

Disentangling the determinants of migrants' gendered labour inclusion gaps in Chile

Dr José Ignacio Carrasco¹,
Dr Nuni Jorgensen²

Introduction

Research on gender inequalities in labour market participation highlights how immigration policies, limited access to childcare benefits, and weaker social support networks often compound the disadvantages faced by migrant women (Iredale 2005; Purkayastha 2005). Consequently, gender gaps in employment are often more pronounced among migrants than among native populations (Fernandez-Reino y Brindle 2025; Orav 2023). Family composition and gender norms within different communities further shape these labour market outcomes. However, much of this scholarship has focused primarily on countries in the Global North.

In Chile, immigration has become a major driver of demographic change, with the foreign-born population increasing from 1.9% to 7.6% between 2012 and 2022. Notably, gender gaps in labour market participation are narrower among migrants than among natives (Carrasco y Saavedra 2023) —a pattern that contrasts with trends observed in most countries of the Global North. These patterns, however, are far from uniform: studies show that gender disparities are much more pronounced among Bolivian and Haitian migrants than among Venezuelan and Colombian ones (Carrasco & Suárez 2019; Doña 2019). To date, existing analyses on these trends remain largely descriptive, relying on household surveys and national statistics, and have paid limited attention to the mechanisms underlying these disparities (Carrasco y Suárez 2019; Doña 2019).

This study examines the determinants of gender differences in migrant labour market inclusion in Chile, with particular attention to recent arrivals. Leveraging the 2022 National Migration Survey—the first to provide detailed microdata on both labour outcomes and household dynamics—together with the National Employment Survey for comparison with the Chilean population, the analysis considers the interplay of human capital, family arrangements, institutional barriers, and occupational downgrading in shaping gendered labour market participation across migrant groups. To date, no academic articles have used this survey, with existing analyses largely limited to reports by international organisations and other grey literature. By engaging this data in a comparative, theory-driven framework, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how structural conditions and community-specific dynamics produce distinctive patterns of gender inequality in a South–South migration context.

¹ Department of Sociology, University of Oxford

² Centre for Migration, Policy and Society, University of Oxford

In synthesis, this study focuses on what are the determinants of gender gaps in labour market inclusion among recent immigrants to Chile, specifically those who arrived between 2016 and 2020. We investigate how gendered differences in employment outcomes are shaped by four key dimensions. First, human capital composition, examining to what extent disparities reflect differences in educational attainment between migrant women and men. Second, family pressures, considering how the unequal differences in the composition of family size and responsibilities of dependent abroad (i.e. transnational families) constrains women's labour market participation. Third, institutional barriers, including limited or unequal access to the validation of educational and professional credentials acquired abroad. Finally, labour market dynamics, analysing how indicators of labour inclusion intersect, particularly occupational downgrading between migrants' countries of origin and their employment outcomes in Chile. Together, these dimensions illuminate the structural and individual factors underpinning gendered inequalities in immigrant integration into the Chilean labour market.

Previous studies

Gender operates as a structuring element of migratory processes, emphasising that understanding *who* migrates, *when*, *why*, and *how* requires attention to the gender norms shaping both origin and destination contexts (Cerrutti 2022). These norms influence not only migration decisions but also patterns of family separation, labour insertion, and occupational trajectories.

Evidence suggests that labour market integration processes are deeply gendered, with migrant women facing specific barriers and, often, compounded disadvantages. Research shows that migrant women remain overrepresented in segregated occupations with few opportunities for upward mobility (Birgier y Cantalini 2025; Palencia-Esteban 2022). Moreover, because many women migrate through family reunification channels, even when they are highly qualified, they have greater difficulties in having their skills recognised or in accessing formal employment (Iredale 2005; Purkayastha 2005). Limited access to public funds and free childcare in many countries further constrains their labour market participation. Lower access to social networks and the absence of extended family support, such as grandparents, can also reduce women's opportunities for employment, explaining higher levels of migrant women exiting the labour market following childbirth, when compared to the native-born (Vidal-Coso, 2017). To this, one must add gendered inequalities in countries of origin, which shape both migration decisions and post-migration trajectories. Importantly, however, recent evidence highlights that these differences are intersectional: the experiences of migrant men and women are influenced by multiple, overlapping factors, which in some contexts result in men being more disadvantaged or migrant women fairing better than their native counterparts (Arai, Bursell, y Nekby 2016; He y Gerber 2020; Jorgensen 2025; Vidal-Coso 2019) (He & Gerber, 2019; Vidal-Coso, 2017; Arai et al., 2018; Jorgensen, 2025).

Latin America and the Caribbean have historically exhibited the highest rates of female labour market participation among regions in the Global South, a trend closely linked to the feminisation of international migration, both within and beyond the region, and a gradual move toward gender parity (Bastia and Busse, 2011). On the one hand, the gendered structure of labour demand in destination societies—particularly those further along in the demographic transition, such as Chile and Argentina—has generated strong demand for

female migrant labour in the care and domestic work sectors (Arriagada & Todaro, 2012). On the other hand, women from countries such as Bolivia, Paraguay, and Peru have relied on extended family and care networks in their home countries, enabling them to migrate independently to take up live-in domestic positions in the Southern Cone (Cerruti & Parado, 2015). In a study conducted in 2002 in Chile, Stefoni showed that most domestic workers from Peru and Bolivia in Chile had children, but did not live with them (Stefoni 2002).

At the same time, recent decades have seen rising numbers of forcibly displaced people from Colombia, Central America, Haiti, and Venezuela moving across Latin America, with Chile emerging as one of the main destinations. Migration patterns vary considerably across these groups. Colombian and Venezuelan mobility has often involved high rates of children migrating with their families, or reuniting after short periods of separation (Jorgensen Forthcoming; Mejía Ochoa 2012). Haitian migration, by contrast, has been predominantly male and characterised by extended family separation, although it has gradually become more feminised in recent years (Cerrutti 2022). These flows are also diverse in their social composition: for example, Venezuelan migration to Chile was initially dominated by highly educated people but has since become more socioeconomically varied (SJM 2020). Such diversity in socioeconomic background, migration pathways, and family composition is likely to have markedly different implications for migrants' labour market outcomes across gender lines.

Data

The 2022 National Migration Survey was conducted by the World Bank, the UC Center for Longitudinal Survey Studies, SERMIG, and the National Institute of Statistics (INE) to provide updated information on the recent migrant population in Chile: those who arrived between 2016 and 2020. Its sampling design ensures representativeness by nationality, sex, age, and year of arrival, allowing for detailed analysis of recent migration flows. The survey provides independent representativeness for the five main national groups—Bolivia, Colombia, Haiti, Peru, and Venezuela—alongside an aggregated category for other nationalities. Unlike previous surveys that only represent the overall migrant population, this design allows for disaggregated analysis across groups and a focused understanding of recent arrivals. This survey is the first migration survey in Chile based on an administrative sampling frame from the National Migration Service, following the model of the U.S. National Immigration Survey (NIS). This frame includes migrants who have completed administrative procedures with SERMIG, providing an updated universe of residents with settlement intentions.

Methods

The first part of the analysis will provide a detailed description of the key variables associated with immigrants' employment patterns in Chile. Outcome variables include labour market participation, unemployment, occupational status, domestic work, and labour market informality. These indicators will be analyzed across sex and nationality groups to identify patterns of labour inclusion and gender disparities among recent immigrants (arriving between 2016 and 2020). Independent variables will capture dimensions related to human capital, family responsibilities, and institutional barriers. These include educational attainment, number of children in the household, number of dependent children remaining in the country of origin, and access to and success in the validation of educational certificates.

Together, these measures will allow assessing to what extent differences in education, family composition, and credential recognition shape gender gaps in labour market outcomes among migrant groups.

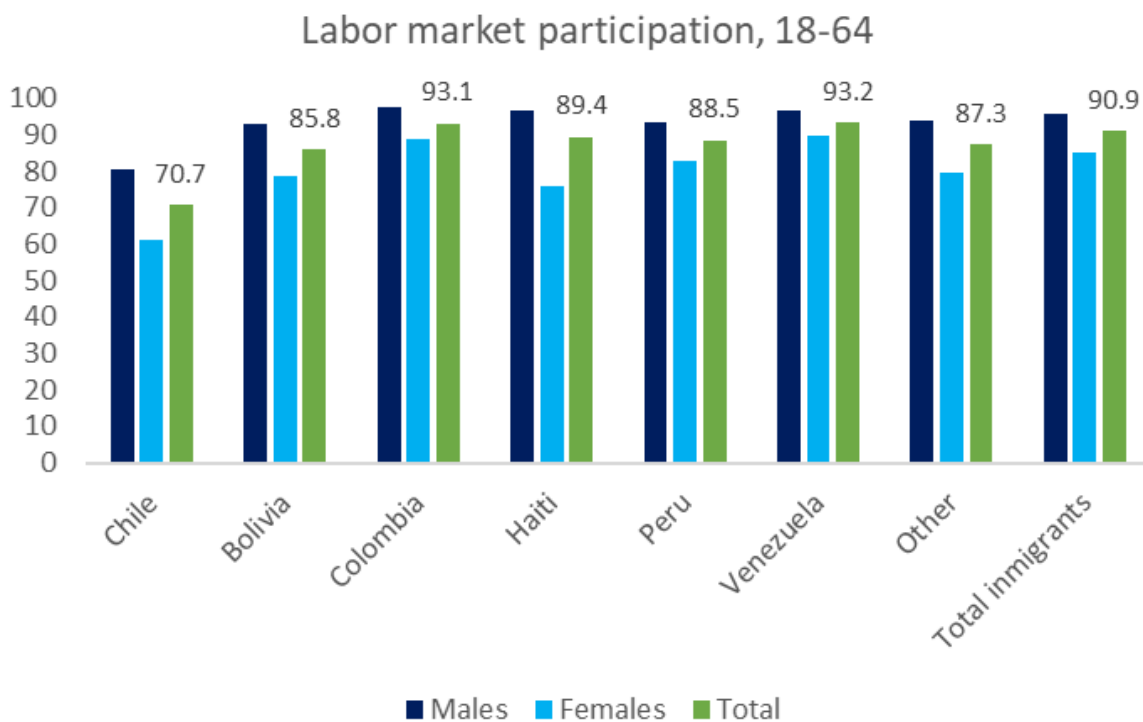
The second part of the analysis will consist of a multivariate regression analysis of each of the outcome variables associated with employment patterns—namely, labour market participation, unemployment, occupational status, domestic work, and informality. This stage aims to quantify the extent to which gender differences in labour market outcomes among recent immigrants can be explained by disparities in human capital, family structure, and institutional barriers. Each model will include a set of sociodemographic control variables, such as age, region of residence, among others, to account for compositional effects. The regression results will help disentangle the relative contribution of individual factors to gender gaps in labour inclusion across different national origin groups.

Preliminary Results: Employment patterns.

In this section we present preliminary results concerning the outcome variables associated with employment patterns to be analyzed, namely: labour market participation, unemployment, occupational status, domestic work, and labour market informality.

Similar to previous studies on immigrant labour market integration in Chile (Arriagada y Todara 2012; Doña 2016), gender gaps in key labour market indicators remain substantial for all migrant groups. Regarding labour force participation, migrant women display lower participation rates than men (Figure 1). At the same, migrant women present higher rates compared to Chilean women across all migrant groups. The largest gender differences in participation rates are observed among Haitian and Bolivian migrants.

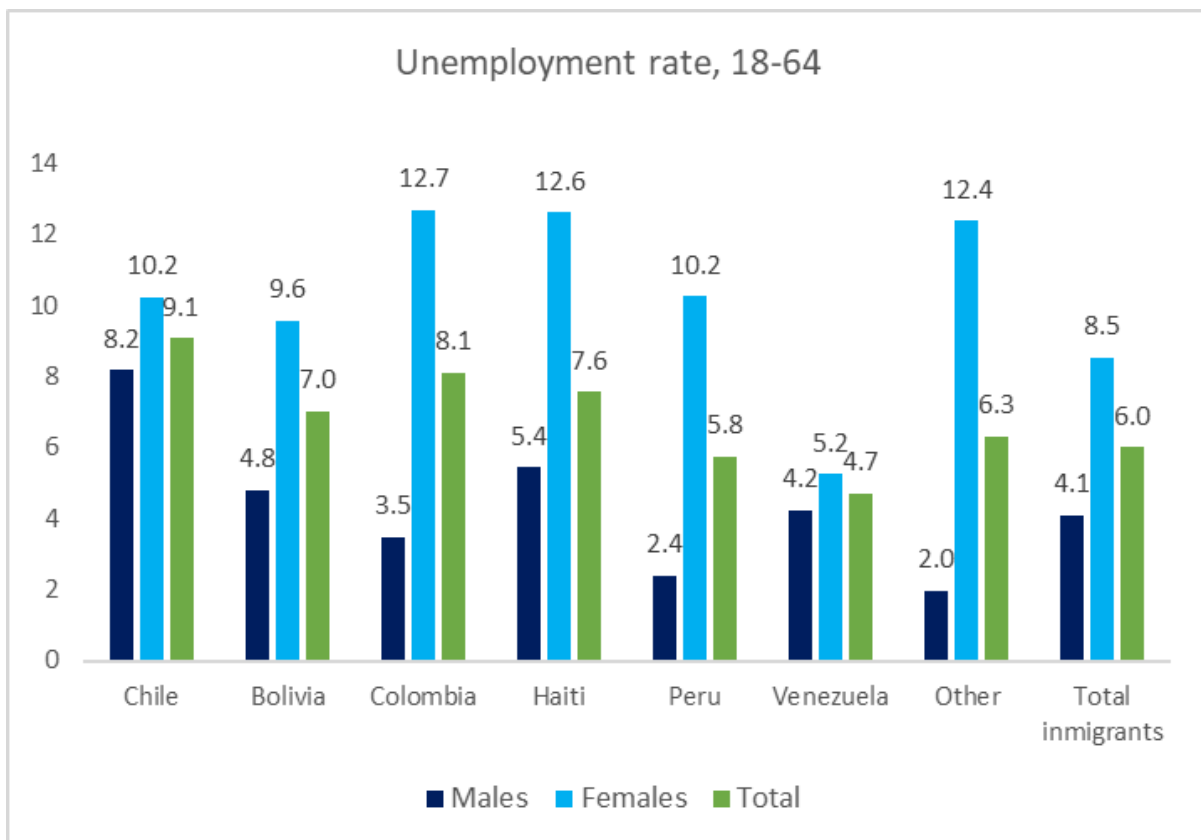
Figure 1



Source: National Immigration Survey 2022 for immigrants; National Employment Survey for Chileans (January-March 2022).

In terms of unemployment (Figure 2), disaggregated data show that migrant men from Colombia, Haiti, and other nationalities experience higher unemployment than Chilean men. Moreover, gender gaps in unemployment are wider among immigrants than among the Chilean population. The greatest disparities are found among migrants from Colombia, Peru, and Haiti. Qualitative research has further shown that limited access to childcare services acts as a key barrier explaining part of the gender differences in labour market participation between migrant women and men (Hoop et al. 2021).

Figure 2



Source: National Immigration Survey 2022 for immigrants; National Employment Survey for Chileans (January-March 2022).

With respect to occupational status, Figure 3 shows that self-employment is the second most common form of employment among working migrants, although its prevalence is lower than among Chilean workers. Notably, Bolivian women present the highest rates of self-employment.

Figure 3

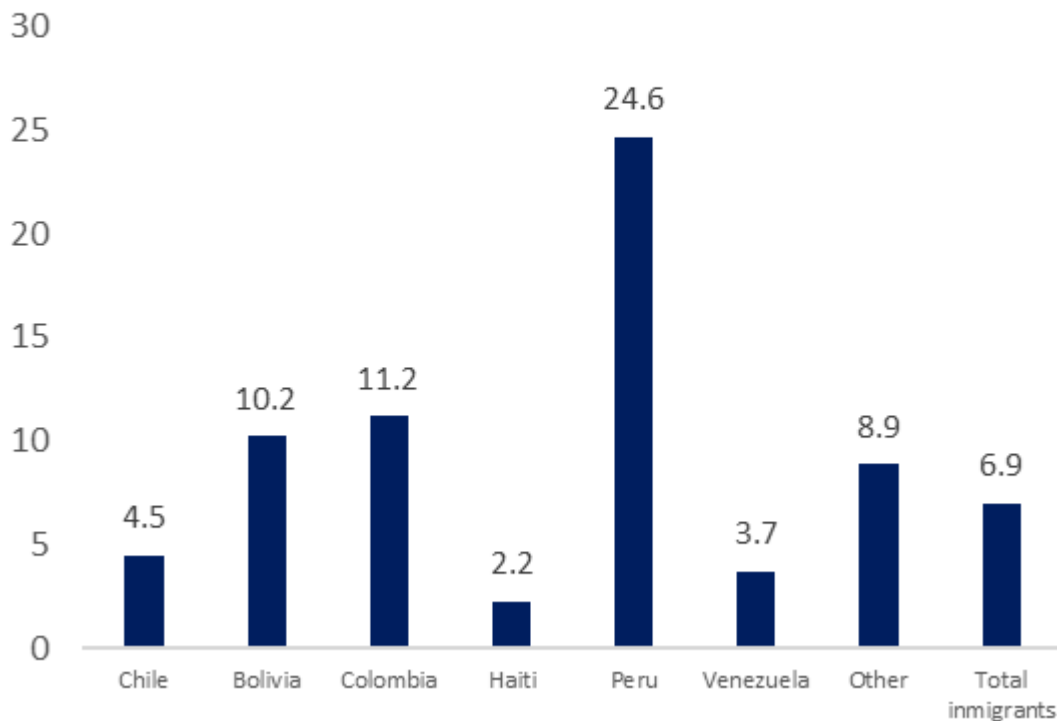
Percentage employed as self-employed, by sex



Source: National Immigration Survey 2022 for immigrants; National Employment Survey for Chileans (January-March 2022).

Employment as domestic workers among migrant women is nearly twice as high as among Chilean women. The proportion of migrant women employed in domestic services is particularly high among Peruvians, followed by Colombians and Bolivians.

Percentage employed as domestic worker. (women).



Source: National Immigration Survey 2022 for immigrants; National Employment Survey for Chileans (January-March 2022).

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