

*What Do We Do Now?*  
**Qualitative Research on Immigrant Women's Access to Skills Training Provided by  
the Public Service in Canada**

by

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## **Abstract**

Women worldwide choose to immigrate to Canada inspired by other immigrants' experiences and immigration news. There are many reasons why women choose to emigrate; most are following a promise of socio-economic improvement, but for some, that promise is not easily realized. There is a need to understand what barriers keep newcomer women from socio-economic insertion once they have settled in Canada. This research aims to explore the services provided by the public sector in Canada to immigrant women, to support their skills development for successful socio-economic integration. The study investigates persistent barriers experienced by immigrant women in the settlement process that remain despite engaging with the available public aid. The research follows a framework analysis method which facilitates discovery and highlight themes from qualitative data on available research on immigration, socio-economic insertion, and skill development topics in Canada. Overall, this research aims to build awareness of immigrant women's needs and their access to public resources intended to facilitate their effective socio-economic integration. The framework analysis on existing research allows for a mapping of themes found in articles related to gender, immigration, socio-economic insertion, and skill development, documenting systemic barriers impeding the settlement of immigrant women. The analysis of the data outlines the concept of the *survival job* (a job with the sole intention of providing quick income to subsist), while exposing the limited options public service programs have for high-skilled women and mothers. The research also uncovers ways in which family responsibilities felt upon arrival have a significant impact on both socio-economic integration and mental health. This research is important in that it provides findings relevant to policy makers, by identifying and analyzing gender-specific barriers present during the immigration process. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge on Canadian immigration and the role of Canadian public services, like public libraries and community centres, in providing sufficient and efficient settlement support to immigrants.

**Keywords:** Canada, immigrant women, socio-economic insertion, public services, settlement services, and skill development.

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## 1. Introduction

Globally, a growing number of women are seeking better socio-economic opportunities outside their home countries (Migration Data Portal, 2023), migrating to major capitalistic countries to provide themselves and their families with options that may be challenging to access within their home countries (UN Women, 2020). However, there are conflicting discourses and an overall lack of research focused on immigrant women's access to post-migration skills training to best manage socio-economic integration for themselves and their families. This research explores the services provided by the public sector in Canada for immigrant women, to support their skills development for successful socio-economic integration, and aims to answer:

- RQ1: How is the Canadian public sector supporting immigrant women's skills development for successful socio-economic integration?
- RQ2: What barriers do immigrant women still encounter in their settlement process, even after engaging with public assistance?

This section will introduce the study by first discussing the background and context, followed by the research problem, the research aims, objectives and questions, the significance of the research, and finally, the limitations.

As a multicultural country, Canada promotes itself as a society willing to engage with newcomers, sharing social and political benefits as equals. Broadcasting news showcases the growing number of immigrants accepted into Canada annually (see, for example, D'Andrea, 2023; Levinson-King, 2022; Van Dyk, 2023), and more dedicated websites (see, for example, [www.moving2canada.com](http://www.moving2canada.com); [www.ruteimmigration.com](http://www.ruteimmigration.com)) provide women worldwide with enough information to choose Canada as their migration country.

According to the latest census profile (Statistics Canada, 2023), Canada is now host to around 8 million immigrants. Between 2016 and 2021, the country welcomed 1 million immigrants, half of whom were women, from all around the world: the United States, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Around 2 million women who have immigrated to Canada are in their main working years (OECD, 2023), between the ages of 25 and 44.

To immigrate to Canada, the government follows a selection process, screening, and setup (Government of Canada, 2023a). Overall, there are three admission category programs: economic immigrants, immigrants sponsored by family, and refugees. Following the Canadian government's website on admission categories, the programs are defined as follows:

- Economic immigrants are those selected “for their ability to contribute to Canada’s economy through their ability to meet labour market needs” (Statistics Canada, 2022a).
- Immigrants sponsored by family are those “sponsored by a Canadian citizen or permanent resident and were granted permanent resident status on the basis of their relationship either as the spouse, partner, parent, grand-parent, child or other relative of this sponsor” (Statistics Canada, 2022a).
- Refugees are those who are “granted permanent resident status on the basis of a well-founded fear of returning to their home country” (Statistics Canada, 2022a).

According to Statistics Canada (2023), women made 3.5 million applications for the economic program, family sponsorship program, and refugee program between 1980 and 2021. Only 22.8% of them were the principal applicant for the economic program; most women arrived in Canada as secondary applicants (31%) or were sponsored by family (29.6%). Only 15.2% of them arrived under the refugee program; a few immigrant women arrived as “other” immigrants (1.3%). These results confirm what Momani et al. (2021) and Drolet (2022) point out: most women arrive in Canada as dependents of their partners; choosing immigration programs considers family, education, finances, and social roles traditionally followed in their home country.

Only one of the admission programs—economic immigrant admission—clearly expresses the relevance of immigrants’ background experience, education, pre-migration skills and knowledge for the Canadian government. Work skills are not considered in the visa application for sponsored family members and refugees.

Federal policies encourage highly skilled and educated immigrants to join the Canadian labour market, yet provincial policies fail to supply equal access to jobs. According to the Multiculturalism Act of 1985 and the various gender equality policies in place in Canada, provincial companies and recruiters should recognize immigrants’ international experience and allow them to integrate into the Canadian economic fabric (Van Dyk, 2019). However, researchers like Drolet (2022), Mata (1985), Wilson-Forsberg (2015), and Banerjee et al. (2021) have documented immigrants’ struggles post-migration finding jobs; archaic processes and discourses followed by recruiters and provincial hiring institutions frequently impede immigrant women from growth in socio-economic opportunities (Petri, 2010; UN Women, 2017).



From the 2021 census profile (Statistics Canada, 2023) it is known that almost 7 million educated women are currently living in Canada, and 1.3 million of them have international education; in other words, they completed their postsecondary studies outside Canada. Public services such as community centres and public libraries have implemented settlement programs to support immigrants with some of their needs (for example, language skills); however, these programs overlook key services that immigrant women need for successful socio-economic integration, such as affordable childcare, training in specific trades or more advanced training levels in available programs.

While the Canadian federal government continues to increase the immigration goal each year, provincial governments face a collection of skilled immigrants in low-wage jobs. We must ask whether public support is valid enough to enhance immigrant women's socio-economic status. There is a lack of research on not-principal applicants' socio-economic barriers post-migration and how the current public system supports their integration. By ensuring the effective integration for immigrants, countries' economies and their societies' cultural fabric will notably improve, but if immigrants continue to experience barriers to integration, the risk of poverty and vulnerability increases, translating to unsafe societies and unproductive economies.

This research follows a qualitative design, aiming to explore the services provided by the public sector in Canada to immigrant women, to support their skills development for successful socio-economic integration. Thus, the research questions for this paper are as follows:

- RQ1: How is the Canadian public sector supporting immigrant women's skills development for successful socio-economic integration?
- RQ2: What barriers do immigrant women still encounter in their settlement process, even after engaging with public assistance?

The objectives of the paper are to collect and codify 21 existing research papers published between 2010 and 2022, with topics on women, immigration, socio-economic insertion, and skills development in Canada. The paper analyzes existing resources examining Canadian public support options offered to immigrant women for skills development, and it identifies the persistent barriers immigrant women face, even after utilizing the public support available. Several authors explore the immigrant barriers post-immigration with regard to looking for employment (see, for example, Banerjee et al., 2021 or Bonikowska & Hou, 2017), but more research is needed to capture economic barriers linked to immigration admission programs

(secondary applicants to the economic program, sponsored family program, or refugee program), considering credential recognition impacts even the principal economic applicants and that at least 20% of women in Canada have international post-secondary education (Statistics Canada, 2023). Furthermore, acknowledging the systemic barriers, the public sector has implemented settlement programs to support immigrants with their needs, but the programs are limited when immigrant women are looking for training in specific trades, higher levels of training and education, or affordable childcare, for example. As a result of the lack of resources, women are forced to accept low-paid or physically demanding jobs, or to work long hours (UN Women, 2013).

This research is relevant to the Canadian government's immigration agenda to welcome at least half a million new immigrants each year until 2025. Public support must be sufficient to ensure that both the government and immigrants' expectations are met, with successful socio-economic integration as the result. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge on Canadian immigration and the role of Canadian public services, like public libraries and community centres, in providing sufficient and efficient settlement support to immigrants. By identifying and analyzing gender-specific barriers present during the immigration process, this research aims to build awareness of immigrant women's needs and their ability to access public resources with the goal of quick and effective socio-economic integration. The paper will help address the current lack of gender-specific research and providing real-world value to policy makers and possibly, public service staff.

This study has some limitations. The research analysis covers the entire country of Canada; as such, it lacks detailed analysis that could come from gathering data in specific provinces or from rural towns. The research intended first-person data gathering; due to no participation, all findings and discussions are based on pre-existing data. The research focuses on the barriers women face post-immigration; as such, the analysis does not explore pre-migration socio-economic.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In Section 1, the context of the study has been introduced. The research objectives and questions have been identified, and the value of the research has been presented. The limitations of the study have also been discussed.

In Section 2, the existing literature will be reviewed to highlight the impact of women of Canadian history and the establishment of immigration practices; these are presented with a

view to informing current perspectives. Moreover, governmental and policy concepts are addressed; the section will explain the difference between migration and immigration, clarifying the immigration process, visas, and the admission programs available to perspective migrants to Canada. The literature review concludes with an overview of previous training and certification programs offered by the public service to immigrants to help them to access better job opportunities.

Section 3 will present the qualitative methodology used for data analysis. Topics related to immigration, socio-economic insertion, and skills development in Canada will be explored. By following Goldsmith's (2021) publication *Using Framework Analysis in Applied Qualitative Research*, this research aims to explore the services provided by the public sector in Canada to immigrant women, to support their skills development for successful socio-economic integration. The chosen method will help discover and highlight qualitative data from previous research, allowing the mapping of themes that will then provide data for the results section.

In Section 4, the findings are presented in the form of a summary of data gathered from the framework analysis. This section will update information about systemic barriers, documenting the available public services programs focused on helping immigrant women's settlement; revealing the concept of survival jobs (jobs with the sole intention of providing a quick income to survive); and tracing how family-related circumstances impact the mental health of immigrant women.

Section 5 discusses the underlying gender tokenism discourse applied by provincial recruitment offices, which ultimately forces women to be stay-at-home mothers or to remain fully dependent on their partners. The section questions the role of the public service in providing immigrant women with a vast variety of options for skills development, with the goal of ensuring effective socio-economic insertion in the new society. It discusses the existing public services settlement programs and support, which are trying to close the gap between governments' (federal and provincial) credential acknowledgement. The last section concludes the study by summarizing the key research findings in relation to the research aims and research questions, as well as the value and contribution of the study. It will also review the limitations of the study and will propose opportunities for future research.

## **2. Literature Review**

This section will review the existing literature, highlighting the impact of Canadian history on women, and the establishment of immigration practices that have been used throughout the years. The goal here is to contextualize the current situation and to assist in understanding current problems. Moreover, governmental and policy concepts are addressed; the difference between migration and immigration is explained; and the immigration process, visas, and the admission programs available to migrate to Canada are clarified. The literature review concludes with an overview of previous training and certification programs offered by the public service to immigrants to allow them to access better job opportunities. The resources considered for the literature review consist of high-quality assets from reliable sources, such as academic journals, doctoral dissertations, governmental websites, and peer-reviewed articles. This section is organized as follows: 2.1 traces the history of immigration in Canada; 2.2 outlines governmental and policy concepts; and 2.3 describes public service and settlement programs.

### ***2.1 Immigration in Canada***

It is common knowledge that Canada is a nation founded on immigration. In their exploration of Canadian immigration policy, Green and Green (2004) point out that large-scale immigration to Canada started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with a growing number of migrants to western Canada. In 1910, determined to ensure immigrants safety and protection from exploitation, the Canadian government proclaimed the Immigration Act of 1910 (Van Dyk, 2019). Social architects of this time gave careful consideration to policy development regarding women's roles under the lens of immigration; as Chilton (2016) expresses, women were seen quite literally as "the mothers of future Canadian generations" by the social architects of the time, and it was considered imperative to provide more attention for them than their counterparts, immigrant men.

World War I reduced male immigration due to conscription and the subjective and racist processes of border patrols; women were encouraged to migrate but also faced incriminatory surveys by the border patrols and discriminatory workplace practices. Green and Green (2004) explain the importance global governments had upon the availability of farmers and "female domestics" in order to ensure food access and caregivers in the case of a recession. Women

immigrating to Canada during the WWI years were asked to fill domestic service and healthcare roles (Chilton, 2016). However, not all immigrant women stayed in these expected work roles, and some took advantage of opportunities to work in service roles traditionally filled by men. Because of these women, the Canadian government was compelled to establish the Canadian Department of Immigration and Colonization, intending to regulate the work of immigrant women in the trades (Chilton, 2016). Nevertheless, despite government recognition of the presence of immigrant women in the trades, discrimination against them inside the factories set a different tone: most women were kept unskilled by their employers to prevent them from seeking higher wages (Hale, 2013).

The Great Depression came in by the 1920s, impacting all political, social, and economic levels; worldwide, a social disease of racism and discrimination was growing, and Canada was no exception. Green and Green (2004) explain how the immigrant's country of origin determined whether that person's application for a permit or visa would be accepted or rejected. This discriminatory practice applied to immigration laws, to business (no selling or buying contracts from specific countries) and travel.

After World War II ended, Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King was determined to end existing racist and hostile immigration laws. The reason for his eagerness to solve the issue lay more in economic interests than social concerns (Green & Green, 2004), but the intention was to solve both social and economic issues. Canadian policies allowed for the administration of very strict and invasive immigration questionnaires by the immigration patrol, searching for details of women's sexual histories (Chilton, 2016). Even with intrusive immigration protocols, women kept being encouraged to immigrate to Canada, with the added benefit of accessing public funds. The public fund benefit was valid only when immigrant women accepted and followed strict moral practices, becoming mothers and homemakers, and avoiding public scandal (Chilton, 2016). On the other hand, immigrant men had no job limitations and did not go under judgment due to public scandal (Green & Green, 2004; Van Dyk, 2019).

In more recent years, because of the wide range of cultures and ethnicities immigrating to Canada, the government has recognized the need to acknowledge the different cultures. In 1985, Canada passed the Multicultural Act, intended to recognize the many cultural and ethnic facets becoming the building blocks of Canadian society, but also aiming to protect cultural heritage, reduce discrimination, and encourage the practice of multicultural programs and

initiatives (Van Dyk, 2019). Nowadays, Canada's multicultural landscape attracts immigrants and refugees from all over the world. By 2022, Canada welcomed almost half a million new permanent residents, despite the COVID-19 global pandemic (Thevenot, 2022) this shows the recognition of Canada as a preferred immigration country and the necessity and importance of immigrants in Canada's evolving labour force (Reitz, 2021; Thevenot, 2023a, 2023b).

Nevertheless, history has shown that the Canadian government had little interest in providing equal opportunities for immigrant men and women. Being an immigrant has some discriminatory discourses related to race, nationality, immigration status, and gender. Women face a complex lens of scrutiny questioning their societal role (for example, as a care worker, mother, sister, sex worker, victim, refugee, or scientist), thus confronting difficulties related to their socio-economic insertion (Papillon, 2002; UN Women, 2017). As shown by Chilton (2016), Hale (2013), and the UN Women paper on *Women Working Worldwide* (2017), immigrant women are quietly forced to perform mostly domestic or caregiver work, with less access to, or with discriminatory practices in, trades like construction, agriculture, and manufacturing. This phenomenon is commonly referred to by UN Women as the "feminization of migration." The concept can be defined as the increasing number of women leaving their home countries and migrating to other countries for better economic opportunities; the definition also contemplates the increasing number of women shifting society roles (Paiewonsky, 2009).

Although the feminization of immigration has become more frequent, destination countries continue to set male-focused recruitment quotas; as seen in Chui's research (2011), Canada is one of the preferred destination countries requiring workers in male-oriented skills. Chui's research explains that at least "one in five women living in Canada were born outside Canada" (p. 5); the paper conclusions project that by 2026, 25% of Canada's female population will comprise immigrant women living and working here.

## ***2.2 Governmental and Policy Concepts***

*Migration* is a global phenomenon encompassing the act of moving from one region to another. *Immigration* falls under the concept of migration; according to Blackwood (2022), to immigrate entails the act of changing the country of residency, with the intention of settling permanently; on the other hand, migration is a broader concept, and is not necessarily intended to be

permanent. Now, more than ever, people are moving for many reasons, and it is common to see large capitalistic countries preferred by individuals as immigration destinations, Canada being one of them. Each year, the Canadian federal government sets immigration goals considering the country's socio-economic needs. By following the Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act proclaimed in 2001, the federal government considers three immigrants admission categories:

- Economic class immigrants are those selected “for their ability to contribute to Canada’s economy through their ability to meet labour market needs” (Statistics Canada, 2022a). Visas available for this category are skilled worker, Québec-selected skilled worker, business immigration, provincial nominees, and Canadian experience class (Gogia & Slade, 2016).
- Family class immigrants are those who arrive “sponsored by a Canadian citizen or permanent resident and were granted permanent resident status on the basis of their relationship either as the spouse, partner, parent, grand-parent, child or other relative of this sponsor” (Statistics Canada, 2022a). Visas available for this category are spouses, partners, dependent children, and other eligible relatives (Gogia & Slade, 2016).
- Refugees are those who are “granted permanent resident status on the basis of a well-founded fear of returning to their home country” (Statistics Canada, 2022a).

According to Statistics Canada (2023), 3.5 million applications for the economic program, family sponsorship program, and refugee program were made by women between the years 1980 and 2021. Only 22.8% of these women were the principal applicant for the economic program. Most women arrived in Canada as secondary applicants (31%) or were sponsored by family (29.6%); only 15.2% of them arrived under the refugee program; a small number of immigrant women arrived as “other” immigrants (1.3%). This data reinforces what Drolet (2022), Statistics Canada (2022b), and UN Women (2013) found in their gender immigration research: more women are secondary applicants or part of other categories, one reason being the certainty of visa access. Of the total number of immigrant women in Canada, at least half of them (around 2 million) arrived in Canada in their working years (between 15 and 64 years old) (OECD, 2023; Statistics Canada, 2023), yet not many apply as principal applicants in the economic category.

Equal gender policy in Canada has been in the works for a long time, from 1929, the year in which women were officially declared as *persons*, to 1960, when they won the right to vote, to

1977, when the Canadian Human Rights Act was declared. History built the foundations for recent policies aiming for gender equality with the Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) toolkit in 2011 (Government of Canada, 2022). The toolkit study and improves diversity issues by applying it to public institutions' strategies, policies, social programs, and legislation to focus on and strive for gender equality (Government of Canada, 2022). With the implementation of GBA Plus, policy makers and institutions have had more insight and information; this helps them to respect and truly engage with gender equality and its different axes, which impact social experiences by encouraging intersectionality perspectives, such as disability, race, and other demographics (Government of Canada, 2022). However, even though the toolkit aims for equality between genders there is much more work to do to achieve gender equality in immigration policy.

### ***2.3 Public Service and Settlement Programs***

According to the Collins English Dictionary (2023), public service refers to “activities and jobs which are provided or paid for by a government, especially through the civil service.” The institutions considered part of the public sector vary from country to country, but in general the public sector constitutes the military, police, public transit, infrastructure care, public education, healthcare, and of course, the government itself (including federal, provincial, and municipal governments). All these services are intended to be available to everyone, despite the individual's income, ability, background, education level, immigration status, or gender (Tamara, n.d.).

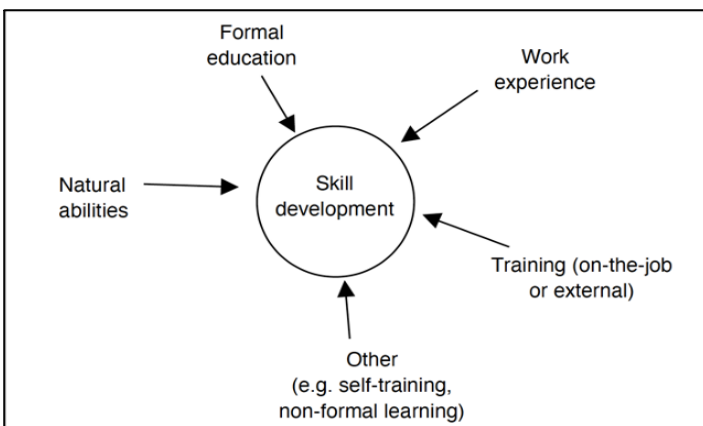
In Canada, the public sector is actively involved in policy development, implementation, and promotion of social inclusion (Caidi & Allard, 2005; Doerr, 2013). Canada's Multiculturalism Act (1985) declares the Canadian federal government to be responsible for the equal access, promotion, and participation of all citizens and communities; it is responsible for affording access to skills training and further education to help eliminate social exclusion, and for encouraging respect and protection of immigrants in the name of diversity.

Existing research (Alboim, 2002; Brigham, 1998; Caidi et al., 2007; Li, 2003; Papillon, 2002; Polèse, 1999) shows positive results with immigrants' integration into the Canadian economy when appropriate cultural spaces are provided, with appropriate resources and skills training offered by public services such as community centres and public libraries. The OECD



(2001) explains how individuals acquire or improve skills, as shown in Figure 1: by formal education (in person or online); by nurturing natural abilities; by training, putting into practice formal education and natural abilities; with work experience (the more time you spend at work, the more experience you gain); and through self-development initiatives (López-Bassols, 2022).

**Figure 1** *How Skills Are Acquired*



Source: López-Bassols (2022)

Public libraries and community centres can provide training and other forms of skill development, affording social inclusion and justifying being the most common sources reached by immigrants looking for multicultural information post-migration (Caidi & Allard, 2005; Wang et al., 2020). Successful integration into society depends on how immigrants can access content in an easy and practical way; immigrants are not only less familiar with local institutions and practices, but they also tend to lack command of the English language (Caidi & Allard, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2022b). More immigrant women are looking to public services for settlement orientation, language training, and skills training programs. Language is one of the most common aids to integration, with one third of adult immigrants needing to overcome language barriers to achieve inclusion in Canadian socio-economic life (Statistics Canada, 2022b).

Followed by language skills, immigrants look to the public libraries and community centres for work skills development. In Canada, around 84% of jobs currently require the use of a computer and basic technical skills; even low-skilled jobs require some level of digital literacy (Essential Skills Ontario, n.d.). Multiple studies (Hafkin & Huyer, 2007; Sandys, 2005; Smythe

& Breshears, 2017) demonstrate that women experience disadvantages compared to men in accessing technology skills training, resulting in fewer opportunities for development and socio-economic growth. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2001), while these technology skills are crucial to economic growth, there is no consensus on which skills and competencies are most important for immigrants to learn and/or certify in to ensure a quicker path to socio-economic inclusion in the host countries.

As part of a federal government initiative to improve technological skills across the country, the Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada Office planned to broaden the internet infrastructure, ensuring 80% of the population of Canada will have access to ultrafast internet by 2025 (ISED, 2020). Though this motion grants near-universal access to the internet, the plan of action addressing the problem of digital literacy in rural areas of the country remains unclear (Hadziristic, 2017; Reid, 2021). Without proper training in the use of technology, immigrants struggle to find jobs, thereby limiting their possibilities of building professional networks and reducing their economic activity and creative contributions to society (Bejaković & Mrnjavac, 2020).

### **3. Methodology**

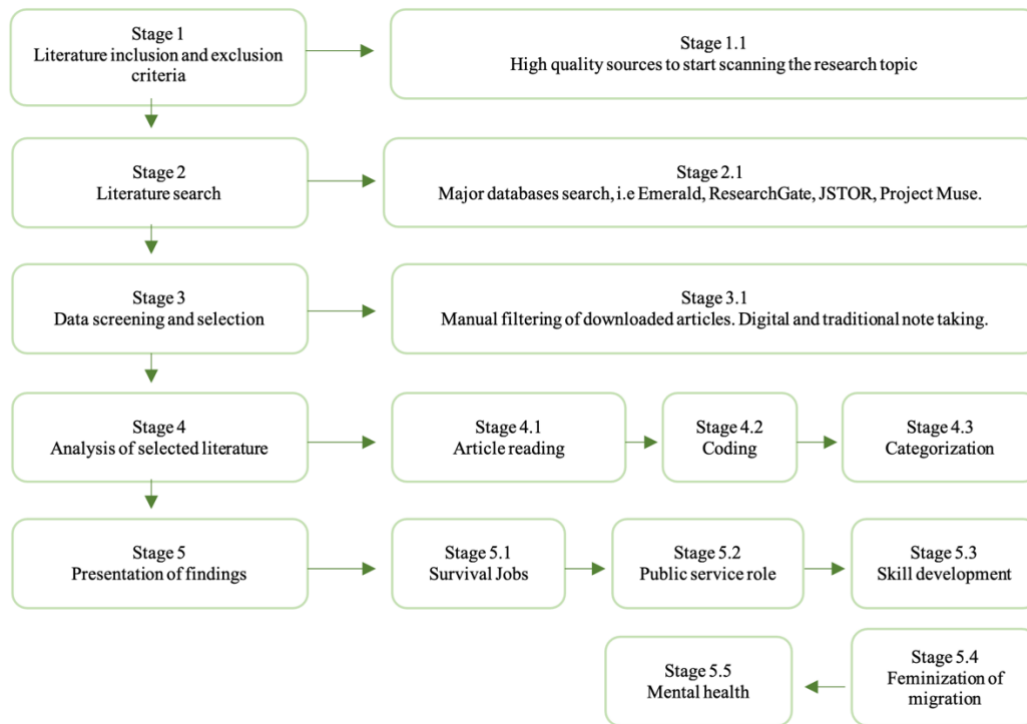
This section will present the qualitative methodology used for data analysis. By following Goldsmith's (2021) publication *Using Framework Analysis in Applied Qualitative Research*, this research aims to explore the services provided by the public sector in Canada to immigrant women, to support their skills development for successful socio-economic integration. The chosen method will help to identify and highlight qualitative data from previous research, allowing the mapping of themes that will then provide data for the results section.

According to Goldsmith (2021), a framework analysis can be defined as a comparative form of themes, which uses an organized structure of inductive and deductive topics. The overall objective of framework analysis is to identify, describe, and interpret key patterns within and across themes, interpreted from the data. Gaining more interest in multiple fields, this method is mostly used for government, social, and health research, ensuring quality standards in qualitative evaluation (Yee et al., 2022). The principal characteristics of this method are five stages designed to be followed sequentially, as well as the use of a matrix output (Goldsmith 2021; Yee et al., 2022).

Chosen for the versatility of the matrix, this method virtually displays themes and sources in a chart and facilitates the visualization and analysis of the relationship between the topics and authors. The matrix offers a deeper analysis with a holistic perspective of the themes. Goldsmith (2021) explains the method as consisting of five sequential steps; these are listed below and are illustrated in Figure 2.

1. Data familiarization
2. Identifying a thematic framework
3. Indexing all study data against the framework
4. Charting to summarize the indexed data
5. Mapping and interpretation of patterns found

**Figure 2 A Five-Stage Systematic Literature Review Process Flow\***



\*The flow references Goldsmith’s work. The information displayed follows data from this research.

These stages are explained below in relation to the research.

### 3.1 Data Familiarization

Goldsmith (2021) states that data familiarization provides an initial understanding of any available data. The time allotted for the researcher to reach a reasonable understanding of the data may vary. For this research, data familiarization took place over two months, and included reading articles and sources related to the topic.

As a result of data familiarization, it became imperative to establish quality standards for the research analysis. To ensure the value of analysis and data gathering, the research materials selected consisted of high-quality assets from reliable sources, such as academic journals, Ph.D. dissertations, annual reports from non-profit organizations, and government reports. The selected documents were also required to be published between the years 2010 and 2022. This chosen

timeframe ensured up-to-date information and allowed the exploration of the GBA Plus toolkit’s influence on research and policy development.

The researcher identified four initial themes during this step, shown in Table 1. Table 1 also includes a sample excerpt from a selected source read during the analysis stage.

**Table 1** *Key Themes Found in the First Step of the Framework Analysis*

<b>Key Themes</b>	<b>Finding jobs barriers</b>	<b>Public service assistance</b>	<b>Learning experiences</b>	<b>Gender-related</b>
Mabi, M. (2018). <i>Public Libraries Serving Immigrant Communities in Canada</i>	While the SIIC has the potential to help immigrants obtain employment faster, it is limited to the economic facets of immigration, thereby shutting out other crucial aspects of their settlement, such as housing and legal issues.	Libraries will need to understand not only the demographics of the immigrant communities but also what resources and services they need from libraries.	Immigrants may be reluctant to access library offerings due to language and cultural barriers.	When the women first arrived, they had few to no social networks to turn to for information and support.

### **3.2 Identifying a Thematic Framework**

Goldsmith (2021) established this stage to identify the thematic framework by looking for discussion points, issues, or themes buried in the text. This is usually an inductive step, and like many other types of qualitative analysis, framework identification is an iterative process where refinements like renaming, identifying new themes, deleting, collapsing themes, and reordering can, and most likely, will occur (Goldsmith, 2021; Yee et al., 2022). This research had four iterations of themes, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2** *Evolution of Key Themes*

	<b>First set of themes</b>	<b>Second set of themes</b>	<b>Third set of themes</b>	<b>Fourth set of themes</b>
<b>1</b>	Finding job barriers	Finding job opportunities	Finding jobs	Finding jobs
<b>2</b>	Public service assistance	Public service assistance	Credential recognition	Credential recognition
<b>3</b>	Learning experience	Learning experience	Public service assistance	Public service help
<b>4</b>	Gender-related	Gender inequality	Learning experience	Learning experience
<b>5</b>	x	Mental health	Gender issues	Gender issues
<b>6</b>	x	x	Mental health	Family
<b>7</b>	x	x	x	Mental Health

The first set depicted in Table 2 considered only four themes. The first theme calls out workforce access for women immigrants; the theme “finding job barriers” codes data related to the barriers experienced when looking for jobs. The second theme identifies government and public service roles; the theme “public service assistance” codes data related to the assistance that governmental institutions and public services offer for effective settlement processes. The theme “learning experience” codes data on current or future learning experiences, such as certifications, language courses, and skills development. The last theme identified is “gender-related,” coding all data differentiating gender outcomes during the settlement process.

The themes of the second set in the thematic framework essentially stayed the same. The first theme was reworded from “finding job barriers” to “finding job opportunities”; by revising the theme from a negative connotation to a positive one, the coded data was better reflected at this stage of analysis. The second and third themes remained the same; however, the fourth

theme was reworded from “gender-related” to “gender inequality,” which more accurately reflected the data found in the sources. In this second iteration, a new theme was identified: “mental health”; coded data here related to any mental health impacts throughout the settlement and employment process.

In the third iteration, most themes changed, and another new theme emerged. The first theme was again modified, from “finding job opportunities” to “finding jobs.” The theme was broadened as gathered data began to show both the positive and negative aspects related to the job search code. A new theme was identified, “credential recognition”; coded data here related to the impact of having—or *not* having—one’s skills and credentials recognized once settled in Canada. The themes “public service assistance” and “learning experience” remained the same. The theme “gender inequality” was reworded to “gender issues.” As data started to highlight relevant information regarding gender, it was essential to create a code that included every angle, not only gender inequalities. Meanwhile, the theme “mental health” stayed the same without changes.

The fourth and final iteration features seven themes. The first and second themes stayed the same as the previous iteration: “finding jobs” and “credential recognition.” The third theme was modified from “public service assistance” to “public service help”; this stage of the research began to show the role of the public service when considering digital access to help and personal assistance. The themes “learning experience” and “gender issues” remained the same, while a new theme was identified: “family”. Included here was coded data related to specific family topics as they impacted immigrants in Canada. The last theme, “mental health,” remained the same.

### ***3.3 Indexing Data against the Framework***

Goldsmith (2021) explains that throughout the indexing step, the researcher starts to code themes to the selected articles to start a qualitative coding process, typically to short phrases, allowing the data gathering. Linking the gathered data to the framework helps to stress-test the identified themes by ensuring each article relates back to the framework (Goldsmith, 2021; Ritchie & Spencer, 2002; Yee et al., 2022).

While some researchers use coding software like Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), NVivo, or DELVE, this research did not use software for code charting due to having no financial resources or software knowledge.

To be selected for data analysis, the chosen articles were carefully studied; after this, a three-step screening process was applied, which filtered out the results. In Step 1, the title and abstract of each article was read, and only those papers related to immigration in Canada were retained. In Step 2, the full text of each retained article was read, and those that explored immigrant women settling in Canada and technology skills development were identified. In Step 3, the final step, the quality of each paper was assessed, and each article's reference list was checked.

Articles published outside the established time frame of 2010 to 2022 were not considered. Articles exploring fewer than two of these research themes were also not considered. The keyword "women" must be present in the articles to be considered relevant for the present research. Articles without a clear focus on gendered immigration in Canada were removed. For example, the article *They See Us As Machines: The Experience of Recent Immigrant Women in the Low Wage Informal Labor Sector*, by Panikkar et al. (2015) addresses the needs of recent immigrant women in the labour market and the subsequent lack of policies and/or legislation to fulfill their needs and security, but the study was carried out in the United States and was, therefore, eliminated from the selection process. After this screening process, 21 articles were identified as suitable for deeper analysis. Appendix A lists all 21 articles with both the title and the focus areas.

### ***3.4 Charting to Summarize the Indexed Data***

The next step in this method was to chart and organize the indexed data to proceed to analysis. Using a spreadsheet to generate a matrix, the data from each source was charted, with the data summarized according to theme, thereby allowing it to be examined systematically and in totality (Goldsmith, 2021). The matrix uses rows to populate the article's information, such as the title and date of publication; the columns present the framework themes. This method of charting allows the researcher to revisit the data and compile a deeper analysis of the connection between each theme. As mentioned, the coding and charting process was created



without the help of software. The researcher coded each article and populated the framework chart using Google Sheets.

### ***3.5 Mapping and Interpretation of Patterns Found***

The final step of the method considered the analysis of the charted data by analyzing key learnings, considering all transcribed notes from the researcher, and exploring the patterns and comparisons found across and within the themes of analysis from the framework (Goldsmith, 2021). The next section describes the findings around this data.

## **4. Findings**

Considering the number of research papers exploring immigration issues, it is important to question immigrants' experience federal government pre-immigration assessment and recruitment offices post-immigration. Governments should provide more training topics and support immigrants' successful integration. This section will run essential data aiming to answer this study's research questions regarding how the Canadian public sector is supporting immigrant women's skills development for successful socio-economic integration, and what barriers immigrant women still encounter in their settlement process, even after engaging with public assistance. This section presents the results of analysis of the 21 existing research papers addressing immigrant women's access to public services for skills development. The codes are listed in Table 3; the pattern codes are the sub-section titles.

**Table 3** *Coding Scheme*

<b>Pattern codes</b>	<b>Open codes</b>	<b>Number of open codes excerpts</b>
Government role	Credential recognition	69
	Public service help	275
	Gender issues	69
Job opportunities	Finding a job	215
	Learning experiences	136
	Tech skills	66
Private life	Family	64
	Mental health	42

#### **4.1** *Government Role*

Through the coding analysis of 21 pre-existing articles on immigration, socio-economic insertion, and skills development in Canada, 61% of the articles reported as the most common issue for immigrants in their settlement process is credential recognition. Most articles state that Canadian companies do not recognize the work experience and education immigrants received in their home countries, and when immigrant women provide their pre-migration resumés, they experience discrimination. Human Resources departments often overlook and disregard their documents (Charpentier & Quéniart, 2017; Frank & Hou, 2016; Hathiyani, 2017; Kaushik & Drolet, 2018; Koert, et al., 2011; Momani et al., 2021; Petri, 2010; Wilson-Forsberg, 2015).

As Hathiyani (2017) reveals, the government selects highly skilled professionals for the economic class visa; this means their home countries' experience and education are considered valid under a federal government lens. When immigrants arrive under the family or refugee class, they are invited to undergo a post-migration validation of international education and work experience. Despite this opportunity, the option is not always considered or used by immigrants, as the cost of the process (ICAS, n.d.) is frequently beyond the initial survival budget (a survival budget is a specific budget some immigrants have collected pre-migration to pay for initial expenses before earning post-migration income), not to mention the time investment attached to it, as it can take up to several months for immigrants to receive their accreditation papers (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018; Petri, 2010; Wilson-Forsberg, 2015). Even if immigrants choose to pursue post-migration certification, they still run the risk that their credentials will not be recognized by Canadian employers.

Most authors highlighted the commonality for women to arrive in Canada as spouses (Bonikowska & Hou, 2017; Hathiyani, 2017; Momani et al., 2021; Phan et al., 2015; Wilson-Forsberg, 2015). They explore the repercussions the different admission categories have on women. Those applying for an economic class visa as the principal applicant show a greater chance of finding a job in the first year after arrival in Canada. This, however, is the less common case; according to the authors Bonikowska & Hou (2017), Hathiyani (2017), Momani et al. (2021), Phan et al. (2015) and Wilson-Forsberg (2015), it is more common to arrive with a family class visa, reducing their employment opportunities.

Family class immigrants do not undergo the same pre-migration assessment as the economic class applicants; therefore, the government loses perspective on family class immigrants' labour needs. An analysis of the articles reveals that the most common employment for family class immigrants is part-time jobs in sales and services, administrative occupations, education, social services, and childcare; they also work as cashiers and in clerical positions. Family class job opportunities are limited to stay-at-home mothers, family caretakers, low-wage part-time workers, or volunteers, regardless of pre-migration experience, education, and skill level.

More challenges are attached to women entering Canada in the refugee category. The requirements are focused on social safety; therefore, there are no education or skill requirements, there is no pre-migration language assessment, and refugee class immigrants' risk not having the benchmark skills needed for successful integration. Refugee class immigrants require closer guidance and consultation to have a practical and positive settlement experience and to avoid poverty and exploitation (Bonikowska & Hou, 2017; Phan et al., 2015; Shuva, 2022).

The aim of the Canadian points system is to select highly skilled professionals, but as Petri's (2010) research explains, Canada's immigration process works now as a "broken contract." While the federal government adheres to a strict selection process, requiring immigrants to have the highest education level with a mid-to-high level of skill set, the provincial governments demand a more specific experience source (Canadian work experience). The result is that immigrants' education and work experience drop in relevance, forcing them to start over from scratch to gain Canadian work experience in low-income roles or vastly different career paths. This issue emphasizes the significant gap between the application of federal and

provincial immigration policies, translating into the most significant systemic barrier (Bonikowska & Hou, 2017; Kaushik & Drolet, 2018; Shuva, 2022; Wilson-Forsberg, 2015).

An interesting topic discussed by Petri (2010), Nardon et al. (2022), Smythe and Breshears (2017), and Wilson-Forsberg (2015) exploring immigrant women's expectations linked with their pre-migration skill set and their success in integrating into the Canadian economy. It seems that women with low skills and less formal education have more opportunities to engage with jobs more quickly in the first year after arrival in the country: their expectations are low, and any job opportunity is seen as sufficient. Women with formal education and a robust skill set will have more difficulty finding a job that reflects their experience: their expectations are high based on their jobs in their home country. Low-skilled women might have a short-term advantage, but highly skilled women have better income growth experience in the long term (four to five years) Petri (2010).

No matter what conditions and experience immigrant women bring with them, most of them are forced into low-wage employment with limited career growth, endangering their socio-economic incorporation while increasing their risk for mental health vulnerability. The public service offers some guidance and support in this regard (Hathiyani, 2017; Koert et al., 2011; McMullin, 2021; Momani et al., 2021; Nardon et al., 2022; Petri, 2010; Rashid & Gregory, 2014). Smythe and Breshears (2017) describe a public program initiated by the Canadian government for a year in 2008. This information helped to understand an ideal, successful, and inclusive settlement program. The initiative provided courses at different levels of difficulty, enabled access to affordable digital tools and technology (computers, internet, training, and certifications), and increased immigrants' opportunities to develop their skills regardless of their education level prior to training. Since the 2008 initiative, the government has implemented from that point on affordable digital tools and access to technology.

Public services such as community centres and public libraries play an important role in assisting immigrants in their settlement process, providing them with accessible digital tools to develop their skill set and grow their social network, leading in some cases to socio-economic improvement (IWSO, 2022; Koert et al., 2011; Mabi, 2018; McMullin, 2021; RIWC, 2020).

Many public services provide training programs for low-skilled immigrant women, and because every immigration story is unique, some of them offer individualized training and consultation sessions for a personalized experience, assisting women in their settlement journey.

In some cases, public services offer editing services for women's documentation (Canadian adaptation of their resumé, cover letters, and references); job search consultations; basic skills training; and sometimes, assistance with job placements. These bridging programs were designed with the intention of connecting low-skilled immigrants with relevant stakeholders. These services' main objective is to empower immigrants facing existing systemic barriers (IWSO, 2022; Petri, 2010; RIWC, 2020); general needs such as basic skills training and language development are accessible within the public service: the key benefits include internet access, community activities, basic digital literacy education, and community building.

The settlement services gap show with the lack of acknowledgement for educated immigrants' needs, no extensive childcare options (some public libraries offer childcare during training sessions only (Petri, 2010)) and traditional basic levels of computer and software training (such as internet safety, computer use, and smartphone access). Hathiyan (2017) and Shuva (2022) discuss the need for more due diligence; for example, it is crucial to ensure that relationships between the settlement services and the recruitment offices are not being formed with companies who seek to abuse immigrant women with low wages and long working hours. A transparent networking system is needed between immigrant women and recruiters through the services provided by community centres and public libraries to ensure their safety.

When immigrants arrive with young children, the public library offers them a solution to entertain their children, allowing parents to participate in the public library's services (Bonikowska & Hou, 2017; Mabi, 2018; McMullin, 2021; Momani et al., 2021; Petri, 2010; Singh & Chobotaru, 2022). Usually, public libraries keep an extensive catalogue of books with topics of interest to the public, and yet there is typically a significant lack of minority language resources. The low number of resources in languages other than English and French has been shown to be a significant barrier for immigrant women (especially when they are the parent in charge) to participate in public library activities. The differences in operation and engagement also cause them to lose interest in the library's other services (Mabi, 2018; McMullin, 2021; Shuva, 2022; Singh & Chobotaru, 2022).

Most public services offer programs to fulfill immigrants' general needs, yet some immigrants arrive more skilled, looking for trainings beyond the basic level often offered. Current skills training considers internet access a priority (IWSO, 2022; Mabi, 2018; McMullin, 2021; Nardon et al., 2022; Petri, 2010; Shuva, 2022; Singh & Chobotaru, 2022).

## 4.2 Job Opportunities

Phan et al. (2015) provided essential data acknowledging the four years it takes to immigrants to find employment aligned with their pre-migration occupation. Finding a job is the immigrant's benchmark of socio-economic incorporation, and engaging with an opportunity that meets their pre-migration experience is ideal. It sustains an immigrant's identity and personality as career growth is often a precursor to higher self-esteem and independence (Bonikowska & Hou, 2017; Charpentier & Quéniart, 2017; Hathiyani, 2017; Koert et al., 2011; Momani et al., 2021; Petri, 2010; RIWC, 2020; Wilson-Forsberg, 2015).

Hathiyani (2017) explains that pre-migration information sourced by immigrants is typically shared within community networks and occasionally through government communications. It prepares immigrants to consider barriers and/or opportunities during the first few years. This information feeds immigrants' expectations of the settlement process (for the best or the worst). Hathiyani (2017) and Shuva (2022) explain that while immigrant women may access pre-migration information, it is missing important details on processes and political barriers. Once they have landed in Canada, women see themselves as having insufficient support for overcoming mental and physical fatigue caused by the systemic barriers.

These systemic barriers (for example, no recognition of their credentials and a lack of Canadian work experience) will force them to engage in low-skill jobs to survive, impacting their self-confidence and self-worth. Canadian public services are failing to provide resources to overcome those cultural and systemic barriers, and local companies are taking advantage of them: knowing that immigrants need a job no matter what, they offer low wages, physically demanding positions, and long working hours (Bonikowska & Hou, 2017; Nardon et al., 2022; Petri, 2010).

Regardless of their admission class, not all women arrive with the same level of education. Immigrant women face hard career decisions, forced to put off their goals for their intended career path, only to support themselves and their families with a *survival job* until they find an opportunity that fits their background and experience. Some of them have the added barrier of a language barrier but most of them seek aid from the public sector. One of the most common forms of support sought by refugee women is language skills training (IWSO, 2022; RIWC, 2020). Accents are a significant impediment to immigrant women finding or keeping a long-term contract. Petri (2010), Momani et al. (2021), and Hathiyani (2017) explain that many

Canadian companies equate heavy accents with low education and intellect, consequently dismissing candidates with heavy accents. Some employers use immigrants' countries of origin as a filter to identify good- or bad-quality education; this is a subjective and discriminatory practice where a non-European education will automatically be identified as inferior and unable to meet Canadian standards (Ferguson, 2016; Kaushik & Drolet, 2018; Koert et al., 2011; Petri, 2010). Contrary to what companies assume, overall, immigrant women are typically highly skilled and are overqualified compared to Canadian men and Canadian-born women, yet most immigrant women must accept alternative career paths, engaging in non-gendered trades, such as welding, automotive services, and machining (Frank & Hou, 2016; Hathiyan, 2017; Kaushik & Drolet, 2018; Koert et al., 2011; Momani et al., 2021; Nardon et al., 2022; Rashid & Gregory, 2014; Wilson-Forsberg, 2015). Some immigrant women are opting for entrepreneurial opportunities, aiming to override their lack of credential recognition and Canadian work experience (RIWC, 2020).

Good-quality pre-migration education plays a vital role in determining access to job opportunities for immigrant women if they are the principal applicant for the economic admission category; women that show high skills and high education standards are more likely to obtain the economic permit. According to research carried out by Petri (2010), Rashid and Gregory (2014), Momani et al. (2021), Ferguson (2016), Bonikowska and Hou (2017), Phan et al. (2015), and Wilson-Forsberg (2015), principal applicants' earnings are higher than those of secondary applicants and those in the family and refugee classes. Most immigrant women equate a better education to economic improvement and independence. Some women can afford further education and re-skilling opportunities once in Canada, enabling them to enroll in post-secondary education, thereby enhancing their job opportunities and quicker socio-economic integration. In most cases, seeking a better education is the reason why women choose Canada as their immigration destination (Charpentier & Quéniart, 2017; Singh & Chobotaru, 2022).

While most immigrant women have a basic understanding of digital tools, most of them lean to public services to solve internet requirements and computer access in the first year in Canada, both of which public libraries provide free of charge. Access to digital tools and affordable internet is essential for immigrant women in those first stages of their settlement process, as they figure out with time how to achieve social integration (Frank & Hou, 2016; Koert et al., 2011; Nardon et al., 2022; Petri, 2010; Phan et al., 2015). The settlement services

also provide introductory training on technology and administrative abilities and teach people how to navigate the Canadian labour system (for example, adjusting their resumé and other documentation). However, limited public services schedules conflicting with immigrants' working schedules and personal responsibilities present a significant barrier to progress. Working long hours prevents many immigrant women from accessing digital tools or attending training programs, keeping them in low-skilled and minimum-wage jobs with no way out.

### ***4.3 Private Matters***

Immigrant women experience similar social and systemic barriers, age and marital status are two factors that Charpentier and Quéniart (2017) explore in their research. Some young immigrant women who recently landed in the country without pre-migration work experience and lacking Canadian work experience can afford formal education within the Canadian education system. Some older immigrant women who recently landed in the country will have fewer affordances for enrolling in formal education. However, they bring vast pre-migration experience but no credential recognition; this shows an important systemic barrier combining age, gender, and international experience.

There is a concise discourse among researchers when it comes to immigrant women arriving in Canada with children. Young women with children who have recently landed in the country with family admission find it more challenging to pursue job opportunities, even if they have high pre-migration education and work skills. They are almost always forced into becoming housemakers. Regardless of whether they come with their partners or by themselves with their children, immigrant women who are parents have more difficulties adapting quickly and successfully to Canadian socio-economic life. The admission category plays a distinctive role in determining immigrant mothers' opportunities (Charpentier & Quéniart, 2017; Phan et al., 2015).

Many immigrant families apply the *family investment strategy*. In families with two parents with children, there is less chance for the newcomer couple to both engage in full-time employment. Therefore, the family is divided into two roles: one parent, typically the principal applicant, becomes the leading provider and is responsible for earning income and developing work skills. The second parent will take on the caregiver role, taking charge of housekeeping and other family care duties with fewer contributions to the family's economic income. As already discussed, women more often arrive as dependents of their partner, and they are more often



vulnerable to mental health issues and domestic violence (Bonikowska & Hou, 2017; Ferguson, 2016; Frank & Hou, 2016; Hathyani, 2017; Koert et al., 2011; Nardon et al., 2022; Phan et al., 2015; Rashid & Gregory, 2014; Wilson-Forsberg, 2015).

Immigrant families often endure significant emotional and mental struggles, diminishing their self-confidence and self-worth as the whole unit faces de-skilling, low income, gender barriers, and discrimination. Isolation and loneliness are the principal emotional barriers faced by immigrant mothers: a lack of extended family and friend support, combined with unemployment and underemployment, cause stress, which can develop into mental and even physical illnesses (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018; Koert et al., 2011; Momani et al., 2021; Nardon et al., 2022; Rashid & Gregory, 2014; Singh & Chobotaru, 2022).

When immigrant women who are parents lack the support of a partner (single parenting) and cannot access help from their extended family, their entry into the workforce can be delayed by several months, and more commonly postponed for up to several years (Petri, 2010; Wilson-Forsberg, 2015). Low wages and poor employment offers will impact on the family's quality of life. Accessing and reaching out to public services for guidance may help them in some ways, like with community networking.

Often, single female parents are invited to in-person interviews; due to lack of affordable or subsidized daycare for their young children, some choose to let the opportunity lapse, while others decide to attend the interview with their children. The result is a snowballing effect of subtle discrimination (Pikulina & Ferreira, 2022), with recruiters failing to hire due to their preconception that the female parent is unable to separate from her family (Momani et al., 2021; Petri, 2010). This is more problematic when the child is younger than five years old (Frank & Hou, 2016; Momani et al., 2021; Nardon et al., 2022; Rashid & Gregory, 2014; Wilson-Forsberg, 2015).

A public service program introduced between 2021 and 2022 offered online engagement and care to immigrant children with playful and educational activities, affording parents responsible for childcare the opportunity to focus on their education or other at-home responsibilities (IWSO, 2022). However, affordable childcare outside the home is an ongoing concern with no clear answer.

## **5. Discussion**

This research is relevant to the Canadian government's immigration agenda of aiming to welcome at least half a million new immigrants each year until 2025. Public support must be sufficient to ensure that both the government and immigrants' expectations are met, with successful socio-economic integration as the result. The findings have presented a summary of the current existing systemic barriers, aiming to answer the research questions on how the Canadian public sector is supporting immigrant women's skills development for a successful socio-economic integration and the barriers that immigrant women still encounter in their settlement process, even after engaging with public assistance. This section is organized as follows: 5.1 Public support; 5.2 Extended barriers.

### ***5.1 Public Support***

Despite Canada's long history of welcoming immigrants, there exists an underlying discourse regarding the country's policies on women's societal roles. The core goals of policy design are to protect traditional gender roles, exposing an archaic perspective on the addition of immigrant women to Canadian culture. Subtle patriarchist mindsets dating from long ago are driving immigration policy design (Chilton, 2016), securing, and safeguarding what looks to be the most important roles a woman can have: mother, childcare worker, and family caretaker. Women are reduced to traditional roles (Ferguson, 2016; Frank & Hou, 2016; Hathiyani, 2017; Phan et al., 2015; Shuva, 2022; Wilson-Forsberg, 2015). This experience can be even more stressful for immigrant women who are highly skilled and educated and who are used to playing active roles in the economy; by quickly reviewing the latest Canadian census, it is clear that more immigrant women are arriving in Canada with higher education and higher work skills than their partners and local women; some even arrive with specialized and in-demand STEM degrees (Statistics Canada, 2023).

The findings helped to unravel a disconnection between federal and provincial recognition of international experience, alluding to an outdated mindset dating from Canada's earliest policymaking era (the World War I years), and establishing a deeply rooted discriminatory recruitment practice impacting all immigrants' socio-economic integration. Regardless of gender, immigrants face an important systemic barrier, with unrecognized education, skills, and lack of Canadian experience. Hathiyani (2017) writes about Canada's

acceptance of the regulations from the Lisbon Convention of 1977, “which stipulates that recognition of foreign qualifications should be granted unless significant difference could be demonstrated” (p. 120). The Canadian federal government’s acknowledgement of international credentials is recognized, but it is ultimately a provincial decision to approve or reject the international credentials of immigrants who wish to practice their profession in Canada.

Immigrants’ admission to Canada is categorized into economic, family-sponsored, and refugee classes. Different backgrounds, values, and educational levels come in play, and the category that immigrant women use to obtain a visa also plays a role in their socio-economic integration. As noted, the Canadian immigration system is failing immigrants, and challenging women more than men as they embark upon their settlement path.

More women are entering Canada sponsored by their partners, and the immigration system does not attempt to understand sponsored and refugee women’s skills and education. Quite literally, all non-principal applicants to any immigration category are considered the “plus one”; theoretically, their sponsors and partners take care of their economic needs. Archaic discourses apply to immigration policy development, with a unidimensional perspective and unrealistic expectations of gender roles. The family immigration class offers easier access to an immigration permit, but it also comes with societal challenges. The principal applicant is under immense pressure to provide for their family; meanwhile, the sponsored applicant is usually bound to the home and volunteering, carrying out chores and other activities at home or in the community, and adding little or no monetary value to the family income. The sponsored immigrant’s home responsibilities grow when the family unit includes children; women’s homemaking and parenting responsibilities often make them vulnerable to isolation from the already scarce community engagement and lack of socio-economic options and opportunities. Due to immigrant parents’ stress and pressure to provide for their children, the family unit risks deterioration, increasing dissolution, and intrafamilial violence.

Refugees are not required to provide pre-migration experience and education. There is a risk that they are underprepared for Canadian standards, forcing them to stay in the low-/no-income bracket or completely change their occupational path. Nevertheless, considering the socio-political barriers they experience, most refugees show gratitude towards the Canadian government for offering opportunities otherwise impossible to achieve, given the socio-economic and political realities experienced in their countries of origin. Refugees can afford a

liberal lifestyle, engaging with work and education opportunities, lead by less oppressive gender roles and government trust. For some refugee immigrant women arriving from war zones or escaping oppressive governments, Canada is the equivalent of freedom and peace; starting from zero encompasses a more positive connotation as they engage with a safer, democratic political system.

Canadian socio-economic development could significantly grow if federal and provincial immigration systems were to be unified. More highly qualified immigrants and refugees could continue working in similar pre-migration careers (Mwarigha, 2002), and the economy could experience a healthy and substantial growth, not to mention a richer cultural society with more gender equality. Nevertheless, the reality is that most immigrant women are forced to start from zero and work their way back up due to this disconnection.

The lack of recognition of international experience is forcing immigrant women to accept any job opportunity available just to survive, before engaging, hopefully, with a similar pre-migration occupation. To help ease immigrants' employment search, the Canadian government offers a post-migration education and experience evaluation (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2022), using the same standards applied to principal applicants for the economic class. The assessment has only two recommendations to follow: either upgrade skills by engaging with the Canadian education system, or opt for a different occupational field (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2022).

Sometimes, shifting from survival jobs to the immigrant's pre-migration occupation in Canada can take years; more often, those survival jobs are the shifting point in their occupational careers, thus more women are engaging in entrepreneurial opportunities (Caidi & Allard, 2005). Entrepreneurship is becoming a preferred solution to provide financial support for the family and to build Canadian work experience without the constraints imposed by employers (Hale, 2013). This path offers women the freedom of flexible work schedules to adjust to training schedules and family responsibilities. It empowers their socio-economic growth as they become the sole decision makers (Hathiyani, 2017; Shuva, 2022), being able to engage directly with clients and possible business partners in their language of choice. Entrepreneurship fosters a sense of community, independence, and better chances to facilitate the socio-economic integration of immigrant women.

## *5.2 Extended Barriers*

Intersectionality shows us that skill training does not answer to a one-size-fits-all-and-forever situation; it demands a sensitive understanding of when, where, and how various groups and individuals learn (Caidi et al., 2007; Pelan & Smythe, 2019). Although many immigrants are familiar with basic technology skills upon arriving in Canada, training programs are essential to certify and validate previous experiences and/or to offer them learning opportunities on new topics and more difficulty levels, with the goal of a successful socio-economic integration (Caidi et al., 2005). Highly skilled sponsored immigrant women suffer more deeply the de-skilling experience; the mental health impact of unemployment can lead to high stress levels, pushing the family unit to vulnerable breaking points. On top of that, when looking for training related to their pre-migration education, they are disappointed to only find resources designed for low-skilled immigrants. Most training programs cover basic computer skills, basic business skills, and basic digital security.

Smythe and Breshears (2017) reference a public program, applied during one year in 2008, which helps to exemplify a good inclusive program for all immigrants. With four levels of computer training, from basic learning up to advanced specialized software development, the program allows immigrants engaging with it to explore and expand their knowledge at a level compatible with their pre-migration experience. Therefore, local public services might need to consider back, high-quality training programs at higher difficulty levels on various topics, such as heavy machinery usage, construction, food manufacturing, welding, and more. Despite public services' best interest in immigrant support, more immigrants are leaning towards other sources of help, thereby risking engagement with scams and fake information. There is no clear blueprint on immigrants needs (Wang et al. 2020), but the public sector settlement services most certainly require a re-design of their training programs.

For mothers in the economic class, the lack of affordable childcare options prevents them from engaging with full-time jobs or those with greater responsibility. These women take longer to join the Canadian workforce, depending on their partner's income and off-shore remittances from family members, or by engaging in low-wage job opportunities. If childcare were free or subsidized, immigrant sponsored, and refugee women could adapt more quickly to life in Canada. Therefore, affordable childcare is crucial to ensure immigrant families have more opportunities for quicker and safer integration into Canadian socio-economic life. One gap

determined from these research findings revolves around the lack of data on the marital status of economic-class women, suggesting a possibility for further research on single-parent immigrant women settlement barriers.

Finally, to conclude the discussion, the author of this research agrees completely with Petri's (2010) research findings, with the concept of Canada's "broken contract." As the federal government carefully assesses economic immigrants' pre-migration skills, provincial policies should recognize the international experience as the first step in ensuring successful social inclusion. It feels as if the provincial governments are breaking the contract made by immigrants and the federal government, leading to a lack of positive insertion and settlement opportunities. Those who arrive in the country with their families experience highly stressful circumstances trying to provide for their families. The socio-economic insertion of sponsored immigrant women is hijacked by the lack of affordable childcare, by the scarcity of training programs that follow their pre-migration career level, and by limited affordable post-migration certification.

## **6. Conclusions**

This research aimed to build more awareness of immigrant women's needs and the accessibility they have to public resources for a quick and effective integration into the Canadian workforce. This section will conclude the study by summarizing the key research findings in relation to the research aim and research questions, as well as the value and contribution thereof. It will also review the limitations of the study and propose opportunities for future research.

The results provide support for Petri's (2010) research and the concept of Canada's "broken contract." As the federal government follows the principles established at the 1977 Lisbon Convention, only the pre-migration skills of economic immigrants are strictly assessed. This assessment is disregarded by local provincial policies, creating a systemic barrier for immigrants' socio-economic insertion, and a *feeling* that the contract made between immigrants and the federal government has been broken. This is a genderless problem with a negative impact on a quick and successful socio-economic insertion.

Those immigrants who arrive in the country with their families experience higher levels of stress when trying to provide for their families. The family unit experiences socio-economic stress and pressure; most families are forced to live with one parent as the principal provider, and according to the results of this research, that main provider is the principal applicant for the

economic visa, who is usually a man. This situation enforces traditional gender roles, limiting women to house making and caretaking roles with a lack of opportunities for sponsored and refugee immigrants. Immigrant women's opportunities are further complicated by a lack of affordable childcare and a lack of diversity in training programs at various levels of difficulty. Due to the barriers caused by no recognition of pre-migration experience, and the difficulties attached to not having affordable childcare, more sponsored and refugee women are choosing entrepreneurial options to economically support the family unit. This decision not only helps with economic insertion, but it also helps women to expand their social networks and leads to an improvement in their mental health.

Public services are trying to keep up with immigrants' needs, but settlement programs are usually designed for specific individuals with a low level of education. If the federal process selects highly skilled international workers, provincial programs should equally recognize all levels of education brought from abroad and/or provide more difficulty levels in training programs.

The method of analysis was developed solely from the literature. To achieve a broader understanding of this research topic, engaging with participants could confirm and even broaden perspectives. More research focused on participants in public service programs might shed light on internal political barriers. Research carried out with immigrant women participants might help to confirm or deny findings from this research.

The scope of the study was broad, studying the implications of government policy and services for all immigrant women. Further research can explore women's experiences migrating from countries or continents or the different immigration programs' settlement outcomes. Further research can also study the government's role regarding intersectionality of gender, age, and immigration status, considering older immigrant women, or divorced women, for example.

To better understand the implications of the disconnection between federal and provincial immigration laws, future studies could explore policy proposals, acknowledging with the same relevancy international credentials at all political levels. Future studies could also explore proposals for new settlement training programs, including the provision of programs with more topics and difficulty levels.

Given the critical importance of the socio-economic integration of immigrant women, this study has sought to identify antecedents of skills development tools within the public service

context. This research contributes to a documentation of the governmental gaps still experienced by immigrants, regardless of their gender. But most importantly, it builds documentation on the current needs of immigrant women for a successful socio-economic insertion. As the Canadian government aims to welcome more than half a million new immigrants annually until 2025, public services and policies must provide efficient and transparent answers to all new citizens. The research adds suggested topics for settlement programs run by public services. Public services, such as public libraries and community centers should support immigrants in their settlement experience, but also answer the federal government's socio-economic needs.

This section concluded the study by highlighting the key findings in relation to the research aims and questions. Notably, the disconnection between federal and provincial immigration policies and the public services' limited training offerings were found to act as primary antecedents, while affordable childcare and immigrant women's mental health were found to act as secondary antecedents. Based on these findings, actionable recommendations were made. The section concluded with a review of overall limitations, from which future research recommendations can be suggested.



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## Appendix: Articles Analyzed

Sorted by publication year.

#	Year	Journal (J) Publisher (P)	Author(s)	Title
1	2010	(P) School of Communication & Culture, Royal Roads University	Petri, Kristen	No Canadian Experience Barrier: A Participatory Approach to Examining the Barrier's Affect (sic) on New Immigrants
2	2011	(J) The Career Development Quarterly	Koert, Emily; Borgen, William A. & Amundson, Norman E.	Educated Immigrant Women Workers Doing Well With Change: Helping and Hindering Factors
3	2014	(J) Canadian Ethnic Studies	Rashid, Ruksana & Gregory, David	"Not Giving Up on Life": A Holistic Exploration of Resilience among a Sample of Immigrant Canadian Women
4	2015	(J) Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies	Phan, Mai B.; Banerjee, Rupa; Deacon, Lisa & Taraky, Hila	Family Dynamics and the Integration of Professional Immigrants in Canada
5	2015	(J) Journal of International Migration and Integration	Wilson-Forsberg, Stacey	"We Don't Integrate; We Adapt:" Latin American Immigrants Interpret Their Canadian Employment Experiences in Southwestern Ontario
6	2016	(P) Statistics Canada, Analytical Studies Branch	Bonikowska, Aneta & Hou, Feng	Labour Market Outcomes of Immigrant Women who Arrive as Dependents of Economic Immigrant Principal Applicants
7	2016	(J) Work, Employment and Society	Frank, Kristyn & Hou, Feng	Beyond Culture: Source Country Female Labour Force Participation and the Earnings of Immigrant Women
8	2016	(P) Statistics Canada	Ferguson, Sarah Jane	Women and Education: Qualifications, Skills and Technology
9	2017	(J) Journal of Women & Aging	Charpentier, Michèle & Quéniart, Anne	Aging Experiences of Older Immigrant Women in Québec (Canada): From Deskillling to Liberation

10	2017	<b>(P)</b> University of Toronto (Canada)	Hathiyani, Abdulhamid	A Bridge to Where? An Analysis of the Effectiveness of the Bridging Programs for Internationally Trained Professionals in Toronto
11	2017	<b>(J)</b> Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education	Smythe, Suzanne & Breshears, Sherry	Complicating Access: Digital Inequality and Adult Learning in a Public-Access Computing Space
12	2018	<b>(J)</b> Social Sciences	Kaushik, Vibha & Drolet, Julie	Settlement and Integration Needs of Skilled Immigrants in Canada
13	2018	<b>(J)</b> Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science	Mabi, Millicent	Public Libraries Serving Immigrant Communities in Canada
14	2018	<b>(P)</b> Bielefeld: wbv	Butterwick, Shauna	Out of the Shadows: Women's Adult Education Leadership in Canada
15	2019-2020	<b>(P)</b> Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre	RIWC Annual Report 2019–2020	Annual Report
16	2020	<b>(J)</b> Voluntary Sector Review	McMullin, Caitlin	Migrant Integration Services and Coping with the Digital Divide: Challenges and Opportunities of the COVID-19 Pandemic
17	2020	<b>(J)</b> Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	Nardon, Luciara; Hari, Amrita; Zhang, Hui; Hoselton, Liam P.S. & Kuzhabekova, Aliya	Skilled Immigrant Women's Career Trajectories during Covid-19 Pandemic in Canada
18	2021	<b>(P)</b> University of Waterloo (Canada)	Momani, Bessma; Johnstone, Rachael; Ferrer, Ana; Basir, Nada; Walton-Roberts, Margaret; Hennebry, Jenna; Finn, Melissa;	Knowledge Synthesis Report on Canada's Racialized Immigrant Women and the Labour Market

			Kearney, Kersty; Callies, Lydia & Uszkay, Jesse	
19	2021- 2022	<b>(P)</b> Immigrant Women Services Ottawa	IWSO Annual Report 2021–2022	Annual Report
20	2022	<b>(J)</b> Public Library Quarterly	Shuva, Nafiz Z.	“Everybody Thinks Public Libraries Have Only Books”: Public Library Usage and Settlement of Bangladeshi Immigrants in Canada
21	2022	<b>(J)</b> Administrative Sciences	Singh, Vikkram & Chobotaru, Joshua	Digital Divide: Barriers to Accessing Online Government Services in Canada