outcomes for highly skilled women migrants.

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