Family Migration Policies and Social Integration

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INTRODUCTION

Over an estimated 244 million people have migrated across borders[1] generally for three primary reasons—permanent resettlement, labour migration, or to find refuge—and in each context, family separation and potential reunification may be a concern.[2] Family migration takes different paths; some families migrate together, others may join a migrant family member, while some may enter into a long-standing intimate relationship with a citizen or permanent resident in another country.[3] As the classification differs cross-nationally, it is difficult to ascertain exact numbers of family class migrants around the world; however, the International Organization on Migration (IOM) estimates that approximately half of immigrants settling in OECD countries are family migrants.[3] When family members categorized under disparate immigrant rubrics are included, 66% of Canadian, 57% of British, and 81% of US immigrant admissions are family migrants.[4] This paper focuses on some of the policies and discourses that underpin these statistics. Beginning with definitions of two central concepts, I provide an overview of family-oriented migration policies, focusing primarily on Europe, Australia, and the USA, and examine their consequences for migrants and for their integration experiences. Next, I examine family migration policies in Canada and conclude with some thoughts about on-going and future considerations for family-oriented migration policies and enhanced social integration.

DEFINING KEY CONCEPTS

The Vanier Institute of the Family defines **family** as: "Any combination of two or more persons who are bound together over time by ties of mutual consent, birth and/or adoption or placement and who, together, assume responsibilities for variant combinations of some of the following: physical maintenance and care of group members; addition of new members through procreation or adoption; socialization of children; Social control of member; production, consumption, distribution of goods and services; affective nurturance – love. . . . The definition includes at least one relationship between an adult and another person (adult or child) – a relationship *over time*, which signifies that a commitment has been made."[5] Importantly, this definition moves beyond the Euro-centric heteronormative definition of the nuclear family and is both more inclusive and arguably more reflective of the myriad forms of families that exist across the globe.

Integration is "a multi-dimensional process, occurring structurally (through access to core rights and status in key institutions such as the labour market, education and through political membership); culturally (through processes of cognitive, cultural, behavioural and attitudinal change of both migrants and receiving societies); socially (through private relationships and group memberships and finally through identificational integration, through which an immigrant feels a sense of belonging to the receiving society" (9).[6] Although integration is critical to the creation of inclusive societies as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, racialized status, gender, sexuality, religion, dis/ability, and other social markers, often enhances migrants' risk of social, economic, and political exclusion.[7]

RECENT TRENDS IN FAMILY-ORIENTED MIGRATION POLICIES

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families enshrine the right to family reunification.[3] In addition, the European Convention on Human Rights includes protection of family life and the right to marry, while Directive 2003/86 of the Council of the European Union affirms the right of third country nationals to family reunification.[3,8] However, these Conventions are interpreted through the lenses of national immigration policies that, crafted in the context of historical, political, economic, and social phenomena, establish the parameters of migrant inclusion and exclusion and help to construct the image of the "desirable" immigrant.[8,9] Two major trends continue to inform migration policies across various immigrant-recipient countries. First, the move, since the 1980s, to managed migration that has led to a proliferation of migrant categories—each with specific requirements and constellation of rights—and all freighted with neoliberal notions of productivity and worth as embedded in human capital theory.[10] Second, the expansion of racism and xenophobia in its various guises that has intensified since 9/11 and has been

reinforced more recently by the multiple refugee crises around the globe.[11] Resultantly, immigration, including family migration, has become more restrictive, depending on nationality, skill-level, age, and income, among other variables.[8]

Although most evidence demonstrates that family members are important sources of social support and aid in migrant integration,[10-14] the moral panic that has arisen about minoritized migrants, in particular, and the attendant concerns about their potentially burgeoning numbers due to family reunification or chain migration, has contributed to increased concerns about family migration. These concerns are often manifest in public discourse as: suspicions about supposed fake (and, in some instances, arranged) marriages especially involving minoritized citizens and permanent residents; consternation about perceived 'traditional' and patriarchal attitudes associated with non-Western households that are juxtaposed against the enlightened and presumably gender-equal Western families; and, tensions about "unproductive" newcomers who may become a drain on collective resources. [3,10,11,15] Often the rationales used to delimit familial migration are coded as feminist and progressive and/or as a means of securitizing the borders.[11] Family migrants—particularly parents and grandparents—are often regarded as obstacles to integration[10] and potential burdens on society[13] while their children are regarded as worthy human capital.[11] These sentiments have contributed to the imposition of a host of conditions including tests of language, civic knowledge, and understandings of local norms and values that contribute to contingent immigrant status and may act to delay integration, which is often regarded not as a mutual process, but one that involves adjustment only on the part of migrants.[8,10]

AN OVERVIEW OF SELECT COUNTRIES' POLICIES

According to the Migration Policy Index, the five most amenable countries for family reunification are Spain, Portugal, Slovenia, Canada, and Sweden; the USA and the UK were ranked 14th and 38th respectively.[16] The immigration status of the principal migrant/sponsor often determines their eligibility to be accompanied or to be later joined by family members. In general, highly-skilled migrants are able to be accompanied by family members whereas temporary workers, with the exception of students, are required to be sojourners.[2,6,10] Family sponsorship requirements are often reduced for refugees; however, Germany and Sweden have recently imposed restrictions on family reunification rights of newly arrived asylum seekers.[4] In Japan, some children of asylum seekers who were born or brought to Japan at a young age have reportedly been offered permanent status as they reach the age of majority, if their parents are willing to return to their home country.[18]

Most countries permit citizens and permanent residents to bring or be reunited with family members, particularly children and spouses[4]; however, the definitions of spouse and child are not uniform. For example, Canada permits the sponsorship of same- and opposite-sex married, common-law, and conjugal[a]partners whereas the USA accepts only legally married couples.[17] In many EU countries, civil partnerships are acceptable although in some nations, including the UK, couples are on probation for two years.[6,11] Many countries require couples regardless of marital status to reside together for a specific period of time.[10,11] Denmark further demands that migrant couples affirm their commitment to gender equality and mutual respect.[10] Generally, only one spouse in a polygynous family is eligible for sponsorship.[11] Concerns about forced and arranged marriage has led to the implementation of age thresholds for spousal migrants that range from 24 years in Denmark, 21 in Austria, Belgium, and the Netherlands, to 18 in most other European countries.[6,8] Age informs the construction of the category of child for the purposes of migration, the limit of which for most EU countries is 18 (15 in Denmark[10]) while the USA accepts unmarried children under 21, Canada under 22, and Australia under 23 years of age.[4] There is general consensus that migrant parents and grandparents must be over 65 years of age to be eligible for sponsorship although the UK allows relations under 65 who are wholly dependent on British family members to join them in exceptional circumstances.[11] Importantly, dependency is often embedded in the sponsorship process. Some countries demand evidence that sponsored relations are unable to care for themselves—whether children or elders—and have no one in proximity to be of

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[a] The category of conjugal partner was initiated in recognition that cohabiting may be difficult or dangerous for some couples; applicants must demonstrate that they are in a serious relationship for a minimum of one year.[17]

material assistance.[10,11]

While all countries ask that migrant sponsors accept financial responsibility for incoming family members in most circumstances,[10,11] the specific demands of migrant sponsors and the processing of sponsorship applications can differ according to migrant status, nationality, and country of resettlement. Sponsors in Belgium, Germany, France, and Sweden must meet housing provisions while the income thresholds required to meet expectations of long-term financial support have, in many cases, increased dramatically.[8] For example to bring a partner and child to the UK, a sponsor must earn £22,400 per annum, a salary that exceeds nearly half of employed Britons.[8] Australia requires an individual sponsoring parents to earn a minimum of $86,606 (AUS) while couples must have an income of $115,475 (AUS).[19] Sponsors may opt for a contributory visa wherein they pay between $50,000-$115,000 (AUS) to facilitate processing of their applications, reducing the wait time from approximately 30 years to two.[4,20] Some countries set quotas on visa allocations for some family members; the USA limits family visas from some countries such that the average processing time for applications from Filipino and Mexican siblings of US citizens is 20 years.[4]

While sponsors must address specific requirements to be reunited with relations, family members too must often meet additional criteria either pre-migration or prior to becoming permanent residents—as many countries initially grant family migrants temporary status.[6,8,10] Depending on the country, family migrants may undergo language testing in the application phase; others assess language skills and knowledge of local contexts and values after partaking in local courses—all of these evaluations are meant to determine family migrants' ability to integrate into local society.[6,8] In the UK, less than half of migrants from Turkey, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Angola and Bangladesh while 95% of those from Canada, the USA, Australia, and New Zealand pass the required tests. South Korea, for example, provides an array of programs including employment training, language courses, and special supports for migrant youth who can access additional programs and supports in school.[21] Despite the availability of instructional assistance and settlement services in many regions, family migrants and their sponsors remain the primary agents of integration.[6,12]

(RE)CONSTRUCTING MIGRANT FAMILIES: THE IMPACTS OF MIGRATION POLICIES

Family migration policies turn on a number of notable issues including: the construction of families; the impact of migrant families on sponsors and society at large; and the consequences for integration. Although more countries have made provisions for same-sex couples and, to a lesser extent, common-law or conjugal partnerships in recent years, most policies employ a Euro-centric heteronormative nuclear definition of the family that does not align with the other familial configurations that may include siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and multiple generations or partners.[7,10,11,22] Strasser, et al.'s[10] study of migrant families in Europe revealed that migrants, especially women, lamented the truncation of their family networks due to enforced or prolonged family separation. Family members are not only a source of support, migrants also want to fulfil their responsibilities to their kin, therefore their proximity is vital.[10] Prolonged familial separation can have deleterious effects on family members, adding stress to intimate and parent-child relationships and creating or exacerbating economic difficulties.[14,22,23,24] Migrant women separated from their children bear the greatest burden of guilt and stress as they contend with maternal discourses that reinforce the notion that they have abandoned their children in pursuit of personal economic or social gain.[3,23,25] Families awaiting reunification may feel unsettled and find themselves devoting more resources to the immigration process and transnational relationships with kin rather than on integration in their new homeland.[3] Notably, families who are reunited after long periods of separation may experience unanticipated challenges as household roles are reconfigured and the dreams of idealized family life together are not realized.[14,23]

Overall, the presence of kin can enhance migrants' economic and social well-being.[3,22] Some public remain concerned that family members, particularly non-European relations, will encourage migrants, particularly women, to resist the modernizing influences of their host society, or that mature migrants will over burden healthcare resources.[10,22] Others maintain that family migrants facilitate integration as they deploy networks established by their sponsors while children help families bridge communities through school and related activities, yet others fear that family migration will reproduce and reinforce ethnocultural segregation.[8] Interestingly, a Canadian study found that the presence of family and friends were deemed more important in determining where to live than being

situated in a co-ethnic community.[26]

Integration may be viewed through three lenses: social integration that refers to participation in institutions, cultural integration that pertains to learning about the dominant values in the host society, and identity integration that highlights migrants' feelings of belonging to a group.[27] The positive impact of family reunification, however, may reinforce the notion that migrants themselves are responsible for their own integration successes or failures—sentiments that fail both to consider integration as a process of mutual adaptation and to acknowledge the myriad challenges that migrant families encounter settling in a new country. [6,7,11,28] Racialized migrants and their families face particular challenges entering the labour market, securing work that is commensurate with their education and experience, locating decent, affordable housing, and contending with multiple forms of personal and systemic racism; importantly, these experiences lead to alienation rather than facilitate social inclusion and integration and have demonstrable intergenerational effects.[7,11,22,28] Settlement services can be of assistance[22]; however, many countries have reduced their investment in integration programs due to austerity measures and to the assumption that the implementation of pre-entry criteria pertaining to income support and language ability are sufficient to guarantee integration.[6] Craig[28] found that migrants fare better where immigration policies are less restrictive and where they encounter less racism, maintaining that: "[U]ntil this potentially disastrous phenomenon of racism is first acknowledged and then effectively addressed at European, National and community levels, much of the vast amount of energy put into the integration of migrants, summarized here, will just be wasted" (64).

INTERSECTIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Family class immigration policies are both informed by and help reinforce classed, gendered, ethnicized/racialized, and religious stereotypes and divisions. This cursory overview of select policies offers evidence as to how migrants and their families who are not categorized as highly-skilled are subject to different regulations and surveillance.[11] Furthermore, income thresholds set for sponsors underscore how less affluent individuals are in essence prevented from family reunification[8,28]; this is particularly problematic as racialized people (migrants and native-born) and women in particular are pooled in the lowest echelons of the labour market.[7,8]

Immigration procedures also tend to highlight single principal applicants (generally male), thereby relegating other accompanying or reuniting relations to dependents who are both presumed and sometimes prevented from making economic contributions to migrant households due to immigration regulations.[7,13,19] The dependencies and subsequent inequalities that sponsorship agreements generate can be unhealthy for family members and may be problematic in additional ways.[6] For example, if a sponsor loses her/his job or dies, remaining kin may readily fall into poverty.[22] Moreover, while non-migrant families may have different living arrangements, migrant families are often required to cohabitate, which may be particularly troubling in instances of abuse.[10]

Delimiting family composition in the context of immigration policies and the obstacles being reunited with parents and grandparents has the greatest impact on migrants from the Asia-Pacific and other non-European regions of the globe.[12,20] As these kin often assist with care-work generally carried out by women, their absence is particularly gendered as it may *inter alia* inhibit women's ability to participate in the formal labour market.[20]

CANADA: A CASE STUDY

As the second largest country in the world with a small and aging population, immigration is crucial to Canada,[22] yet in recent years, those categorized as low-skilled workers are increasingly ineligible for permanent resettlement[12,17] and are unable to be accompanied by family members despite the evidence that earlier iterations of immigration programs that embraced newcomers with a broader array of skills fared well over the long-term.[7] Highly-skilled workers and foreign students are able to be accompanied by family members; spouses are also granted an open work visa.[17] Refugees who are separated from family have one-year to reunite without needing to undergo the formal sponsorship process.[22] Canadian citizens and permanent residents are eligible to sponsor a spouse, common-law partner, conjugal partner, dependent children and parents or grandparents; however, applications for intimate

partners and children are prioritized.[17] As of April 28, 2018, the Government of Canada removed the demand that partners who do not have children and who have not lived together for more than two years be required to reside together.[29] Sponsors must sign an undertaking to take financial responsibility for family members for three years for a partner or dependent children over 22 years of age or ten years for a child under 22 or until they turn 22—the requirements are slightly different for the Province of Quebec.[29] Significantly, there are no income requirements for the sponsorship of partners and children.[29]

There are, however, income thresholds for parents and grandparents based on the annual Low-Income Cut-Off plus 30% for the prior three years, with consideration as to the number of family members, such that a couple would need to earn just under $40,000 CAD to be eligible.[29] Moreover, sponsors must agree to support their parents or grandparents for 20 years.[11] An annual quota of 5,000 parent and grandparent visas was instituted in 2014 following a moratorium on applications in 2011; demand for the visas was so great that the quota was filled by February 3 of that year.[11] At present, the quota has been set at 10,000 and applications are chosen by lottery although the backlog of applications is such that the applications from January 2014 are being processed as of April 2018.[4,29] A newly developed 'super visa' for parents/grandparents was launched concomitant to the levying of the quota system. the visa is valid for ten years and allows multiple entries; however, it must be renewed every two years, requiring visa holders to return home, and meet medical criteria, even though sponsors are required to purchase health insurance for these kin.[12,13] Chen and Thorpe[12] maintain that the super visa program entrenches gendered, classed, and racialized inequalities and that European and American applicants have a higher approval rate than for other nationalities.

The prolonged wait times for family reunification and the more restrictive requirements and quotas have contributed to a decline in family migration.[22] The implications for sponsors in Canada is significant. According to Bragg and Wong,[13] immigrant families, especially women, were burdened as they tried to maintain relationships across borders. Moreover, the absence of kin and inflexibility of childcare arrangements meant that some forewent paid labour to engage full-time in care-work. They also longed for their children to enjoy the companionship of their elders and some noted that without the presence of their parents, they felt as though they were merely visiting Canada rather than settling there—which has obvious implications for integration.[13]

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Immigration policies in much of the world are informed by neoliberal ideologies, which values market-oriented productive labour resulting in programs that facilitate the resettlement of highly-skilled (and generally male) immigrants. In contrast, accompanying or reuniting family members (as well as lesser skilled individuals, and refugees), and are construed as potential burdens on society and their contributions—social and economic—are largely invisible; ironically, their perceived 'inaction' is also a result of policies in some countries that prohibit them from entering the labour market. The presence of kin appears to be beneficial to the well-being of migrant households, aiding in integration and community-building. Revising immigration policies to accommodate the reunification and resettlement of families is vital to creating more inclusive and stable societies.

Drawing on the review presented here, I offer a number of recommendations for discussion and future action:

- ***Embrace a more inclusive definition of family:*** Intimate partners in a stable relationship should be included regardless of marital status, or gender presentation. Canada's policy on same-sex, common-law, and conjugal partners offers an excellent example—particularly as the latter category acknowledges that co-residence may not be possible for some couples; however, in Canada, as elsewhere, parents, grandparents, siblings, cousins, or other relations, could also be considered immediate family. Moreover, children are regarded as independent adults at a particular age, which may not correspond with how all cultures deem children's transition to adulthood. The Eurocentric concept of the family comprised of a (married) couple and their children does not necessarily reflect the diversity of familial arrangements that may exist in the host society, yet, this is the template that informs most immigration policy.

- *Reconsider the requirements of sponsorship agreements and restrictions placed on family migrants*: Sponsorship agreements reinforce dependency within the family unit. While there is a rationale to ensuring that newly arrived migrants do not extract from public resources to which they did not input, the long tenure of many of these undertakings fails to acknowledge the range of contributions that those dependents make from under-valued and invisible care labour to formal labour market participation. Facilitating family migrants' ability to enter the labour market and participate in social institutions and programs can enhance both the economic and social well-being of the family and their sense of belonging to their receiving country. Moreover, the income requirements for sponsorship, have made family reunification out of reach for many migrants. Canada again can serve as a partial exemplar on some of these points as sponsorship for immediate family (partner/children) does not require a minimum income, partners are able to work upon arrival, and the income thresholds established for the sponsorship of other family members are currently set at less than half of national median income. The length of time that sponsors are required to support family members, however, has been, in some cases, extended significantly.

- *Remove mandatory cohabitation:* Undoubtedly countries want and need to ensure that relationships are bona fide; however, compelling migrant families to cohabit for a specific period of time can have untoward consequences. For example, if one member of the household wanted to move for a work opportunity, while others are bound to a location due to school or work commitments, they could not be afforded this option Depending upon country and the composition of the family, if a migrant family had difficulties finding suitable housing, they may or may not be allowed to split up the household. Finally, in instances of abuse, victims might be or—where there are legal options available—*feel* to be unable to leave their sponsors' household. As noted earlier, Canada has very recently repealed this requirement. This regulation targets migrant families and holds them to a different set of rules than their native-born counterparts.

- *Find ways to reduce processing times:* Prolonged family separation has consequences—economic, social, psychological— for multiple generations of migrant families. These costs must be incorporated into nations' calculations of their investments in immigration policy resources. Asking families to endure wait times of 20 to 30 years is perhaps a polite means of declining certain forms of family reunification, which for applicants may have the effect of increasing their sense of social exclusion as well as affecting the distribution of domestic care work and formal labour market participation.

- *Invest in integration and attend to social inclusion:* Integration is a multi-sided, multi-sited, and multi-generational process. Immigration can and does enrich receiving countries and integration processes that embrace mutual learning have the potential to generate more inclusive and stable communities. Investment in integration must include but move beyond the expansion of settlement and language programs, but also permeate other institutions ranging from education and health to government services and the private sector. The elimination of the social, economic, and housing barriers that migrant families face is crucial to integration and social inclusion. Importantly, social exclusion has significant repercussions for subsequent generations.

- *Deploy an intersectional lens in policy making and program evaluation*: Attending to the mutually-constituted and intersecting markers of gender, socioeconomic class, ethnicity/racialized status/nationality, sexuality, disability, age, migration status, amongst other factors, that situate individuals and groups of individuals in the social hierarchy is critical to understanding the implications of policies and programs on sectors of the population. Canada, for example, is meant to employ Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) in policy-making and program evaluation. GBA+ is "an analytical tool used to assess how diverse groups of women, men and gender-diverse people may experience policies, programs and initiatives. The "plus" in GBA+ acknowledges that GBA goes beyond biological (sex) and socio-cultural (gender) differences. We all have multiple identity factors that intersect to make us who we are; GBA+ also considers many other identity factors, like race, ethnicity, religion,

age, and mental or physical disability."[30] Although the current government supports this initiative, its uptake across all government departments has been uneven. While intersectional analysis may be more preferable in part because it does not privilege one identity marker over another—and in some cases racialized status or indigeneity (interacting with other variables) may be more salient than gender—GBA+ has the advantage of being well established and rolled out in institutional settings. Applying either GBA+ or intersectional analysis to immigration policies will highlight intended and unintended consequences of policies and programs for migrants and their families and compel nation-states to reflect on the kind of society they wish to become.

- ***Implement a longitudinal, multi-generational research agenda:*** Countries need more information on the long-term impact of their migrant family immigration and integration policies and programs that includes migrant family perspectives and moves beyond basic economic indicators such as labour market participation. If as Craig[28] maintains more open policies lead to better outcomes, then this must be further documented—or with the accumulation of further research data, nuanced or refuted. Whatever the results, nation-states must not only use this information to inform evidence-based policy-making, they must be actively engaged in countering racism and xenophobia by acknowledging the contributions of migrants and their families to their countries and by working with all to create and maintain inclusive societies.

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