

FEMINIZATION AND THE NEW POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MIGRATION

Women and Child Migrants in the
Context of Political Life, Migration Policies,
and Institutional Structures

ASSOC. PROF. DR. SONER AKIN



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Chairman of the Publishing House Group: Yusuf Ziya Aydoğan (yza@egitimyayinevi.com)

Executive Editor: Yusuf Yavuz (yusufyavuz@egitimyayinevi.com)

Interior Designer: Kübra Konca Nam

Cover Designer: Education Publishing House Design Unit

Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Tourism and Culture

Publisher Certificate No: 76780

E-ISBN: 978-625-5014-51-1

1. Edition, 2 October 2026

Printing and Binding

Vadi Grafik Tasarım ve Reklamcılık Ltd. Şti.

İvedik Org. San.1420. Cad. No: 58/1 Yenimahalle/Ankara

Printing House Certificate No: 47479

Library Information Card

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E-ISBN: 978-625-5014-51-1

VIII+183 p., 160x240 mm

Includes references, no index.

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Publisher Turkey Office: İstanbul: Eğitim Yayınevi Tic. Ltd. Şti., Atakent mah., Yasemen sok., No: 4/B, Ümraniye, İstanbul, Türkiye

Konya: Eğitim Yayınevi Tic. Ltd. Şti., Fevzi Çakmak Mah. 10721 Sok. B Blok, No: 16/B, Safakent, Karatay, Konya, Türkiye
+90 332 351 92 85, +90 533 151 50 42
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Publisher USA Office: New York: Eğitim Publishing Group, Inc.
P.O. Box 768/Armonk, New York, 10504-0768, United States of America
americaoffice@egitimyayinevi.com

Logistics and Shipping Center: Kitapmatik Lojistik ve Sevkiyat Merkezi, Fevzi Çakmak Mah. 10721 Sok. B Blok, No: 16/B, Safakent, Karatay, Konya, Türkiye
sevkiyat@egitimyayinevi.com
E-Commerce: +90 553 950 50 37

Bookstore Branch: Eğitim Kitabevi, Şükran mah. Rampalı 121, Meram, Konya, Türkiye
+90 332 499 90 00
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Internet Sales: www.kitapmatik.com.tr
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PREFACE

Migration is one of those subjects that appears simple only from a distance. People move, states regulate borders, labour markets absorb newcomers, families adapt, and political institutions respond. Yet the closer one looks, the less satisfactory these separate descriptions become. A labour market cannot be understood apart from the visa that admits a worker; a visa cannot be understood apart from the institution that administers it; the institution cannot be understood apart from the political conflict surrounding migration; and none of these can be understood adequately if the family, care work, and the gendered distribution of social reproduction are treated as secondary matters. This book was written from the conviction that these connections are not peripheral. They are the subject itself.

The phrase "feminization of migration" provides the point of departure, but not in the conventional sense of a simple numerical increase in the proportion of women among international migrants. The empirical record is more complicated. Women have long represented a substantial share of international migration, and global averages do not reveal a straightforward historical transition from a male migration system to a female one. The more important transformation lies elsewhere: in the growing visibility of women as autonomous migrants and workers; in the internationalization of domestic, care, health, and service labour; in the reorganization of families across borders; and in the emergence of institutional arrangements whose formally gender-neutral rules often generate distinctly gendered consequences. The term feminization is retained in this book because it remains analytically useful, but only when it is disciplined by distinctions among demography, labour, family, law, political membership, and institutional design.

The argument developed across the six chapters therefore moves deliberately from description toward structure. The first chapter establishes the conceptual and empirical foundations. It asks what exactly has been feminized, distinguishes stocks from flows and global averages from migration corridors, and situates contemporary female migration within the longer history of migration theory. Its purpose is to prevent a misleading starting assumption from shaping everything that follows. If feminization is reduced to one percentage, the labour-market, family, institutional, and

political transformations that give the concept its real significance disappear from view.

The second chapter moves into the labour market, where migration becomes wages, occupations, contracts, unemployment, deskilling, and economic dependency. Here the book rejects another simplification: migrant women do not form a homogeneous vulnerable workforce. Many are concentrated in domestic work, cleaning, care, hospitality, and other sectors marked by informality or precarious employment, but migrant women are also nurses, physicians, academics, engineers, managers, and other skilled professionals. Their trajectories are shaped by the interaction of labour demand, migration channels, professional recognition, welfare institutions, household responsibilities, and employer power. The relevant question is therefore not whether migrant women are vulnerable in the abstract, but under which institutional arrangements particular forms of opportunity, dependency, occupational mobility, or exclusion emerge.

The third chapter turns from economic participation to political life. Residence does not automatically become membership, and membership does not automatically become representation. Migrant women may occupy very different political positions depending on whether they are temporary workers, permanent residents, naturalized citizens, refugees, holders of temporary protection, or mobile citizens within a supranational system such as the European Union. Political participation is consequently examined beyond the ballot box, through associations, unions, local consultative structures, civil-society organizations, citizenship regimes, party recruitment, and the wider politics of belonging. The purpose is not to evaluate political actors or rank national systems, but to understand how formal rights, political opportunity structures, and social resources combine to create different degrees and forms of political voice.

The fourth chapter brings institutions to the centre of the analysis. Migration governance is not one ministry and not one law. It is a field in which interior ministries, migration agencies, labour authorities, welfare institutions, municipalities, courts, equality bodies, employers, and international organizations exercise different competences and often pursue different objectives. A rule that appears neutral in statutory language may have sharply gendered effects when it is implemented through a dependent residence status, an employer-specific permit, an inaccessible welfare entitlement, or a labour-inspection system that cannot easily reach a private household. The chapter therefore shifts attention from law on paper to the

distribution of authority, administrative discretion, and implementation capacity.

The fifth chapter changes the unit of analysis once more. It moves beyond the migrant woman to children, spouses, grandparents, women who remain in origin communities, and transnational families more broadly. This shift is essential because migration redistributes more than income. It redistributes care, authority, responsibility, emotional labour, and risk. A woman employed as a caregiver abroad may leave care responsibilities to a grandmother, an older daughter, a spouse, or another paid worker. A husband's migration may increase a wife's authority while simultaneously increasing her workload. Remittances may improve material welfare while separation generates emotional costs. Children may benefit educationally in some contexts and encounter psychosocial difficulties in others. The evidence resists a one-directional story, and the chapter preserves that complexity rather than forcing it into a narrative of either harm or empowerment.

The final substantive chapter brings these levels together under the heading of a new political economy of feminized migration. Its starting point is that institutions do not carry equal weight in every country. In some systems the central state and public welfare institutions organize the field; in others households and private care markets occupy a more decisive position; in still others employers and sponsors exercise unusually strong control over workers' legal and economic mobility. Origin states may actively organize labour export, recruitment agencies may become powerful intermediaries, municipalities may bear service costs without controlling admission, and banks and remittance providers may acquire infrastructural importance despite possessing no formal migration authority. The chapter therefore asks not merely which institutions exist, but which actors govern, which actors benefit, which actors bear costs, and how the balance among state, market, family, employer, municipality, intermediary, and international organization differs across national political economies.

Several methodological principles guide the book as a whole. First, categories are kept distinct whenever their conflation would distort the evidence: stock and flow; foreign-born and foreign citizen; labour migrant and refugee; regular and irregular status; migrant women and women left behind; formal rights and substantive access; policy design and implementation; correlation and causation. Second, comparison is used to explain difference rather than to produce rankings. Canada, Germany,

Sweden, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States, Türkiye, the Gulf states, the Philippines, and other cases appear because their institutional configurations illuminate different mechanisms, not because the book seeks to construct a league table of migration regimes. Third, the analysis treats institutions as relations of authority and implementation rather than as names on an organizational chart. What matters is who controls admission, work, residence, welfare, family reunification, protection, inspection, settlement, and political membership, and how those powers interact.

The book also takes care to keep political economy broad enough to include social reproduction. Migration is often discussed through wages, remittances, fiscal effects, and labour shortages. These are indispensable, but they are incomplete. Every labour force must be reproduced socially: children must be raised, illness managed, older people cared for, households maintained, and emotional relationships sustained. When care workers move internationally, the cost of reproducing their own families does not disappear. It is redistributed across kin, communities, public institutions, and transnational transfers. This is why the care economy is not a specialist subfield located at the margins of migration studies. It is one of the most revealing sites through which the relationship among labour markets, welfare regimes, families, and states can be observed.

The title of the book reflects this wider ambition. "Feminization" identifies the gendered transformation under study. "New political economy" indicates that the inquiry cannot stop with demographic description or labour-market outcomes. The subtitle - women and child migrants in the context of political life, migration policies, and institutional structures - marks the three additional fields through which the argument proceeds. Together they produce a framework in which migration is understood as simultaneously economic, familial, political, and institutional.

This book does not claim that one model explains every migration corridor, nor that women experience migration in one common way. The opposite is closer to the conclusion toward which the chapters move. The institutional form of migration matters. The sector matters. Legal status matters. Citizenship matters. Family configuration matters. Welfare institutions matter. Employer power matters. Origin-country policy matters. So do age, class, qualification, and the availability of alternative forms of care. The analytical task is not to erase this variation but to make it intelligible.

For that reason, the book is best read as a sequence of widening lenses. It begins with the concept and geography of feminization, moves through labour and political membership, examines institutions, widens again to the transnational family, and finally reconstructs these elements as a political economy. The hope is that this architecture allows the reader to see migration not as a collection of disconnected policy problems but as a system in which movement, work, care, family, rights, and institutions continuously shape one another.

CHAPTER 1: THE FEMINIZATION OF MIGRATION: GLOBAL TRENDS, MIGRATION SYSTEMS, AND COMPARATIVE COUNTRY PATTERNS

Introduction

Migration has never been a gender-neutral movement, although for a surprisingly long period migration scholarship behaved as if it were. The classic twentieth-century image was clear enough: the migrant was a man who left a village, a town or a peripheral economy, crossed a border, entered a mine, a factory, a construction site or an agricultural labour market, and then sent money home. Women appeared, if they appeared at all, as wives who followed, mothers who waited, daughters who depended, or family members who were reunited after the supposedly decisive economic actor had already moved. Yet history was more complicated than the categories used to describe it. Women worked in factories, domestic service, agriculture and commerce; they migrated independently as well as through families; and, moreover, they sustained the social life of migration through care, remittances, kinship and household management. The problem, therefore, was not simply that women were absent from migration. Rather, they were often absent from the analytical grammar through which migration was interpreted (Morokvasic, 1984; Pessar & Mahler, 2003).

This distinction is indispensable when discussing the now familiar expression "feminization of migration." At first sight, the phrase suggests a demographic revolution: women are migrating in ever greater numbers and are gradually replacing a previously male-dominated migration system. However, the long-run data do not sustain such a simple account. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA, 2025), women and girls constituted just under half of the international migrant stock in 2024, and the global female share had already been close to one half in 1990. In other words, the absolute number of women migrants has grown enormously because international migration as a whole has expanded, but the global proportion of women has not risen in anything like a linear or revolutionary fashion. Indeed, the numerical stability is precisely what forces a more interesting question: if feminization is not merely a rising percentage, what exactly has been feminized?

The answer lies in the transformation of migration systems rather than in a single global ratio. Women have become more visible as principal migrants and income earners; labour-market demand has expanded in sectors in which women are heavily represented; care and domestic work have become internationalized; health systems recruit across borders; transnational families distribute paid and unpaid labour across several countries; and states increasingly govern migration through visa, family-reunification, welfare and employment rules whose consequences are profoundly gendered. At the same time, male migration continues to shape the lives of women who do not migrate, while female migration reorganizes fatherhood, grandparental care and childhood in countries of origin. Thus the feminization of migration is best understood not as one demographic event but as a set of linked changes in mobility, labour, family life and institutional regulation (Donato & Gabaccia, 2015; Kofman & Raghuram, 2015).

For this reason, the present chapter proceeds comparatively and historically. It first clarifies the concept of feminization and the limits of aggregate statistics; it then reconstructs the intellectual shift from the male guest-worker paradigm to gendered migration analysis. Thereafter, it examines regional patterns, migration corridors, labour-force participation, unemployment and sectoral concentration. Particular attention is given to the care economy, domestic work and professional health migration because these sectors reveal with unusual clarity how households, markets and states interact. The discussion then moves across selected migration regimes - the Philippines and the Gulf, Southern and Western Europe, North America and Türkiye - before turning to women left behind, transnational families and children. Finally, the chapter brings political life and institutional structures into the analysis, for migration policy is never merely an administrative response to movement; it is also an arena in which parties, parliaments, governments, courts and international organizations define the legal conditions under which mobility becomes work, residence, family life and, eventually, membership.

1.1. The Feminization of Migration: A Problem of Definition, Not Merely of Numbers

The first difficulty is conceptual. "Feminization" has been used in at least three distinct ways, and these should not be confused. In the narrowest sense, it refers to an increase in the female share of a migrant population or flow. In a second sense, it refers to the growing prevalence of women who migrate as workers or principal decision makers rather than being classified primarily

as dependants. In a third and broader sense, it refers to the institutional and economic restructuring of migration around sectors, family arrangements and policy categories in which gender matters systematically. Only the first definition can be tested by asking whether the percentage of female migrants is rising. The other two require attention to labour markets, legal status, household organization and political institutions (Donato & Gabaccia, 2015; Kofman & Raghuram, 2015).

Once the distinction is made, an apparent contradiction disappears. UN DESA (2025) reports that women and girls accounted for about 48% of international migrants worldwide in 2024. Moreover, the report emphasizes that in Europe, Northern America and Latin America and the Caribbean the female share remained broadly stable over the long period from 1990 to 2024. Nevertheless, the regional picture is far from uniform. In 2024 women made up roughly 52% of international migrants in Europe and around 51% in Northern America, whereas the corresponding share in Northern Africa and Western Asia was only about 36%. Central and Southern Asia, by contrast, recorded a female share above one half. Such differences demonstrate why a global mean, although useful, can conceal the structure of particular migration systems (UN DESA, 2025).

Table 1.1. Female Share of International Migrant Stock by Region, 2024

Region	Female share (%)
World	~48
Europe	~52
Northern America	~51
Central and Southern Asia	~54
Oceania	~51
Latin America and the Caribbean	~49
Sub-Saharan Africa	~48
Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	~47
Northern Africa and Western Asia	~36

Note. Rounded values based on UN DESA, International Migrant Stock 2024: Key Facts and Figures (UN DESA, 2025).

The regional contrast also explains why the feminization thesis must be linked to corridor analysis. Northern Africa and Western Asia include major Gulf labour-importing economies that recruit large numbers of men into construction, transport and related sectors; consequently, the aggregate migrant stock is heavily masculinized. Yet within the same regional economy there are major migration corridors associated with household

services, care and other occupations in which women from South and Southeast Asia have long been prominent. The same region can therefore be male-dominated in aggregate and simultaneously contain highly feminized labour channels. A country or region is not one migration stream; it is a bundle of streams produced by different sectors, legal categories and historical ties.

A second methodological caution follows. Migrant stock is not the same thing as migration flow. Stock data measure the number of migrants present at a particular moment, whereas flow data measure entries, exits or movements during a specified period. A country may therefore possess a female-majority migrant stock even if the newest inflow is male-dominated, and the reverse is equally possible. Likewise, "foreign-born" and "foreign citizen" are not interchangeable categories. International datasets generally prefer country of birth, but national statistical systems vary, and citizenship is sometimes used where birthplace information is unavailable. Consequently, comparison requires attention not only to percentages but also to definitions (UN DESA, 2025).

There is, furthermore, a historiographical reason to resist the easy language of novelty. Morokvasic's (1984) famous intervention, "Birds of Passage Are Also Women," was powerful precisely because it exposed a problem of recognition. Women were already present in labour migration, yet theory often treated them as appendages to male workers. Pessar and Mahler (2003) later pressed the argument further by insisting that gender should not be added as a final variable after migration has already been explained; rather, gender relations shape decisions, networks, institutions and experiences throughout the migration process. In this sense, feminization describes not only an empirical transformation but also an intellectual correction: migration studies learned, slowly and unevenly, to see what had previously been treated as secondary.

The strongest formulation, then, is neither triumphalist nor dismissive. It would be mistaken to claim that the world has recently moved from male migration to female migration. Yet it would be equally mistaken to conclude that nothing important has changed because the global share is stable. What has changed is the visibility and autonomy of female migrants, the sectoral architecture of labour demand, the international organization of care, the range of legal channels used by women, and the political salience of gender within migration governance. The numerical ratio is only the beginning of

the inquiry; indeed, if treated as the conclusion, it prevents us from seeing the very structures that make feminization analytically significant.

1.2. From the Guest Worker to Gendered Migration: A Historical and Theoretical Reorientation

The historical literature on post-war Europe offers perhaps the clearest illustration of how analytical categories can lag behind social reality. During the decades of reconstruction and rapid industrial expansion, Western European states recruited foreign labour through programmes designed largely around industrial employment. West Germany's guest-worker system became the best-known example, but France, Belgium, Switzerland and other states also relied on foreign labour. The migrant imagined by both administrators and scholars was usually a male worker occupying a position in industry, mining, construction or transport. Women were frequently entered into the story later, under the heading of family reunification. Yet the sequence of policy categories should not be confused with the full social history of migration. Women also worked, migrated independently and supported transnational households; what differed was the way their mobility was classified and interpreted (Morokvasic, 1984).

The significance of feminist migration scholarship was therefore methodological as much as substantive. Morokvasic (1984) challenged the assumption that men represented the general migrant experience while women represented a special case. Pessar and Mahler (2003), in turn, conceptualized migration through "gendered geographies of power," drawing attention to the way gender operates across scales - from the body and household to the labour market, state and transnational field. Such an approach altered the questions that could be asked. Who decides who migrates? Who finances the move? Who controls documents and earnings? Who performs the unpaid work that remains behind? Who receives the remittance? Who is legally recognized as the principal migrant and who as the dependant? These questions are not supplementary to migration theory; they expose the relations through which migration is organized.

The New Economics of Labour Migration contributed to this shift by moving analysis away from the isolated individual and toward the household. Migration could be understood as a strategy through which families diversify income and risk, especially where credit, insurance and labour markets are incomplete (Stark, 1991). Nevertheless, a household is not a single mind. Feminist scholarship rightly insisted that household

strategies are negotiated under conditions of unequal bargaining power. A decision that appears economically rational at household level may distribute costs and benefits unevenly among women, men and children. Moreover, the person who migrates may gain income but lose daily authority over household affairs; the person who remains may gain responsibility but not property rights. Thus, the household is both a unit of cooperation and a field of power.

Network theory adds another layer. Once a migration route becomes established, kinship, friendship and community ties reduce the cost and risk of subsequent movement, while information, accommodation and employment contacts circulate along the same route (Massey et al., 1993). Yet networks are not gender-neutral. A chain that recruits men into construction is institutionally different from one that connects women to domestic service, elder care or nursing. In addition, networks can enable mobility and constrain it simultaneously. The same relatives who provide information may also monitor behaviour; the same recruiter who secures a job may impose debt; the same transnational household that supports migration may expect strict patterns of remittance and caregiving. Accordingly, agency and constraint should not be treated as opposites but as conditions that often coexist.

The concept of migration infrastructure makes this point especially clear. Xiang and Lindquist (2014) describe migration as increasingly mediated through interlinked commercial, regulatory, technological, humanitarian and social actors. Recruitment firms, training centres, visa brokers, state agencies, digital platforms, airlines and employers all participate in producing mobility. For female labour migration this infrastructure is crucial because domestic work and care migration are frequently organized through highly mediated recruitment chains. The migrant does not simply respond to a wage differential; she moves through an institutional corridor built by agencies, regulations and social networks.

At the level of employment, dual and segmented labour-market approaches remain useful because they draw attention to persistent demand for workers in jobs characterized by instability, low prestige, difficult conditions or limited upward mobility (Piore, 1979). Nevertheless, gender analysis reveals that segmentation occurs within migrant labour as well as between migrants and non-migrants. Men may be concentrated in construction, logistics and parts of agriculture, while women are concentrated in domestic work, cleaning, hospitality, health and social care.

The segmentation is never complete - women also migrate as engineers, managers, academics and physicians - but its persistence explains why the feminization of migration has often been discussed through occupations associated with service and care.

From the 1990s onward, the theoretical focus therefore broadened from migration as movement of labour to migration as reorganization of social reproduction. Hochschild's (2000) notion of global care chains, Parreñas's (2000) analysis of the international division of reproductive labour, and later work by Kofman and Raghuram (2015) connected migration to the everyday reproduction of households and societies. Care, cleaning, emotional support and child-rearing could no longer be dismissed as private matters outside political economy. Once such work became internationalized, the private household was revealed as part of a global labour market. This was a major intellectual shift: the border entered the home, and the home entered migration theory.

1.3. The Global Geography of Female Migration: Regions, Corridors and the Limits of Aggregates

Global migration statistics are most useful when they are treated as maps rather than verdicts. UN DESA (2025) estimates that the international migrant stock exceeded 300 million in 2024. Women and girls accounted for just under half. Yet, as already noted, the regional distribution is uneven. Europe and Northern America have roughly balanced or slightly female-majority migrant stocks, while Northern Africa and Western Asia remain strongly male-dominated. The reason is not mysterious: the composition of migration reflects the composition of demand, the legacy of colonial and post-colonial ties, refugee movements, family migration rules and the structure of national economies. Consequently, a gender map of migration is also a map of institutions and sectors.

Consider Europe. Its migration history combines post-war guest-worker recruitment, post-colonial migration, family reunification, refugee movements, intra-European free movement and, increasingly, explicit skilled-worker recruitment. These streams have different gender profiles. Family reunion historically brought many women into countries where the initial recruitment wave had been male-heavy; care labour drew women from Central and Eastern Europe into Southern and Western European households; and health systems recruited nurses and other professionals from a wider range of origin countries. Meanwhile, refugee movements varied

according to conflict, route and legal conditions. Thus, even within a single destination state, the gender composition of migration may differ sharply by channel.

The Gulf presents a different configuration. Oil-led development and massive infrastructure expansion generated large-scale demand for foreign labour, much of it male. This helps explain the unusually low female share of the migrant stock in Northern Africa and Western Asia (UN DESA, 2025). However, household-service and care sectors developed alongside construction and industrial employment. International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021) data on domestic work in the Arab States show the exceptional importance of the sector to regional employment, although the sex composition of domestic workers is more complex than stereotypes sometimes suggest because male domestic workers also constitute a substantial share in parts of the region. The more accurate point, therefore, is not that Gulf domestic work is uniformly female but that particular origin-destination corridors and occupations within the sector are heavily gendered.

The Philippines offers the reverse view: instead of beginning with the destination economy, one begins with a state that has developed a highly institutionalized overseas-employment system. The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA, 2025) estimated 2.19 million Overseas Filipino Workers for 2024, of whom 57.2% were women. This is analytically significant because it illustrates a migration system in which female labour migration is not marginal to national mobility but central to it. Moreover, women are distributed across domestic service, caregiving, nursing, hospitality and other service occupations, while Filipino men are more heavily represented in other sectors. The national aggregate, again, contains several occupational migration systems rather than one homogeneous flow.

Corridors also reveal historical ties that regional aggregates cannot. Latin American migration to Spain is shaped by language, colonial history, citizenship rules and labour-market demand; Eastern European migration to Italy, Germany and Austria is shaped by European integration, wage differentials and care deficits; Philippine migration to the Gulf, Hong Kong, Singapore, Canada and parts of Europe is mediated by recruitment systems and long-standing labour-export institutions. Each corridor is therefore a historical relationship, not merely a line on a map. The corridor has institutions at both ends, and often many in between.

This is why the distinction between stock and flow matters so much. Stock data capture accumulated migration over time, including older cohorts,

settled families and people who may have naturalized. Flow data, by contrast, are more sensitive to short-term policy and economic changes. A new visa category may sharply alter the gender composition of current entries without immediately changing the overall stock. Conversely, an established female-majority population may remain visible in stock data long after the underlying flow has changed. Comparative analysis should therefore resist the temptation to treat every number as a direct measure of the same phenomenon.

Finally, contemporary forced migration complicates any attempt to identify feminization solely with labour demand. The displacement from Ukraine after 2022, for example, produced a strongly female-and-child presence in many European receiving countries because wartime conditions and exit restrictions shaped who could leave. Here the gender composition of movement arose from conflict and origin-country policy rather than from a destination labour market. The example is theoretically important: gendered migration may be produced by recruitment, by family rules, by war, by welfare systems or by political decisions. The observed proportion of women tells us that a pattern exists; it does not, by itself, explain why.

1.4. Women Migrant Workers: Labour-Force Participation, Unemployment and Sectoral Segmentation

The labour market is the point at which the qualitative meaning of feminization becomes most measurable. Population statistics tell us who resides outside a country of birth; labour statistics show whether migrants participate in employment, where they work, and how gender structures access to employment. The ILO's latest global estimates indicate that 167.7 million international migrants were in the labour force of destination countries in 2022. Of these, 64.9 million were women and 102.7 million were men. Thus women represented a much smaller share of the migrant labour force than of the overall migrant stock, a gap that immediately directs attention toward participation, care responsibilities, legal status and labour-market barriers (ILO, 2024).

The gender gap is visible in unemployment as well. In 2022 the unemployment rate for migrant women was 8.7%, compared with 6.2% for migrant men. The ILO (2024) links such differences to a combination of factors, including care responsibilities, recognition of qualifications, discrimination, language barriers and gendered occupational structures. None of these mechanisms operates identically in every country;

nevertheless, taken together they demonstrate that migration does not erase the gender inequalities of labour markets. Indeed, migration may reproduce them in new institutional forms.

Table 1.2. Selected Global Labour-Market Indicators for International Migrants, 2022

Indicator	Women	Men
Migrants in labour force (million)	64.9	102.7
Unemployment rate (%)	8.7	6.2
Share employed in care economy (%)	28.8	12.4

Note. Values are drawn from ILO Global Estimates on International Migrants in the Labour Force, 4th ed. (ILO, 2024).

Sectoral distribution is equally revealing. The ILO (2024) reports that migrants are highly concentrated in services, and women are especially prominent in care-related activities. In 2022, 28.8% of employed migrant women were in the care economy, compared with 19.2% of employed non-migrant women; the corresponding figures for men were much lower. This does not mean that nearly one third of migrant women are domestic workers. The care economy includes a wide range of occupations and institutions - hospitals, nursing homes, schools, childcare, personal care and household services. Nevertheless, it shows how strongly the contemporary migration of women is connected to the social organization of care.

The point becomes clearer when the domestic-work sector is examined separately. According to the ILO's updated global estimates, there were 75.6 million domestic workers aged 15 and over, and women constituted 76.2% of that workforce (ILO, 2021). This later estimate is important because older literature frequently repeats the 2013 estimate of 52.6 million domestic workers and an 83% female share. The older figure remains historically valid for its reference period, but using it without a date gives a false impression of current precision. A serious comparative study must therefore treat statistical vintage as part of the evidence, not as a footnote to be ignored.

Domestic work also exposes the regulatory problems that arise when the workplace is a private household. Ordinary labour inspection is difficult; working hours may be blurred by live-in arrangements; and the boundary between care, availability and rest can become uncertain. Moreover, migrant status may be linked to a particular employer or household, thereby converting an employment relationship into a residence relationship. In such

settings, vulnerability is produced not simply by gender or migration status in isolation but by their institutional combination. A worker who is female, foreign, live-in, dependent on a sponsor and excluded from ordinary inspection occupies a very different bargaining position from a permanent resident employed by a hospital under a collective agreement.

Yet the analytical pendulum should not swing too far. If the older migration literature made women invisible by imagining the migrant as a male industrial worker, some later writing risks making migrant women visible only as domestic workers. That is another simplification. Women also migrate as nurses, physicians, teachers, researchers, engineers, managers and entrepreneurs. Indeed, the international recruitment of nurses has become a major element of migration policy in ageing societies. Kofman and Raghuram (2015) therefore caution against equating social reproductive labour with low skill; care economies contain occupations ranging from informal household work to highly credentialed professional employment.

Professional migration, however, does not escape gendered constraints. Foreign qualifications may be incompletely recognized; career ladders may differ across health systems; and family responsibilities may reduce mobility or labour-force participation after arrival. Conversely, professional migration may offer women income, autonomy and occupational status unavailable in the origin country. Once again, the relationship between migration and empowerment cannot be reduced to a single direction. It depends on the sector, legal status, household arrangement and institutional setting.

The labour market therefore provides a more convincing empirical foundation for feminization than the global migrant-share statistic. The decisive transformations are visible in participation gaps, unemployment risks, occupational segmentation and the internationalization of care. Moreover, these transformations connect micro-level decisions to macro-level institutions: a household needs an elder-care worker; a hospital needs a nurse; a government adjusts a visa category; a recruitment agency identifies workers abroad; and a family in the origin country reorganizes care after departure. The labour contract is thus only one moment in a much longer chain of social and political relations.

1.5. Care Economies, Domestic Work and the Internationalization of Social Reproduction

Care is often treated as the most private of human activities, yet contemporary migration reveals how thoroughly it is embedded in political

economy. Ageing populations, increased longevity, higher labour-force participation among women in destination countries, changing household structures and uneven public provision of long-term care have generated persistent demand for paid care labour. Where domestic labour supply is insufficient or expensive, migration becomes one mechanism through which societies resolve - or postpone - the contradiction between care needs and care resources. For this reason, the care economy is not an accidental subfield of migration studies; it is one of the places where demographic change, welfare policy and international inequality visibly meet (Bettio et al., 2006; Williams, 2012).

Southern Europe has been particularly important in this literature. Bettio et al. (2006) describe the emergence of a Mediterranean care configuration in which families retain extensive responsibility for elderly care while migrant workers increasingly fill gaps that neither the state nor the formal market fully covers. Italy and Spain are therefore not simply countries in which migrant women happen to work in households; rather, the structure of welfare provision helps create the demand that makes such employment possible. Williams (2012) broadens the comparison by showing that migrant care work across Europe varies according to the intersection of care regimes, migration regimes and employment regimes. The same occupation may consequently be organized very differently from one country to another.

Germany demonstrates the coexistence of formal and informalized care migration. On the one hand, regulated professional recruitment brings foreign nurses and health workers into recognized institutions. On the other hand, cross-border live-in care has developed through arrangements involving workers from Central and Eastern Europe, households and intermediary agencies. The contrast is instructive. Both forms of migration respond to care demand; however, the professional nurse and the live-in household worker encounter different labour laws, qualification rules, inspection systems and pathways to residence. To speak simply of "care migration" without distinguishing these institutional locations would therefore conceal precisely what comparison should reveal.

Canada offers another instructive case because the state historically created explicit caregiver programmes that linked labour demand, residence and family life. Caregiver pathways allowed households to recruit workers from abroad, many of them women, while the programme design also generated debates over live-in requirements, family separation and transitions to permanent residence. The analytical lesson is broader than the

specific Canadian policy. Once a visa category is built around a care occupation, the state participates directly in structuring the gender composition of migration even if the legal text is formally gender-neutral.

The global care-chain literature adds the transnational household to this institutional picture. Hochschild (2000) drew attention to the way care may be transferred along a chain of women across countries and classes: one woman enters paid employment because another woman provides care, while that migrant worker's own family relies on relatives or other carers in the origin country. Parreñas (2000) conceptualized a related process as an international division of reproductive labour. What makes these ideas enduring is not the image of a perfectly linear chain - which later scholarship has rightly complicated - but the insight that care deficits can be displaced rather than solved. A household in a wealthier country may resolve a care problem by importing labour, while the migrant's own household must reorganize care elsewhere.

This does not make migrant care work reducible to exploitation. Migration can expand income, bargaining power, professional opportunity and personal autonomy. Nor, however, does the receipt of wages erase structural inequality. The central issue is the distribution of risk and protection. Who bears recruitment debt? Who can change employer? Who has social insurance? Who can bring children? Who is eligible for permanent residence? Who can leave a household without losing legal status? These are questions of institutions, not of sentiment. Accordingly, the care economy becomes a privileged field for observing how migration policy converts social need into differentiated legal status.

The political implications are substantial. When care shortages become acute, governments may liberalize recruitment; when migration becomes electorally contentious, the same governments may tighten family or settlement rules; when abuse becomes visible, labour standards may be extended to occupations previously treated as private. The ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) marks one such institutional development. As of late September 2026, the ILO's NORMLEX database recorded 40 ratifications (International Labour Organization, 2026). Ratification, of course, is not implementation, and implementation is not enforcement. Nevertheless, the Convention symbolizes an important shift: domestic work is recognized as work subject to international labour standards rather than merely a private household arrangement.

The care sector therefore reveals the central argument of this chapter in concentrated form. Feminized migration is produced at the intersection of demographic change, welfare institutions, household strategies, labour-market demand, recruitment systems and migration law. No single level is sufficient. To study only the worker is to miss the state; to study only the state is to miss the household; and to study only the household is to miss the global wage inequalities that make transnational recruitment economically possible.

1.6. Comparative Migration Regimes: Sending States, Care States, Labour-Importing States and Hybrid Systems

A comparative perspective becomes most useful when countries are treated not as entries in a league table but as different institutional configurations. The Philippines, for example, is best understood as a major labour-sending state with a dense apparatus of overseas-employment governance. Canada, by contrast, has historically used sector-specific admission programmes within a broader permanent-immigration system. Gulf states rely heavily on temporary foreign labour within labour markets where settlement and citizenship pathways are comparatively limited. Italy and Spain combine substantial household care demand with Southern European welfare traditions. Germany mixes post-war guest-worker legacies, European free movement, humanitarian migration and skilled recruitment. Türkiye is simultaneously a country of emigration, immigration, transit, refugee hosting and return. These are not stages on one developmental ladder; they are distinct political economies of migration.

The Philippines illustrates how a sending state can institutionalize outward labour mobility. The PSA's 2024 survey found that women constituted 57.2% of Overseas Filipino Workers (PSA, 2025). Yet the importance of the Philippine case lies not only in the female majority. The state, private recruiters, training institutions and destination-country employers together form a migration infrastructure that channels workers toward particular occupations and regions. Thus, female migration is both an economic strategy and an institutional process. The worker may act autonomously, but she acts within a corridor constructed by regulations, contracts, agencies and household expectations (Parreñas, 2000; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014).

Gulf destination states reveal the other side of this corridor. Their labour markets contain enormous foreign-worker populations, but the overall

gender balance is shaped by strongly male-dominated sectors as well as household services. The result is a regional migrant stock with a low female share even though women are deeply embedded in particular labour streams (UN DESA, 2025). This is precisely why one should avoid the phrase "female migration to the Gulf" as if it described a single experience. A nurse in a hospital, a cleaner employed by a firm, and a live-in domestic worker may all be migrants in the same city yet live under very different employment and residence arrangements.

Italy and Spain, by contrast, demonstrate how care demand can be generated by the intersection of population ageing and family-centred welfare arrangements. Migrant women from Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Philippines and elsewhere have become important in domestic and elder-care work, although the composition differs by country and period. The Mediterranean case is therefore not simply about immigration policy. It is equally about social policy: where public or affordable formal care is limited, households become employers, and migration policy indirectly becomes care policy (Bettio et al., 2006).

Germany complicates the Southern European model because it combines a more developed welfare state with persistent demand for migrant care labour and formal skilled recruitment. The same society may therefore depend on migrant labour in both highly regulated institutional care and less standardized household arrangements. Moreover, the legacy of Turkish guest-worker migration, later family formation, European free movement and more recent humanitarian arrivals means that "migrant women in Germany" is not a coherent social category. Different cohorts entered through different legal and historical channels.

North America presents yet another contrast. Canada has long incorporated migration into population and labour-market planning and has used caregiver-specific programmes at different points. The United States, meanwhile, combines family-based migration, employment-based admissions, humanitarian channels and a large unauthorized population. Gender therefore interacts with legal category in distinct ways. A family-sponsored migrant, an undocumented domestic worker, a professional nurse and a refugee may all participate in the same metropolitan labour market while possessing sharply different rights and vulnerabilities. The national case is meaningful only if these channels remain analytically visible.

Türkiye deserves separate attention because it undermines the old distinction between countries of emigration and countries of immigration.

The history of Turkish labour migration to Western Europe remains central, yet contemporary Türkiye also hosts major refugee populations, receives labour migrants, functions as a transit space and contains extensive transnational family and diaspora relations. Consequently, gender analysis must be multidirectional. The position of a Syrian woman under temporary protection, a migrant domestic worker from a neighbouring region, a Turkish woman in the European diaspora and a return migrant cannot be collapsed into one migration story. The Turkish case therefore illustrates a larger contemporary reality: many states now occupy several positions in the migration system at once (Geddes & Scholten, 2016).

Table 1.3. Selected Comparative Migration-Regime Configurations

Case	Institutional configuration	Gender-relevant implication
Philippines	Institutionalized overseas-employment system	Female-majority OFW population in 2024; strong service and care corridors
Gulf destination states	Large temporary foreign-labour systems	Male-heavy aggregate migration alongside gendered domestic/care channels
Italy / Spain	Family-centred care regimes plus migrant labour	Household demand for migrant elder-care and domestic workers
Germany	Mixed regime: EU mobility, family, humanitarian and skilled recruitment	Professional health migration coexists with household-care migration
Canada	Permanent-immigration system with caregiver-specific pathways	Care work linked historically to residence and family-reunification debates
Türkiye	Emigration, immigration, transit and refugee-hosting system	Multiple female migrant populations governed through distinct legal statuses

Note. Comparative synthesis based on the literature and official data cited in Sections 1.3-1.8; the table is descriptive and does not rank national regimes.

What comparative analysis reveals, then, is not a hierarchy of successful and unsuccessful models but a typology of institutional problems. Where residence is tied closely to employers, bargaining power may be constrained. Where family reunification is central, derivative legal status and access to work become important. Where households employ carers directly, inspection and informality become critical. Where professional recruitment dominates, qualification recognition and brain drain enter the debate. Where refugee protection is central, access to employment, schooling and social protection become decisive. Gender operates through each of these institutional pathways differently.

1.7. Women Left Behind, Transnational Families and the Politics of Care at a Distance

Migration changes the lives of people who do not move. This elementary fact is often acknowledged and then forgotten because migration statistics count border crossers rather than reorganized households. Yet when a husband, wife, mother or father migrates, work, authority, care and emotional obligations are redistributed among those who remain. The category of "women left behind" therefore deserves careful use. It identifies a spatial relationship, but it can also imply passivity. The empirical literature shows something more complicated: women who remain may experience both greater autonomy and greater burden, and the balance between the two depends heavily on household structure, remittance practices, property relations and local gender norms (Desai & Banerji, 2008; Lei & Desai, 2021).

Studies from India illustrate this ambivalence particularly well. Desai and Banerji (2008) found that household structure mediates the consequences of husbands' migration: women in nuclear households may face increased responsibilities but also increased autonomy, whereas extended-family settings can preserve existing patterns of authority. Lei and Desai (2021) similarly show that male out-migration can combine economic gains with health costs, additional work and shifting decision-making power. In short, absence does not mechanically produce emancipation, nor does it mechanically produce victimization. Migration alters the bargaining environment; institutions within the household determine what follows.

Research from Pakistan and Bangladesh points in the same direction. Ahmed (2020) emphasizes that women who remain in rural Pakistan may continue to face surveillance and patriarchal constraints even after husbands migrate. More recent work in Bangladesh, by contrast, identifies circumstances in which male out-migration expands women's engagement with land management, household finance and public activities while simultaneously exposing them to new pressures and social expectations (Uddin, 2022). The apparent contradiction is instructive: the effect of migration is conditional. Remittances, in-law relations, land ownership, community norms and the regularity of migrants' support matter as much as physical absence itself.

This conditionality is especially important for employment and agriculture. In many sending regions, male out-migration increases women's responsibility for farming, household management and community

interaction. Such changes are sometimes described as the feminization of agriculture. Yet more work does not necessarily mean more control over land, credit or income. The distinction between responsibility and authority is therefore essential. A woman may perform tasks previously assigned to men while legal ownership and strategic decision-making remain unchanged.

When women migrate, the distribution of care changes in the opposite direction. Parreñas (2005) documents the transnational families created by Philippine labour migration, showing that migrant mothers continue to exercise parental roles through remittances, communication and decision making even while children remain in the country of origin. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) similarly conceptualize transnational motherhood as a form of parenting conducted across borders rather than as the disappearance of motherhood. These studies challenge moralizing narratives that equate physical absence with abandonment.

Nevertheless, transnational parenting should not be romanticized. Separation can generate emotional strain, substitute-care burdens and unequal expectations. Outcomes vary according to which parent migrates, the age of children, the quality of substitute care, communication technologies and the duration and legality of migration. Remittances may improve education, nutrition and housing, yet they do not eliminate emotional costs. Consequently, the literature on children in transnational families is best read as an argument against simple verdicts. Migration can produce material gains and relational strains at the same time (Parreñas, 2005).

Digital communication has altered these arrangements without abolishing distance. Video calls, instant messaging and online banking enable more frequent participation in household life than was possible during earlier migration periods. Yet technological connection does not equal physical presence, and unequal access to devices, connectivity and time continues to matter. Moreover, digital communication can itself become a means of monitoring and discipline as well as intimacy. Thus, even the technological modernization of transnational families reproduces the chapter's central theme: mechanisms that expand agency may simultaneously generate new forms of constraint.

The study of those who remain therefore enlarges the meaning of feminization. Gendered migration is not simply the migration of women. It is the reorganization of gender relations across space. Male migration may alter women's labour and authority; female migration may alter fatherhood and

grandparental care; children's lives may be reorganized without any migration of their own. A complete migration analysis must therefore follow the consequences of mobility beyond the border and back into the household.

1.8. Political Life, Parties and Institutional Structures: How States Gender Migration

Migration enters political life because borders, labour markets and membership are governed through public authority. A worker may decide to migrate, an employer may want to recruit and a household may need care, but none of these intentions automatically creates a lawful migration channel. Parliaments establish categories, governments administer permits, courts interpret rights, municipalities deliver services and political parties translate migration into competing programmes and narratives. Accordingly, the gendered character of migration cannot be separated from political institutions (Geddes & Scholten, 2016).

The first institutional mechanism is admission. A visa category selects not only a person but often an occupation, skill level, duration and family status. Where a state creates a route for nurses, care workers or domestic workers, the gender composition of the underlying occupation influences the gender composition of the resulting migration flow. Formal neutrality in the legal text therefore does not guarantee neutral social consequences. Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations is useful here: institutions may reproduce gendered assumptions through apparently abstract rules about jobs, availability, dependency and career continuity.

The second mechanism is family reunification. European migration history shows how the distinction between the "principal worker" and the "family member" can carry gendered consequences even where women subsequently enter paid employment. Residence rights, waiting periods, access to work and the timing of autonomous status can affect bargaining power inside families. Family migration is therefore neither simply humanitarian nor simply demographic; it is also a legal architecture of dependency and incorporation. Kofman and Raghuram (2015) emphasize that immigration regulations and social reproduction are deeply connected precisely because rules concerning family and work distribute the conditions under which care is performed.

The third mechanism is welfare and care policy. A state that provides extensive public elder care creates a different labour market from one that leaves care primarily to families. Yet even generous welfare states may rely on migrant labour within hospitals, residential facilities or home-care systems. Conversely, weak or fragmented public provision may turn households into employers. For this reason, migration policy can function as an indirect welfare policy: recruitment rules influence how societies respond to care deficits (Bettio et al., 2006; Williams, 2012).

Political parties enter this field by competing over the meaning and acceptable scope of migration. In European democracies, party conflict concerns border control, asylum, labour recruitment, integration, welfare access, citizenship and family reunion; in the United States, immigration has likewise become deeply entangled with partisan competition and national-identity debates (Geddes & Scholten, 2016; Wong, 2017). Gender does not mechanically determine party positions, nor should women migrants be treated as a single electoral symbol. Nevertheless, because migration channels are gendered, changes in party-supported policy can have gender-specific consequences. A restriction on family reunification, for example, affects a different social population from an expansion of skilled health recruitment.

Political representation raises another question. Migrant women are not only objects of migration policy; where legal status permits, they are workers, association members, voters, activists and candidates. Their political participation depends on citizenship, length of residence, local voting rules, organizational networks and the resources available within communities. In this sense, the movement from migrant to political actor is itself institutional. The right to work, the right to organize, the right to vote and the right to remain are linked but distinct stages of inclusion.

International institutions add another layer to this political architecture. The ILO, IOM, UN agencies and regional organizations produce labour standards, data, policy guidance and monitoring frameworks. The Domestic Workers Convention is one obvious example, but the broader significance lies in the gradual movement of domestic and care labour from the category of private household arrangement toward the category of regulated employment (International Labour Organization, 2026). International standards do not erase national differences; rather, they create reference points around which states, unions, employers and advocacy organizations negotiate reform.

Finally, political life shapes the language through which migrant women are seen. In public debate they may be represented as workers filling shortages, family members seeking reunification, refugees needing protection, cultural outsiders, taxpayers, carers or welfare users. These frames are politically consequential because they define which institutions are expected to respond. A labour-market frame directs attention to employment ministries; a family frame to reunification law; a security frame to border institutions; a rights frame to courts and anti-discrimination bodies. Thus discourse and institutional jurisdiction reinforce one another.

The implication for comparative analysis is straightforward. It is not enough to ask whether a country is "open" or "closed" to migration. One must ask open to whom, through which channel, for what work, for how long, with what family rights and under which path to settlement. Only then does the gendered character of migration policy become visible.

1.9. Comparative Synthesis: From a Demographic Label to an Institutional Explanation

The evidence assembled in this chapter supports a conclusion that is at once simple and demanding: there is no single feminization of migration. There are multiple feminizing processes operating at different levels. At the demographic level, the global female share of migrants is broadly stable. At the labour-market level, however, women are strongly concentrated in particular service and care occupations and face distinct participation and unemployment patterns. At the household level, migration redistributes paid and unpaid work across borders. At the institutional level, visa categories, family rules, welfare systems and sponsorship arrangements create gender-differentiated opportunities and dependencies. At the political level, parties and governments contest these arrangements through competing understandings of labour need, rights, identity and membership.

This multi-level interpretation explains why the Philippines and the Gulf can appear simultaneously feminized and masculinized depending on the unit of analysis. The Philippines sends a female-majority overseas workforce according to the latest PSA estimate, while the broader migrant population of Northern Africa and Western Asia remains heavily male because of the extraordinary scale of male labour migration (PSA, 2025; UN DESA, 2025). Neither statistic invalidates the other. They describe different parts of the same transnational system.

Similarly, the European care economy cannot be understood through labour-market demand alone. Household preferences, ageing, welfare provision, European mobility rules, regularization practices and private intermediaries all help determine who provides care and under what conditions. The Italian household employing a live-in carer, the German hospital recruiting a nurse and the Canadian family using a caregiver programme belong to the same broad world of internationalized social reproduction, but they do not belong to the same legal regime. Comparative analysis is useful precisely because it prevents a shared label from erasing institutional difference (Bettio et al., 2006; Kofman & Raghuram, 2015; Williams, 2012).

Nor should empowerment be treated as the natural outcome of female mobility. Migration may increase income and bargaining power, yet it can also place women in occupations marked by informality, sponsorship dependence or deskilling. The same ambivalence applies to women who remain behind. Male migration may expand a wife's authority while increasing her work burden and affecting health; extended-family structures may moderate or intensify these effects (Desai & Banerji, 2008; Lei & Desai, 2021). The proper language is therefore conditional rather than celebratory: migration creates new resources and new constraints, and institutions influence which of them predominates.

The chapter also suggests a broader political-economic point. Care is one of the hidden infrastructures of every society. Children must be raised, older people must be supported, homes must be maintained, and illness must be treated. Where such work is underfunded, privatized or unevenly distributed, migration can become a mechanism through which one society imports the labour required for its social reproduction. Yet the exporting society does not cease to have care needs. The result is not a simple transfer but a chain of substitutions, negotiations and absences. This is why global care chains remain analytically powerful even when their linear imagery requires qualification (Hochschild, 2000; Parreñas, 2000).

Finally, the comparative perspective restores politics to a field that is sometimes presented as though it were governed only by demography and wages. Ageing creates demand, wage gaps create incentives and networks lower costs, but public authority determines the legal form through which movement occurs. A labour shortage does not automatically produce a visa; a marriage does not automatically produce residence; a job does not automatically produce permanent status; and long residence does not

automatically produce citizenship. Migration systems are institutional constructions built on economic pressures but never reducible to them (Geddes & Scholten, 2016).

For the purposes of this book, the concept of feminization should therefore be retained, but disciplined. It is useful when it directs attention toward women's autonomy, occupational concentration, care economies, transnational families and gendered policy effects. It becomes misleading when it is used as a shorthand for a supposed worldwide numerical transition from male to female migration. The difference between these two uses is not semantic. It determines whether analysis reproduces a slogan or explains a system.

Conclusion

The history of migration is full of categories that appeared obvious until they were examined closely. The "migrant worker" was once assumed to be male; the "dependant" was often assumed to be female; the household was treated as a private sphere; care was separated from economic production; and migration policy was described as though it merely regulated movements that had already been generated elsewhere. The study of gender has unsettled each of these assumptions. It has shown that the worker has a family, the family has a political economy, the household is connected to global labour markets, and the state helps produce the very migration channels it claims merely to regulate.

The evidence also requires discipline in the use of the phrase feminization of migration. Globally, women are not a newly emergent majority among international migrants. They accounted for just under half of the world's migrant stock in 2024, broadly consistent with the long-run pattern (UN DESA, 2025). Yet this numerical stability has coexisted with substantial structural change. Women are increasingly recognized as principal migrants and workers; female migration is central to particular national labour-export systems; care and service sectors are internationally connected; and migration policy more clearly confronts questions of family status, domestic work, qualification recognition, labour protection and social reproduction.

The labour-market evidence is particularly revealing. Women constituted 64.9 million of the 167.7 million migrants in the global labour force in 2022, and their unemployment rate exceeded that of migrant men. At the same time, migrant women were disproportionately represented in care-related activities (ILO, 2024). This pattern is not accidental. It emerges from the

interaction of demographic ageing, unequal wages between countries, gendered occupational structures, welfare regimes and migration rules. The labour market, in other words, translates broader social institutions into migration demand.

The same is true of the household. Global care chains and transnational families demonstrate that migration reorganizes social reproduction across distance. Women who migrate continue to care, remit and make decisions; women who remain may take on additional economic and household responsibilities; children may experience both material improvement and emotional strain; and men may assume caregiving roles that older migration models rarely examined. Hence migration does not simply move workers from one labour market to another. It redistributes obligations among households, states and markets.

Comparative analysis makes this redistribution visible because it shows how differently similar needs are governed. The Philippines institutionalizes overseas employment; Gulf economies rely on large temporary migrant workforces; Southern Europe uses migrant labour within family-centred care arrangements; Germany combines formal skilled recruitment with other forms of care migration; Canada has experimented with caregiver-specific pathways; and Türkiye occupies multiple positions as sending, receiving, transit and refugee-hosting state. These cases should not be ranked through a single normative scale. Their analytical value lies in showing that gendered migration is produced through different combinations of labour demand, family rules, welfare institutions and legal status.

Political life therefore belongs at the centre, not at the edge, of the analysis. Parties and governments decide which shortages justify recruitment, which family ties justify reunification, which residence categories permit work, which workers can change employers, and which migrants can eventually become members of the political community. International organizations set standards, but national institutions interpret and enforce them. Courts define rights; municipalities deliver services; political parties frame migration for electorates. A phenomenon that begins with mobility quickly becomes a question of representation, welfare, labour law and citizenship.

The conceptual lesson is consequently clear. The feminization of migration should not be treated as a slogan about numbers. It should be used as an analytical window onto the changing relations among mobility, work, care, family and political authority. Once understood in this way, the concept

becomes both more modest and more powerful. It no longer claims that women have suddenly entered migration history; rather, it reveals how migration history itself looks different when women, households and institutions are finally placed in the centre of the picture.

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CHAPTER 2: WOMEN MIGRANT WORKERS: LABOUR MARKETS, EMPLOYMENT SECTORS, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND PRECARIOUS WORK

Introduction

The labour market is the place where the feminization of migration becomes visible in its most concrete form. Borders, permits and recruitment systems may determine who moves, yet it is in workplaces that migration is converted into wages, hierarchy, occupational status, social insurance and, not infrequently, dependence. For migrant women, moreover, this conversion is particularly revealing because their labour-market position is shaped simultaneously by migration status and by the pre-existing gender division of work. The result is not one uniform pattern but a strikingly uneven field. Migrant women are highly represented in domestic service, elder care, cleaning, hospitality and other labour-intensive services; at the same time, they are also nurses, physicians, academics, engineers, entrepreneurs and professionals whose qualifications may be central to destination-country economies. Thus any analysis that begins by describing migrant women simply as a vulnerable labour force has already narrowed the field too much. Vulnerability exists, sometimes in severe form, but so do skilled mobility, bargaining power, occupational advancement and institutional pathways to long-term settlement (Kofman & Raghuram, 2015; OECD & European Commission, 2023).

The global figures themselves contain this duality. According to the International Labour Organization's latest global estimates, 167.7 million international migrants were in the labour force in 2022; 64.9 million were women and 102.7 million were men. The labour-force participation rate of migrant women was 52.8%, far below the 77.9% recorded for migrant men, while migrant women's unemployment rate stood at 8.7%, compared with 6.2% among migrant men. Yet migrant women were not simply less connected to employment. Their participation rate was actually higher than that of non-migrant women globally, a reminder that migration itself is a selective process and that many women migrate precisely in order to work. At the same time, the composition of that work was sharply gendered: 80.7% of employed migrant women were in services, and 28.8% were in care

employment, compared with 60.8% and 12.4% respectively among migrant men (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2024).

These contrasts are not statistical curiosities. They point to the central argument of this chapter: migrant women's labour-market outcomes are produced through the interaction of sectoral demand, migration regimes, welfare institutions, family structures, recruitment infrastructures and systems of occupational recognition. In Southern Europe, the ageing of populations and the persistence of family-centred care arrangements have helped create a large market for migrant home-care workers. In Germany and the United Kingdom, health and care shortages have increasingly generated more formalized recruitment channels. In Canada, caregiver programmes have historically connected care work with residence status and eventual permanent settlement, though not without long periods of family separation. In Gulf economies, by contrast, domestic work has developed within temporary migration systems in which legal status has often been tied to a sponsoring employer. These are not merely different national versions of the same labour market; they are different institutional architectures of migration and work (Bettio et al., 2006; Williams, 2012).

Accordingly, the chapter proceeds from the global labour-force baseline to the structure beneath it. It first distinguishes participation, employment, unemployment and inactivity, because these categories are too often collapsed in public debate. It then examines occupational segregation and sectoral concentration, before turning in detail to domestic work and the care economy, healthcare and skilled migration, precarious and informal employment, and the persistence of employment gaps. Particular attention is given to overqualification and deskilling, because highly educated migrant women often encounter a paradox: migration may expand their income opportunities while simultaneously reducing the occupational value of credentials acquired elsewhere. The later sections compare sending-country systems and major labour corridors and, finally, return to political institutions, showing how permits, recognition systems, labour inspection, welfare provision and international standards shape what appears at first sight to be a purely economic outcome.

2.1. Migrant Women in the Global Labour Force: Participation, Employment, and Unemployment

A labour-market analysis must begin with definitions, because several distinct conditions are routinely discussed as though they were

interchangeable. Labour-force participation measures whether a person is employed or actively seeking work. Employment measures whether a person actually has work. Unemployment applies only to those who are in the labour force but do not have a job and are actively seeking one. Inactivity, by contrast, means being outside the labour force altogether. These differences matter greatly in the case of migrant women. A low employment rate may be caused by high unemployment, by high inactivity, or by both, and each mechanism points toward a different institutional problem. The first may indicate weak labour demand, discrimination or skill mismatch; the second may reflect care responsibilities, legal restrictions, language acquisition, household choices or barriers to childcare. A single headline 'employment gap' can therefore conceal several quite different social processes (ILO, 2024; OECD & European Commission, 2023).

The latest ILO estimates provide the most authoritative global baseline. In 2022, 167.7 million international migrants participated in the global labour force, of whom 64.9 million were women. Migrant women represented 38.7% of the international migrant labour force, substantially below their share of the international migrant population. Their labour-force participation rate, at 52.8%, was 25.1 percentage points below that of migrant men. Likewise, their employment-to-population ratio was 48.1%, while that of migrant men was 72.8%. These gaps are large enough that they cannot be treated as residual statistical differences; they reflect the fact that gender continues to shape labour-market incorporation even after migration has occurred (ILO, 2024).

Table 2.1. Selected Global Labour-Market Indicators for International Migrants, 2022

Indicator	Women	Men
Migrant labour force (million)	64.9	102.7
Labour-force participation rate (%)	52.8	77.9
Employment-to-population ratio (%)	48.1	72.8
Unemployment rate (%)	8.7	6.2
Share employed in services (%)	80.7	60.8
Share in care employment (%)	28.8	12.4

Note. Data are from ILO Global Estimates on International Migrants in the Labour Force, 4th ed. (ILO, 2024).

Yet the comparison with non-migrant women introduces an important qualification. Globally, the participation rate of migrant women was higher than that of non-migrant women, 52.8% compared with 47.7%. The employment-to-population ratio showed the same direction: 48.1% for migrant women and 45.1% for non-migrant women. It would be mistaken, however, to interpret these figures as evidence that migrant women generally face fewer barriers. Migration is selective. Labour migrants are, by definition, disproportionately likely to have moved for employment, whereas the non-migrant female population includes women whose relationship to paid work is shaped by a very wide range of local social, family and economic circumstances. Furthermore, the migrant category includes labour migrants, family migrants, refugees, students and others whose employment trajectories differ markedly. Aggregate rates are therefore informative, but they are not self-explanatory (ILO, 2024).

Unemployment adds another dimension. Migrant women had a global unemployment rate of 8.7% in 2022, compared with 6.2% among migrant men. The rate for all migrants was 7.2%, while that for non-migrants was 5.2%. This indicates that migrant women face both a participation gap vis-à-vis migrant men and a higher probability of unemployment once they are economically active. These are separate disadvantages. A woman who is outside the labour force because childcare is inaccessible is analytically distinct from a woman who is actively seeking work but cannot find employment because her credentials are not recognized. Public policy that treats the two situations as the same problem is unlikely to be effective (ILO, 2024).

The OECD and European Commission's comparative integration indicators reveal similar complexity within advanced economies. In the European Union, only 57% of migrant women aged 15-64 were employed in 2021, compared with 73% of migrant men and 65% of native-born women. These figures show that the gender gap is wider among immigrants than among the native-born in much of Europe. However, the size of the gap varies by destination, migration history and entry category. Long-standing labour destinations with large humanitarian or family-migration populations often display different female employment trajectories from settlement countries that select a higher proportion of economic migrants. Thus national averages must be read against the composition of migration itself (OECD & European Commission, 2023).

The first conclusion, therefore, is methodological as much as empirical. Migrant women's labour-market position cannot be summarized by one indicator. Participation, unemployment, employment, occupation, contract type, legal status and skill match belong to different levels of analysis. Taken together, they reveal a labour force that is neither uniformly excluded nor uniformly integrated. Rather, migrant women occupy a wide range of positions created by the intersection of migration selection, gendered labour demand and institutional rules.

2.2. Occupational Segregation and Sectoral Concentration

The most striking characteristic of migrant women's employment is not simply whether they work, but where they work. Labour markets are segmented, and migration frequently intensifies that segmentation. Piore's (1979) dual labour-market theory emphasized the persistent demand in advanced economies for workers willing to occupy unstable, low-status or otherwise unattractive jobs in a secondary labour market. Earlier work on internal labour markets likewise showed that employment systems are structured institutionally rather than operating as one undifferentiated competitive market (Doeringer & Piore, 1971). When gender is added to this framework, an important refinement becomes visible: migrants are not merely channelled into secondary positions; women and men are often channelled into different parts of them. The division is not absolute, but it is sufficiently systematic to make occupational segregation one of the central facts of migrant labour markets.

ILO data illustrate this pattern at the broadest level. In 2022, 80.7% of employed migrant women worked in services, compared with 60.8% of employed migrant men. By contrast, men were much more heavily represented in industry. These aggregate categories are broad, of course: 'services' includes highly skilled nursing, education and professional work as well as domestic service, cleaning, retail and hospitality. Nevertheless, the gender difference is substantial, and it immediately points toward the need to disaggregate the service economy rather than treating it as one sector (ILO, 2024).

Care employment provides a more precise example. Nearly three in ten employed migrant women globally were in the care economy in 2022, compared with roughly one in eight migrant men. Moreover, migrant women were more likely to be in care employment than non-migrant women, whose corresponding share was 19.2%. This concentration is not accidental. Care

work is shaped by a long-standing social division in which women are expected to perform reproductive labour within households and communities; international migration has converted part of that historically unpaid or underpaid labour into transnational paid employment. Thus the migration of women into care work does not create a gendered division of labour from nothing. It internationalizes and reorganizes an existing one (Hochschild, 2000; ILO, 2024; Parreñas, 2000).

At the same time, the concept of occupational segregation must be used carefully. Migrant women are overrepresented at both ends of the occupational hierarchy. OECD and European Commission data show that foreign-born women in the EU hold larger shares of both highly skilled and elementary occupations than men, although they remain more likely than native-born women to work in lower-skilled positions. This bimodality is important because it challenges the tendency to represent migrant women solely through domestic work or cleaning. The same migration system may recruit a Filipina nurse, employ another Filipina woman in domestic service, and receive a third through family reunification. Their legal status, skill utilization and bargaining power may differ dramatically despite common nationality and gender (OECD & European Commission, 2023).

Southern Europe offers a particularly clear example of sectoral concentration. Italy and Spain developed welfare arrangements in which families retained extensive responsibility for elder care even as demographic ageing and women's employment increased the demand for care services. The resulting 'migrant-in-the-family' model, described by Bettio et al. (2006), relied heavily on migrant women employed in private households. In this arrangement, migration policy, welfare policy and labour-market demand meet at the kitchen table and in the elderly person's bedroom. The care worker may be indispensable to the functioning of the household and yet remain only weakly integrated into the formal institutions of the labour market.

The Nordic case differs. Countries such as Sweden historically developed more extensive public childcare and elder-care provision, and therefore relied less heavily on private household employment as the primary solution to care deficits. This does not mean migrant women are absent from care work in Nordic countries; rather, the institutional location of that work is different. More care is provided through municipalities, public agencies or regulated providers, and migration flows have also included substantial humanitarian components. Consequently, the same occupation may be

embedded in a different employment relationship and a different set of social protections. Williams (2012) captures this point by showing that migrant care work in Europe is produced by the intersection of care regimes, migration regimes and employment regimes, not by care demand alone.

A similar analytical caution applies to manufacturing and agriculture. The global 'feminization of labour' literature highlighted the increasing employment of women in flexible export production, particularly in textiles and garments (Standing, 1989). Yet much of that literature concerns internal rural-to-urban migration rather than international migration. It should not be imported wholesale into a study of cross-border migrant women. International migrant women certainly work in manufacturing and agriculture, but the scale and gender composition vary by destination and crop, industry or programme. In agriculture, for example, temporary and seasonal migration may be heavily male in one country and significantly female in another. Sectoral labels alone do not establish feminization; the actual migration channel must be examined.

The result is a labour market marked by patterned diversity. Migrant women are concentrated in particular sectors, but they are not confined to one class of work. Their employment can be low-paid or professional, formal or informal, temporary or permanent, family-based or state-recruited. The central question is therefore not whether segregation exists - it plainly does - but how institutions reproduce, soften or transform it.

2.3. Domestic Work and the Care Economy

Domestic work is perhaps the most revealing sector in which to examine the intersection of gender, migration and institutions, because it occupies an ambiguous boundary between the labour market and the private household. The work is economically necessary, yet it is performed in spaces historically treated as private; it may be paid, but it resembles tasks long assigned to women without pay; and it may be regulated by labour law, yet ordinary inspection mechanisms are often poorly suited to entering a private home. For precisely these reasons, domestic work concentrates many of the structural tensions found elsewhere in migrant labour markets (Anderson, 2000; ILO, 2021).

The scale is considerable. The ILO estimated in 2021 that at least 75.6 million people aged 15 and over were employed as domestic workers worldwide and that roughly three-quarters were women. Eight in ten domestic workers were informally employed. These figures refer to domestic

workers generally, not only to migrants, but migrant workers form a significant share of the sector in many destination countries. The distinction matters: not every domestic worker is a migrant, and not every migrant woman is a domestic worker. Nonetheless, where international migration and domestic work overlap, the employment relationship often combines gendered expectations with legal dependency and weak enforcement (ILO, 2021).

The Mediterranean care model is one well-known configuration. In Italy and Spain, households increasingly turned to migrant women to fill gaps between family obligations and insufficient or fragmented formal elder-care provision. The worker may live in the household, provide care across long and irregular hours, and develop an intensely personal relationship with the person receiving care, while her own contract remains weakly defined or partly informal. This model has sometimes been described as a solution to demographic ageing; equally, it can be interpreted as a way of postponing more expensive public investment in care. Both readings are plausible, and the tension between them is political as much as economic (Bettio et al., 2006; Williams, 2012).

Germany and Austria have developed a somewhat different version through cross-border live-in care, often involving women from Central and Eastern Europe. Here the employment relationship may be mediated through agencies, posting arrangements or self-employment classifications rather than direct household hiring. The formal architecture can therefore look more regulated than in purely informal arrangements, yet the practical reality may still involve extremely long availability periods, blurred boundaries between work and rest, and dependence on the household. The lesson is that formalization has degrees. A contract does not automatically eliminate precarity if working time is difficult to measure and if the workplace is also the worker's home.

Canada offers a contrasting institutional experiment. The Live-in Caregiver Program, in operation from 1992 to 2014, connected household care work to an eventual pathway to permanent residence. The scheme was distinctive because it did not simply import temporary labour; it linked care employment to long-term settlement. Yet the programme also generated serious problems. Caregivers were required to live with their employers, and family members generally could not accompany them during the temporary stage. Government reviews later recognized prolonged family separation and long processing times as major weaknesses, and reforms in 2014 removed

the compulsory live-in requirement and created new pathways (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC], 2022). Thus the Canadian case demonstrates an important point: a migration regime can offer a settlement pathway and still produce forms of dependency during the temporary stage.

The Gulf states represent another model altogether. Large-scale household employment by women from the Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and other countries developed within temporary labour migration systems historically structured through employer sponsorship. The precise rules differ by country and have changed over time, and reforms should therefore be assessed country by country. Yet the general institutional issue is clear: when legal status is tied closely to one employer and the workplace is a private household, the worker's ability to exit a bad employment relationship may be constrained. The risk is not inherent in nationality or occupation; it is produced by the interaction between sponsorship, housing, recruitment debt and limited access to enforcement mechanisms.

Recruitment intermediaries are therefore crucial. Xiang and Lindquist (2014) use the concept of migration infrastructure to describe the commercial, regulatory, technological and social systems that mediate labour mobility. Domestic-worker corridors often involve agencies on both the sending and receiving sides, training centres, medical examinations, document-processing systems, transport providers and state regulators. These institutions can lower the cost and uncertainty of migration, but they can also generate fees, debts and layers of dependency. A migrant worker may thus be formally 'free' to migrate while entering the destination labour market burdened by obligations created before departure.

International labour standards have attempted to address some of these problems. ILO Convention No. 189, adopted in 2011 and in force since 2013, affirms that domestic workers are workers entitled to labour protections rather than a special class of household dependants. As of September 2026, the ILO recorded 40 ratifications. The number is significant but still limited relative to the size of the sector, and ratification does not by itself guarantee enforcement. Nonetheless, the Convention marks an institutional transformation because it moves domestic work from the realm of private benevolence into the language of labour rights (ILO, 2026).

For migrant women, then, domestic work is neither simply a story of exploitation nor simply a story of opportunity. It may provide earnings,

mobility and household bargaining power unavailable at home; it may also place the worker in a highly dependent relationship. Whether one dimension outweighs the other depends on the migration channel, the destination state's labour law, the worker's ability to change employers, the availability of social protection, the cost of recruitment and the possibility of long-term residence. The sector is therefore best understood institutionally, not morally.

2.4. Healthcare, Skilled Migration, and the Politics of Credential Recognition

The concentration of migrant women in low-paid services is only one side of the labour-market story. International migration also moves large numbers of highly trained women across borders, particularly in nursing and healthcare. This matters analytically because the health sector exposes a different form of dependency: the migrant worker may possess high qualifications and professional status, yet still face barriers created by licensing, language requirements, credential recognition and the unequal demand for health personnel across countries. Skilled migration therefore complicates any simple contrast between 'empowered professional' and 'precarious domestic worker.' The relevant question is not skill alone, but whether skill can be transferred institutionally from one national system to another (Chiswick, 1978; Kofman & Raghuram, 2015).

The Philippines is the paradigmatic case. For decades it has supplied nurses and other health professionals to North America, Europe, the Gulf and parts of Asia. The migration is not merely an individual response to wage differences; it is embedded in educational systems, recruitment institutions and state policies oriented toward overseas employment. The result is a transnational labour market in which professional training acquired in one country is designed partly for use in another. Yet the same system raises questions about the distribution of costs and benefits. Destination countries gain trained staff without bearing the full cost of their education, while sending countries receive remittances but may lose personnel from already stretched health systems.

Germany's Triple Win programme illustrates how destination states increasingly attempt to formalize such recruitment. The German Federal Employment Agency and the Philippine Department of Migrant Workers cooperate in the selection and placement of nurses, with language preparation and integration support built into the process. The programme's

significance lies less in its scale than in its institutional design: recruitment is treated as a bilateral governance problem involving qualifications, language, placement and integration rather than as a purely private labour-market transaction (Federal Employment Agency, n.d.).

The United Kingdom has likewise used immigration policy to address health and care shortages. The Health and Care Worker route, introduced in 2020, created a dedicated pathway within the skilled-worker system for eligible healthcare and care occupations. The route illustrates a broader transformation in migration policy: labour shortages that were once addressed domestically through training, wage adjustment or workforce reorganization are increasingly linked to international recruitment. This can be rational from the destination state's perspective, particularly during acute shortages, but it also internationalizes the distributional consequences of workforce planning.

For this reason, the World Health Organization's Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel, adopted in 2010, is especially important. The Code does not prohibit health-worker migration; rather, it seeks to promote ethical recruitment and to protect the sustainability of health systems in source countries. It encourages states to improve data, cooperate bilaterally and avoid recruitment practices that exacerbate critical shortages. The Code's voluntary nature means implementation depends on national policy, but its existence acknowledges that professional migration is not simply a private contract between worker and employer. It is also a matter of international health governance (World Health Organization [WHO], 2010).

Credential recognition is the next crucial issue. A nurse, physician, teacher or engineer does not carry a profession across a border simply by carrying a diploma. Regulated professions depend on licensing bodies, examinations, supervised practice, language standards and, sometimes, nationality or residency requirements. Human-capital theory expects migrants' earnings to rise as host-country experience accumulates and skills become more transferable (Chiswick, 1978). Yet the institutional process through which transferability is achieved may be slow or incomplete. A highly educated woman may therefore enter the destination country with considerable human capital and still work temporarily - or permanently - below her qualification level.

OECD evidence confirms that this is not a marginal problem. Around one-third of highly educated immigrants in the OECD and EU were

overqualified for their jobs in the most recent comparative data, and immigrant women were more likely to be overqualified than immigrant men. In the EU, 47% of highly educated immigrants were either overqualified or not employed, compared with 30% of highly educated native-born people. Perhaps more importantly, a host-country degree reduced the immigrant overqualification gap by roughly three-quarters across the EU, which strongly suggests that recognition and transferability of foreign education are central mechanisms rather than minor administrative details (OECD & European Commission, 2023).

Table 2.2. Overqualification among Tertiary-Educated Workers in the EU, by Citizenship, 2023

Citizenship group	Overqualification rate (%)	Gender pattern
Non-EU citizens	39.4	Female rate 6.7 pp higher than male rate
Citizens of another EU country	31.3	Female rate 3.2 pp higher than male rate
Nationals	20.8	Female rate 1.2 pp higher than male rate

Note. Eurostat citizenship-based overqualification rates for tertiary-educated employed persons, 2023 (Eurostat, 2024).

Eurostat's 2023 citizenship-based data sharpen the point. Among tertiary-educated workers in the EU, the overqualification rate was 39.4% for non-EU citizens, 31.3% for citizens of another EU country and 20.8% for nationals. Women displayed higher overqualification than men in each non-national category, with the gender gap particularly pronounced among non-EU citizens. Country differences were also striking: overqualification among non-EU citizens exceeded 60% in Italy and approached 70% in Greece, whereas it was much lower in several Northern European destinations (Eurostat, 2024).

These patterns demonstrate that high skill does not remove migrants from institutional inequality. In fact, the more regulated the profession, the more consequential recognition rules become. The same woman can be a nurse in Manila, a care assistant in London, a nursing trainee in Germany or a domestic worker elsewhere, depending not only on her knowledge but on the legal and professional institutions that validate that knowledge. Skilled female migration is therefore a central part of the feminization of labour mobility precisely because it reveals how states assign value to qualifications acquired beyond their borders.

2.5. Precarious Work, Informality, and Legal-Status Stratification

Precarity is one of the most frequently used words in contemporary migration research, but it is also one of the easiest to use too broadly. Kalleberg (2009) defines precarious work through uncertainty and insecurity in employment relations, whereas informality refers to the legal and regulatory status of economic activity. The two overlap, but they are not identical. A formally registered worker can hold an insecure temporary contract, while an informal worker may have a stable long-term relationship with the same household. Likewise, low pay is not the same as legal precarity, although the conditions often coexist. For migrant women, analytical precision is essential because the sources of insecurity vary by sector and legal status.

The highest-risk situations often combine several forms of dependency. An employer-tied work permit limits the ability to change jobs; a live-in arrangement links housing to employment; recruitment debt increases the cost of leaving; and informal work reduces access to social insurance or formal complaint mechanisms. None of these features is inherently female, yet women are disproportionately represented in sectors where they cluster together, particularly domestic and care work. Precarity is therefore gendered not because women possess a natural vulnerability but because institutions sort workers into different employment relationships (Acker, 1990; Anderson, 2000).

Undocumented status adds another layer. A worker without secure residence may avoid labour inspectors, police or courts even when labour law formally protects her. Employers are then able to convert immigration insecurity into workplace power. This is particularly important in cleaning, agriculture, hospitality and domestic work, sectors in which subcontracting or private-household employment can make the true employer difficult to identify. The worker's bargaining position is consequently shaped by law far beyond the employment contract itself.

Temporary work can also create insecurity without illegality. In agriculture and hospitality, seasonal permits may authorize employment for a limited period and a specific employer. Such schemes can provide lawful mobility and predictable labour supply, but they can also leave workers with little leverage if dismissal means the loss of the right to remain. The economic argument in favour of temporary migration emphasizes flexibility and circularity; the labour-rights critique emphasizes dependency and weak voice. Both perspectives capture part of the institutional trade-off.

Part-time work presents a similar ambiguity. OECD data indicate that immigrant women are not uniformly more likely than native-born women to work part-time, but involuntary part-time is more common among migrant women in many settings. This distinction matters because chosen part-time work may help reconcile employment and care responsibilities, whereas involuntary part-time signals underemployment. Again, one indicator can represent two very different realities (OECD & European Commission, 2023).

Trade unions and worker organizations can mitigate insecurity, yet domestic and informal workers are difficult to organize through traditional workplace-based methods. The work is dispersed across households, employment relationships may be individualized, and some workers fear that collective action will jeopardize legal status. As a result, domestic-worker associations, migrant-rights organizations, cooperatives and community networks have often supplemented conventional trade unions. These forms of organization are significant because they redefine the worker not merely as a temporary migrant or household helper but as a rights-bearing employee.

The concept of intersectionality helps explain why precarity is distributed unevenly even within the same occupation. Gender interacts with legal status, race, nationality, language, class and family position. Two women performing similar care work may occupy very different positions if one is a citizen with a permanent contract and the other is an employer-sponsored migrant whose housing depends on the job. Crenshaw's (1991) framework is therefore useful not because it adds more labels to the analysis but because it prevents gender from becoming a catch-all explanation for inequalities actually produced by several overlapping institutional systems.

It follows that the phrase 'migrant women are precarious' is too imprecise to be analytically useful. Some migrant women are highly secure professionals; others experience severe employment insecurity. The relevant task is to identify the mechanisms: employer dependency, informality, undocumented status, temporary permits, recruitment debt, weak inspection and barriers to collective organization. Precarity should be explained, not assumed.

2.6. Welfare Regimes, Family Structure, and the Employment Gap

Employment outcomes are shaped not only by the workplace but also by the household and the welfare state. This is especially important for migrant

women because migration often rearranges care responsibilities without eliminating them. A woman who migrates may still be responsible for children abroad; a woman who arrives through family reunification may enter a household in which childcare, language acquisition and settlement tasks delay paid employment; and a refugee mother may face a combination of childcare needs, disrupted education and legal uncertainty. Labour-market integration therefore cannot be understood separately from family structure (Kofman & Raghuram, 2015).

Comparative welfare regimes produce different opportunities and constraints. Nordic welfare states historically invested heavily in public childcare and formal elder care, reducing the extent to which households had to purchase private solutions. Southern European systems relied more strongly on families, which helped create demand for migrant women as private caregivers. Liberal systems such as the United Kingdom and Canada have combined public provision with market-based or immigration-based responses to labour shortages. These are not fixed ideal types, and all have changed over time, but the comparison reveals an important principle: welfare policy can affect migrant women's employment both directly, by enabling them to work, and indirectly, by creating jobs for them in the care economy (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Williams, 2012).

Childcare is a particularly clear mechanism. Affordable childcare increases the feasibility of paid employment for mothers generally, but migrant women may face additional barriers: limited knowledge of services, language difficulties, uncertain eligibility, irregular working hours and the absence of extended family networks. A care worker who begins work before dawn or stays overnight with an elderly client cannot necessarily use childcare services organized around standard office hours. Thus the formal availability of childcare does not automatically translate into effective access.

Migration channel also matters. Labour migrants are selected partly for employability and often arrive with a job or at least a work-oriented migration plan. Family migrants, by contrast, are selected primarily through a relationship to another migrant. Refugees are selected by protection needs rather than labour-market readiness. It is therefore unsurprising that employment trajectories differ across categories. A lower employment rate among family or humanitarian migrants does not by itself prove that family reunification or refugee protection causes labour-market exclusion; selection effects must be considered.

Duration of residence is another important factor. Across many OECD countries, immigrant employment outcomes tend to improve with time, partly because language skills, local credentials, networks and knowledge of the labour market accumulate. Yet convergence is incomplete and uneven. Women may face slower labour-market entry if they arrive with young children or if their spouse is the principal earner. Conversely, those who migrate independently for work may enter employment quickly but remain concentrated in a narrow sector. Time improves some disadvantages, but it does not automatically dissolve occupational segregation (OECD & European Commission, 2023).

The concept of a 'migrant motherhood penalty' is therefore plausible but should be used with care. The general motherhood penalty in labour economics is well established, as is the employment gap between migrant and native-born women. However, isolating the additional effect of being both migrant and mother requires data that can separate education, migration channel, duration of stay, childcare availability and household income. Where such analyses exist, they often show that institutional context matters greatly. A penalty that appears cultural in one model may diminish once childcare access or labour-market selection is taken into account.

Citizenship and permanent residence can also change labour-market opportunities. Stable status may expand access to public-sector jobs, reduce employer dependency and improve bargaining power. Yet causality is difficult to establish because successful labour-market integration can itself make naturalization more likely. The same caution applies to welfare participation. Generous support may reduce immediate pressure to accept poor work, allowing migrants to invest in language or credential recognition; critics may interpret the same support as weakening work incentives. The empirical outcome depends on programme design and population composition rather than on a universal principle.

The relationship between welfare and migration is therefore reciprocal. Welfare systems shape migrant women's employment, while migrant women increasingly sustain welfare systems through their work in health and care. This circular relationship is one of the defining features of contemporary female labour migration: the worker may depend on the welfare state for childcare at the same time that the welfare state depends on migrant labour to provide care to others.

2.7. Overqualification, Deskilling, and the Unequal Portability of Skills

Among highly educated migrant women, perhaps no issue is more revealing than overqualification. A tertiary degree is usually understood as a form of human capital that increases productivity and earnings. Migration, however, exposes the national character of credentials. Degrees, licenses and professional experience are produced within institutional systems, and destination countries do not automatically assign them the same value. Thus a migrant can possess substantial education and still be employed in a job for which that education is formally unnecessary (Chiswick, 1978; OECD & European Commission, 2023).

Overqualification should be distinguished from deskilling. The first is a mismatch at a given point in time: the worker has more education than the job requires. Deskilling is a process through which skills deteriorate or become unusable after prolonged non-use. A physician working temporarily as a care assistant is overqualified immediately; if years pass without medical practice, professional skills may also erode. Both conditions are distinct from low wages. A migrant may be appropriately qualified yet poorly paid, or highly paid yet overqualified in formal terms. Precision matters because each problem requires a different policy response.

Comparative evidence shows that overqualification is widespread among immigrants. OECD and European Commission data for 2021 indicate that around one-third of highly educated immigrants in the OECD and EU were overqualified. In the EU, the overqualification gap between immigrants and the native-born was around 12 percentage points, and immigrant women were more likely than immigrant men to be overqualified. Most strikingly, 47% of highly educated immigrants were either overqualified or not in employment, compared with 30% of their native-born peers (OECD & European Commission, 2023).

Citizenship-based Eurostat data from 2023 show the same hierarchy. The overqualification rate was 39.4% among non-EU citizens, 31.3% among mobile EU citizens and 20.8% among nationals. Female non-EU citizens had a rate 6.7 percentage points higher than male non-EU citizens. The highest overall rates among non-EU citizens were recorded in Greece, Italy and Spain, countries where migrant workers are also heavily represented in lower-skilled service and care work. These patterns do not prove that Southern European institutions alone cause overqualification, but they

demonstrate that the mismatch is not randomly distributed across Europe (Eurostat, 2024).

Credential recognition is one of the most obvious mechanisms. Regulated professions require formal approval, and the procedures can be lengthy, expensive or difficult to navigate in a second language. Yet recognition is only part of the story. Employers may discount foreign work experience even when a degree is formally accepted. Occupational networks may be weak. Discrimination can reduce callbacks or promotion opportunities. Family migrants may accept a job below their qualification level in order to enter the labour market quickly. Refugees may lack original documents needed to prove education. Thus the route from foreign degree to destination-country occupation contains several points at which skill can lose value.

Host-country education reduces the gap sharply. The OECD and European Commission report that a host-country degree cuts the immigrant overqualification gap by about 75% across the EU and by even more in North America, German-speaking countries, France, Sweden and the United Kingdom. This is important because it suggests that the problem is not simply that migrants choose the wrong fields of study. Rather, the location in which the qualification was acquired strongly affects its labour-market value. Institutional familiarity and local accreditation are themselves forms of capital (OECD & European Commission, 2023).

EU internal mobility offers another natural comparison. Professionals trained in an EU member state often benefit from mutual-recognition rules or simplified procedures unavailable to migrants trained outside the Union. Consequently, two women with similar formal education may encounter very different recognition barriers depending on where the degree was obtained. The distinction between EU-born and non-EU migrants in European labour markets is therefore not merely geographical; it is embedded in legal regimes of credential portability.

Domestic work demonstrates the problem in an especially stark form. Migrant women employed as domestic workers are often classified in elementary occupations, yet case studies repeatedly find workers with secondary or tertiary education. In these cases, overqualification is not a small mismatch between adjacent occupational categories; it can represent a dramatic downward shift from professional or clerical work in the origin country to household service in the destination. This form of 'brain waste' is economically inefficient from the perspective of the destination country and

personally costly for the worker, even if the new wage remains higher than what she could earn at home.

The policy implications are therefore more complex than simply accelerating recognition. Rapid recognition can help fill shortages, particularly in healthcare, but professional standards exist for legitimate reasons. The challenge is to distinguish necessary assessment from unnecessary duplication. Bridging programmes, language training, transparent timelines, supervised practice and recognition of prior experience can reduce mismatch without abandoning standards. Overqualification is ultimately an institutional problem of translation: how one labour market reads the knowledge produced by another.

2.8. Sending-Country Systems and Female Labour-Migration Corridors

Destination-country labour markets cannot be understood without the institutions that organize departure. Major sending countries differ markedly in how they recruit, train, regulate and protect workers before they migrate. This is particularly visible in female labour migration because domestic work, nursing and care have often developed through highly structured corridors. The sending state may license recruitment agencies, approve contracts, provide pre-departure training, negotiate bilateral agreements and regulate fees. In other words, the labour market begins before the border is crossed (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014).

The Philippines provides the clearest example. Overseas employment has long been treated as a major national institution rather than an incidental individual choice. The state developed a specialized administrative system for deployment, worker documentation and recruitment regulation, now centred on the Department of Migrant Workers. Women form a large share of overseas Filipino workers, and they are particularly prominent in domestic work, caregiving and nursing. The significance of this case is not that the system eliminates abuse; it does not. Rather, it demonstrates that labour export can become bureaucratically organized and politically normalized on a national scale.

The Philippines-Gulf corridor reveals the double-edged character of such institutionalization. Formal recruitment can provide verified contracts, pre-departure information and mechanisms for diplomatic intervention. Yet recruitment agencies can also become a source of fees and debt, and the worker's dependence on the destination employer may persist regardless of

how carefully departure was regulated. The sending state can reduce risk, but it cannot fully control conditions inside a private household abroad.

Indonesia and Sri Lanka developed related but distinct systems of female domestic-worker migration. Both have large histories of deployment to Gulf states and Asian destinations, and both have periodically used restrictions or moratoria in response to reported abuse. Such measures reveal the political dilemma facing sending states. Restricting migration may protect workers from particular risks, but it may also eliminate an important income strategy and push migration into irregular channels. The choice is not simply between protection and exploitation; it involves competing forms of risk.

Eastern Europe represents a different migration infrastructure. Romanian women moving into Italian, German or Austrian care work operate within European freedom of movement, and their mobility is less dependent on a centralized labour-export bureaucracy. Networks, private agencies and cross-border service arrangements play a larger role. Moldova, outside the EU, participates in similar care corridors but without the same mobility rights. This contrast demonstrates how citizenship can restructure the same occupational corridor: a Romanian and a Moldovan care worker may perform similar labour but enter under different legal conditions.

Latin American migration to Spain provides yet another model. Shared language and historical ties reduce some barriers, while family and migrant networks facilitate entry into domestic and care work. Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia have all participated in these flows at different times. Here, the corridor is less visibly organized through a state labour-export apparatus than in the Philippines; informal networks and family connections play a greater role. Migration infrastructure therefore varies not only in scale but in institutional form.

India illustrates why origin countries should not be treated as unitary migration systems. Indian migration to Gulf construction and service sectors differs sharply from Indian migration into professional occupations in North America, the United Kingdom or Australia. Female participation is therefore highly dependent on corridor and occupation. A national average obscures the fact that the same country can simultaneously generate male-dominated manual migration and substantial skilled female migration.

These sending-country differences matter because they shape bargaining power, information and selection before employment begins. A worker recruited through a bilateral nursing programme enters with a different set of

expectations from one who borrows heavily to pay an intermediary for domestic work. A citizen exercising free movement within the EU has different mobility rights from a temporary worker tied to one sponsor. The migration corridor is therefore not merely a line between two states; it is an institutional chain linking training systems, households, recruiters, ministries, employers and legal regimes.

For migrant women in particular, these chains often connect care deficits in destination countries with employment strategies in origin countries. The global care economy is thus not a spontaneous market. It is assembled through policy, demography and institutional mediation. Sending states, no less than receiving states, are part of the political economy of feminized labour migration.

2.9. Political and Institutional Linkages: From Labour Demand to Migration Governance

By this point the labour-market analysis has returned us to politics. Employment outcomes that appear individual - whether a woman works, what occupation she enters, whether she can change employer, whether her degree is recognized - are produced partly by institutions that make collective choices. Labour ministries define work-permit categories, migration agencies administer admission, professional bodies recognize qualifications, municipalities provide childcare, inspectorates enforce standards, courts interpret labour rights and international organizations formulate norms. The labour market is therefore politically constructed even when wages are set by employers and workers (Acker, 1990; Kofman & Raghuram, 2015).

Table 2.3. Selected Institutional Configurations of Female Migrant Labour

Case	Institutional configuration	Labour-market implication
Italy / Spain	Family-centred care systems; strong household demand	Migrant women concentrated in domestic and elder care; informality can be substantial
Germany	Mixed migration regime; skilled health recruitment plus EU mobility	Formal nurse recruitment coexists with cross-border live-in care
United Kingdom	Skilled migration with dedicated health/care route	International recruitment responds directly to health and care shortages
Canada	Caregiver programmes linked historically to settlement pathways	Long-term residence possible, but earlier schemes produced live-in dependency and family separation

Case	Institutional configuration	Labour-market implication
Gulf states	Large temporary labour-import systems with sponsorship traditions	Female domestic-work corridors exist within a male-heavy migrant economy
Philippines	Highly institutionalized overseas-employment system	Sending-state regulation shapes recruitment, contracts and pre-departure processes

Note. Descriptive comparative synthesis based on the literature and official sources cited in this chapter; the table does not rank national regimes.

Care migration makes this especially visible. Governments can respond to ageing and care shortages in several ways: expand public provision, raise wages to attract domestic workers, subsidize household care, invest in technology, train more workers locally or facilitate immigration. Each choice distributes costs differently among taxpayers, families, employers and migrants. Importing care labour may be less expensive in the short term, but it can also institutionalize dependence on continued immigration. Conversely, restricting migration without expanding domestic capacity can deepen care shortages. Thus migration policy and welfare policy cannot be analysed separately.

Employer sponsorship is another political choice. A state may decide that labour-market efficiency is best served by linking a migrant to the employer who justified the visa; alternatively, it may allow greater portability in order to improve bargaining power and reduce abuse. The difference is institutional, not cultural. Similarly, permanent-settlement pathways can transform a temporary worker's relationship to the employer by reducing the cost of exit. Canada's caregiver reforms and the continuing debate over temporary labour programmes demonstrate how residence status becomes part of employment regulation (IRCC, 2022).

Credential recognition also generates conflict between institutions. Governments facing nurse or physician shortages often want faster recognition of foreign qualifications, while professional bodies are responsible for maintaining standards. Migrant organizations may view lengthy procedures as discriminatory; regulators may view them as necessary for patient safety. The political challenge is to create transparent and proportionate processes that distinguish genuine competence assessment from unnecessary repetition. Germany's formal recruitment of nurses, for example, combines labour demand with language and recognition procedures precisely because admission and professional authorization are separate institutional steps (Federal Employment Agency, n.d.).

Domestic work raises a different enforcement problem. Labour law can prohibit abuse, but enforcement is difficult when the workplace is a private home. Ratifying ILO Convention No. 189 can strengthen the legal framework, but inspection, complaint mechanisms and access to justice determine whether rights are meaningful in practice. Here again, political institutions decide how far the privacy of the household limits the reach of labour regulation (ILO, 2026).

Finally, these labour-market issues become matters of political contestation. Parties debate immigration levels, social rights, family reunification and regularization; employer associations emphasize labour shortages; trade unions may defend migrant workers while also demanding better wages for the resident workforce; feminist organizations may highlight care inequalities; and migrant associations demand status security and recognition. Chapter 2 does not attempt to analyse party competition in detail, but it establishes the material terrain on which that competition occurs. The politics of migration cannot be understood without the labour market, because employment is where abstract debates over borders become concrete questions of wages, shortages, welfare and rights.

The broader lesson is that migrant women's labour-market position is neither the inevitable outcome of globalization nor the product of individual choices alone. It is institutionalized. Different states, sectors and migration corridors generate different combinations of opportunity and constraint. Once this is recognized, the question changes from 'Are migrant women vulnerable?' to the more useful inquiry: under which institutional arrangements, in which sectors and through which legal statuses do particular forms of advantage or disadvantage emerge?

Conclusion

The labour-market experience of migrant women cannot be captured by a single narrative. At the global level, migrant women participate in the labour force at a lower rate than migrant men and experience higher unemployment, yet they participate more than non-migrant women overall. They are strongly concentrated in services and care, but they are also present in highly skilled professions. They are overrepresented in precarious forms of domestic and informal work, but some enter through tightly regulated professional routes and acquire permanent residence. The defining feature is therefore not uniform disadvantage. It is structured differentiation (ILO, 2024; OECD & European Commission, 2023).

Sectoral concentration provides the clearest point of continuity across countries. The care economy, domestic work, cleaning and selected service occupations rely heavily on migrant women, while demographic ageing and labour shortages have increased the political importance of this labour. Yet the same occupation can be organized very differently. A caregiver in Italy may be hired directly by a family; a nurse from the Philippines may enter Germany through a bilateral programme; a caregiver in Canada may have a pathway toward permanent residence; a domestic worker in a Gulf state may work under a temporary sponsorship regime. The work may look similar from a distance, but the legal and institutional environments are not.

The chapter has also shown that skill does not automatically protect migrant women from disadvantage. Highly educated migrants face substantial overqualification, and foreign credentials are systematically valued less than host-country qualifications in many labour markets. Recognition procedures, language requirements, occupational regulation and discrimination can translate professional migration into occupational downgrading. Thus the global movement of skills is not a frictionless market; it is mediated by national institutions that decide which qualifications count (Eurostat, 2024; OECD & European Commission, 2023).

At the same time, the sending-country perspective demonstrates that migrant labour is organized before arrival. Recruitment agencies, labour-export institutions, bilateral agreements and migrant networks shape who migrates and under what conditions. The Philippines represents a highly institutionalized model; Eastern European care migration relies more on mobility rights and private networks; Latin American care migration to Spain is shaped by language and historical ties. These differences help explain why apparently similar women enter destination labour markets with very different rights, debts and expectations (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014).

Most importantly, labour-market outcomes are political. Work-permit portability, family reunification, childcare, professional recognition, social insurance, labour inspection and permanent residence are public institutions, not natural features of markets. They determine how migrant women move between dependence and autonomy, between qualification and deskilling, and between temporary work and membership. The feminization of migration, therefore, cannot be separated from the institutional organization of labour. What is global is the movement; what gives that movement its

social meaning is the political and economic structure into which the worker arrives.

The next chapters can build upon this foundation by examining political parties, representation and the institutions through which migration is governed. The labour-market evidence presented here already suggests the central question for that discussion: when states recruit, restrict, regularize or protect migrant women, they are not merely managing labour supply. They are deciding how care, risk, rights and membership are distributed across borders.

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CHAPTER 3: POLITICAL LIFE, REPRESENTATION, AND THE RIGHTS OF MIGRANT WOMEN

Migration is commonly counted at borders, in labour-force surveys, in asylum files, and in population registers; political life, however, begins where those classifications cease to be sufficient. A woman may be a foreign-born resident, a naturalized citizen, a refugee under temporary protection, a permanent resident, a citizen of another European Union member state, or a temporary worker tied to an employer, and each of these statuses opens some political channels while closing others. Consequently, the political position of migrant women cannot be inferred from the mere fact of residence, nor can it be reduced to the possession of a passport. What matters, rather, is the institutional sequence through which residence becomes membership, membership becomes participation, participation becomes representation, and representation - sometimes, but by no means automatically - becomes influence. This is why political life must be approached as a field of graduated access rather than as a binary distinction between citizens and outsiders (Hammar, 1990; Soysal, 1994; Bloemraad, 2006).

The distinction is especially important for women. Migration regimes are formally gender-neutral in much of their contemporary legal language, yet their practical consequences are often gendered because migration channels, family roles, labour-market positions, care responsibilities, language acquisition, and access to independent residence do not fall evenly across women and men. A spouse who enters through family reunification, a nurse recruited under a skilled-worker scheme, a Syrian woman under temporary protection in Türkiye, and an EU citizen residing in another member state may all participate in political life, but they do so through profoundly different institutional routes. Some can vote locally but not nationally; some can join associations yet cannot vote; some can naturalize relatively quickly; others may live for decades without a realistic route to citizenship. Accordingly, the political incorporation of migrant women is produced at the intersection of gender, legal status, class, nationality, race or racialization, religion, and the institutional architecture of the receiving state (Crenshaw, 1991; Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992).

There is, moreover, a second difficulty. Political participation is often measured too narrowly. Voting is indispensable in democratic systems, yet it is only one form of participation. Migrant women may contact public authorities, organize through neighbourhood associations, join trade unions, establish refugee-women's organizations, take part in demonstrations, petition municipal councils, serve on consultative bodies, support candidates, participate in religious or secular community networks, and eventually stand for office. Indeed, for non-citizens and refugees, these non-electoral forms may be the principal available channels of political voice. The analytical problem is therefore not simply whether migrant women vote less or more than another group, but which political opportunities are legally and practically available to them, how they are mobilized, and how institutions translate social presence into political membership (Verba et al., 1978; Norris, 2002; Morales & Giugni, 2011).

This chapter develops that argument comparatively. It begins by separating formal rights from substantive participation and then examines citizenship and naturalization as institutions of political membership. It next turns to local voting rights, representation, party recruitment, and the role of electoral systems. A separate section considers political parties, not as objects to be ranked but as institutions that frame migration, citizenship, integration, and gender differently in official programmes. The chapter then addresses the politics of secularism, religious dress, multiculturalism, and the contested concept of femonationalism, before moving to migrant women's organizations, refugee women's political voice, and local governance. Finally, it situates these national patterns within European and international rights frameworks. Throughout, the central claim is deliberately modest but consequential: formal political inclusion, actual participation, and substantive representation are related, yet they are not the same thing, and migrant women's political position can be understood only by keeping those dimensions analytically distinct.

3.1 Political Participation Beyond the Ballot Box

The classical literature on political participation emerged largely from the study of citizens in established democracies. Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978) treated participation as a set of activities through which individuals attempt to influence governmental action, while later work widened the lens to include changing repertoires of protest, civic activism, and networked political engagement (Norris, 2002). Migration studies added a complication that older participation models did not have to confront with the same

intensity: many residents who are deeply affected by public policy are not citizens and therefore do not possess an identical bundle of political rights. Hence the relevant question is not merely how much a person participates, but which modes of participation are institutionally available in the first place.

For migrant women, this distinction is particularly significant because legal status and social position often diverge. A naturalized citizen may possess the same formal voting rights as a native-born citizen but still face lower political efficacy, weaker party recruitment, limited time because of care responsibilities, or discrimination within political organizations. Conversely, a non-citizen may be barred from national elections yet be highly active through a migrant association, union, women's organization, local advisory council, or municipal campaign. In other words, citizenship may remove a legal barrier without removing social and organizational barriers, whereas non-citizenship may restrict electoral participation without eliminating political agency. This is why the literature on immigrant incorporation increasingly treats political life as a multidimensional process rather than a single threshold crossed at naturalization (Bloemraad, 2006; Koopmans et al., 2005).

The distinction between electoral and non-electoral participation also prevents an analytical mistake that is common in public debate: equating political integration with turnout alone. Electoral participation is certainly consequential because governments and parties respond to electorates, not simply to residents. Yet participation through organizations can shape agenda formation, public consultation, litigation, labour standards, and local service delivery long before a migrant acquires citizenship. Putnam's (2000) account of social capital emphasized the political value of associational networks, although migration research has rightly complicated the idea by showing that networks differ in resources, institutional access, and representativeness. Migrant associations can mobilize political voice, but they can also be socially narrow, internally hierarchical, or weakly connected to decision-makers. Thus, organization is not synonymous with influence.

Gender adds another layer. Care responsibilities, labour-market segmentation, language acquisition, and family-migration pathways can shape political participation indirectly. A migrant woman working irregular hours in domestic care may have fewer opportunities to attend party meetings than a professional employed in a regulated sector. A refugee

mother may spend the first years after arrival navigating housing, schools, legal status, and language courses rather than electoral organizations. A woman whose residence was initially dependent on a spouse may be formally free to join political organizations but practically constrained by family dynamics. These are not reasons to assume passivity; rather, they are reasons to examine political participation as the outcome of institutional opportunities interacting with unequal resources.

Political opportunity-structure theory provides a useful bridge between individual resources and national institutions. Koopmans et al. (2005) argue that citizenship regimes, institutional openness, discursive norms, and available channels of claim-making shape migrant mobilization differently across countries. Applied to migrant women, the framework suggests that similar social groups can produce different participation patterns in different institutional settings. Sweden's local enfranchisement of long-term third-country residents, Germany's municipal foreigners' advisory councils in many localities, Canada's settlement-oriented citizenship architecture, and Türkiye's temporary-protection regime for Syrians create distinct political opportunity structures even before one considers individual preferences. Consequently, comparative analysis should begin not with an assumption about migrant women's political behaviour, but with a map of the political channels each system makes available.

Table 3.1. Political Participation Channels by Legal Status

Legal status	National vote	Local vote	Associational participation	Typical political constraint
Naturalized citizen	Generally yes	Generally yes	Yes	Formal equality does not eliminate participation or representation gaps
Permanent resident / long-term resident	Usually no	Varies by country	Yes	Citizenship remains a gatekeeper for national electoral power
Mobile EU citizen in another EU state	No in host-state national elections	Yes in municipal elections under EU law	Yes	Rights are multi-level rather than equivalent to host-state citizenship
Recognized refugee / temporary-protection holder	Usually no until naturalization	Varies	Yes	Status security and path to citizenship differ sharply by regime

Legal status	National vote	Local vote	Associational participation	Typical political constraint
Temporary labour migrant	Usually no	Usually no	Often legally possible but institutionally constrained	Employer dependence, temporariness, and weak settlement rights
Undocumented migrant	No	No	Possible but exposed	Legal insecurity can raise the cost of public political activity

Note. This is an analytical typology. Exact rights depend on national and subnational law; the table should not be read as a universal legal rule.

3.2 Citizenship Regimes and the Gendered Architecture of Membership

Citizenship is often presented as the decisive boundary of democratic membership, and for national elections that remains broadly true. Yet comparative politics has long shown that citizenship regimes themselves vary historically and institutionally. Brubaker's (1992) contrast between France and Germany placed citizenship law within differing national traditions of membership; Soysal (1994), by contrast, emphasized the growing importance of rights attached to residence and personhood. Subsequent developments have demonstrated elements of both arguments. Residence-based and supranational rights have expanded, particularly in Europe, but citizenship continues to determine access to national elections, candidacy, and the fullest form of political membership in most states.

What has changed substantially is the content of citizenship regimes. Germany provides a striking example. The 2024 reform of nationality law reduced the ordinary pre-naturalization residence period from eight to five years, allowed multiple citizenship more broadly, and strengthened the automatic acquisition of German citizenship for children born in Germany when one parent has five years of lawful residence and an unlimited right of residence (Bundesregierung, 2024). The reform is significant not merely because it shortened a timetable; it altered the institutional relationship between long-term residence and formal political membership. At the same time, the law retained substantive requirements concerning livelihood, constitutional commitment, and other conditions, illustrating Goodman's (2014) broader point that contemporary citizenship policy often combines inclusionary and disciplinary elements rather than moving in a single liberalizing direction.

Sweden illustrates how quickly comparative typologies can become outdated. For many years it was routinely described as one of Europe's more accessible citizenship regimes. Yet new rules that took effect on 6 June 2026 increased the general habitual-residence requirement from five to eight years and added requirements relating to self-sufficiency, knowledge of Swedish and Swedish society, and strengthened conduct standards (Swedish Migration Agency, 2026a, 2026b). Refugees face a seven-year residence requirement under the new framework, while stateless persons remain subject to a shorter period. Thus, the Swedish case is a reminder that citizenship regimes are political institutions subject to partisan contestation and legislative change; they should not be frozen into static labels such as simply 'liberal' or 'restrictive.'

Spain demonstrates a different kind of institutional differentiation. The ordinary residence requirement for nationality is ten years, yet Article 22 of the Civil Code provides a two-year route for nationals by origin of Ibero-American countries, Andorra, the Philippines, Equatorial Guinea, Portugal, and Sephardic-origin applicants (Ministerio de Justicia, n.d.). These exceptions reveal how historical ties, empire, language, and diplomatic traditions become embedded in contemporary membership rules. Their gendered effect is indirect but potentially important: migrant women from Latin America, for instance, may encounter a substantially shorter route to citizenship than women of otherwise comparable residence duration from other regions.

The United Kingdom and Canada show further variations. British naturalization generally requires five years' residence and, in the standard route, twelve months with indefinite leave to remain or settled status, together with language, knowledge, and good-character requirements; spouses of British citizens can apply after three years' residence once they hold the necessary settled status (UK Government, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). Canada requires 1,095 days of physical presence during the relevant five-year eligibility period, with at least 730 days as a permanent resident, while allowing part of certain periods as a temporary resident or protected person to count at half value (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2026). These systems differ in detail, yet both are settlement-oriented in a manner fundamentally unlike temporary labour regimes in which long residence does not normally lead to citizenship.

Türkiye illustrates the importance of distinguishing protection status from a citizenship pathway. The Presidency of Migration Management states

explicitly that a temporary-protection identity document gives its holder a lawful right to stay but does not itself create a right to apply for Turkish citizenship; time under temporary protection is also not counted in the marriage-based route in the manner an ordinary residence status would be (Presidency of Migration Management, n.d.). Accordingly, Syrian women under temporary protection may live for long periods in Türkiye while remaining outside the ordinary political-membership sequence that connects residence to naturalization and national electoral participation. Their political voice therefore depends much more heavily on municipal engagement, organizations, NGOs, labour-market participation, and community advocacy than on formal electoral incorporation.

These cases show why the gendered effects of citizenship policy rarely arise from explicitly gendered statutory language. Rather, they arise from the interaction between formally neutral rules and gendered migration trajectories. Language and civic tests may be easier to satisfy for migrants with stable employment and extensive institutional contact than for those isolated in domestic work. Income or self-sufficiency requirements may disadvantage those whose labour-force participation is reduced by care responsibilities. Spousal routes may shorten access to citizenship while simultaneously originating in a period of dependent family migration. Consequently, citizenship should be understood as an institution whose gender effects are mediated through labour markets, family structures, and migration channels rather than as a purely legal status detached from social organization (Lister, 1997; Goodman, 2014).

Table 3.2. Selected Citizenship and Voting Configurations, 2026

Country / regime	Citizenship pathway (selected rule)	Non-citizen local voting	Political implication for migrant women	Primary source
Germany	Ordinary naturalization after 5 years under the 2024 reform; multiple citizenship broadly permitted	EU citizens vote municipally under EU law; third-country nationals generally do not	Naturalization remains the principal route from long-term residence to national electoral membership	Bundesregierung (2024); European Union (n.d.)
Sweden	General rule: 8 years from 6 June 2026; additional language, society-knowledge and maintenance requirements	Third-country nationals may vote in municipal and regional elections after 3 consecutive years in the population register	Local electoral voice can precede citizenship by years	Swedish Migration Agency (2026a); Swedish Election Authority (2026)

Country / regime	Citizenship pathway (selected rule)	Non-citizen local voting	Political implication for migrant women	Primary source
Spain	10-year ordinary route; 2 years for specified historical-nationality categories	EU citizens municipally; some third-country nationals under reciprocity arrangements	Historical ties can materially shorten the path to full political membership	Ministerio de Justicia (n.d.); European Union (n.d.)
United Kingdom	Generally 5 years plus settled status; 3-year residence route for spouses of British citizens once settled status is held	Eligibility varies by nation and citizenship; qualifying Commonwealth and Irish citizens have broader rights	Political rights are unusually differentiated by citizenship category and UK nation	Electoral Commission (n.d.-a, n.d.-b); UK Government (n.d.-a)
Canada	1,095 days physical presence in 5-year eligibility period, subject to residence-status conditions	No general non-citizen federal voting right	Settlement and naturalization create a relatively direct route to national electoral membership	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2026); Elections Canada (n.d.)
Türkiye - temporary protection	Temporary-protection status itself does not create a right to apply for citizenship	No voting right without Turkish citizenship	Long-term protection can remain politically non-electoral	Presidency of Migration Management (n.d.); Yüksek Seçim Kurulu (2024)

Note. The table highlights selected rules relevant to political incorporation; it does not reproduce each country's full citizenship code or all exceptions.

3.3 Local Voting Rights and the Multi-Level Politics of Belonging

Local voting rights complicate the conventional assumption that citizenship and suffrage always coincide. Within the European Union, citizens residing in another member state possess the right to vote and stand as candidates in municipal elections in the host state under the same basic conditions as nationals. In 2026, the Council adopted updated rules intended to simplify registration, improve information, and reduce administrative barriers for mobile EU citizens; member states were given a transposition period after the revised directive's entry into force (Council of the European Union, 2026). The institutional principle is therefore clear: European citizenship creates a layer of political membership that is neither purely national nor simply residential.

Nevertheless, this right does not erase hierarchy. A Polish woman living in Germany, for example, may participate municipally by virtue of EU citizenship, while a Turkish woman with an equally long period of lawful

residence in the same city may not possess the same local voting right unless and until she naturalizes. Thus, the category 'migrant woman' conceals different political memberships created by supranational law. The relevant distinction is not merely migrant versus non-migrant, but EU citizen versus third-country national, citizen versus resident, and in some countries permanent resident versus temporary resident.

Sweden goes further than the EU baseline. The Swedish Election Authority confirms that citizens of countries outside the EU, Iceland, and Norway may vote in municipal and regional elections if they have been listed in the Swedish Population Register for at least three consecutive years before election day; the same eligibility rules determine whether they may stand as candidates in those elections (Swedish Election Authority, 2026). This is an important institutional arrangement because it separates local political membership from national citizenship. A third-country-national woman may therefore exercise electoral influence over schools, social services, housing, and municipal integration policy years before she satisfies the now-eight-year general citizenship residence rule.

The United Kingdom produces an even more complex map. Electoral rights vary by the level of election, the constituent nation, and nationality. British, Irish, and qualifying Commonwealth citizens may vote in UK parliamentary elections, while Scotland and Wales extend certain subnational and local rights more broadly to qualifying foreign nationals; post-Brexit arrangements for EU citizens also depend on residence history and reciprocity categories (Electoral Commission, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). In analytical terms, this is not an anomaly to be tidied away. It is evidence that modern political membership is layered and historically contingent.

These differentiated rights matter for women because local government frequently governs policy domains that affect daily life most immediately: childcare, schooling, public transport, housing, social services, neighbourhood safety, and some integration programmes. Thus, local voting rights can have substantive significance even when national voting remains unavailable. They can also create a pathway into candidacy, public visibility, and party recruitment. Yet formal enfranchisement is still only a beginning. Registration rules, political information, language, party outreach, and trust influence whether rights are used. The Council of the European Union's 2026 reform explicitly recognized information and registration burdens as continuing obstacles for mobile EU citizens, demonstrating that legal rights and effective participation remain distinct even in a relatively developed supranational electoral framework (Council of the European Union, 2026).

The broader lesson is that political membership increasingly operates on multiple territorial scales. National citizenship still controls the apex of representative politics in most states; nevertheless, municipal voting rights, European Parliament rights for mobile EU citizens, consultative bodies, and

participatory mechanisms create intermediate forms of membership. For migrant women, whose political incorporation may be delayed by naturalization requirements, these intermediate forms can be especially consequential. They do not replace citizenship, but neither should they be dismissed as merely symbolic.

3.4 Representation: Presence, Voice, and Party Gatekeeping

Political representation is often discussed as though the presence of a migrant-origin woman in parliament were sufficient evidence of political inclusion. Representation theory counsels greater caution. Pitkin (1967) distinguished descriptive representation - the extent to which representatives resemble the represented - from substantive representation, which concerns action on their interests, and symbolic representation, which concerns the meaning attached to political presence. Later feminist scholarship argued that the politics of presence matters because exclusion from office can silence experiences and narrow the range of perspectives inside representative institutions; yet it does not follow that identity mechanically determines legislative behaviour (Young, 1990; Hughes, 2011).

For migrant-origin women, the problem is intersectional. They may confront barriers associated with gender and migrant or minority background simultaneously, but the effect is not simply additive. Hughes's (2011) cross-national study of minority women's political representation showed that gender and minority quotas can interact in complex ways; policies that increase women generally or minorities generally do not automatically produce equivalent gains for women located at the intersection of both categories. The finding is important because it challenges a simple 'double disadvantage' model in which one merely adds two penalties. Institutional design matters.

Party recruitment is one such institution. In most parliamentary democracies, parties determine who becomes a viable candidate long before voters choose among candidates. Norris and Lovenduski (1995) described candidate selection as a process structured by supply and demand: potential candidates possess different resources and ambitions, while parties and selectorates apply their own expectations about electability, experience, loyalty, and social representation. Migrant-origin women can therefore be underrepresented even in electorates where voters themselves show no strong opposition, simply because they are less frequently recruited, placed lower on party lists, assigned less competitive constituencies, or excluded from informal networks that lead to candidacy.

Electoral systems shape these opportunities but do not determine them mechanically. Proportional representation can give parties greater capacity to diversify lists; mixed systems may create both district and list routes; first-past-the-post systems concentrate recruitment around winnable constituencies. Yet party strategy, quota design, district geography, and

internal party rules determine whether those institutional possibilities translate into seats. Comparative research on immigrant and minority representation in liberal democracies repeatedly demonstrates the importance of party organizations as gatekeepers (Bird et al., 2011).

A further methodological difficulty is data. International organizations routinely collect sex-disaggregated parliamentary data, but 'migrant background' is not standardized across states. Some countries classify foreign-born legislators; others include second-generation descendants; still others, particularly where official ethnic classification is politically sensitive, do not maintain comparable categories at all. Therefore, a clean cross-national ranking of migrant-origin women in parliament would risk producing false precision. The appropriate research strategy is instead to combine national studies, transparent definitions, and careful distinctions between foreign-born, migrant-origin, ethnic-minority, and naturalized representatives.

Most importantly, descriptive representation should not be confused with substantive representation. A migrant-origin woman may prioritize labour, environment, taxation, or foreign policy rather than migration or women's rights; conversely, a native-born male legislator may become a leading advocate for migrant women's rights. Identity can shape experience and agenda-setting, but it does not predetermine policy preference. The strongest claim supported by the literature is therefore institutional rather than essentialist: representative presence can widen the range of experiences available within political institutions, but whether this presence becomes substantive policy influence depends on party discipline, committee assignment, legislative opportunity, coalition structures, and the representative's own political priorities (Pitkin, 1967; Bird et al., 2011).

3.5 Political Parties, Migration, and Gender: Documented Differences Without Ranking

Political parties connect social conflict to institutional decision-making. They select candidates, define electoral choices, structure parliamentary voting, and convert complex social problems into programmes that can be communicated to voters. For migrant women, party politics matters because migration, citizenship, integration, welfare, family policy, and gender equality are rarely governed in isolation. The same party may support labour migration while restricting asylum, strengthen gender-equality policy while tightening family reunification, or expand anti-discrimination law while advocating lower overall immigration. Consequently, party positions should be read as multidimensional policy bundles rather than placed on a single 'pro-' or 'anti-migrant' scale.

Germany's 2025 federal election programmes illustrate the point. The SPD programme supported continued development of skilled immigration, faster recognition of qualifications, stronger anti-discrimination protections,

and the modernized citizenship framework, while also endorsing migration management, return of persons without protection status, and implementation of the Common European Asylum System. In the same programme, the SPD committed to gender equality and greater representation of women in political and economic leadership (Social Democratic Party of Germany [SPD], 2025). The CDU/CSU programme, by contrast, placed greater emphasis on limiting irregular migration, faster returns, border control, suspension of family reunification for persons with subsidiary protection, and a more restrictive overall asylum approach; elsewhere, the programme emphasized women's and girls' self-determination and opposition to discrimination in development policy (CDU/CSU, 2025). These differences are descriptive, not a basis for an evaluative ranking. They show how migration control, humanitarian responsibility, integration, and gender policy can be combined differently within mainstream party competition.

The United Kingdom's 2024 Labour manifesto provides another configuration. Labour pledged to reduce net migration, link immigration more closely to domestic skills policy, sanction employers who abuse visa rules, and reduce long-term reliance on overseas recruitment in sectors such as health, care, and construction. At the same time, it proposed strengthened equality measures, including action on women's equality, racial inequality, and dual discrimination (Labour Party, 2024a, 2024b). Thus, a party can advocate lower migration while simultaneously expanding anti-discrimination and equality policy. This is precisely why analytical categories based only on 'restrictive' versus 'expansive' migration policy can be misleading.

France offers a more polarized illustration. In its 2024 legislative programme, the Rassemblement National proposed substantially restricting legal and irregular immigration, tightening family reunification, ending *jus soli*, and narrowing certain forms of access to benefits and regularization (Rassemblement National, 2024). The French Socialist Party, in its parliamentary statements during the same period, emphasized anti-discrimination, opposition to racism and anti-Muslim discrimination, and women's rights; it also opposed several restrictive provisions in the 2023 immigration law, including measures affecting family reunification and social benefits (Parti Socialiste, 2023, 2024). Again, these positions should be reported as documented party claims and legislative positions rather than converted into a normative hierarchy.

Spain's 2023 Socialist programme similarly linked migration governance to legal pathways, labour-market integration, anti-racism, refugee reception, and a gender perspective in asylum and reception policy, including protection for women and girls affected by gender-based violence (PSOE, 2023). The programme also treated nationality as a culmination of

integration and explicitly described integration as a two-way process. The importance of such documents is not that they reveal an eternal ideological essence; party programmes change across elections and governing contexts. Rather, they provide primary-source evidence of how parties officially frame migration and gender at a specific political moment.

Italy's Partito Democratico in its 2022 migration programme emphasized legal and safe pathways, integration, decentralized reception, and protection of migrants' rights, while other Italian parties advanced different priorities in the same election cycle (Partito Democratico, 2022). Comparative party scholarship places such variation within broader party-family competition, yet current analysis should resist importing classifications into policy claims without checking the actual programme. This is particularly important when discussing gender, because parties commonly combine positions that cut across the simplified left-right stereotypes found in secondary commentary.

This multidimensionality becomes even clearer in debates about family reunification. A restriction on family reunification is not gender-neutral in effect when women are disproportionately represented among certain family-migration streams; nevertheless, the party advocating the restriction may justify it in terms of migration volume, housing, integration capacity, or security rather than gender. Conversely, a party defending family reunification may do so through family unity, constitutional rights, integration, or demographic policy rather than an explicitly feminist frame. The analytical task is therefore to separate policy effect from declared motive and to attribute motive claims to primary sources where possible.

The same principle applies to welfare. Welfare chauvinism describes arguments that social benefits should be prioritized for citizens or long-established members of the national community, and the concept is frequently associated with radical-right competition. Yet restrictive welfare-access proposals also appear outside that party family, while some radical-right parties support generous welfare for nationals. Accordingly, migrant women can be affected by welfare restrictions not because gender is explicitly mentioned, but because they occupy migration statuses more exposed to eligibility rules, family benefits, housing conditions, or residence-based thresholds.

Party politics therefore matters in three distinct ways. First, parties define competing policy packages. Second, they recruit migrant-origin women - or fail to recruit them - into political office. Third, they produce the language through which migrant women become visible in public debate. These functions should not be collapsed. A party may recruit minority women while advocating restrictive migration policy, or support expansive immigration policy while remaining internally unrepresentative. Political inclusion, party ideology, and policy effect are related but analytically independent dimensions.

Table 3.3. Selected Official Party Documents: Migration and Gender, Recent Election Cycles

Country / party	Document	Migration-related position documented	Gender / equality-related position documented	Analytical caution
Germany - SPD	2025 federal election programme	Skilled immigration, qualification recognition, anti-discrimination, managed asylum and return policy	Gender equality, women's representation, anti-discrimination	Contains both inclusionary and control-oriented migration measures
Germany - CDU/CSU	2025 federal election programme	Stricter control of irregular migration, faster returns, suspension of family reunification for subsidiary protection	Women's and girls' self-determination and anti-discrimination in development policy	Migration restriction and gender-rights language coexist in the same programme
United Kingdom - Labour	2024 manifesto	Reduce net migration; connect visas to skills and workforce planning; sanction abusive employers	Women's equality, race equality, dual-discrimination protections	Lower-migration policy does not imply rejection of equality measures
France - Rassemblement National	2024 legislative programme	Restrict immigration and family reunification; propose ending jus soli and narrowing regularization	No single migrant-women policy should be inferred from migration proposals alone	Use official programme wording; avoid attributing motives beyond the document
Spain - PSOE	2023 general election programme	Regular and orderly pathways, integration, refugee reception, anti-racism	Gender perspective in reception; protection of women and girls from gender-based violence; broader feminist equality agenda	Programme combines migration management with rights-based integration

Note. This table reports selected documented positions from official party materials. It is neither a ranking nor a complete coding of each party's programme.

3.6 Political Discourse, Secularism, and the Contested Politics of Gender

Migrant women occupy an unusual position in political discourse because they are frequently invoked in debates in which they are not themselves the principal speakers. Questions of religious dress, forced marriage, gender-based violence, family reunification, citizenship, welfare, and integration can become arguments about national identity as much as about the policy issue itself. The central methodological requirement is therefore to distinguish three levels that are often conflated: enacted law, party rhetoric, and scholarly interpretation.

France is the paradigmatic case in the literature on secularism and Muslim women's dress. Scott (2007) interprets French headscarf controversies through the historical development of republicanism and *laïcité*, arguing that the veil became a symbolic site on which questions of sexuality, national identity, and citizenship were projected. Whatever one makes of that interpretation, the comparative point is clear: France's legal and political framework differs from that of the United Kingdom, where no equivalent general prohibition on headscarves or face coverings structures public space. Germany differs again because controversies over headscarves have frequently been mediated through federalism and specific public-sector roles rather than a single nationwide framework. Thus, 'Europe's veil debate' is not one debate but a family of institutionally distinct conflicts.

The politics becomes more complicated when gender equality is used to justify restrictive migration or integration measures. Farris (2017) coined the term *femonationalism* to describe a convergence, in selected European contexts, between nationalist actors, some feminist or femocratic actors, and neoliberal economic agendas around claims to protect women's rights from allegedly patriarchal migrant or Muslim cultures. Her argument is explicitly comparative, focusing on France, Italy, and the Netherlands, and it has become influential precisely because it directs attention to how gender equality can be incorporated into nationalist boundary-making. Yet the concept should be treated as an interpretive framework rather than a neutral empirical label. It has been criticized for potentially overstating coherence among actors whose motivations differ and for fitting some national contexts better than others.

That caution is particularly important because women's-rights concerns can be genuine without any necessary anti-immigration motive. Forced marriage, trafficking, domestic violence, and female genital mutilation are

real policy concerns that states are obliged to address. The analytical problem arises when a practice is represented as the defining characteristic of a broad ethnic or religious population, or when violence within migrant communities is culturalized while comparable violence in majority populations is individualized. Critical frame analysis is useful here because it asks not only what problem is identified but how causation, responsibility, and solution are constructed.

Yuval-Davis's (1997) work on gender and nation provides a broader theoretical language for this phenomenon. Women are often positioned symbolically as reproducers of the nation, carriers of cultural boundaries, and markers of collective morality. Migration politics can therefore attach political meaning to migrant women's family formation, fertility, dress, and caregiving in ways that exceed the immediate policy issue. This helps explain why migrant women may appear simultaneously as vulnerable subjects to be protected, cultural outsiders to be integrated, workers needed in care economies, and mothers whose children are expected to become future citizens.

Puar's (2007) concept of homonationalism provides a parallel argument in relation to sexuality: liberal claims about LGBTQ rights can be mobilized as markers of national modernity against populations represented as culturally backward. The relevance to migrant women lies less in the concept itself than in the broader insight that rights language can be incorporated into boundary-making projects. Once again, however, the presence of a rights claim does not establish its motive. Scholarly analysis must demonstrate the linkage rather than assume it.

Intersectionality offers a corrective to both assimilationist and romanticizing accounts. Muslim migrant women, for example, cannot be reduced to either victims of patriarchal communities or symbols of resistance to state regulation. Their positions vary by religiosity, class, generation, citizenship, profession, political ideology, and individual interpretation. Some support restrictions on religious symbols; others oppose them; many may prioritize employment, housing, education, or foreign policy over dress debates entirely. The methodological implication is simple but often neglected: political discourse about migrant women should never be substituted for evidence of migrant women's own political preferences.

3.7 Civil Society, Local Governance, and Refugee Women's Political Voice

If one looks only at parliaments and elections, much of migrant women's political activity disappears from view. Civil society often supplies the institutional space in which political agency develops before citizenship and sometimes instead of it. Migrant women's organizations provide legal advice, language training, employment support, protection from violence, and community services; yet the same organizations may also petition authorities, submit policy recommendations, organize demonstrations, mobilize voters, train community leaders, and build relationships with parties and municipalities. Service provision and political advocacy are therefore not opposing functions. In many cases, the former creates the organizational capacity that later enables the latter.

The organizational field is heterogeneous. Some organizations are ethnic or nationality-based; others are explicitly feminist, refugee-led, religious, secular, labour-oriented, or professionally staffed NGOs advocating on behalf of migrants. This diversity creates a representational question of its own: who speaks for migrant women? An organization may possess institutional access without broad grassroots membership, while an informal network may have deep community legitimacy but little access to government. Young's (1990) arguments about group representation are relevant precisely because social groups are internally differentiated and no single organization can claim an uncontested mandate to represent them.

Local governance is especially important in this respect. Germany's foreigners' advisory councils and comparable consultative arrangements in a number of European municipalities create institutionalized channels through which non-citizens can communicate with local authorities even when they cannot vote. The powers of such bodies vary, and many are advisory rather than binding; nevertheless, they create public roles, leadership opportunities, and policy access that would be invisible in a purely electoral measure of integration. Spain and Italy have also developed local consultative mechanisms in some municipalities, while Sweden's broader local suffrage rules give long-term third-country residents access to the electoral arena itself after the relevant residence period.

Refugee women make the difference between formal and substantive political opportunity particularly visible. A recognized refugee may be legally secure but still lack citizenship; an asylum seeker may face status uncertainty; a beneficiary of temporary protection may have access to

services and work without a direct political-membership route. In such cases, organizations and municipalities often become the primary interface with the state. They can transmit information, identify service failures, and create consultative participation even when electoral rights are absent.

Türkiye is a particularly important example. Syrian women under temporary protection have lawful residence rights under the protection regime, but the temporary-protection identity document itself does not establish a citizenship application right (Presidency of Migration Management, n.d.). Therefore, political incorporation for this population cannot be measured with the same tools used for naturalized immigrants in Canada or Germany. Municipal services, NGO networks, women's organizations, community mediation, and labour advocacy are more relevant channels of voice. The institutional form of participation follows the legal form of migration.

The international rights framework reinforces this non-electoral understanding of agency. CEDAW General Recommendation No. 26 specifically addresses women migrant workers and emphasizes states' obligations to protect them against discrimination and abuse across different migration situations (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2008). The Istanbul Convention likewise contains migration- and asylum-related provisions on autonomous residence status for victims whose status depends on a spouse or partner, gender-based asylum claims, and non-refoulement in cases involving gender-based violence (Council of Europe, n.d.-a). These instruments are not electoral laws, yet they shape the security and autonomy without which meaningful political participation is difficult.

There is, however, a danger in treating civil society as a substitute for political rights. Advisory councils do not possess the same authority as elected councils; NGO consultation does not equal legislative power; service provision does not replace citizenship. Non-electoral participation should therefore be recognized without romanticizing its limits. The strongest democratic position is not that associations compensate for exclusion, but that political systems should be assessed across the full continuum of membership: security of residence, social and civil rights, access to organizations, local participation, naturalization, electoral rights, candidacy, and representation.

3.8 Rights, Protection, and the International Institutional Framework

Political participation rests on a wider rights infrastructure. A migrant woman who fears deportation if she leaves an abusive spouse, who lacks access to justice, or whose residence depends entirely on an employer may formally possess freedom of association yet be unable to exercise it safely. Political voice is therefore inseparable from residence security, labour rights, family rights, anti-discrimination law, and protection from gender-based violence.

CEDAW provides the foundational global framework. General Recommendation No. 26 on women migrant workers emphasizes that women may migrate independently, join migrant spouses or family members, or become undocumented, and that states retain obligations to protect them from discrimination across these categories (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2008). The importance of the recommendation lies partly in its refusal to treat migrant women as a single labour-market category; it recognizes that legal status and migration channel shape exposure to risk.

Within Europe, the Istanbul Convention adds a particularly concrete migration dimension. Article 59 addresses residence status in situations where a victim's status depends on a spouse or partner; Article 60 concerns gender-based asylum claims and gender-sensitive interpretation of refugee law; Article 61 addresses non-refoulement where women face serious risks of violence (Council of Europe, n.d.-a). These provisions show how apparently separate domains - migration status, family law, asylum, and violence against women - intersect institutionally. The convention's political significance is also demonstrated by contestation over ratification and withdrawal. Türkiye, for example, withdrew from the Convention with effect from 1 July 2021 and is no longer a state party (Council of Europe, n.d.-b), a fact that must be distinguished from the continuing operation of domestic law and other international obligations.

European Union law adds another layer. Mobile EU citizens' municipal electoral rights, anti-discrimination law, family-reunification rules, and residence rights create forms of supranational membership that can materially affect migrant women's political and social position. The 2026 Council action on municipal electoral rights is especially revealing: even where rights are formally guaranteed, administrative complexity and information barriers can reduce actual use, which is why the revised rules

emphasized proactive information and simplified registration (Council of the European Union, 2026).

Rights instruments, however, should not be confused with outcomes. Ratification does not guarantee implementation; formal anti-discrimination law does not eliminate discriminatory practice; citizenship does not guarantee political recruitment. Institutional analysis therefore requires at least three stages: the legal rule, the implementing organization, and the lived outcome. This distinction is particularly important in comparative work, where similar constitutional language may coexist with very different administrative capacity and political opportunity structures.

The broader implication is that migrant women's political rights cannot be separated neatly into a 'political' chapter while labour, family, migration, and gender-based violence are assigned elsewhere. Political voice depends on autonomy; autonomy depends partly on residence, economic resources, protection, and access to institutions. The rights architecture is therefore cumulative. Secure status enables organizational participation; naturalization enables national voting; party recruitment enables candidacy; and institutional access can turn presence into influence. When one link is weak, formal rights elsewhere may remain underused.

Table 3.4. Rights Frameworks Relevant to Migrant Women's Political Agency

Rights domain	Institution / instrument	Relevance to migrant women	Political significance
Electoral rights	EU municipal voting rights for mobile EU citizens	Creates local political membership without host-state nationality	Shows that residence, supranational citizenship, and voting can be layered
Citizenship	National naturalization law	Controls access to national elections and full candidacy rights	Residence requirements and tests can shape the timing of incorporation
Anti-discrimination	CEDAW; national and EU equality frameworks	Protects against sex- and status-related discrimination	Formal equality can support access to employment, organizations, and institutions
Residence autonomy	Istanbul Convention, Art. 59	Addresses status dependence in cases of violence	Autonomous residence can reduce coercive dependency
Asylum protection	Istanbul Convention, Arts. 60-61	Gender-sensitive asylum and non-refoulement	Protection status conditions later political incorporation

Rights domain	Institution / instrument	Relevance to migrant women	Political significance
Migrant-worker protection	CEDAW General Recommendation No. 26	Addresses women migrant workers across legal-status categories	Links labour security and personal autonomy to wider civic participation

3.9 Comparative Synthesis: Political Opportunity Structures, Intersectionality, and Uneven Membership

The comparative cases examined above resist any simple continuum from exclusion to inclusion. Sweden combines broad local voting rights for third-country residents with a substantially tightened citizenship regime after June 2026. Germany broadened access to nationality in 2024 yet still reserves ordinary local voting for citizens and EU nationals. Spain maintains a long ordinary naturalization period while providing sharply shortened routes for certain historically connected nationalities. The United Kingdom distributes voting rights through historically specific nationality categories and devolved rules. Canada ties political inclusion closely to settlement and naturalization, whereas Türkiye's temporary-protection system creates lawful long-term residence for Syrians without making that status itself a route to citizenship. These are not minor technical differences. They are distinct architectures of membership.

Political opportunity-structure theory helps explain why no single indicator captures these differences (Koopmans et al., 2005). Citizenship law is one opportunity structure, but local suffrage, party-system openness, candidate recruitment, associational freedom, municipal consultation, and anti-discrimination institutions are others. A migrant woman may face a closed route on one dimension and an open route on another. Consequently, country comparisons based solely on naturalization rates or parliamentary diversity are incomplete.

Intersectionality adds the necessary social dimension. Crenshaw's (1991) central insight was that categories such as gender and race do not operate as separate, additive disadvantages. In migrant politics, gender intersects with citizenship, legal status, class, occupation, religion, and generation. A highly skilled naturalized woman of migrant origin and a newly arrived refugee mother may both be categorized as migrant women, yet their political resources and institutional constraints are not remotely equivalent. Likewise, a Muslim woman may experience political discourse differently depending on whether she is a citizen, candidate, refugee, student, professional, or second-generation member of the polity.

This approach also clarifies the relationship between rights and representation. Political incorporation proceeds through several partially independent stages: secure residence, social and civil rights, organizational access, local participation, naturalization, national voting, candidacy, and representation. Progress at one stage can occur without progress at another. For example, a state may facilitate naturalization yet its parties may recruit few migrant-origin women; another may permit non-citizen local voting but produce low turnout because mobilization is weak. A third may have visible minority women in parliament while maintaining restrictive migration policy. None of these apparent contradictions is analytically surprising once political incorporation is treated as multidimensional.

Party politics further demonstrates this point. The official programmes reviewed in Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Italy show that migration policy and gender policy do not align mechanically along a single axis. Parties can combine restrictive migration positions with explicit commitments to women's rights, or equality measures with commitments to lower migration. This means that scholars should describe actual policy packages rather than infer a party's position on migrant women from one ideological label.

Finally, political discourse introduces a gap between speaking about migrant women and enabling migrant women to speak politically. The more migrant women become symbolic objects in debates over integration, religion, family, or national identity, the more important it becomes to distinguish external representation from self-representation. Civil society, local institutions, candidate recruitment, and naturalization are the mechanisms through which migrant women move from being the subject of political discourse to becoming political actors within it.

Conclusion

The political incorporation of migrant women cannot be captured by a single statistic, a single legal status, or a single theory of integration. It unfolds across a sequence of institutions that are connected but never perfectly aligned. Citizenship determines access to national political membership in most states, yet local voting rights can precede citizenship; organizations can provide voice without suffrage; descriptive representation can expand without producing substantive representation; and rights may exist in law while remaining difficult to exercise in practice.

The comparative evidence also demonstrates the danger of static national typologies. Germany's 2024 nationality reform broadened access to naturalization and multiple citizenship, while Sweden moved in the opposite direction in 2026 by extending the general residence requirement to eight years and adding language, social-knowledge, maintenance, and conduct conditions. Meanwhile, Sweden still permits long-term third-country residents to vote locally after three years. Political membership, therefore, is not a single national model but a bundle of rules that can move in different directions simultaneously.

The same complexity appears in party politics. Official programmes from recent election cycles show that parties combine migration management, border policy, labour demand, family reunification, anti-discrimination, equality, and women's rights in different ways. A party may advocate stricter immigration while affirming gender equality; another may defend migrant rights while simultaneously supporting managed return or lower migration in particular categories. These configurations should be described rather than ranked. For the study of migrant women, the relevant question is not which party is 'best,' but how specific policy choices affect residence security, family unity, social rights, participation, and representation.

Representation itself requires equally careful language. The presence of migrant-origin women in legislatures matters because institutions that exclude social groups narrow the range of experience visible within public decision-making. Yet presence does not mechanically determine policy. Party discipline, ideology, constituency, committee position, and individual priorities mediate substantive representation. This is why the distinction among descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation remains indispensable.

Civil society and local governance, moreover, reveal political agency where electoral analysis alone would see absence. Migrant women organize as workers, refugees, mothers, professionals, religious participants, secular activists, neighbourhood residents, and rights advocates. Advisory councils, municipal forums, associations, unions, and NGOs may lack the authority of elected parliaments, but they often constitute the first institutional arenas in which non-citizen women acquire public voice. Refugee women, particularly in temporary or precarious legal statuses, demonstrate this most clearly.

International rights frameworks broaden the picture further. CEDAW's General Recommendation No. 26 and the migration provisions of the Istanbul Convention show that autonomy, residence security, protection

from violence, and access to justice are not peripheral to political participation. A woman cannot participate freely if leaving an abusive household threatens her legal status, if reporting exploitation jeopardizes residence, or if discrimination blocks access to institutions. Political rights rest upon civil and social conditions that make voice practicable.

For that reason, the political life of migrant women should be understood as a problem of uneven membership. Residence, citizenship, gender, legal status, class, religion, and institutional opportunity combine to produce different degrees and forms of political belonging. The decisive analytical move is therefore to abandon the search for a universal migrant-woman political trajectory. Some women enter the polity rapidly through settlement and naturalization; others gain local electoral rights before citizenship; others remain politically active through organizations despite exclusion from the franchise; still others live under migration regimes in which permanent political membership is structurally remote.

This conclusion also establishes the bridge to the next chapter. If migrant women's political voice is shaped by citizenship, parties, local institutions, and rights regimes, then the next question is how states organize migration governance itself: which ministries, legislatures, courts, municipalities, welfare institutions, and international organizations convert political choices into gendered migration policy. Political life determines the contest; institutions determine how that contest becomes policy. The feminization of migration, therefore, is not only a transformation of who moves and where women work. It is also a transformation in who belongs, who speaks, who is represented, and through which institutions rights are converted into political agency.

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CHAPTER 4: INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES AND GENDER-SENSITIVE MIGRATION POLICIES: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Migration policy is often narrated through laws, quotas, borders, visas, and political declarations, yet the lived meaning of those instruments is determined by institutions. A statute may authorize family reunification, but a local immigration office decides whether the evidentiary requirements are met; a labour code may prohibit abuse, but an inspectorate determines whether a private household can be reached; a welfare system may formally cover residents, but eligibility rules, contribution histories, waiting periods, and caseworker discretion decide which migrant woman can actually claim a benefit. Accordingly, the institutional analysis of migration cannot stop at formal legal texts. It must ask how authority is divided, how administrative categories are produced, how rules are implemented, and how apparently neutral designs create differentiated outcomes across gender, status, class, and sector (Lipsky, 1980; Sainsbury, 2012).

This problem becomes especially visible when migration is examined through women's trajectories. Contemporary immigration laws rarely state that a woman should have fewer rights than a man. Nevertheless, women enter destination states disproportionately through channels that can carry distinctive forms of dependency: family reunification, domestic work, care work, temporary labour schemes, refugee and temporary-protection systems, and occupations in which employment, housing, and legal status may be intertwined. Consequently, formal sex neutrality can coexist with strongly gendered institutional effects. A rule tying a residence permit to a spouse is not formally addressed to women, yet it can affect women disproportionately where women are more often the joining spouse. An employer-specific work permit does not distinguish male from female workers, yet its consequences are particularly severe in live-in domestic work, where the employer may simultaneously control employment, accommodation, and day-to-day mobility. Feminist institutionalism is useful precisely because it directs attention away from explicit discrimination alone and toward the routines, classifications, and organizational assumptions through which institutions reproduce gendered power (Acker, 1992; Mackay et al., 2010).

A second complication follows from the fragmentation of migration governance. Migration is rarely administered by a single ministry. Interior ministries control admission and residence; labour ministries regulate employment; welfare ministries administer benefits; equality bodies address discrimination; municipalities deliver housing, childcare, language instruction, and social services; courts review administrative decisions; and international or regional organizations establish standards that may constrain national discretion. In federal or decentralized states, provinces, *Länder*, autonomous communities, and municipalities add further layers. Thus, the central question is not merely which policy exists, but who implements it, under which mandate, with which resources, and subject to which accountability mechanisms. Multi-level governance therefore describes more than an institutional map: it captures the practical reality that migrant women encounter the state through a chain of offices that may coordinate imperfectly and sometimes pursue competing priorities (Hooghe & Marks, 2001; Caponio & Borkert, 2010).

This chapter develops a comparative institutional account across European welfare states, Türkiye, North America, and the Gulf. It first reconstructs the institutional architecture of migration governance and then examines gender mainstreaming as a method of policy design. It next turns to work permits and employer dependency, family migration and autonomous residence, welfare and social protection, protection from violence and trafficking, labour inspection and anti-discrimination institutions, local implementation, and international governance. Canada is treated as an important case of formalized gender-based policy analysis, while the Gulf states illuminate the consequences of temporary labour regimes in which migration status remains closely connected to employment. Türkiye, meanwhile, represents a different configuration: a hybrid system shaped simultaneously by regular labour migration, international protection, and a very large temporary-protection population. The purpose is not to rank these regimes. Rather, it is to show how institutional arrangements distribute autonomy, risk, rights, and administrative dependence differently, and why those differences matter for the new political economy of feminized migration.

4.1 Institutions and the Governance of Migration

The modern migration state is not a single administrative actor. It is an institutional field in which control, labour demand, welfare provision, integration, security, and rights protection are distributed among different

organizations. Hollifield's account of the "migration state" emphasized the tension between market demand for mobility and political pressures for control, while later governance approaches widened the picture to include supranational organizations, subnational governments, private intermediaries, employers, and civil society (Hollifield, 2004; Betts, 2011). This wider institutional lens is especially important for women because the point at which a migration rule becomes gendered is often not the statute itself but the interaction between several institutions. A labour ministry may authorize a sectoral permit; an immigration authority may condition residence on continued employment; a welfare agency may exclude short-term residents; and a municipal shelter may nonetheless be required to protect a woman who leaves an abusive employer. The resulting rights configuration is therefore produced horizontally across policy domains as well as vertically across levels of government.

Germany illustrates this fragmentation clearly. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) plays a central role in asylum, integration courses, and migration administration, while the Federal Ministry of the Interior oversees the principal migration-law framework. The Federal Employment Agency and the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs shape labour-market access, and local foreigners' authorities implement substantial parts of residence law. In addition, the Länder and municipalities administer many social, educational, and recognition functions. Germany's Residence Act makes the institutional importance of this architecture visible. Section 31, for example, creates an independent right of residence for spouses after the dissolution of marital cohabitation when statutory conditions are met, and it provides mechanisms for avoiding undue hardship; the existence of a right in federal law, however, still requires local administrative recognition and evidentiary assessment (Federal Ministry of Justice, 2026). Thus, decentralization may permit institutional responsiveness, yet it can also create territorial differences in implementation.

France represents a more centralized administrative tradition, but it is not institutionally simple. The Ministry of the Interior occupies a strong position in immigration and residence, OFII performs integration-related functions, OFPRA decides many protection claims, and labour, health, welfare, and equality institutions operate through separate bureaucratic channels. Italy and Spain are similarly fragmented, though in different ways. Italian prefectures, territorial commissions, municipalities, and social-protection

institutions participate alongside central ministries; Spain combines national migration and labour authorities with autonomous communities that possess substantial responsibility for social services. The institutional consequence is familiar: a migrant woman's entitlement may arise from national law, but her effective access to housing, childcare, health support, or protection from violence may depend on the region in which she lives.

Sweden is often described as administratively more coherent because the Swedish Migration Agency occupies a central role in immigration and protection matters, yet municipalities and the public employment service remain crucial to settlement and integration. The United Kingdom, by contrast, concentrates substantial migration authority within the Home Office, while labour rights, welfare, equality, and devolved public services remain institutionally separate. Canada divides authority both functionally and territorially: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) leads immigration and citizenship, Employment and Social Development Canada administers important labour-market programmes, the Immigration and Refugee Board adjudicates protection matters, and provinces control key welfare, health, labour-standard, and qualification-recognition functions. The United States is more fragmented still, with immigration enforcement and benefit administration dispersed across federal, state, and local structures.

Türkiye's contemporary architecture is distinctive because several migration populations are governed under different legal tracks. The Presidency of Migration Management administers residence, international protection, and temporary protection; the Ministry of Labour and Social Security governs work permits under the International Labour Force Law; the Ministry of Family and Social Services administers protection and social services; and municipalities provide a large share of practical services in high-migrant-density settings. Law No. 6735 explicitly situates work permits within an international labour-force policy framework and permits applicants for international protection, conditional refugees, and persons under temporary protection to seek work authorization under specified conditions, including the six-month rule for certain categories (Republic of Türkiye, 2016). Meanwhile, Law No. 6458 separates family residence, international protection, and other residence categories, thereby institutionalizing the legal-status stratification that shapes access to services and work (Presidency of Migration Management, n.d.).

The Gulf states add another institutional configuration. There, migration governance is built around very large non-citizen labour forces, temporary

residence, recruitment systems, and historically employer-linked sponsorship. Labour ministries and interior ministries therefore sit at the centre of governance, while domestic workers have often been regulated under separate statutes. Reforms in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates have expanded mobility and contractual regulation in important respects, but the institutional reach of those reforms differs by worker category. Saudi Arabia's Labour Reform Initiative, for instance, introduced job-mobility and exit/re-entry reforms for covered private-sector expatriate workers from March 2021, while the ILO notes that domestic workers remain outside key Labour Law protections and continue to require separate reform attention (Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, 2020; International Labour Organization [ILO], 2023). The administrative category, therefore, matters as much as the headline reform.

What emerges from these cases is not a simple continuum from centralized to fragmented government. Fragmentation can create coordination failures, but it can also permit specialization; centralization can produce uniform rules, but it can also concentrate discretion. The more useful analytical question is whether the institutions responsible for migration control, employment, welfare, and protection can coordinate when a person's case crosses those boundaries. For migrant women, the most consequential cases are precisely those that do so: an abused spouse who needs both residence security and shelter; a domestic worker who needs labour enforcement without immigration retaliation; a refugee mother who needs language training and childcare simultaneously; or a foreign-trained nurse whose employment depends on both migration status and professional recognition. Institutional quality, in this sense, is not measured by the number of agencies but by whether those agencies can turn fragmented competences into coherent access to rights.

Table 4.1. Selected Institutional Architectures of Migration Governance

Country	Lead migration / residence institution	Labour-market institution	Gender / protection institution	Characteristic governance feature
Germany	BAMF; Federal Ministry of the Interior; local foreigners' authorities	Federal Employment Agency; Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	Federal Ministry responsible for women/family; equality institutions	Federal and local implementation; significant inter-agency fragmentation
France	Ministry of the Interior; OFII; OFPRA	Ministry of Labour; France Travail	Equality and rights institutions; social-service	Relatively centralized migration

Country	Lead migration / residence institution	Labour-market institution	Gender / protection institution	Characteristic governance feature
			system	administration with separate welfare and protection channels
Sweden	Swedish Migration Agency	Swedish Public Employment Service	Gender Equality Agency; municipal social services	Central migration agency combined with strong municipal implementation
United Kingdom	Home Office / UKVI	Department for Work and Pensions; sponsor-licensing system	Government Equalities Office; local authorities	Strong Home Office role, with protection and welfare rules operating through separate systems
Canada	IRCC; Immigration and Refugee Board	ESDC; provincial labour authorities	Women and Gender Equality Canada; provincial services	Federal-provincial system with formal GBA Plus architecture
Türkiye	Presidency of Migration Management	Ministry of Labour and Social Security	Ministry of Family and Social Services; municipalities	Distinct regimes for regular migration, international protection, and temporary protection
Saudi Arabia	Interior and Human Resources ministries	Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development	Protection institutions operate separately from labour sponsorship	Temporary labour-migration model; reforms differ by worker category
UAE	ICP/GDRFA; federal and emirate authorities	MOHRE	Gender and protection bodies; separate domestic-worker law	Federal-emirate split; domestic work separately regulated
Qatar	Ministry of Interior	Ministry of Labour	Protection institutions and ILO cooperation mechanisms	Post-2020 labour-mobility reforms within a temporary migration regime

Note. The table maps principal institutions and governance features rather than every agency involved. Institutional responsibilities may overlap and, in federal or decentralized systems, vary subnationally.

4.2 Gender-Neutral Rules and Gendered Institutional Effects

The institutional study of migration begins with a paradox: the removal of explicit sex discrimination from law does not necessarily produce gender-neutral outcomes. Contemporary work-permit statutes, family-migration rules, and welfare regulations usually define categories such as worker, spouse, dependant, refugee, or sponsor without assigning them to a particular sex. Yet those categories are occupied unevenly, and the institutional burdens attached to them are therefore distributed unevenly as well. Feminist institutionalism provides a language for this problem by distinguishing formal rules from the informal routines, organizational expectations, and distributional consequences through which institutions become gendered (Mackay et al., 2010). The question is thus not only whether women and men are subject to the same written rule, but whether the rule interacts with socially patterned migration channels in ways that systematically alter autonomy and access.

Family migration is a straightforward example. A dependent spouse's residence permit may be written in gender-neutral language, but where women more frequently migrate as joining spouses the dependency is disproportionately feminized. Similarly, an earnings threshold for family reunification may be neutral in form, but it may affect women differently where gender pay gaps and care responsibilities reduce average earnings. The same is true of contribution-based welfare: a maternity benefit or pension rule tied to continuous formal employment applies to everyone, yet women concentrated in part-time, informal, or interrupted work may accumulate weaker entitlements. The institution is therefore not necessarily discriminatory in intent; the gendered effect emerges from the interaction between formal design and patterned social position (Sainsbury, 2012).

Employer-specific migration status illustrates a second mechanism. In skilled professional work, an employer tie can still constrain mobility, but workers may possess higher earnings, stronger bargaining power, and greater access to information. In domestic work, the same legal design can have more serious consequences because the workplace is a private household, accommodation may be employer-provided, and labour inspection is structurally difficult. The permit is formally the same kind of administrative device - authorization linked to an employer - yet the sectoral context changes its meaning. This is why gender-sensitive migration policy cannot be evaluated by the wording of visa rules alone. It must ask who occupies

each channel, under what labour conditions, and with which practical alternatives (Anderson, 2010; ILO, 2023).

Gender mainstreaming seeks to institutionalize that inquiry before a policy is adopted. In its strongest form, mainstreaming requires policymakers to assess how proposed measures affect differently situated groups, to collect disaggregated data, to identify unequal effects, and to redesign instruments where necessary. In practice, however, mainstreaming ranges from highly formalized analysis to symbolic references to women in policy documents. The distinction between gender-aware, gender-sensitive, gender-responsive, and gender-transformative policy is useful precisely because it separates recognition from institutional redesign. A policy may acknowledge that migrant women face barriers yet leave permit dependency unchanged; another may redesign the permit itself so that reporting abuse no longer threatens legal status.

Canada is the clearest comparator in this chapter because GBA Plus is embedded in federal decision-making and IRCC's reporting architecture. Canada's policy framework requires departments to consider intersecting factors such as sex, gender, race, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, socioeconomic position, and other identity dimensions in policy and programme development. IRCC's 2025 annual immigration report states that GBA Plus and equity considerations are embedded in settlement and resettlement programming, while its 2026-27 departmental plan applies intersectional analysis to temporary-resident and foreign-worker programmes (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC], 2025, 2026a). The institutional significance lies less in the vocabulary itself than in the creation of an internal governance structure: IRCC has designated equity/GBA capacity, collects disaggregated data, and is legally required under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to report on gender-based analysis in its annual report to Parliament (IRCC, 2025).

Even here, however, formal mainstreaming should not be confused with proof of equal outcomes. A gender-impact assessment can identify a problem without guaranteeing implementation, funding, or enforcement. Conversely, states without a comprehensive migration-specific mainstreaming mandate can still adopt highly consequential gender-responsive provisions in particular areas. The United Kingdom's settlement route for certain victims of domestic abuse, Sweden's possibility of extending residence when a relationship ends because of violence, and Germany's hardship provisions for independent spousal residence are not

necessarily products of a single overarching mainstreaming system, but each directly addresses a gendered risk embedded in family-dependent migration (Federal Ministry of Justice, 2026; Home Office, 2026a; Swedish Migration Agency, 2026a).

The institutional lesson is therefore twofold. First, mainstreaming matters because it creates an obligation to ask gender questions systematically rather than episodically. Second, the quality of gender-sensitive migration governance ultimately has to be judged through the design of concrete institutions: whether a woman can change employers, retain residence after leaving violence, obtain childcare while attending language training, access a shelter irrespective of nationality, or report exploitation without exposing herself to removal. In other words, gender mainstreaming is analytically important, but its substantive value becomes visible only when it changes the distribution of administrative dependency.

Table 4.2. Gender-Sensitive Institutional Design: Selected Mechanisms

Mechanism	Institutional problem addressed	Illustrative example	Gender-policy significance
Gender-based impact analysis	Formally neutral policy can have unequal effects	Canada GBA Plus within IRCC	Creates ex ante and reporting obligations to examine intersecting effects
Independent residence after relationship breakdown	Spousal dependency can deter exit from abuse	Germany Residence Act §31; UK VDA route; Swedish violence exception	Reduces residence-status leverage held through intimate relationships
Open work permit for vulnerable workers	Employer-specific status may deter reporting abuse	Canada vulnerable-worker open work permit	Temporarily separates immigration status from abusive employer
Foreign-national shelter access	Nationality/status can block practical protection	Türkiye: foreign women may access women's shelters without nationality distinction	Extends violence-protection infrastructure beyond citizens
Domestic-worker mobility reform	Employer sponsorship concentrates bargaining power	Qatar Law No. 19 of 2020; UAE domestic-worker transfer rules	Addresses a sector with very high female migrant concentration

Note. These mechanisms differ in scope and legal force; they should not be interpreted as overall evaluations of national migration regimes.

4.3 Work Permits, Employer Dependency, and Labour Mobility

Work permits are frequently treated as technical instruments for matching foreign labour to vacancies. Institutionally, however, they also allocate bargaining power. The decisive question is whether authorization belongs primarily to the worker or to the employment relationship. An open permit

allows a worker to leave an employer without immediately losing the legal basis for work; an employer-specific permit makes labour mobility conditional on obtaining new authorization; a sponsorship system can go further by connecting employment, residence, and sometimes exit procedures to the employer. These are not merely administrative variations. They determine whether quitting is an ordinary labour-market choice or a decision carrying immigration consequences.

The gendered dimension follows from sectoral sorting documented in Chapter 2. Migrant women are heavily concentrated in care, domestic work, cleaning, hospitality, and health services. Where an employer-specific permit is combined with domestic work, the worker's dependency is intensified because the workplace is a private home and the employment relationship may include housing. The institutional problem is therefore cumulative: restricted labour mobility, limited inspection, isolation from co-workers, and residence insecurity can reinforce one another. By contrast, a similarly employer-linked arrangement in a large professional workplace may offer greater access to unions, human resources systems, and external networks, even though the immigration dependency remains.

Canada's open work permit for vulnerable workers provides a particularly clear institutional response. IRCC states that workers who hold employer-specific permits and are experiencing or at risk of employment-related abuse may apply for a temporary open permit that allows them to leave the abusive situation and work for another employer (IRCC, 2026b). Abuse is defined broadly to include physical, sexual, financial, and psychological abuse, unsafe working or living conditions, wage theft, intimidation, and retaliation. Importantly, the permit is not a permanent status; it is designed as a bridge that creates time to leave the employer and apply for another permit. This limitation matters. The mechanism reduces immediate dependency without transforming the temporary migration system into an open-ended settlement right.

Qatar's reform offers a different institutional model. Law No. 19 of 2020 removed the requirement for a No-Objection Certificate for workers seeking to change employers, and the ILO described the reform as a major step toward dismantling restrictive elements of the kafala system (ILO, 2020a, 2020b). Later ILO reporting emphasized that workers, including domestic workers, can change employers subject to notice rules, while also acknowledging persistent practical challenges such as misinformation and implementation difficulties (ILO, 2022, 2023). The distinction between legal

reform and labour-market practice is crucial. A worker may possess a legal right to transfer yet still encounter administrative delays, recruitment debt, employer retaliation, or uncertainty about procedures. Thus, labour mobility is not a binary variable but an institutional capacity that depends on enforceability.

Saudi Arabia's Labour Reform Initiative likewise expanded job mobility and exit/re-entry procedures for covered private-sector expatriate workers from March 2021. The official reform allows qualifying workers to transfer employment and to use exit and re-entry services without the employer's prior approval under specified conditions (Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, 2020). Yet the ILO's comparative work on sponsorship reform emphasizes a critical boundary: domestic workers and other workers excluded from general Labour Law coverage have not necessarily benefited from the same mobility rules, and the ILO's cooperation programme with Saudi Arabia continues to identify domestic-worker protection and sponsorship-reform gaps as priorities (ILO, 2023, 2025). Because domestic work is predominantly female, the legal boundary of the reform is itself gendered in effect.

The United Arab Emirates has moved toward a more explicit statutory regulation of domestic work. Federal Decree-Law No. 9 of 2022 provides that domestic workers may transfer to a new employer subject to the conditions and procedures established by the regulatory framework, and it establishes a dedicated dispute-resolution role for the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation [MOHRE], 2022). Again, however, separate domestic-worker legislation should not automatically be equated with full equivalence to the general labour code. The institutional question is whether working-time rules, rest, mobility, dispute resolution, and enforcement are substantively comparable and practically accessible.

European employer-sponsored skilled-work routes reveal another side of the same issue. Sponsorship can be used as a labour-market governance tool without reproducing the full architecture of kafala. Workers may be able to change employers by securing a new sponsor and meeting visa conditions, and settlement pathways may be available after a qualifying period. Nevertheless, the time and cost of transferring sponsorship can still affect bargaining power. The analytical mistake would be to place all employer-linked systems in a single category; what matters is the degree of portability,

the speed and cost of transfer, the availability of interim status, access to remedies, and whether residence survives the loss of a specific job.

The comparative conclusion is therefore institutional rather than regional. Employer dependency becomes most consequential when several conditions coincide: status is tied to one employer; job transfer requires permission or a difficult new application; housing is employer-provided; the workplace is isolated; social protection is weak; and complaint mechanisms are connected to immigration enforcement. Gender enters the analysis because women are disproportionately present in precisely some of the sectors where these conditions cluster. A gender-sensitive labour-migration regime therefore does not simply prohibit discrimination; it reduces the immigration cost of leaving a bad employment relationship.

4.4 Family Migration, Autonomous Residence, and Protection from Domestic Violence

Family migration poses one of the clearest tests of whether migration governance recognizes individual autonomy within households. Family reunification serves a legitimate and often constitutionally or internationally protected purpose: preserving family life. Yet a residence permit derived from a spouse can also create a legal dependency in which the continuation of status appears to depend on the continuation of the relationship. Where violence occurs, that structure can transform immigration law into an instrument of coercion. A perpetrator does not need formal authority over a residence permit to exploit the victim's uncertainty about whether separation will lead to deportation.

The institutional response has developed along two tracks. The first is the creation of an independent or autonomous residence right after a qualifying period of lawful marital cohabitation. The second is an exception that permits earlier independence where violence or severe hardship makes continued cohabitation unreasonable. Germany's Residence Act embodies both principles. Section 31 provides an independent one-year extension after the end of marital cohabitation where statutory duration conditions are satisfied; it also allows the qualifying requirement to be waived where necessary to avoid particular hardship. The statute explicitly treats impairment of the spouse's legitimate interests as relevant to hardship, creating the legal space through which violence-related claims can be recognized (Federal Ministry of Justice, 2026).

The United Kingdom has constructed a more specialized route. Appendix Victim of Domestic Abuse, updated in 2026, permits settlement for eligible partners whose relationships have permanently broken down because of domestic abuse; government guidance also provides a Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession that can grant temporary permission and access to benefits while a settlement application is considered (Home Office, 2026a, 2026b). The architecture is significant because it addresses the interim period. A formal right to eventual settlement is of limited protective value if a woman has no lawful status, income, or access to shelter while the claim is pending. By creating an interim bridge, the concession attempts to prevent the protection route itself from becoming inaccessible.

Swedish policy takes a different form but addresses the same structural risk. The Swedish Migration Agency states that where a relationship ends because the applicant or a child has been subjected to violence or another serious violation, an extended residence permit may in some cases be granted; the agency also explicitly states that it, rather than the abusive partner, determines residence status and directs victims toward police, social services, and shelters (Swedish Migration Agency, 2026a, 2026b). This administrative guidance is institutionally important because misinformation is part of the coercive environment. Protection therefore requires not only a legal exception but credible public communication that the sponsor does not possess unilateral power over the migrant's status.

The Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention gives these national mechanisms a regional normative foundation. Article 59 requires parties, under specified conditions, to provide autonomous residence permits to victims whose residence status depends on a spouse or partner when particularly difficult circumstances arise, irrespective of the duration of the marriage or relationship. It also addresses suspension of expulsion proceedings and residence permits connected to victims' personal situations or cooperation with proceedings (Council of Europe, 2011). Yet treaty ratification cannot be treated as proof of implementation. GREVIO monitoring has repeatedly made the broader point that the effectiveness of violence-protection systems depends on accessibility, awareness, evidence requirements, and coordination between migration and victim-support authorities.

Canada's policy history demonstrates how institutional design can be reversed when dependency is judged to create unacceptable risk. The government introduced conditional permanent residence for some sponsored

spouses in 2012, requiring a period of cohabitation, but removed the condition in 2017. In announcing the repeal, the government explicitly stated that the rule could cause sponsored spouses or partners to remain in abusive relationships because they feared losing permanent residence, and linked the reform to gender equality and combating gender-based violence (IRCC, 2017). This is an unusually clear example of policy feedback: an anti-fraud measure was reconsidered after its interaction with intimate-partner violence became central to institutional evaluation.

Türkiye's framework separates protection from immigration status more explicitly at the service-delivery level. Law No. 6284 is designed to protect women, children, family members, and stalking victims against violence, and official guidance from the Ministry of Family and Social Services states that foreign women may access women's shelters without distinction based on status or nationality (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2012, 2026). At the same time, family residence under Law No. 6458 remains a separate migration-law category governed by its own sponsorship and eligibility conditions (Presidency of Migration Management, n.d.). This division creates a critical coordination question: protection services may be formally available, yet the migrant's separate residence situation may still require immigration-law advice and resolution.

These cases show why autonomous residence is not a narrow immigration-law technicality. It is a protection institution. Its effectiveness depends on at least five variables: whether the right exists; whether interim lawful status exists during the claim; whether evidence requirements recognize the realities of abuse; whether shelters and legal aid are accessible; and whether frontline officials understand the interaction between violence and migration status. The decisive comparative question is not therefore whether a country has a domestic-violence exception, but whether the exception can be used before dependency itself prevents the victim from reaching the institution that administers it.

Table 4.3. Residence Autonomy and Violence-Protection Mechanisms: Selected Cases

Country	Underlying dependency	Autonomy / protection mechanism	Interim protection feature	Institutional significance
Germany	Residence derived through spouse	Residence Act §31 independent right; hardship exception	Case-specific administrative continuation/extension	Turns marital breakdown into an administratively separable residence question
United Kingdom	Partner-based immigration status	Appendix Victim of Domestic Abuse settlement route	Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession may provide temporary status and benefit access	Explicit bridge between relationship breakdown and independent settlement
Sweden	Residence based on relationship	Extended residence may be granted where relationship ended because of violence/serious violation	Migration Agency coordinates information and referral to support	Publicly clarifies that abusive partner cannot determine residence outcome
Canada	Historically conditional spousal PR in some cases	Conditional PR abolished in 2017; broader independent PR after sponsorship	Policy reversal removed the cohabitation condition itself	Reduces structural leverage by eliminating the conditional status
Türkiye	Family residence is migration-law category; protection law is separate	Law No. 6284 protection; foreign women eligible for shelters regardless of nationality/status	Shelter and protective measures available through social-service system	Illustrates need to coordinate protection services with separate migration-status questions

Note. Eligibility and evidentiary requirements differ within each system. The table identifies principal institutional mechanisms rather than providing individual legal advice.

4.5 Welfare States, Social Protection, and Civic Stratification

Migration regimes distribute legal status; welfare states distribute social security. The two systems overlap imperfectly. A permanent resident, a temporary worker, a refugee, an asylum seeker, a family migrant, and an undocumented resident can live in the same city yet possess radically different entitlements to healthcare, unemployment insurance, maternity benefits, childcare subsidies, housing assistance, and social assistance. Civic

stratification captures this layered structure: rights are not organized through a simple citizen/non-citizen divide but through multiple status categories that carry different packages of entitlement (Morris, 2002; Sainsbury, 2012).

Gender modifies this stratification because access to contributory welfare depends on employment histories that are themselves gendered. Migrant women concentrated in domestic work, part-time employment, informal care, or interrupted labour-force participation may satisfy residence requirements while failing contribution thresholds for earnings-related unemployment, maternity, or pension benefits. Thus, even a comparatively generous welfare state can reproduce inequality between those with stable formal employment and those whose work is irregular or poorly recorded. The Nordic model, for instance, generally offers broad residence-based services and extensive childcare, yet earnings-related benefits still depend on prior labour-market attachment. The institutional architecture is inclusive at one level and stratified at another.

Continental systems such as Germany and France rely heavily on social insurance, where contribution histories determine the level or availability of many benefits. This model can protect migrants with stable formal employment well while providing weaker outcomes to those with fragmented careers. Family-derived entitlements may partially compensate, but they can also reproduce dependence on marital status. Southern European systems add another dimension. In Italy and Spain, the comparatively strong role of families in care provision has historically generated demand for migrant women as domestic and elder-care workers; nevertheless, those same workers may lack comparable access to formal childcare or stable contributory protection when their employment is informal. The welfare state therefore participates in the political economy of feminized migration twice: it shapes the demand for migrant care labour and it shapes the worker's own access to social citizenship (Williams, 2012).

The United Kingdom illustrates status-based conditionality more directly through immigration conditions such as 'no recourse to public funds' for many non-settled migrants. The purpose is to limit access to defined means-tested benefits before settlement, but the effect is to separate labour-market presence from welfare membership. A migrant woman may be lawfully employed and taxed yet remain outside parts of the social-assistance system. Domestic-abuse concessions are institutionally significant precisely because they create exceptions to this general logic where destitution and

dependency would otherwise undermine the possibility of leaving violence (Home Office, 2026b).

Canada generally provides permanent residents with relatively broad access to mainstream public institutions, while temporary residents are more dependent on programme-specific rules and provincial arrangements. Here the federal-provincial division matters: immigration status is federal, but healthcare, labour standards, social assistance, and childcare are substantially administered provincially. Consequently, a migrant woman's social rights cannot be inferred from her federal status alone. The same observation applies to professional recognition and settlement services, which often operate through provincial or locally contracted institutions. Canada's GBA Plus framework may identify intersectional effects, but the federal government cannot unilaterally redesign every subnational service.

The Gulf regimes represent a different model because extensive state welfare systems are oriented primarily toward citizens, while migrant workers rely heavily on employment-based or mandatory employer-related provision. Social protection is therefore not simply less generous; it is institutionally organized through a different membership principle. A temporary labour migrant may remain outside citizen-oriented welfare even after many years of residence. Domestic workers are particularly exposed where their legal regime is separated from the general labour code and where health insurance, end-of-service benefits, or dispute mechanisms depend on distinct statutes (ILO, 2023; MOHRE, 2022).

Türkiye again requires status differentiation. Formally employed foreign workers enter the social insurance system through ordinary employment institutions, while persons under temporary protection and applicants for international protection interact with separate health, social-assistance, and protection arrangements. Law No. 6735 connects work authorization to the broader migration-status system, while municipal and internationally supported services play a substantial role in refugee-hosting localities (Republic of Türkiye, 2016). Official Ministry of Family and Social Services guidance confirms that violence-protection services such as women's shelters are available to foreign women without nationality or status distinction, demonstrating that some protective social rights are deliberately separated from migration membership (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2026).

Healthcare reveals the same logic. Recognized refugees and permanent residents often approach mainstream systems, whereas asylum seekers,

temporary workers, and irregular migrants encounter narrower packages, waiting periods, employer-based coverage, or emergency-care rules. For migrant women, reproductive healthcare and maternal care expose the practical consequences of those categories. Formal emergency access is not equivalent to continuity of prenatal care, contraception, specialist referral, or mental-health support. Moreover, fear of immigration consequences can deter irregular migrants from seeking services even where some care is legally available. This is why 'entitlement' and 'access' must remain separate analytical categories.

Childcare is equally important because it functions both as a social right and as an integration institution. A language course or employment programme that assumes full-time attendance without childcare can indirectly exclude mothers of young children. Conversely, subsidized childcare can increase the practical accessibility of language training, qualification recognition, and employment services. Gender-sensitive migration policy therefore cannot be confined to immigration ministries: childcare design, parental leave, and family benefits can determine whether formal labour-market access becomes usable capability.

The broader conclusion is that social protection should be read through two intersecting institutional maps. The first is the welfare regime: universalist, insurance-based, familialist, liberal, or citizen-centred temporary-labour model. The second is the migration-status hierarchy. Migrant women's position lies at their intersection. A comparative chapter that discusses only welfare states or only immigration categories will miss how the two systems combine to distribute security.

Table 4.4. Welfare-Migration Nexus: Stylized Institutional Patterns

Regime pattern	Illustrative cases	Primary entitlement logic	Typical migrant-status differentiation	Gendered institutional issue
Social-democratic / residence-oriented	Sweden	Broad public services plus earnings-related insurance	Status and registration still matter, but residence-based services are extensive	Interrupted employment reduces access to earnings-related components
Continental insurance-based	Germany, France	Contributions and employment record	Temporary / permanent status interacts with contribution history	Part-time and discontinuous work can lower benefit accrual
Familialist care	Italy, Spain	Mix of insurance, means tests, and	Regional and status-based	Migrant women may supply care

Regime pattern	Illustrative cases	Primary entitlement logic	Typical migrant-status differentiation	Gendered institutional issue
regime		family provision	variation	while lacking equivalent support for their own care needs
Liberal / conditional	United Kingdom	Employment plus means-tested assistance with immigration conditions	Many non-settled migrants face restrictions on public funds	Status rules can intensify dependency during unemployment or abuse
Federal settlement-oriented	Canada	Permanent residence plus federal/provincial welfare institutions	Temporary status remains more conditional than permanent residence	Subnational differences shape actual access
Citizen-centred temporary-labour	Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar	Citizen welfare; migrant protection largely labour/employer based	Temporary non-citizen workers remain outside citizen welfare architecture	Domestic workers may be governed under separate, weaker or differently enforced rules
Hybrid refugee-hosting	Türkiye	Mainstream insurance plus separate temporary/international-protection systems	Strong differentiation by status category	Formal work and welfare access differ sharply across regular, protection, and irregular statuses

Note. These are ideal-typical patterns for comparison and should not be treated as exhaustive classifications of national welfare systems.

4.6 Protection Institutions: Labour Inspection, Violence, Trafficking, and Anti-Discrimination

Protection institutions occupy an uneasy place in migration governance because they often encounter the same person through a different logic from immigration control. A labour inspector sees an employee; a shelter sees a victim of violence; an anti-trafficking unit sees a potential victim or witness; an immigration authority sees a status holder whose right to remain is defined by law. Where these institutional logics are coordinated, protection can function independently of status. Where they are not, migrant women may reasonably fear that seeking help will jeopardize employment, housing, or residence.

Labour inspection in private households is the clearest structural difficulty. Domestic work is work, yet the workplace is also a home protected against arbitrary state intrusion. Consequently, routine

unannounced inspection is far more difficult than in factories, hotels, or care institutions. ILO Convention No. 189 sought to establish decent-work standards for domestic workers, and the ILO's broader sponsorship-reform agenda emphasizes that domestic workers should enjoy labour-law protection, mobility, and access to complaints comparable to other workers (ILO, 2011, 2023). Nonetheless, inspection often remains complaint-driven. This has a gendered effect because migrant women form a very large share of transnational domestic workers, making a general limitation on household inspection disproportionately relevant to women.

The institutional difficulty is compounded where migration enforcement and labour enforcement are connected. An undocumented or status-insecure worker who reports wage theft may fear that the complaint will expose her to removal. The 'firewall' concept addresses this problem by separating essential services and rights-enforcement functions from immigration control. Firewalls can operate in healthcare, education, police reporting, domestic-violence services, and labour standards. Their design is controversial because they deliberately restrict information sharing that might otherwise support immigration enforcement. Yet from a labour-rights perspective, the absence of a firewall can make legal protections practically unusable by the workers at greatest risk.

Trafficking institutions reveal a similar tension. The Palermo Protocol and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings require states to identify and assist trafficking victims, while the EU anti-trafficking framework adds minimum criminal-law and victim-support standards. However, identification often depends on police, prosecutors, specialized agencies, or contracted NGOs. A domestic worker in servitude, an agricultural worker subjected to forced labour, and a woman trafficked for sexual exploitation may each meet legal elements of trafficking but encounter different institutional pathways. Historically, anti-trafficking systems have sometimes been criticized for identifying sexual exploitation more readily than labour exploitation, which can obscure domestic servitude and other forms of coercion affecting migrant women.

Residence status is central here as well. Recovery periods and trafficking-specific residence permits are intended to create time for protection and investigation, yet some systems link longer-term status to cooperation with criminal proceedings. The policy rationale is understandable: prosecutions require evidence. The protection concern is equally clear: a traumatized person may be unable or unwilling to cooperate immediately, particularly

when traffickers threaten family members abroad. Thus, anti-trafficking governance constantly negotiates the line between victim protection and law-enforcement objectives.

Anti-discrimination institutions add a different kind of protection. Germany's Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency, Sweden's Equality Ombudsman, the United Kingdom's Equality and Human Rights Commission, France's Défenseur des droits, Canada's human-rights commissions, and comparable bodies elsewhere provide complaint or guidance mechanisms concerning discrimination on protected grounds. Yet migration status itself is not universally a protected ground. A woman discriminated against because of sex or ethnic origin may fall clearly within equality law, while a disadvantage explicitly linked to temporary status or visa category may instead be treated as immigration-law differentiation. This boundary matters because not all unequal treatment of migrants is legally classified as discrimination.

Türkiye's violence-protection framework provides an instructive example of status-independent service access. Official guidance states that foreign women who are victims of domestic or gender-based violence can use women's shelters regardless of nationality or status, and Law No. 6284 provides protective and preventive measures such as shelter, temporary protection, financial assistance, and, where appropriate, childcare support (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2012, 2026). Institutionally, this separates a core protection function from citizenship. The remaining challenge is access: language, knowledge of services, documentation, and coordination with migration authorities can still determine whether the right is usable.

The distinction between law and implementation therefore becomes decisive. A country may criminalize trafficking, prohibit wage theft, protect domestic-violence victims, and establish an equality body, yet still produce weak outcomes if complainants cannot reach those institutions, if evidence requirements are unrealistic, if interpretation services are absent, or if reporting creates immigration risk. Street-level bureaucracy is not a peripheral concern here; it is the point at which the formal state becomes an actual encounter (Lipsky, 1980). For migrant women, the quality of protection is often decided in this administrative space between formal entitlement and practical recognition.

4.7 Multi-Level Governance: Municipalities, the European Union, and International Norms

Migration governance is commonly legislated nationally but lived locally. Housing, childcare, schools, shelters, language courses, health referrals, employment counselling, and social assistance are delivered in cities and municipalities even where the legal authority for migration remains national. This mismatch between rule-setting and service delivery explains the growing importance of the 'local turn' in migration scholarship (Caponio & Borkert, 2010). For migrant women, local institutions are particularly important because many of the services that convert formal rights into actual capability - childcare, violence protection, legal counselling, and language access - are municipal or contracted locally.

German cities operate within a federal structure in which integration, youth services, housing, and recognition may involve *Länder* and municipal institutions as well as federal agencies. Swedish municipalities play major roles in settlement and social services alongside national migration and employment agencies. Spanish autonomous communities and municipalities administer substantial parts of health and welfare provision. In Canada, cities such as Toronto host dense networks of federally funded settlement organizations while provincial governments control many core social services. In Türkiye, municipalities in provinces with large temporary-protection populations have frequently become frontline service providers, often in partnership with national ministries, UN agencies, and NGOs. The formal legal power may sit elsewhere, yet the institutional encounter is local.

This local role can produce innovation, but it can also produce inequality. A municipality with strong administrative capacity and international funding may create dedicated migrant women's centres, multilingual counselling, and integrated referral systems; another municipality operating under the same national law may offer far less. Local discretion thus creates a classic governance trade-off. It allows adaptation to demographic realities but risks making access depend on place of residence. Gender-sensitive migration policy must therefore consider fiscal equalization, minimum service standards, and intergovernmental coordination, not merely local creativity.

The European Union adds a supranational level with binding legislative capacity. Family reunification, asylum procedures, anti-trafficking standards, labour mobility, social-security coordination, and anti-discrimination are all shaped partly by EU law. Council Directive 2003/86/EC establishes a common framework for family reunification of third-country nationals,

including rules on resources, accommodation, and more favourable treatment for certain refugees. These common rules do not eliminate national discretion; rather, they define a legal corridor within which national systems vary. The result is harmonization without uniformity.

A major institutional change occurred in 2026 when the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum entered into application on 12 June. Adopted in 2024, the Pact reorganized screening, asylum, responsibility, solidarity, and border-procedure rules across the Union and required extensive national implementation planning (European Commission, 2026). For migrant and refugee women, the most relevant aspect is not a single 'women's provision' but the broader treatment of vulnerability, special procedural needs, family unity, trafficking, pregnancy, children, and violence within screening and asylum procedures. The exact distribution of gender-sensitive safeguards across the Pact's multiple instruments is complex, which reinforces the institutional argument of this chapter: rights are increasingly located across packages of legislation rather than in one migration code.

The European Institute for Gender Equality, the Fundamental Rights Agency, the European Union Agency for Asylum, the European Labour Authority, Frontex, the Commission, Council, and Parliament each approach migration from a different institutional mandate. This multiplicity can produce expertise but also fragmentation. EIGE may identify a gendered impact; EUAA may focus on asylum practice; the Labour Authority addresses fair mobility; Frontex is concerned with borders and return; the Commission monitors implementation. Gender-responsive governance therefore depends on information and accountability moving between institutions whose core missions differ.

The Council of Europe operates through another model. Rather than legislating migration policy directly, it establishes human-rights treaties and monitoring systems. The Istanbul Convention is particularly important because Article 59 links violence protection to migration status, while the European Convention on Human Rights protects family life and prohibits inhuman treatment, slavery, and forced labour. GREVIO and GRETA monitoring bodies provide country-specific implementation scrutiny for violence and trafficking frameworks. This creates an institutional bridge between abstract rights and administrative practice, because monitoring reports can identify gaps that statutory ratification alone would conceal.

The United Nations and the ILO add still another layer. CEDAW General Recommendation No. 26 specifically addresses women migrant workers and

calls for state measures across recruitment, employment, access to justice, health, violence, and exploitation (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2008). The Global Compact for Migration incorporates gender responsiveness as a cross-cutting policy principle, though it remains non-binding. ILO conventions and guidance address domestic work, migrant workers, forced labour, freedom of association, recruitment, labour inspection, and sponsorship reform. These instruments do not replace national law, but they establish standards against which national institutions can be assessed and around which advocacy and technical cooperation can be organized.

The institutional landscape is therefore plural rather than hierarchical. EU law can bind member states; Council of Europe treaties operate through ratification, monitoring, and adjudication; UN and ILO instruments vary between binding conventions and soft-law guidance; municipalities implement services; and national governments retain decisive authority over admission and status. For migrant women, the practical significance of international governance lies in whether these layers create usable domestic mechanisms. A treaty clause becomes meaningful when it changes a residence rule, a labour inspection practice, a shelter eligibility criterion, or a caseworker's decision. Multi-level governance should therefore be evaluated through institutional transmission: how norms move from international text to national rule and then to local encounter.

4.8 Comparative Regimes, Implementation Gaps, and the Political Economy of Institutional Dependence

The comparisons developed above permit a cautious typology of migration governance, provided that it is used as an analytical map rather than a ranking. Canada approximates a settlement-oriented inclusion regime in which permanent residence and eventual citizenship remain central to major migration pathways and gender-based policy analysis is institutionally formalized. Sweden represents a welfare-inclusive integration regime in which broad public services and structured integration institutions reduce some forms of market dependence, even though migration status and contribution histories continue to stratify outcomes. Italy and Spain illustrate familialist care regimes in which migrant women's labour helps sustain household-based care arrangements while welfare and labour institutions do not always eliminate informal employment. Türkiye represents a refugee-hosting hybrid regime combining ordinary labour migration with distinct international-protection and temporary-protection systems. The Gulf states

remain paradigmatic temporary labour-import regimes in which residence is fundamentally organized around work rather than settlement. The United Kingdom and parts of continental Europe occupy intermediate positions that combine settlement possibilities with employer-sponsored or status-conditional pathways.

These categories overlap because institutions change incrementally. Historical institutionalism is therefore especially useful. States rarely redesign migration governance from a blank page; instead, they layer new rules onto older systems. Germany's contemporary integration and citizenship reforms coexist with institutions descended from a guest-worker era that originally assumed temporary residence. Gulf labour reforms introduce greater mobility into sponsorship systems without immediately transforming the underlying temporary-migration model. Canada can repeal conditional spousal residence while retaining employer-specific temporary-worker programmes. Policy change therefore often occurs through layering, conversion, and partial replacement rather than complete rupture (Pierson, 2000).

The implementation gap is the second recurring feature. Qatar's removal of the No-Objection Certificate changed the formal law of labour mobility, but the ILO continued to identify practical barriers to job transfer after the reform (ILO, 2022, 2023). Saudi Arabia's Labour Reform Initiative expanded mobility for covered workers, yet domestic workers remained outside central parts of the Labour Law and thus outside some reform benefits (ILO, 2023, 2025). Germany's independent spousal residence right exists in federal statute, but individual cases still depend on administrative evidence and local application. Canada's GBA Plus creates a systematic analytical duty, yet analysis does not guarantee that every programme produces gender-equal outcomes. The gap between norm and implementation is not a defect unique to one regime type; it is a structural problem of administration.

Administrative capacity partly explains the gap. Asylum backlogs, understaffed inspectorates, limited interpretation services, scarce shelter places, and slow professional-recognition procedures can weaken rights without any explicit policy decision to do so. Yet capacity cannot explain everything. Governments choose where to invest enforcement resources, which sectors to inspect, which categories to exclude from general labour law, and whether immigration and protection institutions share information.

Implementation is therefore both technical and political. Resource scarcity and policy priority interact.

Digitalization introduces a new dimension. Online visa systems, biometric identity, automated document checks, cross-agency databases, and digital portals can simplify applications and reduce some discretionary encounters. At the same time, they can create new exclusions for migrants with limited digital literacy, unstable internet access, language barriers, or difficulty producing standardized documents. Women who depend on a spouse or employer for devices, accounts, or identity documents may face distinctive problems. Moreover, data integration can undermine firewall principles if information collected for health, labour, or protection purposes becomes accessible to immigration enforcement. Digital efficiency is therefore not institutionally neutral; it redistributes both access and surveillance capacity.

The chapter's central comparative finding can now be stated more precisely. Gender-sensitive migration policy is not a discrete policy sector. It is an institutional property that emerges when migration status, employment law, family law, welfare, protection, and local service delivery are designed so that women do not have to trade one basic form of security for another. A domestic worker should not have to choose between escaping abuse and retaining legal status; a sponsored spouse should not have to choose between physical safety and residence; a refugee mother should not have to choose between childcare and language integration; a foreign-trained professional should not have to abandon her occupation because recognition institutions are inaccessible; and an irregular migrant should not have to choose between reporting violence and avoiding immigration enforcement.

This formulation also clarifies the meaning of the 'new political economy' in the title of the book. Migration institutions do not merely regulate mobility; they allocate costs and risks among states, employers, households, workers, and families. Employer-specific permits shift some migration governance to employers. Familialist welfare systems shift care to households, which may then purchase migrant women's labour. Temporary labour regimes obtain labour without extending the full social membership associated with settlement. Gender-sensitive protection rules transfer some risk away from the individual migrant by creating independent status, open permits, shelters, or welfare access. Institutional design is therefore distributive. It decides who bears the cost of reproduction, integration, unemployment, violence, and care.

A genuinely gender-responsive approach must accordingly move beyond adding 'women and vulnerable groups' to the final paragraph of a migration strategy. It requires policy coordination, disaggregated data, independent residence possibilities, portable labour rights, accessible social protection, effective inspection, qualification recognition, childcare, violence safeguards, and complaint mechanisms that do not collapse into immigration enforcement. A gender-transformative approach would go further by questioning the institutional arrangements that generate dependency in the first place: sponsor-based residence, household privatization of care, exclusion of domestic work from ordinary labour law, and welfare rules built around uninterrupted full-time employment.

None of this implies that one country has solved the institutional problem. Canada combines strong mainstreaming with temporary-worker vulnerabilities; Sweden combines welfare inclusion with status and integration conditionalities; Germany combines statutory residence protections with federal implementation complexity; the Gulf states have implemented significant labour reforms while retaining temporary-worker structures; Türkiye provides broad violence-protection services to foreign women while operating multiple migration statuses with different labour and welfare consequences. Comparison is valuable precisely because it reveals these combinations. Institutional regimes should therefore be studied as bundles of strengths, constraints, and trade-offs rather than as league tables.

The deeper lesson is that the feminization of migration has forced migration governance to confront institutions that were once treated as peripheral to migration policy: childcare, social care, domestic violence, labour inspection, professional recognition, local social services, and gender equality. As women's migration becomes more visible as autonomous labour migration, family migration, refugee movement, and transnational care work, the boundary between 'migration policy' and 'social policy' becomes increasingly difficult to defend. The institutional state that governs migration is, in practice, also a welfare state, a labour-market regulator, a family-law administrator, and a protection system. Understanding migrant women's position therefore requires analyzing those institutions together rather than treating immigration control as the whole of migration governance.

Conclusion

Institutional structures are the machinery through which migration policy acquires social meaning. Formal legal equality is important, yet it does not

answer the practical questions that determine migrant women's autonomy: whether a worker can change employers, whether a spouse can retain residence after leaving violence, whether social insurance recognizes fragmented employment histories, whether domestic work can be inspected, whether a trafficking victim can receive protection without immediate immigration consequences, and whether local services are accessible in practice. Across the cases examined in this chapter, gendered outcomes arise less from explicit sex discrimination than from the interaction between migration categories and institutions designed around employment, family, welfare, and temporary residence.

The comparative evidence also demonstrates that there is no single institutional model of gender-sensitive migration governance. Canada formalizes intersectional policy analysis through GBA Plus and has created targeted status-protection mechanisms such as the vulnerable-worker open permit. Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom provide different routes through which family-dependent residents can retain or obtain independent status after violence. Türkiye separates violence-protection services from nationality by allowing foreign women to access shelters, while simultaneously governing regular migration, international protection, and temporary protection through distinct legal systems. Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates have reformed important elements of labour mobility and domestic-worker regulation, yet the temporary nature of migration and the legacy of sponsorship continue to shape the institutional balance between employer authority and worker autonomy.

These differences are not incidental details; they are part of the political economy of migration. Institutions determine who bears risk when employment ends, who finances care, who carries the cost of integration, and whether residence security belongs to the migrant or to a relationship with an employer or spouse. In this sense, gender-sensitive migration policy is best understood not as a separate set of protective programmes but as a principle for reorganizing institutional dependency. The most consequential reforms are those that convert dependency into portable rights: independent residence, transferable work authorization, accessible social protection, autonomous complaint mechanisms, and services available without status-based fear.

The new political economy of feminized migration therefore directs attention to the distribution of institutional power. States remain central, but their authority is dispersed across ministries, courts, municipalities,

international organizations, employers, and welfare institutions. Migrant women encounter this architecture through everyday administrative decisions, and it is at this level that formal rights either become capabilities or remain promises. The institutional question is ultimately simple to state, even if difficult to resolve: does the migration regime organize mobility in a way that makes legal status contingent on relationships of dependence, or does it provide sufficient institutional autonomy for migrants to act as workers, family members, rights holders, and political subjects in their own right?

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CHAPTER 5: BEYOND THE MIGRANT WOMAN: CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND WOMEN LEFT BEHIND

Migration becomes analytically incomplete when the migrant is treated as an isolated individual. A woman who crosses a border for work may leave behind children, a spouse, elderly parents, land, debt, expectations, and a household whose daily organization must be reconstructed in her absence. Conversely, a woman who does not migrate may nevertheless experience migration as a profound reordering of her life when a husband, daughter, son, or other household member departs. The social consequences of mobility are therefore distributed across people who move and people who stay, across origin and destination societies, and across generations. Feminized migration is not simply the growing visibility of women in international mobility; it is also a transformation in the geography of care, authority, reproduction, and family obligation.

This shift in perspective changes the unit of analysis. Earlier migration scholarship often approached the household as the background against which an individual worker made a decision, while family members were frequently reduced to dependants or recipients of remittances. The new economics of labour migration challenged this individualist view by conceptualizing migration as a household strategy for risk diversification and income stabilization (Stark & Bloom, 1985). Feminist and transnational scholarship went further. It asked who within the household bears the costs of that strategy, whose labour substitutes for the migrant's absence, whose authority expands or contracts, and how intimacy itself is reproduced across distance. The transnational family literature consequently treats geographically dispersed families as social units whose members may continue to organize collective welfare, obligation, decision-making, and identity across borders (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Baldassar & Merla, 2014).

This broader approach is especially important for a book concerned with the feminization and political economy of migration. The movement of women into care, domestic, health, service, and other gendered labour markets does not eliminate the care responsibilities previously performed in origin households. It relocates and redistributes them. Some are assumed by fathers, yet many are transferred to grandmothers, aunts, older daughters, or

other women. Some are purchased on the local market. Some remain partially in the hands of the migrant mother through remote communication, remittances, visits, and long-distance decision-making. The classic concept of the global care chain captures this transfer of reproductive labour across class and national boundaries, although subsequent scholarship has correctly emphasized that actual care relations are more reciprocal and multidirectional than a simple linear chain implies (Hochschild, 2000; Yeates, 2012; Baldassar & Merla, 2014).

For children, the evidence does not support either an uncomplicated social-cost narrative or an equally uncomplicated remittance-benefit narrative. A parent abroad can relax financial constraints, increase educational spending, improve housing, and fund health care. Yet parental absence can also reduce supervision, intensify loneliness, alter household labour demands, and disrupt relationships. The most recent meta-analytic evidence on education and child labour is particularly instructive: averaged across studies, parental migration has no practically meaningful uniform effect on educational performance or child labour, while its relationship with school disruption and other outcomes varies significantly by national setting and research design (Bergner et al., 2026). Health research is more concerning, especially for psychosocial outcomes, but even here heterogeneity in definitions, instruments, family arrangements, and migration contexts requires caution (Fellmeth et al., 2018; Ding et al., 2019).

Nor are the consequences confined to children. Women whose husbands migrate may acquire new decision-making authority and mobility, but may simultaneously absorb additional agricultural work, financial management, childcare, eldercare, and emotional responsibility. Empirical research from India illustrates precisely this combination: household structure can determine whether a husband's absence produces greater autonomy, additional responsibility, or both, while later panel evidence indicates that increased responsibility and insufficient remittances can also be associated with poorer self-rated health (Desai & Banerji, 2008; Lei & Desai, 2021). The useful question, therefore, is not whether migration empowers or burdens women left behind, but under what institutional, economic, and familial conditions one effect becomes more salient than the other.

The chapter develops this argument in eight stages. It begins by moving from the individual migrant to the transnational family as an analytical unit, then examines global care chains and transnational motherhood. It subsequently reviews the contested evidence on children left behind, before

turning to women who remain, grandmothers, and the intergenerational redistribution of unpaid care. Financial and social remittances are then considered as distinct but interacting processes. The final sections address family reunification, refugee and mixed-status families, children who migrate, and unaccompanied minors. The chapter closes by connecting these micro-level family processes to the macro-level political economy developed in Chapter 6. The central proposition is deliberately conditional: migration reorganizes family life, but its consequences are mediated by legal status, gender norms, labour markets, welfare systems, family-reunification rules, substitute-care arrangements, remittance flows, and the duration and meaning of separation.

5.1 From the Migrant Woman to the Transnational Family

The intellectual move from the migrant woman to the transnational family is more than a change in scale. It challenges the assumption that the effects of migration are concentrated where the migrant is physically located. In practice, a migration decision reorganizes several spaces at once. It changes the labour supply of the destination economy, the income structure of the origin household, the allocation of unpaid work among those who remain, and the emotional and disciplinary relations linking parents and children. The same migration can therefore appear economically beneficial, socially disruptive, and institutionally constrained at the same time.

The new economics of labour migration provides one foundation for this shift. Stark and Bloom (1985) argued that migration is frequently a household strategy rather than a purely individual response to wage differentials. Households send members abroad to diversify risks, overcome credit constraints, and stabilize income in contexts where insurance and capital markets are incomplete. This framework remains valuable because remittances, migration costs, and household labour allocation are central to the experiences examined in this chapter. Yet the household is not a unitary actor. Feminist research has shown that members do not necessarily share identical preferences, bargaining power, or exposure to costs. A decision that raises aggregate household income may impose additional unpaid labour on one woman, reduce supervision available to one child, or strengthen another member's control over resources. Household strategy, in other words, is not synonymous with equal household benefit.

The concept of the transnational family addresses a different limitation: the assumption that geographic separation implies family dissolution.

Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) describe families living across national boundaries as capable of maintaining a shared sense of collective welfare and familyhood through communication, obligations, remittances, visits, rituals, and future plans. Baldassar and Merla (2014) later emphasized the circulation of care, showing that support moves in multiple directions and over the life course. A migrant daughter may send money to elderly parents while also relying on a grandmother to care for her child. A child may receive financial support from a migrant parent while providing companionship and practical support to an older caregiver. The relationship is consequently not a one-way transfer from migrant to dependant.

This framework also reveals why the identity of the migrating parent matters. The absence of a father and the absence of a mother are embedded in different gendered expectations regarding breadwinning, physical care, emotional availability, discipline, and household authority. Where fathers are culturally expected to provide income and mothers are expected to provide daily care, paternal migration may be interpreted as an extension of a conventional breadwinner role, whereas maternal migration may require a more visible renegotiation of what constitutes "good motherhood." The pioneering work of Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) showed that Latina domestic workers in the United States actively reconstructed motherhood around economic provision, long-distance intimacy, and future-oriented sacrifice. Parreñas (2005) similarly demonstrated in the Philippine context that children themselves do not speak with a single voice about parental migration: pride, gratitude, resentment, loneliness, and pragmatic acceptance can coexist.

The distinction between physical presence and social presence is therefore essential. A migrant parent may remain highly involved through daily communication, money transfers, school-related decisions, and periodic visits, while a co-resident parent may be emotionally or practically distant. Yet it would be equally misleading to treat digital and financial contact as fully equivalent to co-residence. Transnational familyhood is an adaptive form of family organization, not proof that distance has no cost. Its analytical value lies precisely in allowing both propositions to be true: families can remain families across borders, and prolonged separation can still alter authority, intimacy, and wellbeing.

Legal institutions further determine how long transnationality remains a family arrangement rather than a temporary phase. A professional migrant admitted with accompanying-family rights faces a different family trajectory

from a domestic worker on a temporary visa that excludes dependants. A recognized refugee may have access to facilitated reunification, while a person under temporary or precarious status may confront documentation, income, housing, or processing barriers. Thus, the architecture of migration channels, discussed in Chapter 4, becomes family structure in Chapter 5. Institutions do not merely regulate mobility; they help produce the duration, intensity, and sometimes permanence of family separation.

Family arrangement	Typical care/authority pattern	Key institutional determinant	Main analytical risk
Mother migrates; children remain	Grandmother, father, aunt, or older daughter assumes daily care; mother may retain remote authority	Family-accompaniment and reunification rules; work visa duration	Treating maternal absence as automatic abandonment
Father migrates; wife and children remain	Wife often assumes household management and added productive work	Remittance reliability; land/financial rights; duration of migration	Equating added responsibility with empowerment
Both parents migrate; children remain	Extended kin, often grandparents, become primary caregivers	Migration costs and family-reunification feasibility	Ignoring caregiver burden and child agency
Whole family migrates	Care remains within household but must be renegotiated under new labour and welfare conditions	Residence status, childcare, school access, employment	Assuming family unity removes integration pressures
Refugee family separated during flight	Care and authority fragmented involuntarily; family tracing may be required	Protection status, documentation, reunification procedures	Applying labour-migration household-strategy models to forced displacement

5.2 Global Care Chains and the Redistribution of Social Reproduction

The global care-chain literature provides the clearest conceptual link between feminized migration and the reorganization of families. Hochschild's (2000) formulation drew attention to chains of care in which women in wealthier households employ migrant women to perform paid domestic and caring labour, while those migrant women transfer parts of their own unpaid care obligations to relatives or lower-paid caregivers in origin communities. Yeates (2012) subsequently reviewed and extended this literature, arguing that the significance of global care chains lies not only in the movement of individual workers but in the transnational organization of care itself.

At the destination end of the chain, the demand for migrant care is generated by a combination of demographic, economic, and institutional

conditions. Ageing populations increase eldercare needs; women's labour-force participation increases the opportunity cost of unpaid household care; long working hours reduce the time available for family-provided care; and inadequate or expensive public care services create a market for private solutions. Chapter 2 showed that migrant women are disproportionately concentrated in care and service employment, while Chapter 4 demonstrated that welfare regimes and permit structures shape how that labour is recruited and regulated. Chapter 5 adds the missing family question: who provides care for the caregiver's own family?

The answer is frequently another woman. Grandmothers occupy a particularly important position, but aunts, sisters, daughters, and paid local helpers also appear. This transfer is not merely an incidental household adjustment. It reveals a stratified international division of reproductive labour. Care that is paid in the destination household may be unpaid in the origin household; work recognized as employment at one end of the chain may be treated as natural kinship obligation at the other. This asymmetry is central to the political economy of feminized migration because the labour required to reproduce the migrant worker's own household is externalized from the destination employer and often from the destination welfare state.

Nevertheless, the original care-chain metaphor can become too linear if treated literally. Families are not conveyor belts moving a fixed quantity of care downward through women. Baldassar and Merla's (2014) concept of care circulation is useful because it recognizes reciprocity and movement in multiple directions. Migrants send money, advice, and emotional support home; grandparents provide childcare; children may assist ageing carers; returning migrants may later provide physical care to the relatives who supported them during migration. The nature of care also changes over time. A grandmother who initially cares for a preschool child may later depend financially or physically on the now-adult grandchild.

The Philippines provides the classic empirical setting for this literature. Long-standing state institutions organize overseas employment, and the country's labour migration includes large numbers of women in nursing, domestic work, and caregiving. The institutional infrastructure is unusually developed. Republic Act No. 11641 created the Department of Migrant Workers, which consolidated major overseas-employment functions, while the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration continues to provide pre-departure education and programmes for workers and dependants. Its Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar is mandatory and covers destination-country

conditions, employment standards, health and safety, and government services (Department of Migrant Workers, 2022; Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, n.d.). The existence of such institutions demonstrates that labour export is not only a household strategy but also an administratively organized national system.

Yet institutional sophistication at the point of departure cannot remove the care consequences produced by prolonged separation. Asis's (2006) nationwide Philippine study of left-behind children found that children and families actively reconstructed everyday family life in the absence of migrant parents, combining emotional displacement with agency and adaptation. Parreñas (2005) likewise showed that the children of Filipino migrant workers develop differentiated interpretations of parental sacrifice. These findings complicate both extremes: the family is neither simply destroyed by migration nor unaffected because remittances arrive.

Care chains also vary by migration corridor. A Romanian citizen working in Italy under EU free movement has a different legal capacity to reunify with children than a Filipina domestic worker in a Gulf state on a temporary employer-linked arrangement. A Moldovan care worker in Italy faces different legal and financial constraints from a Romanian worker even when both perform similar labour. Consequently, the global redistribution of care is shaped by citizenship and migration law as much as by wage differentials.

This point is decisive for the book's broader argument. The feminization of migration does not merely add women to a pre-existing labour market. It connects the welfare deficits, demographic needs, and household arrangements of destination countries to the unpaid labour, emotional relations, and demographic structures of origin societies. Global care chains are therefore simultaneously labour-market arrangements, family arrangements, and institutional arrangements. Their costs and benefits are distributed across different actors rather than contained in the migrant worker's wage.

5.3 Transnational Motherhood and Long-Distance Parenting

Transnational motherhood emerged as a distinct field precisely because maternal migration challenged deeply rooted assumptions about the spatial requirements of care. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) documented how Latina domestic workers in Los Angeles, whose children remained in countries of origin, redefined motherhood around economic provision and long-distance responsibility. The women did not simply cease to mother

when they crossed a border. They continued to make decisions, send money and gifts, communicate, and imagine eventual reunion, while confronting social expectations that identified maternal virtue with physical presence.

This tension between provider motherhood and physically present motherhood is particularly visible in feminized labour corridors. When men migrate as breadwinners, their absence may be culturally legible as economic provision. When women migrate for the same purpose, households often need to reconstruct both material provision and daily care. Mothers may therefore perform a double form of labour: paid work for a destination household and continued emotional, disciplinary, and financial work for their own family at a distance. Parreñas (2005) uses the Philippine case to show how this dual obligation creates both pride and pain. Earnings may improve children's access to education and health care, but the migrant mother may simultaneously experience guilt and anxiety arising from the inability to perform daily embodied care.

Money in this setting is more than income. Remittances can carry symbolic meanings of commitment and sacrifice, while gifts may serve as tangible expressions of affection. Yet children may not interpret these signals in the same way as parents. For some, remittances confirm that the parent is working for the family's future; for others, material provision does not compensate for absence. Qualitative research is especially valuable here because aggregate indicators cannot capture the moral language through which family members interpret the same transaction differently.

Substitute caregivers are also active participants rather than passive stand-ins. A grandmother who manages meals, school attendance, discipline, and illness may become the child's primary everyday authority. The migrant mother may continue to issue instructions remotely, producing a dual-authority structure that can work cooperatively or generate conflict. A father may assume substantial care responsibilities, but the wider literature indicates that care is often redistributed to women, particularly older women and female relatives. This persistence of gendered substitution is one reason why migration can reproduce rather than dissolve gendered care hierarchies.

Digital communication has transformed, but not abolished, these dynamics. Earlier transnational families relied on letters, remittance channels, expensive calls, and periodic visits. Contemporary families can use messaging, video calls, photographs, school-platform access, and near-continuous contact. This allows migrant parents to participate more frequently in homework supervision, everyday conversation, celebrations,

and discipline. Yet digital co-presence cannot fully reproduce touch, physical comfort, or the practical labour of daily caregiving. It can also intensify remote monitoring and generate tension with the resident caregiver. The result is not the disappearance of distance but a changed experience of distance.

The duration and predictability of separation are consequently crucial. A family that understands separation as a time-limited project with a credible route to reunification may experience distance differently from a family facing repeated contract renewals, uncertain legal status, or a visa category that excludes dependants. The institutional design of migration therefore enters the emotional life of the family. A rule about accompanying dependants can determine whether a child grows up with a parent; an income threshold can postpone reunification; an employer-tied temporary visa can turn an intended short absence into a multi-year transnational arrangement.

Transnational motherhood should thus be understood neither as a deficient imitation of co-resident motherhood nor as proof that physical presence is unnecessary. It is a historically specific response to labour markets and migration regimes that separate earning from caregiving across national borders. The most useful analytical question is how mothers, children, and substitute caregivers negotiate the gap between economic provision and embodied care, and how law, technology, class, and gender shape the resources available for that negotiation.

5.4 Children Left Behind: Education, Health, and Psychosocial Wellbeing

The phrase "children left behind" is analytically useful only if it does not become a diagnosis. It describes a family arrangement, not an outcome. Children whose parents migrate differ by age, sex, household income, caregiver, country, whether the mother or father migrates, the duration of separation, remittance level, frequency of contact, and the stability of the parental relationship. Earlier research often obscured these distinctions, contributing to a literature in which apparently contradictory findings could reflect different populations rather than genuine disagreement about the same population.

Educational outcomes provide the clearest illustration. The economic mechanism is straightforward: remittances can relax credit constraints and fund fees, books, transport, tutoring, and the opportunity cost of keeping a child in school. The social mechanism can work in the opposite direction:

parental absence may reduce supervision, increase domestic or productive work, or create a culture of migration in which young people perceive overseas work rather than further education as the most realistic path to mobility. The net outcome depends on which mechanism dominates.

Recent evidence strongly supports caution against a single verdict. Bergner, Ebbers-Pardijs, and Wagner's (2026) meta-analysis synthesized 764 estimates from 44 studies on education and child labour, supplemented by systematic reviews on remittances and aspirations. Across studies, they found no practically meaningful average effect of parental migration on educational performance or child labour. Once study characteristics and publication bias were considered, parental migration was associated with less school disruption, while effects on performance and child labour remained null or mixed. Crucially, there was substantial contextual heterogeneity, including a less favourable pattern in the Chinese literature and more positive results in some low-income settings. The importance of this 2026 synthesis lies not in replacing one generalization with another, but in demonstrating that the average effect is a poor guide to specific contexts.

Quasi-experimental and within-family studies likewise show that parental migration can generate positive educational effects under some conditions. Antman's (2012) analysis of Mexico addressed selection bias by exploiting sibling age differences around the timing of parental migration and found positive effects of paternal migration on girls' educational attainment. Her earlier study of children's time allocation also showed that the impact of paternal U.S. migration on schooling and work is gendered rather than uniform (Antman, 2011). Wassink and Viera (2021), using retrospective life-history data from the Mexican Migration Project and a counterfactual matching strategy, found that parental migration during childhood was associated with higher lifetime educational attainment, especially among children from less-educated and rural households. Such evidence warns against assuming that parental absence mechanically lowers schooling.

At the same time, positive educational effects do not imply positive outcomes across all dimensions of child wellbeing. Health and psychosocial research produces a more concerning picture. Fellmeth et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis covering 111 studies and 264,967 children and adolescents in low- and middle-income countries. They reported higher risks or scores for several adverse mental-health outcomes among left-behind children, including depression and anxiety, alongside smaller adverse associations for some nutritional and behavioural outcomes.

Yet the evidence base was heavily concentrated in China, and study quality varied considerably. A later systematic review focused specifically on international labour migration also found substantial variation across regions and emphasized the need for longitudinal research rather than relying predominantly on cross-sectional comparisons.

China is particularly important because the scale of internal rural-to-urban migration has generated a large dedicated literature. Ding et al. (2019) meta-analyzed 21 studies of depression among Chinese left-behind children and reported a pooled depression estimate of 26.4 percent, but also found significant heterogeneity related to definitions, measurement instruments, and geography. That methodological heterogeneity is not a minor technical issue. It means that prevalence figures cannot be detached from how "left behind" is defined, which screening instrument is used, and which region or age group is studied.

The distinction between maternal and paternal migration is equally important. In gendered care systems, maternal migration more often triggers a change in primary daily caregiver, whereas paternal migration may leave an established maternal care arrangement intact. This does not mean mother migration is necessarily more harmful; rather, it means the mechanism is different. The 2026 meta-analysis by Bergner et al. notes that several studies associate maternal migration and conflict between the migrant parent and substitute caregiver with less favourable outcomes, while frequent contact and remittances can support parent-child relationships. Such moderators are essential because two households with an absent mother may be radically different: one may have a stable grandmother caregiver, daily video contact, reliable remittances, and a clear reunification plan; another may have unstable care, irregular transfers, and indefinite separation.

Child gender also matters, though the evidence is less consistent than sometimes assumed. Girls may benefit educationally when remittances relax household constraints, as in Antman's Mexican results, yet older daughters may also absorb disproportionate domestic work and sibling care when adult women migrate. Boys and girls may express psychosocial distress differently, and studies using different instruments can therefore produce different apparent gender gaps. It is safer to speak of gendered pathways than of a universal ranking of vulnerability.

The Philippine literature offers a useful counterweight to deficit-only accounts. Asis (2006), drawing on a nationwide study, found emotional displacement but also child agency, adaptation, and the active reconstruction

of family life. Parreñas (2005) similarly foregrounded children's own voices, showing that parental sacrifice could be understood with pride as well as resentment. Such work does not negate quantitative evidence of psychosocial risk. It shows instead that wellbeing is not adequately described by a single score and that children interpret family separation through moral narratives of sacrifice, obligation, and future mobility.

Child labour presents another two-direction mechanism. Remittances can reduce the need for children to work, yet migration can remove an adult worker from an agricultural or household economy, increasing demand for children's labour. The 2026 meta-analysis found mixed overall effects, again shaped by national context and study design (Bergner et al., 2026). This suggests that the relevant policy question is not whether migration causes child labour, but whether remittances are sufficient to replace the labour contribution of the migrant adult and whether substitute care and labour are available within the household.

The most defensible synthesis is therefore conditional. Parental migration creates a bundle of changes: income may rise, adult supervision may fall, household labour demand may change, children's expectations may shift, and emotional relationships must be maintained across distance. These mechanisms can offset or reinforce one another. Research designs capable of separating them remain less common than simple comparisons between migrant and non-migrant households. Consequently, causal language should be reserved for studies that explicitly address selection and endogeneity, while broader cross-national patterns should be described as associations.

Outcome domain	Potential beneficial channel	Potential adverse channel	Best-supported conclusion
School enrolment / disruption	Remittances relax fees and income constraints	Reduced supervision; household labour demands	Recent meta-analysis suggests less school disruption on average after adjustment, but strong contextual variation
Grades / attainment	Tutoring, materials, aspirations, improved household income	Absence of academic supervision; migration-oriented aspirations	No uniform average effect; quasi-causal studies in Mexico identify positive effects under some conditions
Child labour	Remittances reduce need for paid work	Loss of adult labour raises demand for children's work	Mixed; depends on household economy and migration context

Mental health	Improved material security and future prospects	Loneliness, uncertainty, caregiver instability, prolonged separation	Adverse associations are more consistent than in education, but causal certainty and cross-country comparability remain limited
Nutrition / physical health	Higher food and healthcare spending	Care disruption and health-service access problems	Mixed; some adverse associations in meta-analysis, but less consistent than mental-health findings

5.5 Women Left Behind, Grandmothers, and the Intergenerational Redistribution of Care

The literature on women left behind requires the same rejection of simple binaries. Male out-migration can widen women's practical authority, but authority gained through necessity is not identical to secure empowerment. A woman may make more decisions because no one else is present to make them while simultaneously facing greater workloads, uncertainty, and social scrutiny. The distinction between responsibility and resources is therefore central.

Desai and Banerji's (2008) study of India is instructive because it demonstrates the mediating role of household structure. Using the India Human Development Survey, they found that wives of migrant men living outside extended-family households experienced both greater responsibility and greater autonomy, whereas women living in extended households did not obtain the same benefits. The finding undermines any general claim that a husband's migration automatically empowers his wife. Whether absence translates into decision-making authority depends on who else is present, particularly older relatives and in-laws.

Later longitudinal evidence sharpens this point. Lei and Desai (2021), using two waves of the India Human Development Survey and lagged dependent-variable models, found that left-behind wives reported worse self-rated health than wives of non-migrants. Lower remittances and added responsibilities contributed to this association, while increased autonomy partly offset the negative effect for women in nuclear households. The result captures the paradox at the heart of this literature: autonomy and burden can rise together. Empowerment is therefore not a single-axis condition that can be inferred from one indicator such as household decision-making.

Research from rural Nepal reaches a similar conclusion. Maharjan, Bauer, and Knerr (2012) found that male out-migration broadened women's roles and responsibilities, with potential for both empowerment and

disempowerment. Such studies suggest that the absence of men creates institutional and social openings, but the durability of those openings depends on land rights, inheritance systems, access to credit, community norms, remittance control, and what happens when the migrant returns.

This leads directly to Chant's (2008) critique of the feminization of poverty framework. Chant argued that policy analysis should pay attention not only to women's income poverty but also to the increasing responsibilities and obligations assigned to women for household survival. Applied to migration, the concept of a feminization of responsibility is useful because the most consistent consequence of male migration is often not a measurable gain or loss of autonomy but an expansion of the tasks for which women are accountable. They may manage land, animals, debts, school decisions, health care, eldercare, and social relations simultaneously.

The same mechanism operates in households where women migrate. Care responsibilities frequently move to grandmothers and older daughters. Grandmothers occupy a particularly important but under-researched position. They may become primary caregivers, administrators of remittance income, and guardians of household continuity. Their contribution is often unpaid and may draw on pensions or savings. Although transnational family scholarship increasingly recognizes intergenerational care, quantitative evidence on the health, financial, and wellbeing effects on grandmother caregivers remains thinner than evidence on children or migrants themselves. This asymmetry in the research record mirrors the invisibility of older women's unpaid work in the care economy.

Older daughters form another layer of the same care redistribution. When a mother migrates and a grandmother becomes primary caregiver, adolescent girls may assume substantial sibling care and household work, especially where the older caregiver faces health or mobility limitations. The result can be an intergenerational reproduction of feminized care: the migration of one woman into paid care abroad creates unpaid care responsibilities for another woman or girl at home. The specific educational consequences vary, but the mechanism is theoretically important even when no uniform outcome is established.

Grandparent care should not, however, be represented exclusively as exploitation or burden. Extended-family caregiving can be a source of continuity, attachment, and resilience, and older relatives may value the reciprocal dimensions of intergenerational support. The care-circulation perspective is particularly useful here because it avoids reducing every

exchange to a one-directional transfer. Today's grandmother caregiver may later be supported by the migrant daughter or adult grandchild through remittances, healthcare payments, or direct physical care.

Return migration tests the durability of changes generated during separation. Women who managed households in a husband's absence may retain enhanced confidence and authority, but in other cases the returning migrant reclaims financial and decision-making control. Migrant mothers may also discover that their children have developed primary attachments and routines around substitute caregivers, requiring a renegotiation rather than simple restoration of maternal roles. Reunion can therefore be emotionally desirable and socially difficult at the same time.

The proper analytical conclusion is that migration creates opportunities for renegotiating gender relations without guaranteeing transformation. Where women obtain direct control over remittances, independent bank accounts, land or property rights, and public mobility, changes in authority are more likely to persist. Where their increased responsibilities are unsupported by independent resources and legal rights, migration may simply intensify the feminization of obligation. This distinction will become even more important in Chapter 6, where household adaptation is connected to the wider political economy of labour export, welfare provision, and social reproduction.

Dimension	Possible autonomy effect	Possible burden effect	Conditioning factor
Household decisions	More day-to-day authority during spouse's absence	Authority may remain constrained by migrant husband or in-laws	Nuclear vs. extended household; remittance control
Paid/productive work	Greater public participation and management experience	Additional agricultural or business workload	Land rights; labour availability; access to credit
Care work	Potential reallocation within household	Childcare and eldercare usually remain with women	Availability of kin and public services
Financial management	Direct remittance receipt can strengthen bargaining power	Debt servicing and irregular remittances can increase stress	Bank access; migration debt; transfer channel
Return migration	Skills and authority may persist	Pre-migration hierarchy may be re-established	Property rights, income independence, social norms

5.6 Remittances, Social Remittances, and Household Bargaining

Remittances are the most visible link between migration and the family, but their effects are frequently overstated in both directions. Development-

optimist accounts emphasize household consumption, education, health, housing, savings, and national foreign-exchange earnings. Development-pessimist accounts emphasize dependency, reduced incentives for local employment, unequal access to migration, and the risk that states treat private transfers as substitutes for public development policy. De Haas (2005, 2010) argues persuasively that both positions become misleading when they treat migration as an exogenous force with a uniform developmental effect. Migration outcomes depend on the wider institutional and economic environment in which households deploy remittance income.

The macroeconomic scale is nevertheless substantial. World Bank estimates for 2024 placed remittances to low- and middle-income countries at roughly \$685 billion, with Mexico among the largest recipients at about \$68 billion and the Philippines at about \$40 billion (World Bank, 2024). These figures help explain why migration policy is not only social policy but also political economy. In countries with large overseas populations, remittances support consumption and external balances, while state institutions may actively facilitate overseas employment and remittance transfer.

At household level, the uses of remittances are more diverse than the language of "development" sometimes implies. Food, daily consumption, school costs, medical expenses, housing, migration debt, savings, and investment all compete for the same transfers. Debt deserves particular attention because migration itself is frequently financed. Recruitment fees, transport, documentation, and pre-departure expenses can absorb early remittances, meaning that the household may experience a period in which the migrant is abroad but the net financial gain remains limited.

Education is one of the clearest examples of conditional benefit. Remittances can raise educational spending without necessarily increasing academic performance. The 2026 meta-analysis by Bergner et al. found evidence that remittances tend to increase educational investment, yet performance outcomes remain heterogeneous. The difference is conceptually important: spending is an input, not an outcome. A family may spend more on education while a child simultaneously experiences less parental supervision or greater household responsibilities.

Claims about gender differences in remitting should be treated with similar caution. The proposition that women remit a larger share of their earnings, remit more regularly, or allocate money more "responsibly" to health and education appears frequently in policy discourse. But these are

separate empirical questions: absolute amount, share of earnings, frequency, recipient, and expenditure control are not interchangeable. Differences also depend on wages, family structure, migration costs, and sector. It is therefore preferable to use corridor-specific evidence rather than a general claim that women remit "better."

Financial remittances are accompanied by social remittances. Levitt (1998) used this term for ideas, practices, identities, and social capital that circulate from destination to origin communities. Migration can transmit new expectations about gender roles, education, consumption, political life, and parenting. Yet social remittances should not be narrated as a simple modernization process. Ideas are selected, contested, adapted, and sometimes rejected. A woman who experiences paid employment and greater personal autonomy abroad may return to a household that expects restoration of earlier gender relations. A husband exposed to more egalitarian norms may support a wife's expanded decision-making role, but migration can also reinforce conservative identities and expectations.

Household bargaining provides a useful bridge between financial and social remittances. Sen's cooperative-conflict framework emphasizes that household outcomes depend on perceived contribution, fallback position, and norms, not simply aggregate income. Migration can change all three. A woman who directly receives remittances may become the acknowledged manager of the household budget. A migrant woman whose income finances children's schooling may gain moral authority even while physically absent. Yet bargaining power remains vulnerable if income is controlled by other relatives, if property rights are weak, or if status is temporary.

Remittances should therefore be understood as relational rather than purely monetary. The transfer is embedded in expectations of care, obedience, sacrifice, return, and inheritance. It may strengthen a transnational family by sustaining its material basis, while also creating disputes over spending and authority. In political-economy terms, remittances are private transfers carrying public significance: they support household welfare, influence national external accounts, and can reduce immediate pressure on public institutions without replacing the need for education, health, childcare, and social-protection systems.

5.7 Reunification, Refugee Families, Migrant Children, and Mixed Status

Family separation is not produced only by labour-market decisions. It is also made, extended, or ended by law. Family-reunification rules determine which relatives qualify, when an application can be made, what income or housing conditions apply, and how missing documents are treated. The European Union's Family Reunification Directive 2003/86/EC illustrates this institutional logic. It allows Member States to impose conditions concerning resources, insurance, accommodation, and integration, while establishing more favourable provisions for recognized refugees. Articles 9-12 contain specific refugee rules, including greater flexibility in proving family relationships and, under defined conditions, exemption from ordinary material requirements (Council of the European Union, 2003).

For migrant women concentrated in temporary care and domestic-work channels, however, the decisive issue may arise even earlier: whether the migration category allows family accompaniment at all. Where a labour permit is explicitly temporary and employer-linked and dependants cannot accompany the worker, prolonged transnational family life is not merely the consequence of household preference. It is institutionally produced. This is particularly important in Gulf-bound domestic-work corridors, where the worker's employment provides care to another household while the worker's own family remains outside the destination-country residence system.

Refugee families require a separate analytical framework because separation is frequently involuntary. Conflict, hurried flight, closed borders, missing documents, and different routes of movement can divide households before any family strategy exists. Legal status then shapes the possibility of reunion. Recognized refugee status, subsidiary protection, temporary protection, and pending asylum status do not necessarily carry identical family rights. The European response to displacement from Ukraine demonstrates both the scale and fluidity of such frameworks. By 2025, 158,400 minors lodged first-time asylum applications in the EU, and 13.3 percent of those minor applicants were unaccompanied; Eurostat and the Commission recorded roughly 21,125 first-time applications by unaccompanied minors that year (Eurostat, 2026a; European Commission, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2026). These figures concern the asylum system and should not be conflated with the far larger population of children covered by temporary protection.

The status of Ukrainians also illustrates the danger of using quickly outdated legal information. Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2025/1460 initially extended temporary protection to 4 March 2027, but a further Council decision adopted in July 2026 extended it again until 4 March 2028 (Council of the European Union, 2026). A chapter concerned with current family regimes must therefore distinguish legal frameworks whose rules are stable from emergency regimes that can change within months.

Unaccompanied and separated children occupy an especially sensitive position because family separation, child protection, and asylum procedure converge. EUAA Fact Sheet No. 36, published in August 2025, analyzes unaccompanied-minor applications in 2024, not 2025; this distinction matters when constructing time-series claims (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025). The category itself also demands precision. An unaccompanied child is without a parent or responsible adult caregiver, whereas a separated child may be apart from parents but accompanied by another relative. Guardianship, accommodation, education, age assessment, family tracing, and the transition to adulthood at eighteen are therefore not peripheral administrative questions; they determine whether the child is treated primarily through a migration-control institution or a child-protection institution.

The international child-rights framework sets an important normative baseline. The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides that children should not be separated from parents against their will except where separation is necessary for the child's best interests, and Article 10 requires family-reunification applications to be handled in a positive, humane, and expeditious manner (United Nations, 1989). These principles do not eliminate states' immigration-control authority, but they make family unity and the child's interests legally relevant considerations rather than merely private preferences.

Children who migrate with or after their parents should also be distinguished from children left behind. First-generation child migrants and the so-called 1.5 generation face school integration, language acquisition, housing, poverty, discrimination, and identity questions in destination societies. Children born after migration may not be migrants in a strict demographic sense, but their opportunities can remain shaped by parents' labour-market position, legal status, and access to social protection. The economic insecurity documented among migrant adults can therefore become intergenerational even without geographic family separation.

Mixed-status families reveal another form of institutionalized family uncertainty. A citizen child may live with an undocumented parent; a permanent resident may have a spouse on temporary status; a recognized refugee may have relatives who do not fit the legal definition of eligible family. In the United States, Menjívar and Abrego's (2012) concept of "legal violence" describes how precarious legal status can shape work, family, and schooling through persistent uncertainty and vulnerability. Importantly, a child's citizenship does not automatically protect an undocumented parent from removal. Family unity can therefore be threatened within a household whose members live together and possess radically different legal security.

Parental detention or deportation creates a form of separation analytically distinct from both labour migration and forced displacement. It is state-produced and often unplanned. Children may experience abrupt income loss, changes in caregiver, school disruption, or child-welfare involvement. These consequences should be described without turning empirical analysis into a normative judgment about immigration enforcement as such. The relevant analytical point is that immigration institutions can become family institutions because their decisions alter household membership, caregiving, and economic security.

The women's-rights framework also intersects with family life. CEDAW General Recommendation No. 26, adopted in 2008, addresses women migrant workers and calls attention to the particular discrimination and vulnerability generated by gendered migration channels and employment structures (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2008). Although its focus is migrant workers rather than children, its relevance to this chapter is clear: protecting a migrant woman's rights at work, in residence, and in access to justice also affects the security of the family members who depend on her income and status.

The institutional lesson is straightforward. The transnational family is not created by economics alone. Visa categories, protection statuses, family definitions, income thresholds, documentation standards, processing capacity, and enforcement practices help determine whether families can migrate together, reunify rapidly, remain separated for years, or become mixed-status households. Chapter 4 examined these rules as institutional structures; here their social consequences become visible.

Migration/status context	Family-unity mechanism	Main separation risk	Key institutional issue
Settlement-oriented skilled migration	Dependants often admitted together or via predictable family route	Temporary processing delays	Eligibility, documentation, processing time
Temporary domestic/care work	Family accompaniment often limited or unavailable	Multi-year separation	Visa design and employer-linked status
Recognized refugee	Specific reunification route; EU law provides favourable conditions in defined circumstances	Documentation and processing delays	Proof of relationship; status category
Temporary protection	Emergency residence framework, rules may differ from ordinary refugee reunification	Uncertain long-term family planning	Duration and transition from temporary status
Mixed-status household	Family already co-resident	Detention/deportation or status expiry can separate family	Different legal security within one household
Unaccompanied minor	Family tracing/reunification where possible	Prolonged separation; transition at age 18	Guardianship, age assessment, child-protection capacity

5.8 Toward the New Political Economy of Feminized Migration

The family-level evidence developed in this chapter points beyond the family. Global care demand, wage differentials, demographic ageing, welfare-state design, migration law, recruitment systems, and origin-country labour-export institutions collectively produce the conditions under which households decide - or are compelled - to live across borders. What appears at the micro level as a private family arrangement is therefore linked to a wider distribution of costs and benefits.

The global care chain makes this distribution unusually visible. A destination household gains affordable or available care; an employer gains labour; a destination welfare system may postpone or reduce the need for publicly provided care; an origin household gains remittance income; an origin economy gains foreign exchange. Yet the social reproduction of the migrant worker herself must still be financed and performed somewhere. Children must be raised, older relatives supported, family relations maintained, and future workers educated and cared for. When these tasks are absorbed by grandmothers, older daughters, or other unpaid relatives, part of the full cost of migrant labour is borne outside the wage relation.

This is why family separation can be interpreted, cautiously, as a political-economy mechanism rather than merely an emotional consequence

of migration. The argument is not that every separated family is exploited, nor that migration produces a calculable hidden subsidy in every case. It is that labour markets routinely price the worker's labour without fully pricing the reproduction of the worker's own family life. The gap is managed through private households, kinship obligations, remittances, and unpaid care.

Origin states can also become participants in this structure. The Philippine case illustrates a highly institutionalized system of overseas employment that protects and trains workers while also recognizing overseas migration as a major economic reality. The Department of Migrant Workers and OWWA provide a formal architecture for recruitment governance, pre-departure orientation, welfare assistance, reintegration, and support to dependants (Department of Migrant Workers, 2022; Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, n.d.). Such institutions can reduce risk, but they also demonstrate that labour export has moved beyond spontaneous mobility into public administration and national development strategy.

Remittance dependence deepens the connection. World Bank estimates show that remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries now rival or exceed other major external finance flows in aggregate (World Bank, 2024). Families may become dependent on transfers because local wages are insufficient; governments may value migration because it eases unemployment pressures and supports foreign exchange; recruitment industries profit from mobility; destination employers rely on labour that may be difficult to source domestically at prevailing wages. The resulting system is maintained by mutually reinforcing interests even when family separation imposes real social costs.

Chapter 6 will therefore shift from family consequences to the political economy that generates and allocates them. It will examine care, labour, welfare, remittances, ageing, labour shortages, recruitment industries, temporary migration regimes, and global inequality as parts of a common system. Chapter 5 provides the necessary bridge: the "private" sphere of the transnational family is one of the principal places where the costs of the new political economy of migration are absorbed, negotiated, and made socially sustainable.

Conclusion

The feminization of migration cannot be understood by counting migrant women alone. Its deeper significance appears in the families reorganized

around women's and men's mobility, the children whose lives stretch across borders, the grandmothers and daughters who absorb unpaid care, the spouses who acquire new responsibilities, and the legal regimes that determine whether families can live together. Migration redistributes labour and income, but it also redistributes intimacy, authority, and social reproduction.

The transnational-family perspective corrects two persistent errors. The first is the assumption that separation necessarily means family breakdown. Families can sustain collective projects, emotional ties, authority, and reciprocity across borders, and children can display considerable agency and resilience. The second is the opposite assumption that remittances and digital communication neutralize the social costs of absence. They do not. Material improvement can coexist with loneliness; educational spending can coexist with reduced supervision; greater autonomy for women left behind can coexist with heavier workloads; and eventual reunification can coexist with difficult renegotiation of roles.

The empirical literature is strongest when it preserves this complexity. The latest meta-analysis of education and child labour finds no uniform average harm from parental migration and substantial heterogeneity across contexts (Bergner et al., 2026). Health research identifies more consistent adverse associations, especially in psychosocial domains, yet remains shaped by country concentration, measurement variation, and limitations of causal inference (Fellmeth et al., 2018; Ding et al., 2019). Studies of women left behind likewise show that responsibility and autonomy can increase simultaneously rather than cancelling one another (Desai & Banerji, 2008; Lei & Desai, 2021).

Institutions determine how these private negotiations unfold. Family-reunification rules, temporary-worker programmes, refugee and temporary-protection statuses, child-protection systems, and immigration enforcement all shape the duration and form of family separation. The legal framework can facilitate reunion, institutionalize prolonged distance, or create mixed-status insecurity within the same household. Current policy analysis therefore requires precise dates and categories: the EU's Ukraine temporary-protection regime, for example, has already been extended to 4 March 2028, demonstrating how quickly an emergency status can evolve (Council of the European Union, 2026).

The chapter's final implication is political-economic. The unpaid work performed by left-behind relatives, the emotional labour of long-distance

parenting, and the family risks borne in origin communities are not external to migration systems. They help make those systems possible. Destination-country care markets, origin-country remittance economies, employers, welfare institutions, recruitment systems, and migrant households are connected through the circulation of labour and care. The next chapter therefore moves from the transnational family to the system that surrounds it: the new political economy of feminized migration.

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CHAPTER 6: THE NEW POLITICAL ECONOMY OF FEMINIZED MIGRATION: CARE, LABOUR, WELFARE, AND GLOBAL INEQUALITY

The political economy of feminized migration begins where a labour-market account ends. Demand for nurses, domestic workers, home-care workers, cleaners, hospitality workers, agricultural labourers, and other service employees matters, but it does not by itself explain why women migrate through one channel rather than another, why a worker can change employer in one country but not easily in another, why settlement is expected in one migration system but actively limited in another, or why the family absorbs care costs that never appear in the migrant's wage. Those outcomes are produced by institutions. States authorize admission; labour ministries define shortage occupations and employment conditions; welfare institutions determine the distribution of care between public services, markets, and households; employers select workers and, in some systems, acquire substantial power over legal status; recruitment firms convert migration opportunities into market transactions; municipalities provide many of the services through which incorporation becomes practical; origin states train, document, and deploy workers; banks and remittance companies monetize cross-border transfers; and international organizations define standards, finance programmes, generate data, and diffuse policy models. The political economy of migration is therefore an institutional economy of interdependence.

This final chapter develops that proposition through the specific case of feminized migration. The central issue is not that every institution has equal influence, but precisely the opposite: institutional weight varies sharply across countries. Southern European care systems make households unusually important as employers and purchasers of care. Nordic welfare systems place municipalities and publicly financed services closer to the centre of the care economy, even while migrant workers have become increasingly important within those public and quasi-public systems. Gulf labour migration has historically assigned employers and sponsors much greater control over migrant workers' mobility and everyday status, although recent reforms in Qatar and Saudi Arabia demonstrate that sponsorship institutions are neither identical nor static. The Philippines, by contrast,

illustrates the power of an origin-state labour-export apparatus in which public agencies, private recruiters, bilateral agreements, and the remittance economy are tightly interconnected. Canada provides another configuration: immigration selection, provincial authority, employer demand, settlement institutions, and permanent-residence pathways coexist in a system whose institutional purpose is more settlement-oriented than the temporary-worker systems of the Gulf. These are not points on a simple scale from good to bad; they are different political-economic configurations.

The empirical importance of care makes the comparison especially consequential. According to the ILO's fourth global estimates, 167.7 million international migrants participated in destination-country labour forces in 2022. Migrant women were disproportionately concentrated in care employment: 28.8 percent of employed migrant women worked in care jobs, compared with 12.4 percent of migrant men and 19.2 percent of non-migrant women (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2024a). The care sector itself is expanding under demographic and social pressure. OECD data show that the share of foreign-born long-term-care workers across 26 European OECD countries increased from 14 percent in 2014 to 21 percent in 2024; in Sweden, Ireland, Luxembourg, and Switzerland, roughly four in ten long-term-care workers were foreign-born (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2025). The ILO has meanwhile estimated that sufficiently ambitious investment in the care economy could generate up to 299 million jobs globally by 2035, with most of them held by women (ILO, 2025a). These figures do not prove that ageing automatically causes migration, nor that migrant workers can permanently solve care shortages. They do show that feminized labour migration is embedded in a rapidly expanding institutional field in which care has become both a social necessity and an economic sector.

The central argument of this chapter is consequently relational. What matters is not merely whether a state has a migration ministry, a labour ministry, a welfare ministry, or a municipality. What matters is how those institutions interact with employers, households, recruiters, unions, courts, international organizations, and origin-country governments; which actor controls admission, labour mobility, welfare access, and settlement; which actor bears fiscal or social costs; and which actor is capable of blocking or redirecting reform. Formal authority and effective power often diverge. A migration agency may issue a visa, but an employer can become the worker's effective gatekeeper when the permit is tied to a specific job. A national

government may define social rights, but a municipality may carry the financial and administrative burden of implementing them. A destination state may control admission, but an origin state may control licensing, training, and pre-departure regulation. A public welfare system may finance long-term care, yet private providers or migrant households may perform much of the work.

This perspective also places Chapters 1-5 into one integrated system. Chapter 1 established that feminization is not a simple numerical rise in female migration but a transformation in women's autonomy, visibility, labour roles, and migration channels. Chapter 2 showed how labour-market segmentation concentrates migrant women in particular sectors. Chapter 3 examined the political rights, representation, and citizenship structures within which incorporation occurs. Chapter 4 demonstrated that ostensibly gender-neutral institutions produce gendered outcomes through permit design, dependent residence, social protection, and administrative practice. Chapter 5 shifted the unit of analysis to transnational families and showed that the reproductive and emotional costs of migration are redistributed across children, spouses, grandparents, and origin communities. Chapter 6 now asks how all these dimensions are connected by the political economy of institutions.

The chapter proceeds in eight stages. It first defines the move from institutions to political economy and then develops a comparative account of institutional hierarchy: who governs, who benefits, and who pays. It next examines the care economy, demographic demand, and welfare-state variation before turning to employers, recruitment industries, and the governance of labour mobility. The fifth section analyzes labour-export states and remittance infrastructures. The sixth examines social reproduction and cost shifting. The seventh compares national configurations directly, with particular attention to Sweden, Italy and Spain, Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, Türkiye, the Gulf states, and the Philippines. The final section addresses crisis, institutional change, digitalization, and Hollifield's liberal paradox. The purpose throughout is not to identify a single superior model, but to explain why similar labour demand produces different forms of feminized migration when it passes through different institutional architectures.

6.1 From Institutions to Political Economy

Political economy asks not simply what rules exist, but how power and resources are organized through those rules. In migration, this means moving beyond the legal catalogue of visas, permits, welfare entitlements, and administrative competences to examine the relationships that make those rules consequential. Hollifield's concept of the migration state is useful precisely because it places migration management within the core functions of contemporary states rather than treating it as a marginal administrative domain (Hollifield, 2004). Yet a state-centred perspective is not sufficient for feminized migration. Much of the relevant governance is delegated, negotiated, or indirectly exercised through employers, households, private intermediaries, social-insurance systems, local governments, and transnational institutions.

The care economy illustrates why this broader framework is necessary. Care is simultaneously a social relation, a public-policy responsibility, a market service, and a form of paid and unpaid labour. Esping-Andersen's (1990) welfare-regime approach explained variation in the degree to which individuals are protected from market dependence, but feminist scholarship demonstrated that decommodification alone could not capture the gendered organization of care. The central question became not only whether citizens were protected from the market, but whether families - and within families, women - remained responsible for the work of social reproduction. Concepts such as familialism, defamilialization, and care regimes emerged from this critique, allowing comparative analysis of how childcare, eldercare, and domestic work are distributed between state, market, family, and community (Bettio & Plantenga, 2004; Sainsbury, 2012; Williams, 2012).

Feminized migration enters at the point where these arrangements encounter labour scarcity, cost pressure, and unequal wages across borders. A familialist care system does not cease to be familialist when women enter paid employment; it may instead purchase another woman's labour. A public-service system does not cease to be public when migrants become a large share of its workforce; it may instead internationalize the staffing of public care. A market-oriented system may rely on private agencies and household purchasing power. Thus migration is not external to welfare institutions. It can become one of the mechanisms through which those institutions reproduce themselves.

Labour-market segmentation adds a second layer. Piore's (1979) dual-labour-market approach emphasized that advanced economies generate jobs

that are difficult to fill from domestic labour because they are low-paid, insecure, physically demanding, socially undervalued, or structurally positioned in secondary labour markets. Feminized migration sharpens this logic because many of the relevant jobs are additionally coded as extensions of women's supposedly natural caring roles. The result is not simply a migrant labour market but a gendered migrant labour market. Domestic work, home care, cleaning, and parts of hospitality and health support sit at the intersection of labour shortage, low social valuation, and gendered expectations.

The state's role in this process is paradoxical. It may restrict immigration while expanding shortage-occupation lists. It may recognize care as essential while maintaining low wages or weak inspection in parts of the sector. It may promote women's labour-force participation while leaving households to purchase care privately. It may welcome skilled nurses while relying on origin countries to finance their education. These apparent contradictions are not policy accidents alone. They reflect competing institutional objectives: migration control, labour-market efficiency, welfare sustainability, fiscal restraint, employer demand, gender equality, and political responsiveness.

Institutional complementarity helps explain why national systems do not converge despite similar demographic pressures. A country's migration institutions operate alongside labour-market institutions, welfare arrangements, family norms, and administrative traditions. Germany's social-insurance and federal structures shape the recruitment of care workers differently from Britain's sponsor-based immigration system. Sweden's municipal welfare services place care delivery within a different institutional setting from Italy's household-centred live-in care market. Gulf labour markets historically embedded mobility within sponsorship structures that granted employers a degree of status-related power unusual in European welfare states. These differences persist because institutions develop path dependently: new rules are layered onto older arrangements, and reforms often modify rather than replace inherited structures (Pierson, 2000; Streeck & Thelen, 2005).

For this reason, the political economy of feminized migration cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between state and market. Households are economic actors when they hire domestic workers; municipalities are political-economic actors when they finance integration or eldercare; recruitment agencies exercise infrastructural power when they control access to jobs and documentation; origin states act economically when they regulate

deployment and seek remittance inflows; and international organizations shape the field through standards, technical assistance, data, and funding. Xiang and Lindquist's (2014) concept of migration infrastructure is particularly useful because it directs attention to the commercial, regulatory, technological, humanitarian, and social intermediaries that make migration possible.

The political economy approach adopted here therefore treats institutions in terms of four dimensions. The first is formal authority: who can issue a permit, set a quota, define an entitlement, or impose a sanction. The second is economic power: who controls wages, budgets, recruitment fees, or remittance channels. The third is infrastructural power: who controls the practical pathways through which migrants move, work, receive services, and transfer money. The fourth is bargaining power: who can refuse, delay, or reshape policy because other actors depend on them. These dimensions rarely coincide in a single institution. The central comparative task is to understand their configuration.

6.2 Institutional Hierarchies: Who Governs, Who Benefits, Who Pays

A migration system contains many institutions, but it does not follow that they are equally powerful. Institutional hierarchy is visible whenever formal responsibility and practical control diverge. Interior or migration ministries normally hold the highest formal authority over admission and status. Labour ministries determine employment eligibility, shortage lists, and parts of work-permit policy. Welfare and family ministries govern social assistance, childcare, long-term care, and equality programmes. Municipalities administer services. Employers hire and dismiss. Recruiters connect workers and employers. Yet the actual balance between them differs substantially by country.

The most direct form of institutional hierarchy appears where legal status is tied to a specific employer. In such systems, the state formally controls migration but delegates part of its regulatory power to the employer. The employer's decision is no longer limited to the ordinary employment relationship; it can affect the worker's ability to remain, change jobs, or maintain lawful status. Anderson (2010) described this interaction between immigration controls and labour markets as a mechanism that can produce precarious workers rather than merely regulate migration. The degree of dependency varies across systems, and recent reforms demonstrate why static labels are inadequate. Qatar removed the No-Objection Certificate

requirement in 2020, enabling workers, including domestic workers, to change employers without the former sponsor's permission; implementation has expanded mobility, although the ILO has continued to identify practical barriers (ILO, 2022a). The ILO's Global Care Policy Portal reports that 3,399 domestic-worker job-change applications were approved in Qatar during the first nine months of 2024, evidence that formal reform has generated measurable use of the mobility mechanism (ILO, 2024b).

Saudi Arabia illustrates a different trajectory. Labour-mobility reforms for workers covered by the Labour Law expanded the possibility of changing employers, while domestic workers historically remained under a separate regulatory framework. In September 2026 the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development launched new electronic services for labour mobility, including a general service allowing resident employees to transfer to a new employer without the current employer's approval under the stated rules and separate Musaned-based transfer services for domestic labour. The distinction matters because it shows that "employer power" cannot be described uniformly even within one national system: sector, legal category, and platform architecture alter the balance of control (Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, 2026a, 2026b).

In Europe, the hierarchy is generally less concentrated in the individual employer, but employer influence remains important. Labour ministries and migration agencies often rely on employer-reported vacancies, shortage analyses, and sectoral lobbying when designing labour-migration routes. The United Kingdom provides an especially clear example of rapid institutional rebalancing. Following the exceptional expansion of Health and Care Worker migration after 2021, the government progressively tightened the route. From 22 July 2025, overseas recruitment into the care worker and senior care worker occupations was closed, with a transitional period for some in-country switching until 2028; restrictions on dependants had already been introduced in March 2024 for care workers (Home Office, 2025). By the year ending June 2026, 34,143 Health and Care Worker visas were issued, including 7,228 main applicants, a substantial fall from the peak period (Home Office, 2026). This is a political-economy lesson as much as an immigration-policy fact: an institution can first respond to employer demand by opening a route and later reassert migration-control objectives by narrowing it.

Canada distributes authority differently. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada controls federal admission and permanent-residence

pathways, while Employment and Social Development Canada regulates employer access in temporary-worker programmes and provinces exercise significant authority through the Provincial Nominee Program and through their jurisdiction over healthcare and social services. Caregiver policy has repeatedly been redesigned at the intersection of these actors. The Home Care Worker Immigration Pilots launched in 2025 as direct permanent-residence pathways for home child-care and home-support workers, but high demand led the federal government to pause new intake for 2026 while processing existing applications (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC], 2026a). The structure remains significant even during the pause: the programme treats home care as part of an immigration-to-settlement architecture rather than merely a short-term labour-supply instrument.

Municipalities occupy another type of institutional position. They rarely decide who may enter a country, but they often decide whether formal rights become practical access. Housing, childcare, social assistance, language courses, local health services, shelters, schools, and integration programmes are delivered locally. This creates a recurring vertical asymmetry: national governments exercise admission authority while local governments carry service-delivery responsibilities. The asymmetry is especially visible during refugee inflows, but it also exists in ordinary labour migration. A national visa programme can increase the local population without automatically expanding municipal fiscal capacity.

Origin states complicate the hierarchy further. The Philippines has developed one of the world's most institutionalized systems of labour deployment. The Department of Migrant Workers regulates recruitment and overseas employment, while the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration provides worker-welfare and reintegration functions. Private recruitment agencies are licensed within this public architecture, and bilateral agreements can establish state-to-state recruitment channels. Thus the destination state does not monopolize migration governance: an origin state can exercise substantial pre-departure and deployment power even though it cannot dictate conditions in the destination country.

Financial institutions occupy yet another layer. They do not issue visas or work permits, but they control infrastructure through which remittances move. The World Bank estimated that officially recorded remittances to low- and middle-income countries reached approximately USD 685 billion in 2024; Mexico received about USD 68 billion and the Philippines about USD

40 billion (World Bank, 2024). When remittances reach this scale, banks, money-transfer firms, fintech platforms, central banks, and financial regulators become part of migration's political economy. Their power is infrastructural rather than juridical, but it is not trivial: transaction costs, access to formal banking, exchange regulation, and digital identification shape the value that migrant households actually receive.

The distribution of benefits and costs follows these hierarchies unevenly. Employers benefit when vacancies are filled, households benefit when care becomes available, origin households gain remittance income, and states can gain labour supply or foreign exchange. At the same time, migrant workers may bear recruitment debt, status insecurity, and family separation; origin households may absorb unpaid care; municipalities may bear service-delivery costs; and origin health systems may lose trained workers. No actor is purely beneficiary or purely cost bearer. The purpose of institutional political economy is to identify where each cost is located and why it is not necessarily borne by the institution that generates the demand.

Political economy	Institutions with greatest effective weight	Characteristic relationship	Gendered implication
Sweden / Nordic public-service	Municipalities, welfare institutions, national labour/migration authorities, unions	Public financing and local delivery; migrant labour increasingly staffs formal care services	Formal employment protection can be stronger, but occupational concentration remains possible
Italy / Spain familialist care	Households, local welfare systems, private/informal care markets, national migration authorities	Households purchase or organize care directly; live-in care remains important	Migrant women become central to household-level eldercare and domestic work
Germany corporatist/federal	Federal state, Länder, social insurance, employers, Federal Employment Agency	Insurance-financed care plus formal and semi-formal recruitment channels	Professional recruitment coexists with live-in care and recognition barriers
United Kingdom liberal/sponsor	Home Office, employers, NHS/social-care institutions, local authorities	Employer sponsorship and rapid policy adjustment to migration targets and shortages	Care-route restrictions directly alter family and employment security
Canada settlement-oriented	IRCC, ESDC, provinces, employers, settlement agencies	Multi-level selection plus pathways to permanent residence	Care work can be linked to settlement rather than permanently temporary status
Gulf sponsor-dependent	State, employer/sponsor, recruitment agencies, origin-state institutions	Admission and labour mobility historically organized through	Domestic workers face distinctive dependency and

		sponsorship, with reform trajectories differing by country	enforcement issues
Philippines labour-export	DMW, OWWA, recruitment agencies, destination states, financial/remittance institutions	Origin state actively regulates deployment and worker welfare while depending on destination access	Women are a majority of OFWs and concentrated in gendered occupations
Türkiye refugee-governance hybrid	PMM, Labour Ministry, Family Ministry, municipalities, employers, international organizations	Centralized status authority with decentralized service delivery and important donor/ILO/UN involvement	Temporary protection, informality and care responsibilities intersect in women's labour-market access

6.3 The Care Economy and Demographic Demand

The care economy is where demographic change becomes labour-market demand, but the relationship is neither automatic nor institutionally neutral. Population ageing increases the number of people likely to need assistance with daily living, while smaller households, geographic mobility, and women's employment can reduce the supply of unpaid family care. Whether this produces public-sector hiring, household purchase of services, institutional care, cash benefits for family carers, or recruitment from abroad depends on the care regime.

OECD data reveal the scale of the labour challenge. Across 31 OECD countries with available data, the average number of long-term-care workers remained around five per 100 people aged sixty-five and over between 2013 and 2023 even as demand increased. More than one-third of long-term-care workers were employed part time and one in six on fixed-term contracts across the countries reporting those measures. Most striking for migration analysis, the foreign-born share of the long-term-care workforce across 26 European OECD countries rose from 14 percent in 2014 to 21 percent in 2024 (OECD, 2025). This is not evidence that migrants are a residual or temporary supplement. In several national care systems, they have become structurally embedded in the workforce.

The gender composition reinforces this conclusion. Care work remains overwhelmingly feminized. Earlier OECD evidence found that women constituted at least four-fifths of the long-term-care workforce in many member countries, while the ILO's migrant-worker estimates show a much higher probability of care employment among migrant women than among migrant men (ILO, 2024a; OECD, 2023). Migration thus intersects with an

already gendered sector rather than creating gender segmentation from nothing. The international division of care labour builds upon domestic gender divisions.

The care crisis is therefore best understood as an institutional imbalance rather than a simple numerical shortage. Demand can rise because populations age; supply can remain constrained because wages are low, working conditions are difficult, training is inadequate, and care occupations have limited career progression. The OECD explicitly links long-term-care recruitment difficulties to low pay, high physical and mental risks, non-standard contracts, limited training opportunities, and low social recognition (OECD, 2025). Migrant recruitment can fill vacancies under these conditions, but unless working conditions improve it may reproduce the very features that made the sector difficult to staff domestically.

This insight changes the policy question. If the problem is defined only as labour scarcity, migration appears to be a straightforward supply response. If the problem is defined as an institutional organization of care, migration becomes one element in a larger choice among public investment, wage reform, professionalization, family support, technological change, and international recruitment. The ILO's 2025 care-economy modelling illustrates the alternative scale of policy: investment sufficient to close care gaps could generate up to 299 million jobs by 2035, mostly for women, while expanding public infrastructure and improving employment quality (ILO, 2025a). The important point is not the forecast itself but the implication that care labour supply is policy-produced, not simply discovered in global markets.

National systems translate this common challenge differently. Sweden finances a large share of long-term care through public and municipal structures, yet the OECD's 2024 workforce data show that foreign-born workers have become highly significant within Swedish long-term care. This is a crucial corrective to the assumption that a strong welfare state eliminates migrant-care dependence. Public provision can reduce household purchasing of informal care while increasing the need to recruit and retain workers within formal services. Migration dependence is thereby transformed rather than necessarily reduced.

Italy and Spain display another pattern. Their care regimes historically relied more heavily on family provision, and live-in migrant carers became an important mechanism for reconciling ageing with insufficient or uneven formal-service provision. OECD research on long-term-care working

conditions reports that more than half of live-in carers in Italy and Spain, among the countries for which comparable data were available, were foreign-born; the report also emphasizes that live-in care is especially difficult to regulate because the workplace is a private household (OECD, 2023). In these systems the household acts simultaneously as care consumer, employer, and welfare intermediary.

Germany combines social-insurance financing with both institutional care and household-based arrangements. Statutory long-term-care insurance introduced in the 1990s created a formal financing structure, but it did not remove reliance on family care or migrant labour. Germany's contemporary recruitment policy includes structured international recruitment, such as the Triple Win programme, under which the Federal Employment Agency and GIZ recruit nurses and care workers from countries including India, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Tunisia (Federal Government of Germany, 2026). At the same time, live-in care arrangements involving workers from Central and Eastern Europe remain part of the care landscape. The result is a hybrid political economy in which public insurance, employers, households, European free movement, and bilateral recruitment coexist.

Türkiye demonstrates that the care economy can become an explicit development-policy field even before international recruitment reaches the scale observed in Western European long-term care. In 2024-2025, a United Nations Joint Programme led by the ILO and implemented with UNDP, UN Women, UNICEF, and UNFPA worked with the Ministry of Family and Social Services on a transformative care-economy agenda, including a multisectoral working group, policy modelling, and discussion of cooperative and local delivery models (ILO, 2025b). This institutionalization of care policy matters for migration because future labour-market participation, ageing, and refugee integration will all be mediated by the availability and organization of care services.

Demography, in short, creates pressure but not destiny. The political economy of care determines how that pressure is translated into jobs, migration routes, wages, and family obligations. Where governments expand public services, migrant women may enter formal municipal or institutional employment. Where households remain the residual care provider, migrant women may be hired directly or informally. Where temporary labour channels dominate, the workforce may be recruited without accompanying settlement rights. The same demographic trend can therefore produce very different forms of feminized migration.

Care regime	Primary care organizer	Typical migrant-labour insertion	Political-economy consequence
Nordic public-service	Municipal/public services	Formal public or contracted care employment	Migration can staff welfare provision rather than substitute for it privately
Continental insurance	Social insurance + family + providers	Nursing recruitment, institutional care, live-in arrangements	Public finance coexists with household responsibility and cross-border recruitment
Southern European familialist	Family/household with uneven public support	Live-in domestic/eldercare and household employment	Households become major employers and informal regulation becomes consequential
Liberal market	Private providers, employers, households, local authorities	Employer-sponsored or market-recruited care workers	Immigration rules and private-sector employment conditions interact directly
Gulf sponsor-dependent	Employer/household under state immigration framework	Migrant domestic workers and household service workers	Work, residence and household authority can overlap in a single employer relationship
Türkiye hybrid	Family, public social policy, municipalities and emerging care institutions	Domestic/informal care plus formal services; refugee women intersect with informal labour markets	Care policy, gender policy and migration/refugee governance increasingly overlap

6.4 Employers, Recruiters, and the Governance of Labour Mobility

One of the most important implications of an institutional political-economy approach is that states do not govern migration alone. Employers and recruiters are not merely private actors operating after the state has made the important decisions; in many systems they help determine who migrates, under what conditions, into which sectors, and with what practical capacity to exit an employment relationship.

Employer power is strongest when three conditions coincide: the migrant's legal status is linked to a specific job or sponsor; the workplace is difficult to inspect; and the worker has high switching costs. Domestic work frequently combines all three. The workplace is a private household, recruitment may involve debt, and the worker may lack an easily usable alternative job channel. The political economy therefore differs from ordinary employment even where formal labour rights exist. This is why ILO Convention No. 189 and the broader fair-recruitment framework emphasize both labour standards and recruitment governance.

Recruitment agencies occupy the intermediary space between state regulation and employer demand. Xiang and Lindquist (2014) describe migration infrastructure as the interconnected commercial, regulatory, technological, humanitarian, and social mechanisms that facilitate mobility. The concept is valuable because it explains why eliminating one intermediary does not necessarily eliminate intermediation. Digital platforms can replace traditional brokers while introducing new forms of information asymmetry, algorithmic matching, payment, or reputation control. State licensing can formalize agencies without fully eliminating recruitment fees or debt. Bilateral agreements can reduce commercial intermediation in one corridor while leaving it dominant in another.

The contrast between the Philippines-Gulf and Philippines-Germany corridors is instructive. In Gulf-bound domestic work, private recruitment and household employment have historically played a substantial role, with origin-state licensing layered onto destination-country sponsorship institutions. Germany's Triple Win programme instead organizes recruitment more directly through public or quasi-public agencies. The same origin country therefore participates in two distinct migration infrastructures: one more commercially intermediated, the other more state-to-state and professionally regulated. The worker's experience cannot be inferred from nationality alone.

The United Kingdom shows how employer sponsorship can coexist with a strong administrative state. The Home Office controls visa rules, but employers must hold sponsorship licences and certify eligible jobs. The explosive growth of the Health and Care Worker route after 2021 increased the importance of social-care providers as migration gatekeepers. Subsequent rule changes then rebalanced authority toward the state by restricting dependants and closing overseas recruitment for care-worker and senior-care-worker occupations from July 2025 (Home Office, 2025). The episode demonstrates a recurring pattern in political economy: employers can gain agenda-setting influence when shortages are acute, but the state retains the capacity to redesign the institutional channel.

Canada offers another variant. Employer demand is filtered through federal labour-market mechanisms and immigration selection, but caregiver programmes have periodically linked work to permanent-residence pathways. The 2025 Home Care Worker Immigration Pilots were designed as direct routes to permanent residence for workers with qualifying home-care job offers. The 2026 pause on new applications reflected capacity and

inventory management rather than a conversion of the route into a purely temporary programme (IRCC, 2026a, 2026b). Here the employer remains essential, but the worker's longer-term legal trajectory is not conceptually limited to the employment contract.

Gulf reform illustrates why announced legal change must be separated from effective power. Qatar's removal of the NOC requirement formally weakened the sponsor's capacity to block job changes and created an alternative labour-mobility channel (ILO, 2022a). Yet implementation research continues to identify information gaps, procedural barriers, and retaliation risks. Saudi Arabia's 2026 digital labour-mobility services similarly show an active reconfiguration of employer-state-worker relations, but the separate treatment of domestic labour under Musaned indicates that sectoral distinctions remain central. The appropriate analysis is therefore dynamic: sponsorship power can be reduced without disappearing uniformly across occupations or administrative practices.

Trade unions and worker organizations provide a potential counterweight, but their strength is uneven. Domestic work, live-in care, and fragmented private social care are difficult to organize because workers are dispersed across households or small providers. In countries with strong sectoral bargaining institutions, migrants working inside formal care institutions may benefit from negotiated wages and employment protections even if they are concentrated in lower occupational tiers. In more fragmented systems, domestic-worker associations and advocacy networks can substitute partially for mainstream union representation. Representation is consequently another institution whose weight differs by country and sector.

The deepest political-economy point is that recruitment and employer institutions govern mobility by shaping alternatives. Power is not only the ability to issue a command; it is the ability to make exit costly. A worker with portable status, an open labour market, enforceable wage rights, accessible inspection, and credible union or legal support is institutionally different from a worker whose residence, housing, transportation, and job are bundled into a single employer relationship. Feminized migration is therefore structured not only by whether women can enter a country, but by the institutional architecture of their choices after entry.

Relationship	Mechanism of power	Where especially visible	Institutional counterweight
State - employer	Permit/sponsorship rules delegate or constrain employer gatekeeping	UK sponsorship; Gulf systems; temporary-worker programmes	Portability rules, open permits, labour inspection, judicial review
Recruiter - worker	Control over job information, placement, documentation and fees	Domestic-work and labour-export corridors	Licensing, fee bans, bilateral recruitment, fair-recruitment standards
Employer - worker	Wage, dismissal, scheduling, housing and sometimes status dependence	Live-in domestic work, social care, seasonal work	Unions, complaint systems, mobility rights, minimum wages
Origin state - recruiter	Licensing and deployment regulation	Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka	Administrative sanctions, deployment rules, bilateral agreements
Municipality - migrant household	Access to housing, childcare, integration and local services	Refugee-hosting cities; settlement systems	National fiscal transfers and statutory service standards

6.5 Labour-Export States and the Remittance Political Economy

If destination countries reveal how migrant labour is demanded, labour-export states reveal how mobility can become a public economic strategy on the origin side. The Philippines is the paradigmatic case because emigration has been institutionalized through dedicated agencies, recruitment regulation, worker-welfare mechanisms, bilateral labour diplomacy, pre-departure programmes, and a financial system closely attuned to remittance flows. Rodriguez's concept of the labour-brokerage state is especially useful here: the state does not simply tolerate emigration but actively organizes the international marketability of its workers while attempting to regulate the terms of deployment.

Current Philippine data demonstrate the gendered scale of this system. The Philippine Statistics Authority estimated 2.19 million Overseas Filipino Workers in 2024, of whom 1.25 million - 57.2 percent - were women. Elementary occupations accounted for 43.6 percent of OFWs, although the overseas workforce also includes nurses, professionals, technicians, seafarers, and other occupational groups (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2025). The political economy therefore combines feminized low-wage service migration with skilled professional migration rather than fitting a single occupational profile.

The state apparatus matters because it connects migration to worker protection and macroeconomic management simultaneously. The Department of Migrant Workers licenses and regulates deployment and negotiates with destination states; OWWA provides welfare, repatriation, training, and reintegration programmes; private recruitment agencies remain critical market intermediaries; destination employers generate demand; and banks and remittance firms convert earnings into household and national foreign-exchange flows. These institutions cooperate because each depends on the others, but their objectives are not identical. Worker-protection rules can increase deployment costs. Deployment restrictions can protect workers while reducing remittance flows and employment opportunities. Destination states can change visa policies unilaterally, exposing the limits of origin-state control.

Remittances make these tensions macroeconomic. The World Bank's 2024 estimate of roughly USD 40 billion in remittance inflows to the Philippines places the country among the world's largest recipients in absolute terms; Mexico, another major labour-export country with a very different migration profile, received about USD 68 billion (World Bank, 2024). The economic significance of such flows does not mean that remittances are equivalent to development. De Haas (2005, 2010) has shown how migration-development debates oscillate between excessive optimism and excessive pessimism. Remittances can reduce household poverty, finance education and health, and stabilize external accounts, but they may coexist with regional inequality, dependency, and insufficient domestic job creation.

Financial institutions therefore deserve analytical attention. Remittances are not simply money moving from migrant to household. They pass through commercial banks, money-transfer operators, digital platforms, foreign-exchange systems, identity requirements, and anti-money-laundering regulations. Each intermediary can lower or raise transaction costs and can extend credit, savings, insurance, and investment products to migrant households. The expansion of digital remittance platforms potentially reduces some traditional fees and physical barriers, but it also creates new forms of platform dependence and data governance.

The Philippines also demonstrates how origin-destination relations can vary by corridor. State-to-state nurse recruitment to Germany through programmes such as Triple Win is different from household-based domestic-work recruitment in Gulf markets. The former relies more heavily on

professional recognition, public recruitment institutions, and coordinated preparation; the latter may involve private agencies, household employers, and sponsorship institutions. Thus a labour-export state does not have one political economy of migration but a portfolio of bilateral and market relationships.

Indonesia and Sri Lanka display related but distinct patterns. Both regulate significant overseas labour migration, including female domestic work, through public agencies and recruitment controls. Yet the institutional density, market destinations, use of deployment restrictions, and capacity for worker protection differ from the Philippine model. Moldova and Mexico, by contrast, are remittance-significant origin countries without the same degree of centralized labour-export bureaucracy. This comparison is essential because remittance dependence and labour-export statehood are analytically separate. A country can receive large remittance flows without organizing emigration through a dedicated state apparatus.

The broader implication is that origin countries possess bargaining power but not sovereignty over the full migration chain. They can license recruiters, train workers, require contracts, negotiate agreements, and provide consular support. They cannot independently determine destination-country admission, wage enforcement, or settlement policy. Labour-export governance is therefore structurally interdependent: origin states seek access to foreign labour markets while attempting to regulate risks they cannot fully control. That asymmetry is one of the defining political-economic features of feminized migration.

6.6 Social Reproduction, Cost Shifting, and Who Bears the Costs

The most distinctive contribution of a feminist political economy of migration is to make visible costs that conventional labour-market analysis treats as external. Fraser's (2016) argument about the contradiction between capital accumulation and care is relevant because labour markets depend on the continuous reproduction of human beings, yet the activities that accomplish that reproduction are frequently unpaid, underpaid, or institutionally separated from the sphere in which profits and wages are calculated. Migration internationalizes this contradiction.

A migrant care worker arrives in a destination economy already raised, educated, socialized, and in many cases professionally trained. The destination employer pays for current labour but did not bear the full historic cost of producing that labour capacity. If the worker leaves children or

elderly relatives behind, the ongoing cost of reproducing the worker's own family may be carried by spouses, grandmothers, older daughters, remittances, and origin-country services. Chapter 5 showed that these arrangements can be resilient and mutually beneficial, but they can also transfer substantial unpaid work to other women. The political-economy question is where those costs appear - and where they disappear from formal accounting.

This is the logic of cost externalization. The term should not be understood as a claim that every destination employer consciously shifts family costs abroad. Rather, institutional design can produce that outcome without any actor intending it. A temporary domestic-worker visa that excludes family accompaniment places the cost of maintaining family life outside the destination country. A care market organized around live-in workers relies on housing arrangements embedded in employment. A welfare state that recruits already trained nurses benefits from skills financed partly by another society. A remittance-dependent household internalizes the risks of exchange rates, job loss, and contract renewal.

The same logic operates within destination countries. When public eldercare is insufficient, responsibility can move from state to family; when family capacity is insufficient, care can move from unpaid family labour to market purchase; when domestic labour is scarce or expensive, the market may recruit migrant workers. Cost shifting therefore moves across institutional boundaries: state to family, family to market, destination to origin, employer to worker, working-age woman to grandmother, public sector to informal sector. These transfers are neither inherently illegitimate nor uniformly harmful. Their importance lies in showing that care systems remain functional because costs are redistributed, not eliminated.

Southern European live-in care is one clear example. Households purchase individualized care that can allow older people to remain at home, while migrant workers obtain employment and income. Yet the arrangement can also transfer regulatory responsibilities to private households, where working time, rest periods, and occupational safety are difficult to monitor. The OECD notes both the high foreign-born share of live-in carers in Italy and Spain and the enforcement problems associated with private-home workplaces (OECD, 2023). The economic benefit of flexibility is therefore linked to a governance cost.

Nordic public provision redistributes costs differently. Tax-financed municipal services socialize a larger share of care expenditure, but labour

shortages can still lead to reliance on migrant workers. The fact that around four in ten long-term-care workers in Sweden were foreign-born in 2024 indicates that a highly decommodified care regime can still be internationalized at the workforce level (OECD, 2025). Here the cost is not primarily externalized through private household purchasing; it is incorporated into public-sector recruitment, language training, occupational integration, and municipal budgeting.

Gulf domestic work represents another configuration. The household employer pays wages and often recruitment-related costs, but the worker's access to settlement, family accompaniment, or long-term social citizenship is much more limited than in settlement-oriented immigration systems. Even where labour-mobility reforms expand job switching, the broader system remains organized around temporary presence. The economic contribution of the worker is incorporated while the reproduction of the worker as a long-term member of the polity is constrained. This is a particularly sharp version of the distinction between wanted labour and limited settlement.

Canada demonstrates an alternative allocation. Caregiver programmes that include permanent-residence pathways internalize more of the migrant's long-term social membership within the immigration system. This does not eliminate employer dependence, labour-market inequality, or care-sector problems, but it changes the distribution of institutional costs by making settlement, family life, and social rights more integral to the migration trajectory. The 2025 Home Care Worker Immigration Pilots, despite their 2026 intake pause, remain analytically important for precisely this reason (IRCC, 2026a).

Cost externalization also affects origin states. International recruitment of nurses can generate remittances and professional opportunities while contributing to staffing pressures in source-country health systems. Bilateral recruitment programmes increasingly invoke ethical-recruitment principles precisely because the distribution of gains is not automatically balanced. Germany's official recruitment framework restricts recruitment from countries on the WHO health workforce support and safeguards list except under specified public channels, illustrating an attempt to govern this externality (Federal Government of Germany, 2026).

The central proposition is therefore not that migration is a hidden subsidy with a single monetary value. The concept is more precise if understood institutionally: feminized migration allows care, labour, and social-reproduction costs to be allocated across jurisdictions and households in

ways that wage statistics alone do not capture. Identifying those allocations makes visible the political economy behind apparently private arrangements.

Cost or benefit	Primary recipient / bearer	Institutional mechanism	Possible countervailing effect
Filled care vacancy	Destination employer / household / welfare system	International recruitment or migration channel	Recruitment, training and integration costs
Remittance income	Origin household and origin economy	Cross-border earnings transfer	Dependency on foreign labour markets and exchange conditions
Family separation	Migrant, children, spouse, grandparents	Temporary status, no accompaniment, distance	Higher household income and future opportunities
Training externality	Destination health/care system	Recruitment of already trained workers	Ethical recruitment and bilateral training investment
Municipal service burden	Local government	Housing, schools, social services, integration	Local tax base, national/EU transfers
Informal care flexibility	Household employer	Private-home employment and weak enforcement	Worker vulnerability and undeclared-work risks
Permanent settlement	Migrant household and receiving society	PR/citizenship pathways, settlement services	Higher short-term integration expenditure

6.7 Comparative National Configurations

The comparative value of political economy lies in showing that the same underlying pressures do not generate the same institutional outcome. Ageing, labour shortages, women's employment, and cross-border wage differentials are widespread, but they are filtered through national institutions. The resulting configurations can be compared without reducing them to a ranking.

Sweden represents a welfare-state-mediated configuration. Municipalities and public services carry substantial responsibility for long-term care, reducing the extent to which individual households must organize care through direct private employment. Yet this does not imply a nationally self-contained workforce. OECD data show that foreign-born workers accounted for roughly four in ten long-term-care workers in Sweden in 2024 (OECD, 2025). The crucial institutional feature is therefore not low migration dependence but the location of that dependence inside formal, publicly financed services. Municipalities, collective bargaining institutions, professional standards, and national labour-market policy matter more than household sponsorship.

Italy and Spain represent a different equilibrium. Familialist traditions, demographic ageing, and gaps in formal long-term-care provision have contributed to the expansion of household-based migrant care. The household is unusually central because it combines care demand, financing, employment, and daily supervision. OECD evidence that foreign-born workers make up more than half of live-in carers in Italy and Spain among the comparable countries illustrates how migration becomes embedded in private welfare provision (OECD, 2023). Informality is not simply a migrant characteristic in this setting; it is linked to the institutional difficulty of regulating work performed inside private homes and to the economics of household affordability.

Germany is more corporatist and institutionally layered. Long-term-care insurance creates a public financing structure; Länder and municipalities matter in service delivery and professional recognition; employers and social partners shape labour-market institutions; the Federal Employment Agency participates directly in international recruitment; and EU free movement supports cross-border care work from Central and Eastern Europe. The Triple Win programme provides an especially visible example of state-organized recruitment of nurses and care workers from the Philippines, Indonesia, India, and Tunisia (Federal Government of Germany, 2026). Germany therefore combines a strong state and social-insurance architecture with market and household arrangements rather than conforming to a purely public or private model.

The United Kingdom exemplifies a sponsor-mediated liberal configuration. The Home Office possesses strong centralized power over visa design, while employers act as gatekeepers through sponsorship. Health and social care are themselves institutionally divided: the NHS is a national public institution, whereas adult social care is more fragmented across local authorities and private providers. This fragmentation became particularly important when the Health and Care Worker visa expanded rapidly. The later closure of overseas care-worker recruitment in July 2025 and the decline in visa grants by mid-2026 demonstrate the state's continuing capacity to redefine the labour-supply channel even after employers became dependent on it (Home Office, 2025, 2026). The result is a system in which labour shortages, public-service need, private-provider economics, local-authority financing, and central migration control pull in different directions.

Canada is settlement-oriented but still multi-level and employer-responsive. Federal immigration policy is intertwined with provincial

economic selection, healthcare and social-service jurisdiction, and a dense settlement-service infrastructure. The design of caregiver pathways is especially revealing. The 2025 Home Care Worker Immigration Pilots explicitly linked qualifying home-care employment to permanent residence, while allowing accompanying family members within the immigration process; intake was paused in 2026 because demand exceeded available processing space (IRCC, 2026a, 2026b). The Canadian case thus differs structurally from temporary labour systems not because employer interests are absent, but because the institutional architecture more often treats immigration as demographic and settlement policy as well as labour-market policy.

The United States is defined less by a single institutional logic than by fragmentation. Federal law controls immigration status, but states and municipalities differ in labour regulation, access to services, cooperation with federal enforcement, and domestic-worker protections. Market provision dominates much of childcare and home care, while undocumented workers remain significant in several low-wage service sectors. Worker organizations and state-level domestic-worker bills of rights have therefore become important because national labour and migration institutions leave substantial regulatory gaps. The political economy is highly territorial: a migrant domestic worker's practical rights can depend heavily on the state and city in which she lives.

Türkiye is a hybrid in a different sense. The Presidency of Migration Management, under the Ministry of Interior, holds central formal authority over international and temporary protection, while the Ministry of Labour and Social Security regulates work authorization and the Ministry of Family and Social Services plays a central role in family, care, and social policy. Municipalities deliver many practical services, and international organizations and EU financing have played important roles in refugee-related programmes. The PMM's current institutional mandate explicitly includes temporary protection and coordination with public institutions, local administrations, international organizations, universities, and civil society (Presidency of Migration Management, 2026a). At the same time, the 2016 regulatory framework assigns work-permit administration for Syrians under temporary protection to the labour ministry, demonstrating an intentional division between status authority and economic incorporation (Presidency of Migration Management, 2026b).

This institutional division is gendered. Refugee and migrant women's employment is shaped not only by work-permit law but by childcare, social norms, informal employment, language, and local labour demand. Recent ILO work in Türkiye has made the care economy itself an explicit multi-institutional policy field, with the Ministry of Family and Social Services as a national partner and ILO, UNDP, UN Women, UNICEF, and UNFPA contributing to policy design and capacity building (ILO, 2025b). Türkiye therefore illustrates how refugee governance, labour-market incorporation, international financing, and gendered care policy can coexist within one institutional ecosystem without being fully integrated.

The Gulf states form another family of configurations but should not be treated as identical. Qatar's 2020 reforms removed the NOC requirement and expanded legal job mobility, while ILO cooperation has continued to focus on implementation, domestic-worker protections, and recruitment practices (ILO, 2022a, 2024b). Saudi Arabia has expanded labour mobility and in 2026 introduced new digital transfer services for resident workers and domestic labour, though the administrative procedures differ across categories (Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, 2026a, 2026b). The UAE has likewise developed a separate legal and administrative framework for domestic work and recruitment. The shared feature is not an unchanged "kafala system" but a historically sponsor-centred political economy undergoing uneven reform. Employer and recruitment institutions remain more central to everyday migrant governance than in most European welfare states, while long-term settlement institutions remain comparatively limited.

The Philippines completes the comparison from the origin side. In 2024 women constituted 57.2 percent of OFWs, confirming that feminization is not a marginal feature of the country's international labour system (PSA, 2025). Here the strongest institutional chain runs from the Department of Migrant Workers and OWWA through licensed recruitment, destination-state access, employers, financial institutions, and migrant households. The state has unusually high capacity to regulate departure but necessarily limited capacity to control what happens after the worker enters another sovereign jurisdiction. Its bargaining power therefore depends on bilateral agreements, market importance, diplomatic relations, and the credibility of deployment restrictions.

These cases support a non-ranking typology. Sweden approximates a welfare-state-mediated model; Italy and Spain a household-mediated care

model; the United Kingdom a sponsor-mediated liberal model; Canada a settlement-oriented immigration political economy; the United States a fragmented market-federal model; Türkiye a refugee-governance and labour-market hybrid; Gulf states sponsor-centred temporary labour regimes in reform; and the Philippines a labour-export political economy. Germany occupies a corporatist and institutionally layered position between several ideal types. The categories overlap because actual systems are hybrid. Their value is analytical: they identify where institutional power is concentrated and therefore where reform is likely to produce the largest effects.

Regime type	Illustrative case(s)	Institutional centre of gravity	Typical tension
Welfare-state-mediated	Sweden	Municipal/public care institutions	Public care commitment vs. workforce recruitment and integration
Household-mediated care	Italy, Spain	Families and private/live-in care markets	Affordability/flexibility vs. informality and enforcement
Corporatist/federal layered	Germany	Social insurance, federal/Länder institutions, employers/social partners	Formal recruitment vs. household/live-in care and recognition bottlenecks
Sponsor-mediated liberal	United Kingdom	Central migration authority + employers/providers	Labour shortage vs. migration-control targets
Settlement-oriented	Canada	Federal immigration state + provinces + employers + settlement sector	Employer demand vs. processing capacity and worker protection
Fragmented market-federal	United States	Federal immigration law + state/local labour and service systems	National status control vs. subnational rights variation
Refugee-governance hybrid	Türkiye	PMM + labour/family ministries + municipalities + international actors	Central status authority vs. decentralized incorporation and informality
Sponsor-centred temporary labour	Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE	State + employer/sponsor + recruitment system	Labour mobility reform vs. inherited sponsorship practices
Labour-export political economy	Philippines	DMW/OWWA + recruiters + destination states + remittance system	Deployment/remittance objectives vs. worker protection

6.8 Crisis, Institutional Change, and the Liberal Paradox

Migration institutions are often most visible during crisis because crises expose dependencies that routine administration obscures. The 2008 financial crisis shifted labour demand and intensified debates over welfare and mobility. The refugee movements of 2015 expanded the institutional importance of asylum agencies, municipalities, humanitarian organizations, and international financing. COVID-19 made care, cleaning, food, health, and logistics workers newly visible as "essential" even while many migrant

workers faced heightened exposure, job loss, and mobility restrictions. The displacement from Ukraine after 2022 activated the EU Temporary Protection Directive at unprecedented scale and created a distinct mode of protection outside ordinary asylum processing.

COVID-19 was especially revealing for feminized migration because the sectors most associated with migrant women could not simply move online. Home care, nursing, residential care, cleaning, and domestic work required physical presence. The crisis therefore exposed a political contradiction: occupations that had often been low paid and weakly recognized became publicly defined as essential. Yet recognition did not automatically produce permanent institutional upgrading. The long-term-care sector continues to face low wages, non-standard employment, and staffing difficulties across many OECD countries (OECD, 2025). Crisis visibility and structural reform are not the same thing.

The EU's post-2015 and post-2022 evolution shows another form of institutional change. The Pact on Migration and Asylum entered into application on 12 June 2026, establishing a common framework for screening, responsibility, asylum procedures, solidarity, and crisis management across the Union (European Commission, 2026a). Its implementation requires continued interaction among the Commission, member states, EUAA, Frontex, eu-LISA, and other agencies. Meanwhile, the Council extended temporary protection for displaced people from Ukraine until 4 March 2028 in July 2026 (Council of the European Union, 2026). These developments illustrate how supranational institutions can alter the national balance of migration governance without eliminating member-state implementation authority.

Digitalization is becoming another source of institutional change. Visa processing, biometric registration, employer sponsorship portals, recruitment platforms, and remittance applications change who controls information and transaction costs. Saudi Arabia's 2026 Qiwa and Musaned labour-transfer services are an example of how digital administration can reconfigure labour mobility by formalizing transfer procedures and documenting consent. Yet digitalization is not synonymous with liberalization. A platform can make a restrictive rule more efficient as easily as it can make mobility more accessible. The analytical question is therefore which actor gains informational and procedural power from digitalization.

These developments return the analysis to Hollifield's liberal paradox. Advanced economies often seek the economic benefits of openness while

maintaining political control over membership and borders. Feminized care migration intensifies the paradox because care demand can be persistent, politically difficult to offshore in the ordinary sense, and closely connected to ageing and household welfare. States may therefore want the worker without necessarily wanting the same degree of settlement, family reunification, or social citizenship. Temporary-worker programmes, employer sponsorship, restricted welfare access, and differentiated rights are institutional attempts to reconcile these objectives.

The paradox, however, is not universal in form. Canada has historically resolved more of the tension through settlement-oriented immigration. Gulf states have relied more heavily on temporary labour and limited settlement. The United Kingdom has moved between labour opening and restriction as care shortages and migration-control objectives changed. Sweden incorporates migrants within a public-service welfare state while confronting integration and staffing challenges. The Philippines experiences the mirror image: it seeks access to foreign labour markets while trying to protect workers beyond its territorial jurisdiction. Political economy therefore transforms the liberal paradox into a broader family of institutional dilemmas.

The final implication is that feminized migration is not governed by a single institution called "the state" or a single force called "the market." It is governed through relationships. Crises redistribute power among those relationships; reforms alter the costs of exit and entry; digitalization changes information and transaction structures; demographic change intensifies care demand; and political conflict determines which costs are socialized, privatized, or transferred across borders. The durability of a migration regime depends on how these institutions fit together - and on whether the people who supply care, labour, and social reproduction can exercise meaningful rights within that configuration.

Conclusion

The new political economy of feminized migration is best understood as a system of institutional interdependence. Women move because households make strategies, employers demand labour, states create legal channels, recruiters organize mobility, welfare systems generate particular forms of care demand, and origin countries facilitate or regulate departure. Once migrants arrive, municipalities, labour inspectorates, unions, courts, social-insurance systems, care providers, and families shape the conditions under

which labour is performed and life is reproduced. The relative weight of these actors changes from one country to another, which is why similar demographic and labour-market pressures produce different migration regimes.

The comparison developed in this chapter identifies several recurring patterns. First, strong public welfare institutions do not necessarily eliminate dependence on migrant care labour; they can formalize and institutionalize it, as Sweden's foreign-born share of long-term-care employment illustrates. Second, weaker or more familialist public-care systems can push care organization toward households, as in Italy and Spain, increasing the importance of live-in and sometimes informal migrant labour. Third, employer sponsorship can convert ordinary managerial power into migration-related power, although Qatar and Saudi Arabia demonstrate that sponsorship institutions are reformable and internally differentiated. Fourth, settlement-oriented systems such as Canada's allocate more institutional space to permanent residence and family membership, while temporary-worker regimes place a larger share of social reproduction outside the destination polity. Fifth, labour-export states such as the Philippines reveal that migration governance begins before the border: recruitment licensing, bilateral diplomacy, worker welfare, and remittance institutions are integral to the system.

These institutional differences also determine who pays. Employers may pay wages without bearing the full family cost of reproducing migrant labour. Welfare states may rely on workers educated elsewhere. Households may absorb care responsibilities when public services are insufficient. Municipalities may deliver services authorized but underfunded nationally. Grandmothers and daughters may perform unpaid care that allows a migrant worker to remain economically active abroad. Origin states may gain remittances while facing skill losses; destination states may gain labour while financing integration. Political economy does not imply that these exchanges are necessarily exploitative or mutually beneficial. It provides the language for identifying how benefits and costs are distributed.

Current evidence also shows why simplistic narratives about a universal "care crisis" or a single migration solution are inadequate. In 2024, foreign-born workers already represented 21 percent of long-term-care workers across 26 European OECD countries, while migrant women globally were substantially more concentrated in care employment than non-migrant women (ILO, 2024a; OECD, 2025). Yet the same period has also seen

governments restrict some care-migration channels, redesign caregiver programmes, expand ethical recruitment, digitize job mobility, and invest in domestic care infrastructure. Migration policy and care policy are therefore being made together, even when governments continue to administer them through separate bureaucracies.

The book's wider argument can now be stated in its complete form. The feminization of migration is not only a demographic trend, a labour-market phenomenon, a question of political rights, an institutional problem, or a transformation of family life. It is all of these simultaneously because they are connected through a political economy of care, labour, welfare, and inequality. Migrant women occupy the point at which those systems meet. Their mobility reveals how states value labour, how markets price care, how households absorb social reproduction, how institutions distribute rights, and how global inequality becomes embedded in everyday relationships.

For that reason, the most important comparative question is not which country has the "best" migration regime. It is which institutions govern each function, how those institutions depend on one another, where effective power is located, and who bears the consequences when institutional objectives conflict. Once these relationships are made visible, feminized migration no longer appears as a peripheral subset of international migration. It becomes a window into the changing architecture of contemporary political economy itself.

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CONCLUSION

This book began with a deceptively simple expression: the feminization of migration. The phrase has often been used as though its meaning were self-evident, as if the essential transformation could be established by observing that more women migrate or that women now constitute a large share of international migrants. The analysis developed across the preceding chapters leads to a different conclusion. The most consequential feminization is not a single demographic shift. It is the reorganization of migration systems around forms of labour, family life, political membership, and institutional regulation in which gender operates continuously, although often indirectly. Women have not merely entered a pre-existing migration system in greater numbers. Their mobility, work, care responsibilities, family strategies, and political incorporation reveal how that system itself is structured.

The first major implication is therefore conceptual. Aggregate migrant stocks remain indispensable, but they do not explain migration. The global share of women can remain comparatively stable while the social meaning of female migration changes substantially. Women can become more visible as principal migrants, wage earners, nurses, caregivers, domestic workers, students, professionals, refugees, and political actors without producing a dramatic movement in one global percentage. Likewise, a region with a male-dominated aggregate migrant stock may contain highly feminized labour corridors. The appropriate unit of analysis is consequently not the global ratio alone, but the migration system: the corridor, sector, legal channel, household strategy, and institutional configuration through which mobility occurs.

The labour-market analysis reinforced this point. Migrant women occupy markedly different economic positions. They are strongly represented in services and care, where labour demand is intertwined with demographic ageing, changing household structures, and the organization of welfare. Yet they also participate in skilled professional migration. Some workers face employer dependency, informality, deskilling, or exclusion from professional recognition; others enter highly regulated occupations and obtain stable residence. The central pattern is not uniform disadvantage but structured differentiation. Labour markets sort migrants through institutions. Work-permit rules, qualification systems, welfare entitlements, labour inspection, recruitment infrastructures, childcare availability, and pathways

to settlement shape whether the same act of migration becomes a route to autonomy, a period of temporary dependence, or an experience of occupational downgrading.

This institutionalization of labour has a political dimension. The chapter on political life demonstrated that residence, membership, participation, and representation form a sequence rather than a single threshold. Migrant women can be socially and economically embedded while remaining outside national electoral citizenship; they can possess formal rights while facing practical barriers to participation; and they can exercise political voice through associations, unions, local councils, migrant organizations, or civil society before naturalization. Citizenship remains important, particularly for national electoral power, but it is not the only institution through which belonging is organized. Local voting rights, supranational citizenship, naturalization law, party recruitment, and political opportunity structures distribute political access differently across countries.

This is why migration policy cannot be understood as the work of a single sovereign actor. The institutional analysis of Chapter 4 showed that the migration state is internally divided. Interior ministries regulate admission and residence; labour ministries respond to employers and labour-market conditions; welfare institutions govern access to social protection; municipalities translate abstract rights into services; courts review administrative action; equality institutions address discrimination; and international organizations establish norms, data, and monitoring frameworks. In federal and decentralized systems, regional governments add another layer. The relevant question is not whether a state is centralized or fragmented in the abstract. It is whether institutions whose competences intersect in an individual migrant's life can coordinate effectively.

Gender becomes especially visible at those institutional intersections. Contemporary laws may be formally sex-neutral, yet their effects need not be. An employer-specific permit can create disproportionate dependency in sectors where women are concentrated. A residence status derived from a spouse can make the end of a relationship a migration-status event. A contribution-based welfare system can disadvantage workers with interrupted employment histories. A language programme without childcare can be formally open while practically inaccessible to some mothers. A labour-inspection regime can protect workers generally while remaining structurally weak in private households. None of these rules needs to mention women explicitly in order to produce gendered outcomes.

The analysis of families extends the same logic beyond the destination state. Migration moves people, but it also moves responsibilities. When a mother migrates, care must be redistributed; when a father migrates, economic and household authority may be renegotiated; when both parents migrate, grandparents or other relatives may become primary caregivers. Remittances can improve schooling, health, housing, and consumption, while separation can create emotional strain and greater workloads for those who remain. The evidence on children and left-behind families is therefore necessarily conditional. Migration can generate material benefits and social costs at the same time. Greater decision-making authority for a woman left behind can coexist with heavier unpaid work. Digital communication can sustain intimacy without abolishing physical absence. Reunification can be desired and still require difficult renegotiation of roles.

These family processes are not external to the political economy. They are part of it. Paid care in one country can depend on unpaid care in another. The destination household may employ a migrant caregiver while a grandmother, aunt, spouse, or older daughter provides substitute care in the origin household. Remittances connect these spaces financially; communication technologies connect them emotionally; migration law determines whether and when they can be reunited. The global care chain is therefore not merely a metaphor for emotional transfer. It reveals a transnational allocation of reproductive labour.

The final chapter made explicit what the earlier chapters had progressively established: feminized migration is governed through a variable hierarchy of institutions. There is no universal institutional centre. In Southern European care economies, households can become especially important as direct employers and purchasers of care. In Nordic systems, municipalities and publicly financed welfare institutions occupy a more central position even when migrant labour is indispensable to service delivery. In the United Kingdom, the Home Office and employer sponsorship interact with labour shortages in health and social care. Germany combines federal migration authority, social insurance, employers, Länder, municipalities, and social partners in a more corporatist institutional environment. Canada links federal selection, provincial competence, employers, settlement institutions, and comparatively strong pathways to long-term membership. The United States distributes relevant authority across federal, state, and local institutions while large segments of the care and service economy remain market-oriented.

Türkiye represents another configuration. Its migration political economy combines regular labour migration, international protection, temporary protection, central migration administration, labour-market regulation, municipal service delivery, employers, informal work, and international organizations. The resulting institutional field cannot be reduced to either a classic settlement regime or a temporary labour-import regime. It is a refugee-hosting hybrid shaped by legal-status differentiation and multi-level implementation. The Gulf cases differ again. Their labour markets have historically embedded large non-citizen populations within temporary residence and sponsorship arrangements, giving employers and sponsors a degree of control over workers' mobility and status that is unusual in many European and North American systems. Reforms matter, but their practical significance depends on coverage, implementation, and whether domestic workers are included in the same protections as other workers.

The Philippines shows the mirror image from the origin side. Here the state does not simply react to emigration. It has developed institutions that organize, regulate, document, and support overseas employment. Recruitment agencies, public authorities, training systems, bilateral agreements, welfare institutions, and remittance infrastructures form a recognizable labour-export apparatus. This reveals an important point: the political economy of migration exists on both sides of the border. Destination states control admission, but origin states can shape recruitment, preparation, worker protection, and the financial organization of migration. Neither possesses complete control because each depends on the other and on employers, intermediaries, and migrants themselves.

The comparative evidence therefore suggests that institutional weight is a better analytical question than institutional presence. Nearly every state has migration, labour, welfare, and local administrative institutions. What differs is their relative authority and the relationships among them. An employer may be a market actor in one system and a quasi-gatekeeper of legal status in another. A municipality may implement national policy without significant discretion in one country and function as an important policy innovator in another. A welfare institution may directly provide care or merely subsidize households that purchase it privately. Recruitment agencies may be peripheral, tightly regulated intermediaries or central actors controlling access to jobs and mobility. The same organizational label does not imply the same political-economic function.

This insight also changes how costs and benefits should be discussed. Migration generates wages and remittances, fills labour shortages, supplies care, and can increase household income. It can also generate recruitment debt, family separation, administrative costs, welfare expenditures, integration burdens, and unpaid substitute care. These benefits and costs do not accrue to the same actors. Employers may benefit from labour supply while municipalities finance services. Destination households may purchase care while origin households absorb the worker's family-care responsibilities. Origin states may receive remittance inflows while losing workers from particular sectors. Migrant women may gain income and autonomy while carrying the emotional and financial burden of transnational family life. A political economy of migration must therefore ask not only whether migration creates aggregate gains, but how those gains and costs are distributed.

The concept of cost shifting captures one of the book's broader conclusions. Welfare systems can shift care to families; families can shift care to markets; markets can recruit migrant labour; migrant workers can shift parts of their own family care to relatives; and origin households can rely on remittances generated abroad. This sequence does not mean that every actor deliberately externalizes costs or that every migrant family is disadvantaged. It means that the social reproduction necessary to sustain labour is organized across institutions and borders, and that conventional economic accounts frequently capture the wage transaction more readily than the unpaid work that makes it possible.

The politics surrounding migration follows from these institutional contradictions. States may face employer demand for workers while encountering political pressure to limit immigration. Governments may depend on migrant labour in health, care, agriculture, hospitality, or domestic services while restricting settlement or welfare access for particular categories. Origin governments may encourage overseas employment while promising stronger worker protection. Municipalities may seek greater resources because they implement policies decided elsewhere. Trade unions may defend labour standards while confronting sectors in which informal or household employment makes organization difficult. International organizations may promote standards but depend on national cooperation for implementation. These are not anomalies around the edge of migration policy. They are recurring features of a field in which economic openness,

political control, social protection, and institutional responsibility do not always point in the same direction.

The concept of the liberal paradox captures part of this tension, but feminized migration adds a specific dimension. Care work reveals a particularly direct relationship between social need and migration control. Ageing societies, health systems, households, and care providers may require labour that is difficult to recruit domestically, yet the workers who provide that labour may enter through temporary, conditional, or employer-linked statuses. Economic dependence and political inclusion therefore need not move together. A society can rely on migrant women economically while limiting their access to permanent membership; it can recognize care as essential while leaving parts of care work weakly valued; and it can promote gender equality among citizens while importing care through arrangements that reproduce inequalities between women across borders.

No single institutional reform can resolve these tensions because they arise across several systems simultaneously. More portable work permits may reduce employer dependency but do not by themselves solve childcare shortages. Easier family reunification can reduce separation while increasing demands on housing and public services. Better credential recognition can reduce deskilling but may intensify international recruitment from countries facing their own health-worker shortages. Stronger welfare access can reduce civic stratification while creating fiscal and political debates about eligibility. More effective labour inspection can protect workers while confronting the practical and legal difficulty of regulating private households. The value of comparative analysis lies precisely in making these trade-offs visible without converting them into a simplistic ranking of national models.

The broader conclusion of the book is therefore relational. Feminized migration is produced where demographic pressures, labour markets, welfare arrangements, family strategies, legal categories, political institutions, and global inequalities intersect. None of these is sufficient on its own. Wage differentials matter, but they do not create a visa. Labour shortages matter, but they do not determine whether a worker can change employer. Family ties matter, but they do not guarantee reunification. Long residence matters, but it does not automatically become citizenship. Care needs matter, but they can be met by public provision, family labour, private markets, or migrant workers depending on the institutional setting. Migration becomes intelligible only when these relationships are examined together.

This is also why the feminization of migration should be understood as a transformation in visibility and institutional organization as much as in movement itself. Women were never absent from migration history. What changed, and what scholarship increasingly learned to recognize, was their position as workers, principal migrants, political subjects, transnational caregivers, household decision-makers, and bearers of rights. At the same time, the analysis of women made visible other actors who had been analytically marginalized: children, grandmothers, women left behind, municipal institutions, recruitment intermediaries, local service systems, and origin-state bureaucracies. The study of feminization thus widens migration studies rather than narrowing it to women alone.

The new political economy proposed in these pages follows from that widening. It asks how migration is organized, not merely why people move; how care is redistributed, not merely who provides it; how institutions exercise power, not merely which laws exist; and how costs and benefits travel across borders, households, and levels of government. It treats the migrant woman neither as a victim category nor as an emblem of uncomplicated empowerment, but as an actor situated within structures that create opportunities, dependencies, and obligations in different combinations.

If one conclusion deserves to remain after the details of countries, statistics, laws, and institutions fade, it is this: migration is never only movement. It is a reorganization of work, care, family, membership, and authority. Feminized migration makes that fact especially visible because it connects spheres that modern social analysis has often separated - economy from household, production from reproduction, labour from citizenship, and national policy from transnational family life. Bringing those spheres back together is the central purpose of this book, and it is also the reason a political economy of migration must remain, at its core, an institutional and human analysis.

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The numbering below is global across the book. The same source retains the same number wherever it appears in a chapter reference list.

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