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## Analysis in Brief

# Immigrant women among board directors and officers: From admission in Canada to executive roles

by Léa-Maude Longpré-Verret and Ivy McKee

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# Immigrant women among board directors and officers: From admission in Canada to executive roles

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## Acknowledgements

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## Abstract

This study provides the first socioeconomic profile of immigrant women board directors and officers in Canada from an intersectional lens. It presents exploratory estimates by linking data from the *Corporations Returns Act* with those from the Longitudinal Immigration Database and the T1 Family File. The study analyzes the characteristics of immigrant executives at admission and disparities in family, work and income characteristics, mainly by gender and immigrant status. Furthermore, it informs on the types of businesses in which diverse women executives contribute to corporate governance and strategic decision making.

## 1. Introduction

The underrepresentation of women persists in management and leadership positions despite their significant gains in the workplace and their higher levels of educational attainment (Moyser 2017; Osler 2021). In the late 2010s, women accounted for one in two workers, whereas among executives, women represented about one in five board directors (Osler 2021; Statistics Canada 2019; Statistics Canada 2020a; Statistics Canada 2021). An initiative to increase the representation of women in leadership positions was broadened to various groups of the Canadian population to include further diversity in top management positions. For that purpose, regulations were implemented through the *Canada Business Corporations Act* (CBCA). Under this regulation, federally regulated corporations are required to share information on the composition of their board members and senior management who are part of the four employment equity designated groups: women, visible minorities, persons with disabilities and Indigenous individuals.<sup>1,2</sup>

To expand on information known on diversity and women in top decision-making roles in Canada, this study sheds light on the path to board directorship and officer positions for immigrant women. Recent findings showed that immigrant women were underrepresented in decision-making roles, as 18% of executive women were immigrants, while immigrant women accounted for one in four Canadian women workers (Longpré-Verret and Richards 2021).

This intersectional analysis fills an important data gap on immigrant women accessing leadership positions in Canada by showing for the first time the socioeconomic characteristics of immigrant executives at admission, and by examining the pay gap between immigrant and Canadian-born executives through a gender lens. The role of women in leadership positions is one of the six key areas of the Gender Results Framework implemented by the federal government to advance gender equality in Canada; having women at all levels of decision making creates a more fair and democratic society.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Statistics Canada was mandated in Budget 2021 to put the Disaggregated Data Action Plan into effect to promote intersectional analyses on specific groups.

This study also takes place in a particular context as the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the contributions of newcomers to the well-being of communities and across all sectors of the economy, and how they were disproportionately represented among essential workers (Statistics Canada 2020b). Concurrently, the aging population, combined with the reduction of the workforce, creates challenges to recruitment, while population growth in Canada is mainly driven by immigration (Statistics Canada 2017a; Statistics Canada 2022a). And more

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1. Under the *Canada Business Corporations Act*, publicly traded corporations are required to disclose information on the number of women on their boards, and their diversity policies, targets and statistics in relation to the four employment equity groups for boards of directors and executive officer positions. Essentially, while it will not be mandatory for public corporations to adopt diversity policies or quotas, they will also be required to disclose whether they did so or not and—if not—to explain why.

2. The CBCA applies to specific publicly traded corporations that are federally regulated, representing a limited number of corporations in Canada. In total, about 318 companies provided disclosure on the proportion of designated groups on board directors and officer positions in 2021.

3. For more information on Gender Results Framework, see the [Gender Results Framework](#) web page.

recently, the rising number of refugees caused by the outbreak of the war in Ukraine adding to the number of refugees caused by the civil war in Syria is a factor, among others, encouraging Canada to welcome newcomers. The country seeks to attract talented workers and facilitate their integration into the labour market to ensure their engagement in and contribution to the economy and society in Canada.

To gather information on immigrant women executives, the *Corporations Returns Act* (CRA) data and the T1 Family File (T1FF) were combined for the period from 2016 to 2018, and then linked to the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB). Given the linkage exercise, the estimates presented in this study are considered exploratory, meaning that they should be vetted in future work and interpreted with caution.

This descriptive analysis also presents current demographic characteristics of immigrant women, as well as the type of firms in which they contribute compared with their Canadian-born counterparts.

## 2. Previous literature

Since 2015, publicly traded corporations have been required, under the CBCA, to disclose information to shareholders on the gender composition of their corporate board and senior management. Private organizations, measuring progress made by women in leadership and decision-making roles of publicly traded enterprises, noted some progress toward increasing women representation on boards of directors in 2020, while very little improvement was detected for representation in executive officer roles (Osler 2021; MSCI 2021). The Conference Board of Canada revealed that Canada's disclosure requirements have not improved the pace of change for the appointment of women on boards of directors. Other studies, covering publicly traded enterprises, private enterprises and government business enterprises, found that women board directors and officers were better represented in government business enterprises, large-sized enterprises and firms operating in the utilities and finance sectors (Statistics Canada 2019; Statistics Canada 2020a; Statistics Canada 2021; Statistics Canada 2022b; Longpré-Verret and Richards 2021).

Starting January 1, 2020, Canada has broadened the requirement for diversity under Bill C-25, making it mandatory for federally incorporated enterprises to disclose information on the four employment equity designated groups: women, visible minorities, persons with disabilities and Indigenous individuals. Initial information indicated that very few people who are part of employment equity designated groups occupy decision-making positions in 2020, as corporate boards were composed of 6.8% of members belonging to a visible minority group, 0.5% of persons with disabilities and 0.5% of Indigenous individuals (Osler 2021). Exploratory estimates also illustrated that visible minority women, who did reach management positions in their careers, were more likely to work in low-level positions (Longpré-Verret and Richards 2021). In regard to immigrant women, they were better represented in executive positions, though to a lesser extent than Canadian-born women. They also had a higher level of educational attainment than Canadian-born women and had more frequently chosen a field of study less common among women (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) (Longpré-Verret and Richards 2021).<sup>4</sup>

Very little is known about immigrant women in leadership and decision-making roles in Canada. Many researchers have tried to better understand the factors facilitating the participation of immigrant women in Canadian society, given that immigrant women face numerous challenges to integrate into the labour market in Canada. For example, immigrant women have more difficulty than immigrant men to gain recognition of their credentials and work experience, to find an occupation matching their field of study, and to overcome the language barrier (Grondin 2005; Liversage 2009; Houle and Yssaad 2010). Other factors related to gender also influence their participation in the labour market, as immigrant women continue to be particularly affected by cultural gender roles embraced in their source country even after immigration (Levitt 2005; Frank and Hou 2015). Some have argued that they were more likely to work in Canada if the labour force participation rate of women was high in the source country (Blau, Kahn and Papps 2011; Frank and Hou 2015).

In the following sections, the study attempts to determine whether immigrant women executives have the same socioeconomic characteristics as the broader population of immigrant women, and whether immigrant women accessing leadership positions have a different profile than Canadian-born women executives.

4. Exploratory estimates of immigrant executives were published in the study titled *Diversity Among Board Directors and Officers: Exploratory Estimates on Family, Work and Income* (Longpré-Verret and Richards 2021) by combining the CRA and the 2016 Census. In the following study, a different source of data was used to identify immigrants – the IMDB.

### 3. Data

Exploratory estimates were created using multiple datasets to conduct an intersectional analysis of board directors and officers, mainly by gender and immigrant status. Board directors, who are elected by shareholders, are responsible for supervising the activities of corporations and making decisions on those activities. As for officers, they are in charge of the day-to-day operations of the enterprise and are appointed by board directors. Together, board directors and officers form the management of the corporation.<sup>5</sup>

Financial and ownership information is collected on corporations conducting business in Canada through the CRA, along with information on board directors and officers.<sup>6</sup> These data were integrated into the Derived Record Depository (DRD), a national dynamic relational database containing only the basic personal identifiers of Canadians. From 2016 to 2018, 44% of board directors and officers were successfully linked to the DRD.<sup>7</sup> This subgroup was then integrated to the T1FF, which contains income tax returns and socioeconomic information.<sup>8</sup> To distinguish between immigrants and Canadian-born executives, this subgroup was integrated to the IMDB, which is a comprehensive source of information on the characteristics of immigrants at admission and their socioeconomic outcomes after admission.<sup>9</sup>

Among the 44,360 executives identified by the CRA from 2016 to 2018, 20,160 were successfully linked to the DRD and then to the T1FF. Out of these individuals, 3,230 were identified as immigrants within the IMDB, accounting for 16.0% of all executives. Immigrant women formed the smallest group, with 660 executives (3%), followed by immigrant men, with 2,570 executives (13%). Their Canadian-born counterparts were better represented, with 3,890 Canadian-born women (19%) and 13,040 Canadian-born men (65%) in decision-making roles.

Executives can be assigned to different positions within corporations: board director exclusively, officer exclusively, or both board director and officer. Some executives occupied both a seat on a board of directors and an officer position in the same corporation or in multiple organizations. In total, 10,930 executives held both a board director seat and an officer position, 7,800 executives occupied an officer position exclusively, and 1,430 executives contributed as board director exclusively. Given the small number of individuals occupying a board director position exclusively, they have been combined with executives who were both board directors and officers for the remainder of the study, except in the earnings section.<sup>10</sup>

Immigrants included in the estimates were admitted in Canada in different calendar years, at different ages and in different cohorts.<sup>11</sup> Because of a small sample size, the distinction between new immigrants (admitted in Canada five years ago or less), recent immigrants (admitted in Canada for more than 5 to 10 years) and long-term immigrants (admitted in Canada for over 10 years) cannot be made for nearly all estimates presented. Nevertheless, long-term immigrants constituted the largest share of immigrant executives, corresponding to 82% of immigrant women and 73% of immigrant men. Because of a small sample size, immigrants included in the estimates had a permanent or temporary status and are referred to as immigrants for the remaining of the study.<sup>12</sup> Permanent immigrants represented 91% of immigrant women executives and 85% of immigrant men executives. People must be at least 18 years old to contribute as board directors in Canada, while there is no additional age restriction for older board members.<sup>13</sup> That same age restriction was imposed on board directors and officers examined.

5. One enterprise can count only one shareholder occupying both roles of board director and officer. For more information on the roles of board directors and officers, see the [Directors and officers](#) web page.
6. The CRA is a mandatory survey for all public, private and government business corporations that meet one of the CRA thresholds for a fiscal period: gross revenue over \$200 million, assets exceeding \$600 million, or long-term debt or equity owing to non-residents surpassing \$1 million. For more information on the CRA data, see the [Corporations Returns Act \(CRA\)](#) web page.
7. When the first and last names of executives provided in the CRA questionnaire were used, 44% of executives were linked to the DRD. Some enterprises provided incomplete information (such as giving only executives' initials), preventing a successful linkage between the CRA and the DRD. Moreover, directors and officers living abroad will never be integrated in the DRD, because it contains personal identifiers only of Canadian citizens.
8. The T1FF is an administrative database that includes almost all individuals who completed an individual T1 tax return, submitted to the Canada Revenue Agency, and recipients of federal child benefits. For more information on the T1FF data, see the [T1 Family File \(T1FF\)](#) web page.
9. The IMDB is the result of a partnership between Statistics Canada; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada; and the provinces. It contains administrative information on all immigrants admitted to Canada since 1952 and on non-permanent residents admitted since 1980. More information were made available through the administration data for immigrants who were admitted after 1979. For more information on the IMDB data, see the [Longitudinal Immigration Database \(IMDB\)](#) web page.
10. Different estimates are displayed for directors exclusively and for both directors and officers in the earning section, given that the role occupied within an organization influenced the employment income of individuals.
11. Immigrants who were younger than 18 years old at admission were included in the estimates.
12. Immigrants refers to a person who is, or who has ever been, a landed immigrant or permanent resident. Such a person has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. While individuals with a temporary status are non-permanent residents who have been issued temporary resident permits.
13. For more information on the age of directors and officers in Canada, see the [Directors and officers](#) web page.

The database used in this study is not necessarily a representative sample of all executives covered by the CRA. Further investigations showed that this sample has a bias toward women, resulting in a potential overrepresentation of women in executive roles. A larger sample would allow for a distinction between new, recent and long-term immigrants. Long-term immigrants may have a different profile, given that they had time to adjust their employment strategy to access top management positions in the host country (e.g., returning to school or language training).

Nonetheless, this study highlights key characteristics of immigrant and Canadian-born women in management roles and draws the path to board directorship and officer positions for diverse women. This intersectional analysis also raises important issues related to discrimination in the labour market, such as gender diversity in top decision-making roles, equal access to management positions, and equal pay when holding similar roles and levels of competencies.

## 4. Results

### **Immigrant women executives are more likely to be admitted as a spouse or dependant applicant under the economic category than immigrant men executives**

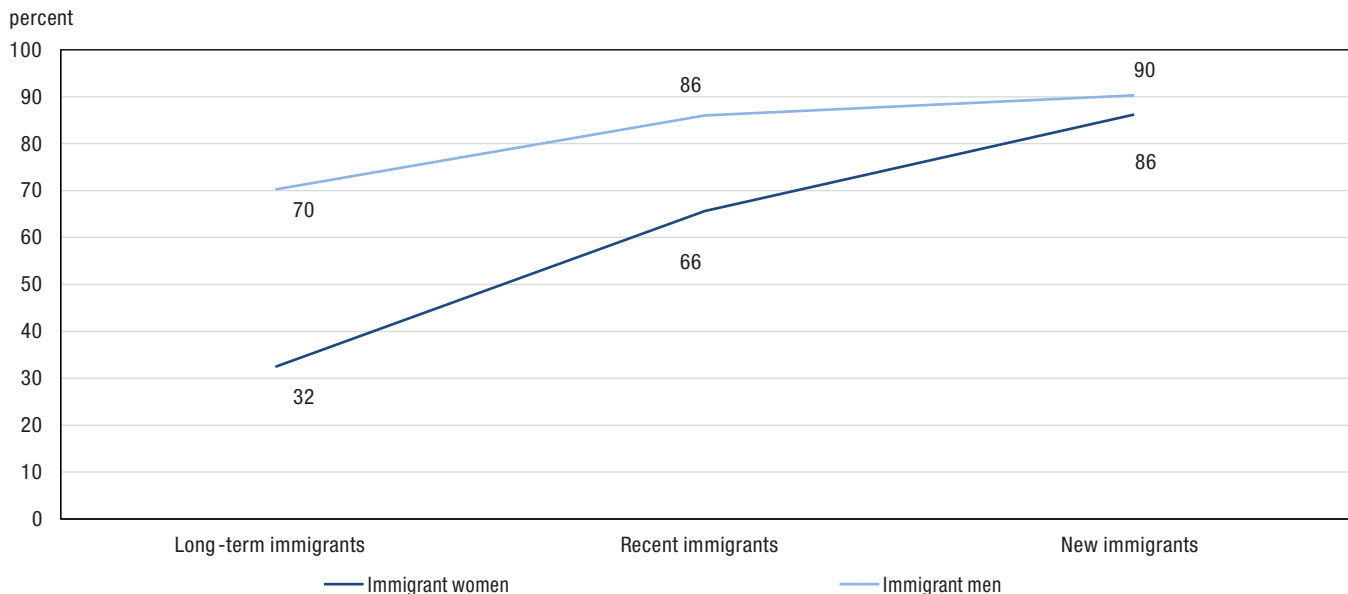
Canadian immigrants can be admitted under three broad admission categories: economic immigrants, family immigrants and refugees.<sup>14</sup> The vast majority of immigrant executives were admitted under the economic immigrant category, accounting for two in three immigrant women executives and more than four in five immigrant men executives (Table 1). Meanwhile, about half of the broader immigrant population has been admitted under that category for both genders (Statistics Canada 2017b).

Economic immigrants are selected based on their ability to contribute to the Canadian economy. They must meet a number of admission criteria assessing their human capital, such as their level of education, work experience, knowledge of official languages and age (Houle and Yssaad 2010). Within a heterosexual couple, the spouse who meets the most admission criteria is the most likely to be designated as the principal applicant. This is typically the man, whereas economic immigrant women are more likely to be admitted as spouses and dependant applicants (Banerjee and Phan 2014; Bonikowska and Hou 2017). The ability of the spouses and dependant applicants is not assessed under admission criteria, and they are automatically admitted with the principal applicant. Besides, spouses of principal applicants experience a greater drop in their occupation status after immigration. They are not able to overcome this drop with tenure, while principal applicants do so (Banerjee and Phan 2014). Nonetheless, a trend toward gender parity has been observed in recent years because of the growing number of economic immigrant women admitted as principal applicants in the broader immigrant population (Hudon 2015).

Among economic immigrant executives aged 18 years old and over at admission, these trends were also observed, as women were about 1.8 times (42%) less likely than men (75%) to arrive in Canada as principal applicants, while being more likely to be admitted as a spouse or dependant economic applicant. When immigrant executives were examined by the number of years since admittance to Canada (i.e., new immigrants, recent immigrants and long-term immigrants), a gender gap of 38% was observed among long-term immigrants, and it narrowed gradually to reach 4% among new immigrants (Chart 1).

Immigrant women executives were also more likely to be admitted through the family-sponsorship category than immigrant men executives. Similarly, a trend toward gender parity did show that the share of new immigrant women admitted in the family-sponsorship category decreased compared with long-term immigrant women. Moreover, immigrant women executives (27%) were less likely than the broader population of immigrant women (35%) to be admitted for family reunification (Statistics Canada 2017b).

14. Admission category refers to the immigration program's name under which an immigrant was first granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration officials since 1980. For more information on the admission category, see the [Immigration Longitudinal Database \(IMDB\) Technical Report, 2020](#) web page.

**Chart 1****Share of economic immigrant executives admitted as principal applicants, by cohort and gender, 2016 to 2018**

**Note:** Only immigrants who were at least 18 years old at admission were included in the estimates of Chart 1.

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2019; and *Corporations Returns Act*, 2016 to 2018.

### **Immigrant women executives tend to be younger, to have a lower educational attainment and less likely to converse in either French or English**

Immigrants are typically admitted at a young age. Younger immigrants (aged 24 to 35 years) were more likely than older immigrants to receive recognition of their credentials and work experience by employers (Houle and Yssaad 2010). The recognition of foreign credentials and work experience is an important factor facilitating the integration of skilled immigrants into the labour market, as is the ability to speak at least one of the official languages (Adamuti-Trache and Sweet 2005; Houle and Yssaad 2010). Among the broader immigrant population, immigrant women tended to arrive at a younger age, have attained a lower level of education and be less likely to speak an official language than immigrant men (Hudon 2015). These gender differences were also reflected between immigrant women and immigrant men occupying leadership positions.

Similarly, immigrant women executives were admitted in Canada at a younger age than immigrant men executives, as women were 22 years of age on average at admission, compared with men, who were 27 years of age on average (Table 1). Immigrant women executives were also more likely to not speak one of the official languages, with 23% reporting knowing neither English nor French, compared with 10% of immigrant men executives. Of the immigrant executives unable to converse in English or French, the majority was born in Asia.

Immigrant women executives reported a lower educational attainment upon arrival than immigrant men executives, as 46% of immigrant women had a bachelor's degree or above, compared with 59% of immigrant men. This gender gap disappeared for principal applicants admitted under the economic category, as the results suggested no statistical difference between the level of education attainment of immigrant women executives and immigrant men executives—a trend that was also observed among the broader immigrant population of principal applicants admitted under the economic category (Bonikowska and Hou 2017).

### **Immigrant women executives are more than four times as likely to be born in the United States or the United Kingdom as the broader population of immigrant women**

An important shift occurred in the source countries of immigrants after the 1970s, with Asia becoming the most common region of birth. Over the years, Asia stayed the most frequently reported region of birth among immigrants and was the birthplace of 63% of immigrant women who arrived in Canada between 2011 and 2016



(Picot 2008; Statistics Canada 2017b). Before this shift, the most frequently reported region of birth was Europe (Picot 2008).

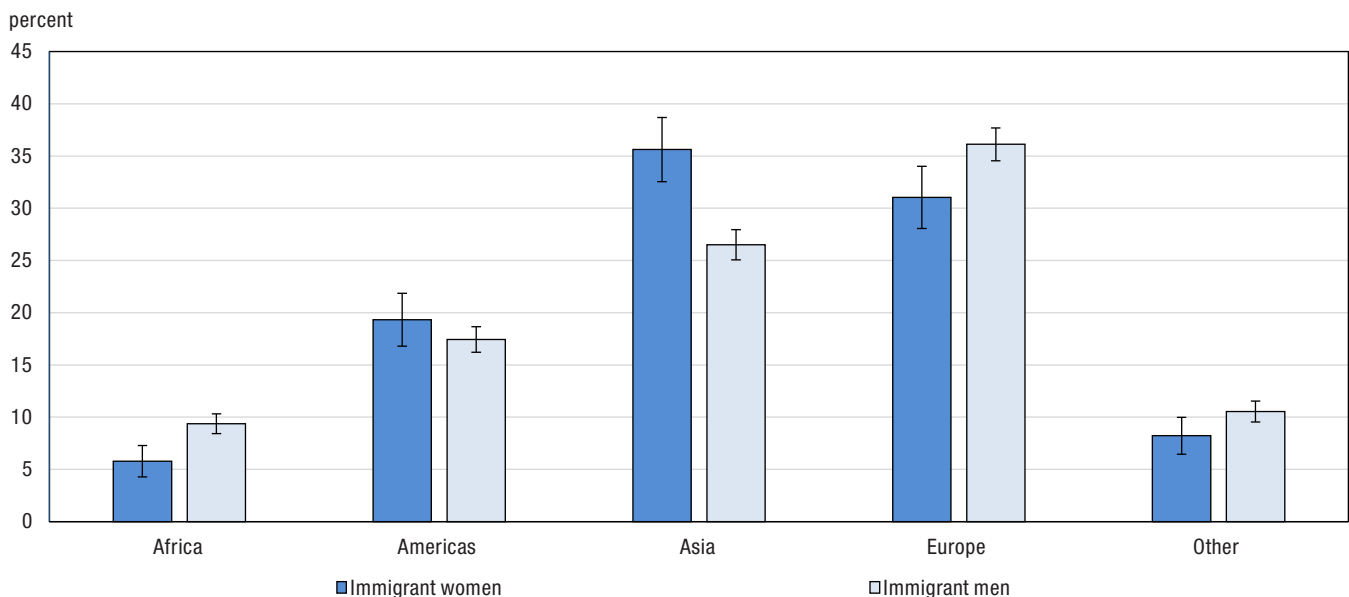
Asia was the most prevalent region of birth among immigrant women executives, as more than one-third of immigrant women were born in that region (Table 1 and Chart 2). Differences were noticed for the top five countries of birth, as immigrant women executives were four times more likely to be born in the United Kingdom or the United States than the broader population of immigrant women. For immigrant women executives, the United States (12%) ranked first as birth country, followed by the United Kingdom (11%), China (8%), Hong Kong (6%) and France (5%). Meanwhile, the top five countries of birth among the overall population of immigrant women were China (11.1%), the Philippines (10.6%), India (10.0%), the United States (2.7%) and the United Kingdom (2.6%) (Statistics Canada 2017b).<sup>15</sup>

Results were different for immigrant men executives, because Europe was the most common region of birth (36%), and the top five source countries were the United Kingdom (16%), the United States (12%), India (6%), France (5%) and South Africa (4%). The top five birth countries also differed from those of the overall population of immigrant men: India (11.0%), China (9.8%), the Philippines (8.5%), the United Kingdom (3.1%) and the United States (2.6%) (Statistics Canada 2017b).<sup>16</sup>

Additional differences were found when examining the birth country of immigrant executives by number of years since admission. For example, European and American immigrant women were more likely to be new immigrants than Asian women, who were more likely to be long-term immigrants.<sup>17</sup> Among immigrant men, Europe was always the most frequently declared birth continent regardless of the number of years spent in Canada.

Some immigrants reached decision-making roles only after a few years lived in Canada. Several studies have demonstrated that recent immigrants from the United States, the United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, other Western countries were more successful in integrating the Canadian labour market, mainly because of the recognition of their credentials and their origin from an English-speaking region (Boyd and Thomas 2002; Adamuti-Trache and Sweet 2005; Houle and Yssaad 2010).

**Chart 2**  
**Continent of birth of immigrant executives, by gender, 2016 to 2018**



**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2019; and *Corporations Returns Act*, 2016 to 2018.

15. For the overall immigrant population, the estimates cover all immigrants who arrived in Canada between January 1, 1980, and May 10, 2016. For more information, see [Immigrant population by selected places of birth, admission category and period of immigration](#).

16. *Ibid.*

17. Throughout this study, the term "American women" refers to all women executives who were born in one of the Americas' countries (United States, Mexico, Argentina, Cuba, etc.), except for Canadian-born women executives who are not part of this sub-group.

### Immigrant women executives are the youngest

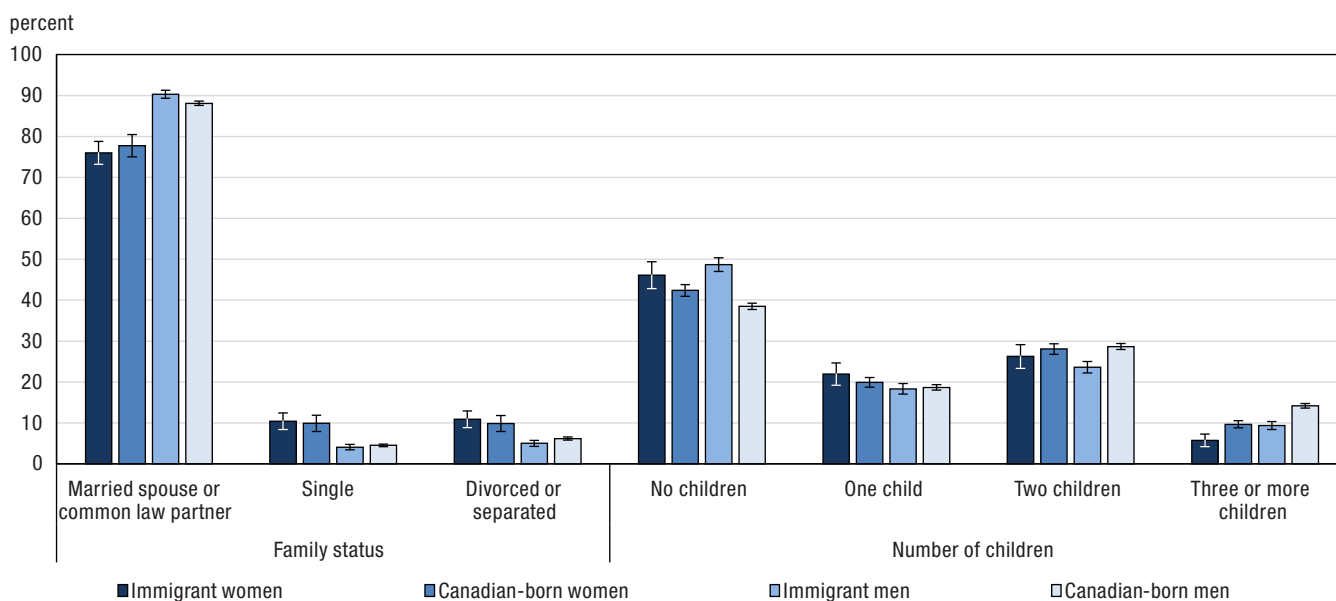
Even though women’s participation in the labour market has substantially increased, they continue to play a more important role in regard to housework, childrearing and caregiving responsibilities, and they spend more time than men doing unpaid work (Moyser and Burlock 2018). Among workers in leadership or high-paying positions, similar gender gaps were detected since women were less likely to be in a relationship and to have children (Richards 2019; Longpré-Verret and Richards 2021). These gender gaps were partly reflected among immigrant executives and their Canadian-born counterparts.

Immigrant women executives were younger and less likely to be in a relationship than immigrant men executives.<sup>18</sup> For example, they were 51 years old on average, compared with an average age of 54 for immigrant men executives (Table 2). Moreover, three-quarters of immigrant women were married or in a common-law relationship, compared with 9 in 10 immigrant men (Chart 3). This gender gap slightly narrowed for core-aged immigrant workers aged 25 to 54 years, a period when family responsibilities may be greater. There were similar gender gaps between Canadian-born women and Canadian-born men, as Canadian-born women were on average two years younger and 10 percentage points less likely to be married or in a common-law relationship than Canadian-born men.

Men working in top management or high-paying positions were more likely to have children than women with similar professional responsibilities (Richards 2019; Longpré-Verret and Richards 2021), while the trend was mixed for immigrant and Canadian-born executives (Table 2). The difference in the proportion of immigrant women (46%) and immigrant men (49%) who did not have children was not statistically significant, while it was for Canadian-born executives (43% for Canadian-born women versus 39% for Canadian-born men). Canadian-born men were also more likely to have a larger family, with three or more children.

In contrast with those in the broader immigrant women population—who tended to be older, more likely to be in a relationship and more likely to have children than their Canadian-born counterparts (Hudon 2015)—the results indicated that immigrant women executives were on average younger than Canadian-born women executives (51 years old versus 53 years old) and equally likely to live with a spouse or common-law partner and to have children.<sup>19</sup>

**Chart 3**  
**Family status and number of children of executives, by immigrant status and gender, 2016 to 2018**



Sources: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2019; T1 Family File 2016 to 2018; and Corporations Returns Act, 2016 to 2018.

18. The marital status was taken from the T1FF and reflects the marital status of the individual once in management position —specifically, in the most recent year of appearance in the CRA.  
 19. These results were not consistent with the ones published in the study by Longpré-Verret and Richards (2021). Different data sources were used to create estimates in that particular study. For more information, see [Diversity Among Board Directors and Officers: Exploratory Estimates on Family, Work and Income](#).

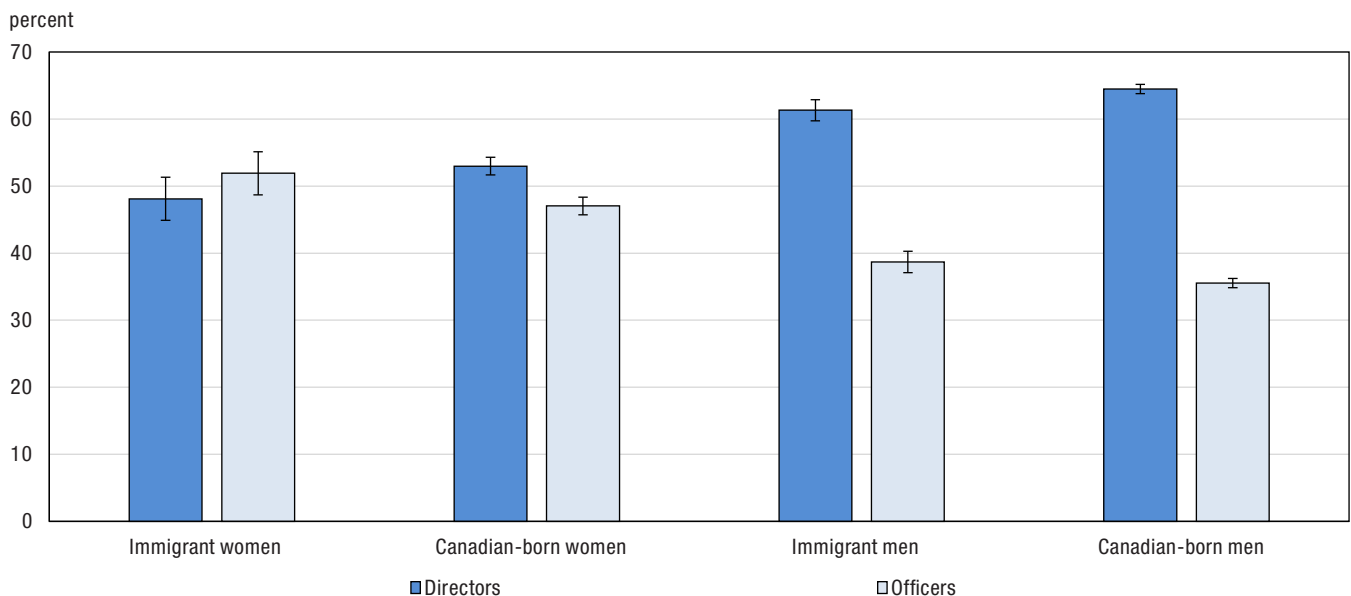
## Immigrant women and Canadian-born women are underrepresented in decision-making positions

About one in four executives were women, and of these, about one in seven were immigrant women. In the broader Canadian working population, women represented almost half of the workforce, while immigrant women counted for one in four women, reflecting the underrepresentation of Canadian-born women and immigrant women in decision-making roles.

Differences were observed in the roles played by immigrant women executives compared with Canadian-born women (Chart 4). The exploratory estimates revealed that immigrant women were equally likely to work as board directors (48%) or officers (52%), since the difference between these two estimates was not statistically significant. Canadian-born women were more likely to contribute as board directors (53%), immigrant men were more likely to occupy a role of board director (61%) than an officer role (39%), and Canadian-born men were also more likely to work as board directors (64%) than officers (36%).

Consistent with previous findings (Muñoz-Bullón 2010; Carter, Franco and Gine 2016), women officers were less likely to occupy top officer roles (e.g., chairperson or president of a company) compared with men officers (Table 4). For example, immigrant women officers were more than two times less likely than immigrant men officers to be president of a company (10% compared with 22%, respectively). Conversely, immigrant women were considerably more likely than immigrant men officers to hold secretary or assistant secretary positions—lower-level positions, or ones with less decision-making authority. These patterns were also observed among Canadian-born executives.

**Chart 4**  
Share of executives by decision-making role, immigrant status and gender, 2016 to 2018



Sources: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2019; and *Corporations Returns Act*, 2016 to 2018.

## Asian women are the most prevalent in board director roles, whereas European women are the most prevalent in officer positions

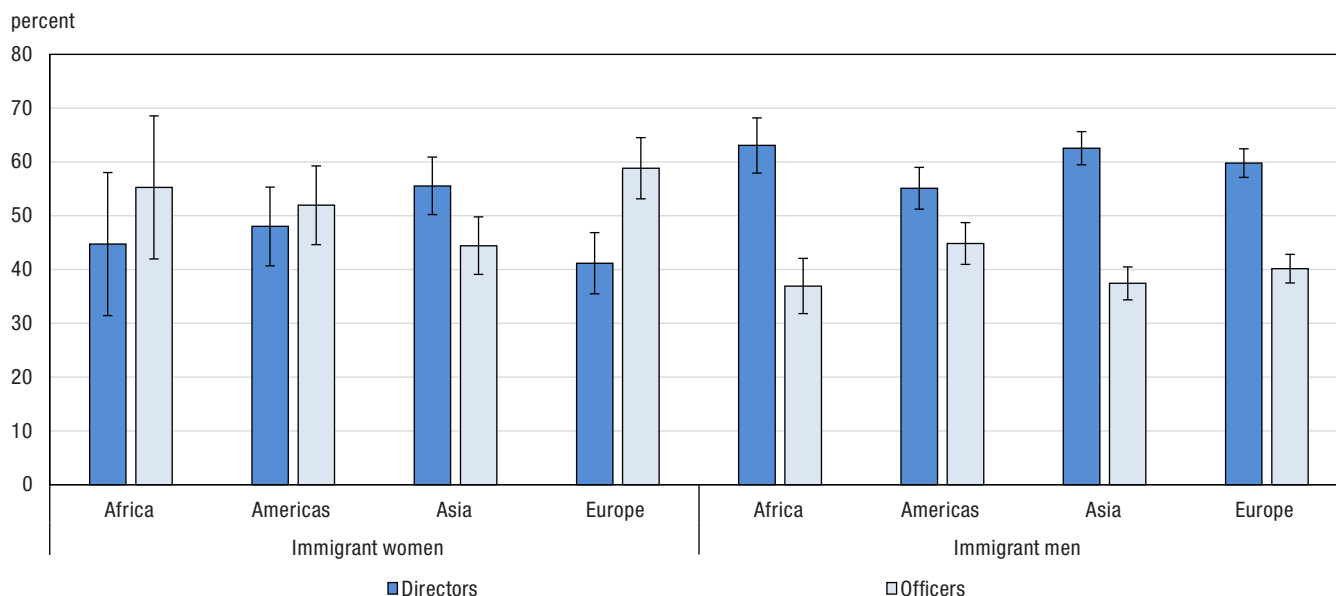
Differences were also observed in the executive roles played by immigrants according to their region of birth (Chart 5). Among all women executives, Asian women had greater similarity with Canadian-born women, as both were more likely to work as board directors (56% versus 53%, respectively). In contrast, greater differences were shown with European women, who were more frequently working as officers (59%) than Canadian-born women (47%). Nevertheless, European women officers had similar level of influence within corporations, being as likely as Canadian-born women to work in top decision-making roles.<sup>20</sup>

20. Top decision-making roles include the following officer roles: president of a corporation, chairperson, vice-president or executive vice-president.

African (63%) and Asian (63%) immigrant men were almost as likely as Canadian-born men (65%) to contribute on a board of directors. Roles occupied by American immigrant men were the most distinct. They reported the highest proportion of officers relative to their Canadian-born counterparts (45% versus 36%, respectively) and the greatest participation in top decision-making roles (63% versus 59%, respectively).

### Chart 5

#### Share of immigrant executives by decision-making role, continent of birth and gender, 2016 to 2018



Sources: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2019; and *Corporations Returns Act*, 2016 to 2018.

### Immigrant women executives are more likely to work in large corporations operating in the finance sector, located in Ontario and controlled by American entities

In the Canadian labour market, women have always been better represented in the service sector than in the goods-producing sector (Moysier 2017). Likewise, immigrant women executives and Canadian-born women executives were mostly concentrated within the services industry (e.g., finance, management of companies and enterprises, or distributive trades), especially in the finance industry. Almost one-third of immigrant women worked in finance, compared with more than one in four immigrant men. The magnitude of the gender gap was more pronounced for Canadian-born executives, given that about 4 in 10 Canadian-born women occupied an executive position in finance compared with almost 3 in 10 Canadian-born men (Table 5).

Overall, immigrant women and immigrant men contributed as board directors, officers or both in similar corporations, much like Canadian-born women and Canadian-born men. Most executives worked in large private corporations, located in Ontario and controlled by Canadian entities—a firm characteristic established through the CRA to evaluate foreign control in the Canadian corporate economy (Table 5).<sup>21</sup>

Differences in the characteristics of the firms in which executives worked were greater according to the immigrant status. For example, immigrant women were better represented in corporations operating in Ontario, as almost 6 in 10 immigrant women (57%) contributed as executives in that province compared with less than 1 in 2 Canadian-born women (49%).<sup>22</sup> Conversely, immigrant women executives were almost two times less likely than their Canadian-born counterparts to contribute in corporations located in Quebec (13%), where one in four Canadian-born women worked (25%). When occupying an executive position in corporations located in Ontario, immigrant women were more likely to have declared at admission to be able to speak English, whereas English–French bilingualism was more predominant in enterprises located in Quebec.

21. Company size was determined by assets, then classified by quartile. More specifically, smaller firms were classified in the first quartile, small-to-medium companies were classified in the second quartile, medium-to-large firms were classified in the third quartile and larger firms were classified in the fourth quartile (see Table 5).

22. Across Canada, the province of Ontario reported the largest share of enterprises (46%) through the CRA. For more information, see [Statistics Canada \(2021\)](#).

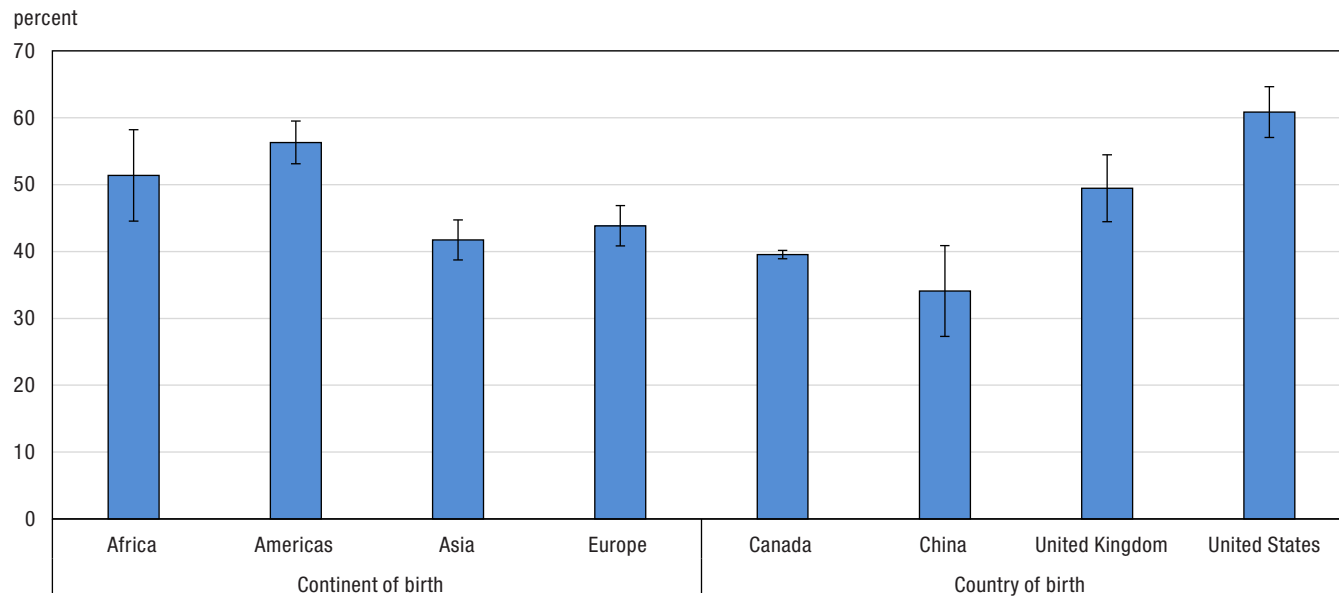
The characteristics of firms in which immigrant executives exercised leadership roles corresponded to those where visible minority executives contributed, although a recent study demonstrated that less than the majority of immigrant executives identified as belonging to a visible minority group—as less than one in three were visible minorities (Longpré-Verret and Richards 2021). Similar to visible minority women executives, immigrant women executives were more likely to contribute to American-controlled entities (2 times more) and larger corporations (about 1.2 times more) than Canadian-born women.<sup>23</sup> Similar patterns were found for men executives, except that immigrant men were more represented in Japanese-controlled corporations.

### Asian women executives are the least likely to contribute to Canadian-controlled corporations and to work within large corporations

Managers' origin matters when hiring new workers, because managers are more likely to hire workers with similar backgrounds and origins (Åslund, Hensvik and Skans 2014). Likewise, immigrant executives were more likely to work in corporations controlled in the continent where they were born than immigrant executives born in other continents (Table 6).<sup>24</sup> For instance, among executive women, Asian women were the most likely to work in Asian-controlled corporations (11%), while 1% of Canadian-born women contributed to it. By comparison, Asian women were the least likely to work in Canadian-controlled corporations (46%), while Canadian-born women were the most likely to work in Canadian-controlled corporations (79%).

The participation of immigrant women in large firms was greater than that of Canadian-born women—especially for American women—as more than one in two American women (56%) worked in the largest enterprises (Chart 6). On the contrary, Asian women (42%) were the least likely to occupy leadership roles in large firms, representing a similar share to that of Canadian-born women (40%). Examining the top country of birth in those two regions illustrated greater discrepancy; 34% of women born in China worked in large corporations, whereas 61% of women born in the United States worked in large corporations.

**Chart 6**  
Share of women executives in large firms, by selected continent and country of birth, 2016 to 2018



**Note:** Canada was not considered as a country of birth of the Americas.

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2019; and *Corporations Returns Act*, 2016 to 2018.

23. Throughout this study, the term "American-controlled enterprises" refers to enterprises operating in Canada that are controlled by entities established in the United States.

24. To determine the country of control of the enterprise, a specific approach is used. In a simple way, the country of control of the enterprise is established according to the country of residence reported by the enterprise owners. For more information, see [Concepts and indicators](#).

## Immigrant women executives register a larger gender pay gap than Canadian-born women executives

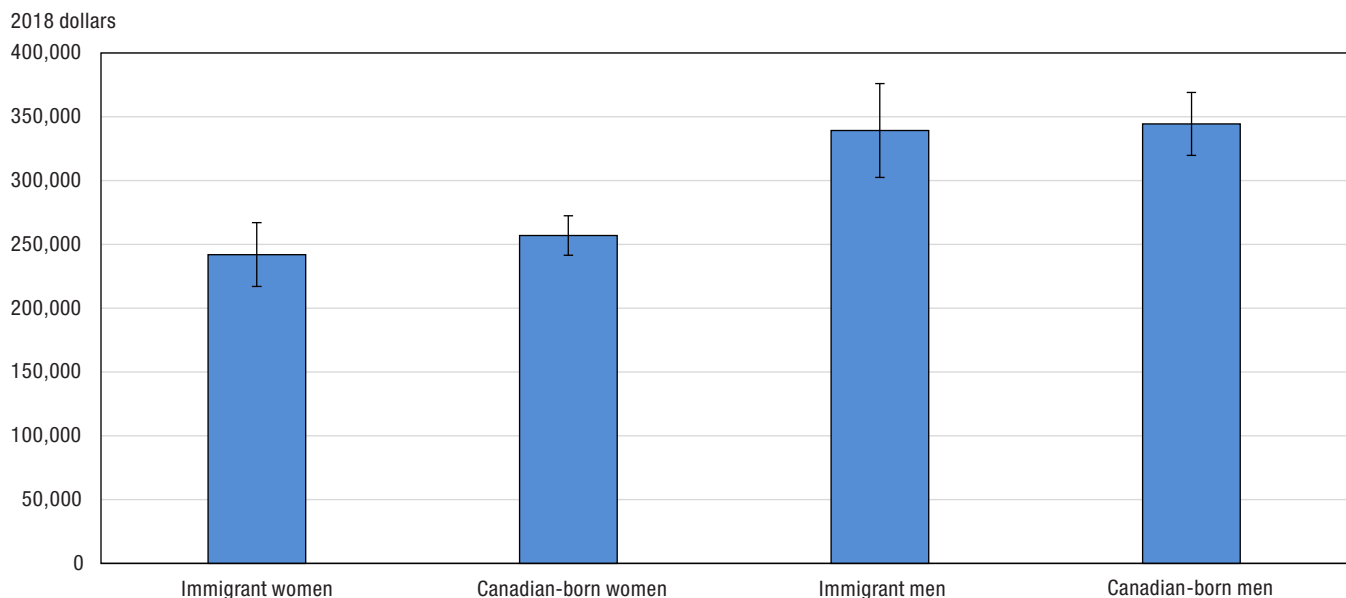
Extensive research has been conducted to determine factors contributing to the gender pay gap, as pay discrepancies persist after controlling for socioeconomic characteristics, role, type of enterprise and workplace.<sup>25</sup> Essentially, women tend to be segregated in lower-paying roles and distributed differently by industry and firm size (Card, Cardoso and Kline 2016; Pelletier, Patterson and Moyser 2019)—a pattern also observed among executives and top earners (Carter, Franco and Gine 2016; Macdonald 2019; Bonikowska, Drolet and Fortin 2019). The compensation packages accepted by women and men officers were also scrutinized, and researchers found a greater gender pay gap in the variable pay (e.g., stock options) than the base salary, distinguishing a lower-equity incentive among women officers (Muñoz-Bullón 2010; Carter, Franco and Gine 2016).<sup>26</sup> Larger gender pay gaps were also associated with male-dominated boards and less gender diversity on compensation committees (Adams and Ferreira 2009; Elkinawy and Stater 2011; Carter, Franco and Gine 2016).

Among immigrant and Canadian-born executives, immigrant women earned the lowest median employment income, at \$241,900, and encountered the greatest gender pay gap, at 29% (Chart 7). Canadian-born women earned a median employment income of \$256,900, 25% less than Canadian-born men. The employment income of executives was taken from the T4 Statement of Remuneration Paid corresponding to the income received from their everyday jobs and other payments gained in the course of their occupations (such as bonuses, director's fees, managements fees, pension, etc.).<sup>27,28</sup>

When income is examined by role, the gender pay gap for immigrants who were exclusively officers widened, at 30%, relative to the overall gender pay gap of 29% noted among immigrants, while it narrowed significantly to 4% for those contributing as board director exclusively (Table 7). Among Canadian-born individuals who were officers exclusively, a gender pay gap of 28% was found, while it was smaller for those who were board directors exclusively (12%).

### Chart 7

#### Median employment income of executives, by immigrant status and gender, 2016 to 2018



**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2019; T1 Family File 2016 to 2018; and *Corporations Returns Act*, 2016 to 2018.

25. The workplace encompasses different components of the work environment, such as workplace size, foreign ownership, training expenditure for employees and unionization. For more information, see Drolet (2002).

26. The term "equity incentive" refers to a component of an overall compensation package (shares, stock options, etc.) that gives employees the opportunity to own shares in the company they work for.

27. The income of executives was taken from the employment income declared in the T4 Statement of Remuneration Paid available in the T1FF for 2016, 2017 and 2018. Income values for 2016 and 2017 were adjusted for inflation, with the 2018 dollars as the reference period. The income values available in the T1FF were an aggregation of all the T4 received during one fiscal year by board directors and officers. The income values may include employment incomes that were not earned as board director or officer.

28. For more information on employment income, see [Employment income](#).

In addition to gender obstacles, immigrant women face challenges related to their immigrant status when integrating into the Canadian labour market that explain the lower employment outcomes (e.g., employment rate and earnings) of immigrant women compared with their Canadian-born counterparts, particularly for new and recent immigrants (Yssaad and Fields 2018). Disparities tend to narrow with longer tenure in Canada, and recent data indicated an improvement in the earning of immigrants, tightening the pay gaps further between immigrants and their Canadian-born counterparts (Hudon 2015; Crossman, Hou and Picot 2021). For immigrant executives, these trends were not fully aligned with the literature.

The difference in the median employment income of immigrant women executives and their Canadian-born counterparts was not statistically significant, which was the same between immigrant men executives and Canadian-born men executives.

In contrast, pay gaps differed greatly between immigrant women executives and Canadian-born women executives by the region or country of birth of immigrants (Table 7). For example, immigrant women born in the United States earned a median employment income 15% higher than the one of Canadian-born women. Conversely, Canadian-born women earned a median employment income 34% higher than Chinese women.<sup>29</sup> The extent of the pay gaps was even greater among men executives, as Chinese men earned a median employment income 1.8 times less than Canadian-born men and 2.6 times less than men born in the United States.

## 5. Summary

This is the first study to provide an overview of the socioeconomic profile at admission of immigrant executives and examine the pay gaps of executives through an intersectional lens, by gender and immigrant status. The estimates were created by linking company data to the IMDB. While the results are considered exploratory and should be interpreted with caution, they do begin to build our understanding of the characteristics of immigrant women who are breaking the glass ceiling in reaching executive positions. Essentially, immigrant women executives shared similarities with Canadian-born women executives in terms of the extent of their roles, the type of enterprises in which they contributed as executives, and their current family situation. In contrast, the socioeconomic profile of immigrant women executives differed, to a greater extent, to the profile of the overall population of immigrant women.

Consistent with the broader population of immigrant women, immigrant women executives arrived in Canada at a younger age, were less likely to speak one of the official languages and had a lower level of education attainment than immigrant men executives at admission. In contrast with the broader population of immigrant women, immigrant women executives were more frequently admitted through the economic category and more likely to be born in Western regions, as reported for immigrant men executives.

Once in a management position, immigrant women executives were on average younger than Canadian-born women executives, and as likely to have children and to be in a relationship as them. Among the broader immigrant population, immigrant women were typically older, more likely to have children and more likely to be in a relationship than their Canadian-born counterparts.

In regard to roles, immigrant women were equally likely to work as board directors or officers, while Canadian-born women were slightly more likely to contribute as board directors. Examining estimates by region of birth shows that Asian women's participation was more similar to that of Canadian-born women, while European women differed because of their greater participation in officer positions.

Overall, immigrant women executives and Canadian-born women executives tended to participate in similar types of corporations, except a greater share of immigrant women were detected in corporations located in Ontario and entities controlled by the United States. In addition, women born in the United States were the most likely to work in the largest companies, whereas Chinese women were the least likely.

Analyzing the earnings of executives illustrated that the gender pay gap was greater between immigrant executives (29%) than Canadian-born executives (25%). It also demonstrated that immigrant women executives earned a similar median employment income than their Canadian-born counterparts. When examining the income

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29. Employment income was more frequently unavailable among Chinese immigrants.

information by region and country of birth, a pay gap between immigrant women executives and Canadian-born women did show.

Differences between immigrant women executives and Canadian-born women executives were more pronounced by region of birth. Immigrant women born in Western countries seemed to perceive a higher employment income than Canadian-born women, whereas Asian women shared even further similarities with Canadian-born women in terms of their distribution across firms, roles and incomes. To measure the contribution of each factor in the gender pay gap and immigrant pay gap of executives, econometric research would be required. Furthermore, granular financial information on the compensation packages accepted by gender and particular group would contribute to better understand its interactions with the gender pay gap of board directors and officers in Canada.



## 6. Tables

**Table 1**  
**Demographic characteristics for immigrant executives at admission, by gender, 2016 to 2018**

	Women	Men
	in years	
<b>Average age at admission</b>	22	27
	percent	
<b>Age at admission</b>		
Younger than 18 years	39.3	28.7
18 to 24 years	16.6	12.6
25 to 34 years	23.4	25.0
35 to 44 years	13.1	18.6
45 to 54 years	6.4	12.4
55 to 64 years	1.2	2.5
65 years and older	0.0	0.2
<b>Knowledge of official languages</b>		
English as a mother tongue or knowledge of English at admission	61.9	73.6
French as a mother tongue or knowledge of French at admission	2.1	3.2
Does speak English and French	12.5	13.6
Does not speak English or French	23.0	9.6
Unknown	0.5	0.1
<b>Immigrant status</b>		
Permanent	90.9	85.1
Temporary	9.1	14.9
<b>Immigrant cohort</b>		
New immigrants	12.6	18.4
Recent immigrants	5.3	8.4
Long-term immigrants	82.0	73.2
<b>Admission categories</b>		
Economic immigrant, principal applicant	31.9	65.8
<b>Skilled worker and skilled trades worker, principal applicant</b>	<b>21.9</b>	<b>45.1</b>
<b>Business class, principal applicant</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>2.0</b>
<b>Canadian Experience Class, principal applicant</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>12.2</b>
<b>Provincial nominee, principal applicant</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>6.5</b>
Economic immigrant, spouse and dependant	34.2	16.1
<b>Skilled worker and skilled trades worker, spouse and dependant</b>	<b>25.6</b>	<b>11.2</b>
<b>Business class, spouse and dependant</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>4.3</b>
<b>Canadian Experience Class, spouse and dependant</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
Immigrant sponsored by family	26.6	15.5
Humanitarian and compassionate cases, refugees, and other immigrants	7.3	2.5
<b>Education level at admission</b>		
High school or less	38.4	25.0
Postsecondary below bachelor's degree	15.4	16.0
Bachelor's degree	27.7	34.9
Master's or doctoral degree	18.5	24.1
<b>Continent and selected country of birth</b>		
Africa	5.8	9.4
<b>Republic of South Africa</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>4.0</b>
Americas	19.3	17.4
<b>United States</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>12.0</b>
Asia	35.6	26.5
<b>China</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>3.5</b>
<b>Hong Kong</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>2.6</b>
<b>India</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>6.0</b>
Europe	31.1	36.1
<b>France</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>5.2</b>
<b>Germany</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>3.5</b>
<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>10.8</b>	<b>15.9</b>
Oceania	2.1	2.3
Other	6.1	8.2

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**Notes:** Some demographic characteristics started to be collected through the Longitudinal Immigration Database in 1980, such as the level of education, the admission category and the knowledge of official languages. This is why individuals were not included in the estimates when declaring unknown. Broad admission categories and regions of birth are presented in this table, along with selected subcategories important to immigrant executives to promote more detail. The percentages of the subcategory are calculated from the total of all subcategories, not as a percentage of the broad category. Additionally, only the main subcategories for executives are shown, explaining why the total of subcategories does not sum up to 100%.

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2019; and *Corporations Returns Act*, 2016 to 2018.

**Table 2**  
**Recent demographic characteristics for all executives, by immigrant status and gender, 2016 to 2018**

	Women		Men	
	Immigrant	Canadian-born	Immigrant	Canadian-born
	in years			
<b>Average age</b>	51	53	54	55
	percent			
<b>Age</b>				
18 to 24 years	0.0	x	x	0.7
25 to 34 years	0.0	x	x	0.1
35 to 44 years	22.7	16.7	16.6	12.6
45 to 54 years	41.0	40.3	37.5	33.2
55 to 64 years	25.1	32.9	29.7	36.6
65 years and older	11.1	9.8	15.8	16.8
<b>Marital status</b>				
Married spouse or common law partner	76.0	77.7	90.3	88.1
Single	10.4	9.9	4.1	4.5
Divorced or separated	10.9	9.8	5.0	6.2
Widowed	2.7	2.5	0.6	1.2
<b>Number of children</b>				
No children	46.1	42.4	48.7	38.5
One child	21.9	19.9	18.3	18.7
Two children	26.2	28.0	23.6	28.6
Three or more children	5.8	9.7	9.4	14.2

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**Note:** Individuals were not included in estimates when declaring unknown for some demographic characteristics.

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2019; *Corporations Returns Act*, 2016 to 2018; and T1 Family File, 2016 to 2018.

**Table 3**  
**Distribution of executive positions, by immigrant status and gender, 2016 to 2018**

	Women		Men	
	Immigrant	Canadian-born	Immigrant	Canadian-born
	percent			
<b>Proportion of directors and officers</b>				
Directors exclusively	6.7	8.2	5.5	7.1
Both board directors and officers	41.4	44.7	55.8	57.4
Officers exclusively	51.9	47.0	38.7	35.5

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2019; and *Corporations Returns Act*, 2016 to 2018.

**Table 4**  
**Distribution of officer positions, by immigrant status and gender, 2016 to 2018**

	Women				Men			
	Immigrant		Canadian-born		Immigrant		Canadian-born	
	Occupy the position	Do not occupy the position	Occupy the position	Do not occupy the position	Occupy the position	Do not occupy the position	Occupy the position	Do not occupy the position
	percent							
<b>Officer positions</b>								
Chairperson	1.0	99.0	2.2	97.8	4.2	95.8	5.7	94.3
President	9.6	90.4	10.2	89.8	21.6	78.4	21.8	78.2
Vice-president	24.5	75.5	23.5	76.5	25.0	75.0	26.8	73.2
Executive vice-president	2.6	97.4	3.5	96.5	5.5	94.5	4.5	95.5
Secretary	11.1	88.9	13.4	86.6	4.3	95.7	6.8	93.2
Assistant secretary	5.7	94.3	8.4	91.6	1.5	98.5	2.5	97.5
Secretary treasurer	x	x	1.8	98.2	1.4	98.6	1.3	98.7
Treasurer	4.2	95.8	3.6	96.4	3.4	96.6	3.0	97.0
Other	47.0	53.0	45.3	54.7	45.4	54.6	43.2	56.8

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**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2019; and *Corporations Returns Act*, 2016 to 2018.

**Table 5**  
**Selected firm characteristics for executives, by immigrant status and gender, 2016 to 2018**

	Women		Men	
	Immigrant	Canadian-born	Immigrant	Canadian-born
	percent			
<b>Type of corporation</b>				
Public	3.2	2.7	3.6	2.5
Private	96.8	97.3	96.4	97.5
<b>Selected country of control</b>				
Canada	53.9	78.8	49.2	78.1
France	3.3	2.2	5.1	2.0
Germany	3.7	1.1	3.6	1.2
United Kingdom	3.7	3.2	5.1	2.4
Japan	0.6	0.5	4.5	1.1
Switzerland	1.2	0.9	2.2	1.0
United States	24.3	10.2	18.1	10.7
<b>Selected firm industry</b>				
Construction	2.5	2.4	4.1	4.1
Distributive trades	11.6	7.5	13.1	10.1
Energy	3.6	2.3	4.9	3.5
Finance	33.0	37.6	27.7	29.3
Management of companies and enterprises	12.7	16.2	12.7	16.0
Manufacturing	5.9	5.2	10.2	7.7
Utilities	3.5	2.5	1.5	2.2
<b>Size by assets</b>				
Small	18.6	19.2	16.7	19.6
Small to medium	15.1	20.4	18.5	20.1
Medium to large	19.3	20.8	23.5	22.2
Large	46.9	39.7	41.3	38.1
<b>Operating region</b>				
Atlantic region	4.2	3.7	3.1	4.5
Quebec	13.3	25.1	12.3	23.4
Ontario	57.3	48.5	57.7	44.2
Manitoba	1.8	3.1	1.2	3.3
Saskatchewan	0.4	1.5	1.2	1.9
Alberta	13.0	11.7	11.6	13.4
British Columbia	9.8	6.4	12.6	9.3
Territories	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1

**Note:** Company size was determined by assets, then classified by quartile. More specifically, smaller firms were classified in the first quartile, small-to-medium companies were classified in the second quartile, medium-to-large firms were classified in the third quartile and larger firms were classified in the fourth quartile.

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2019; and *Corporations Returns Act*, 2016 to 2018.

**Table 6**  
**Distribution of executives in enterprises controlled in selected continents, by region of birth, immigrant status and gender, 2016 to 2018**

	Women					Men					
	Immigrant				Canadian-born	Immigrant				Canadian-born	
	African	American	Asian	European		African	American	Asian	European		
	percent										
<b>Selected regions of control</b>											
Americas	15.1	36.9	23.5	20.8	10.5	14.6	36.6	13.2	16.1	11.1	
Asia	0.0	1.7	10.9	1.2	1.3	6.8	3.0	31.3	3.6	2.2	
Canada	69.9	53.3	46.0	55.2	78.8	61.4	46.3	42.9	47.3	78.1	
Europe	15.1	7.4	19.6	22.2	9.1	16.9	13.3	11.6	32.8	8.3	

**Notes:** The distribution of executives by enterprise region of control is presented as a percentage of the total number of executives by region of birth. Not all regions of control are included in the table; thus, columns may not always sum to 100%. All countries in the Americas, such as the United States, Mexico, Argentina and Cuba, are included in the selected region of control—Americas—except enterprises controlled by Canadian entities.

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2019; and *Corporations Returns Act*, 2016 to 2018.

**Table 7**  
**Income characteristics of employed executives, by immigrant status and gender, 2016 to 2018**

	Women		Men	
	Immigrant	Canadian-born	Immigrant	Canadian-born
	2018 dollars			
<b>Median income</b>	241,900	256,900	339,100	344,300
<b>Median income, directors exclusively</b>	219,500	165,700	229,800	188,000
<b>Median income, both directors and officers</b>	242,200	268,100	340,500	347,700
<b>Median income, officers exclusively</b>	242,900	260,400	347,000	360,700
<b>Median income by selected continent of birth</b>				
Africa	280,600		380,500	
Americas	273,000		435,700	
Asia	209,000		273,300	
Europe	250,600		365,900	
<b>Median income by selected country of birth</b>				
China	168,900		195,000	
Republic of South Africa	x		458,600	
United Kingdom	329,300		424,600	
United States	300,900		513,500	

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**Notes:** The income of executives comes from the employment income declared in the T4 Statement of Remuneration Paid available in the T1 Family File for 2016, 2017 and 2018. Income values for 2016 and 2017 were adjusted for inflation, with the 2018 dollars as the reference period. Estimates show a median of all income values declared regardless the year, because of the inflation-adjusted values, by immigrant status and gender for each characteristic.

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2019; *Corporations Returns Act*, 2016 to 2018; and T1 Family File, 2016 to 2018.

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