

# High-Skilled Temporary Migrants in Kitchener-Waterloo: Inherently Resilient?

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# What do we mean by gender-responsiveness?

**Gender** – socially constructed set of ideas and expectations regarding men and women's roles in society

These roles lead men, women & non-binary individuals to have different needs and experiences in their families, society and in migration

Making a policy or program **gender-responsive** means:

1. Considering gender norms, roles and inequalities
2. Taking measures to actively address them



# Spectrum of gender-responsiveness



Source: British Columbia Centre of Excellence for Women's Health



# High-skilled migrant workers in KW: Preliminary research findings

- Focus groups and interviews with temporary migrants/residents in six categories:
  - Caregivers
  - International students
  - Refugee claimants
  - **High-skill workers**
  - Low-skill workers
  - Individuals without status
- Interviews with key informants from community organizations, companies / institutions working with migrants



# Example #1: High-skilled worker resilience

- *“We can bring people here quickly but then what’s the responsibility or commitment to them?”*
- *The temporary permit “weighs on their psyche. It will impact their day-to-day work. The impact of the uncertainty is bigger than you would believe.”*
- *“In recruitment the focus is on securing the candidate, but in migration it is a continuum. You have to listen without assumptions, but may only be able to help the candidate navigate the administrative gaps but not necessarily their spouse (Canadian health card, SIN, driver licence, etc.)”*
- *“The employer emphasis is on settlement; maybe they hire legal help to get them here. But what about the international student or the person on an open work permit trying to navigate their transition [to PR]?”*
  - Tech sector recruiter and immigration consultant; advocate for Global Skills visa



# Example #2: High-skilled migrant worker resilience

*“Universities bring people using temporary schemes (esp. International Mobility Program) because it is the fastest way to get them here. But temporary residents are not eligible for settlement services and what we can do in terms of ‘on boarding’ new faculty is limited. HR now advises on housing, school, benefits, but there are always gaps. A lot falls on the spouse, mostly the wife, to figure out childcare, education...With postdocs, their families can’t access language assistance because they can’t use an open work permit for that. The university has English-language conversation services, but it is through the Students Access Office. Everything is in silos.”*

- Immigration consultant at a local university



# Example #3: High-skilled migrant worker resilience

- Monica moved to K-W 8 years ago when her Canadian husband got a job in the IT sector, initially with a work permit as she pursued PR through family sponsorship.
- She holds a BA, MA and PhD in IT Engineering but **it took her 3 years to find an appropriate job for her skill level**. She had experience as a high school teacher, but found obtaining the necessary certifications in Canada daunting. A program for skilled IT internationals in Mississauga calling for a minimum MA she said was *“basically to get you as a code monkey.”*
- *“They said to go back to school here. I don’t want to go back to school because I believe in my education. I worked with the Working Centre through Skills International – they helped me a lot to improve my resume. I went to the Communitech job fairs and got some interviews. I would go to other events to get interviews. My first year I worked giving Java classes in Toronto but I barely saw my husband. Eventually I found a company that was a good match for my skills. It took 3 years. **People are not that used to women in technology. They don’t know what your skills are like from another country. They just might not consider you.**”*
- *“It’s hard to find the resources when you come in as a trailing spouse. My husband’s company arranged our move here, but then there was no support for spouses for finding jobs. You have to fend for yourself.”*

# Toward a gender analysis of resilience among 'high-skilled' migrant workers (1)

- Clear **gender gap in recruitment** of the so-called high-skilled who are targeted through Global Skills visa to attract global talent
  - Masculinized sectors: tech sector, STEM
- Trailing spouses (disproportionately women) are needed for **social reproduction**, but there are gaps in services available to support them. They may be de-skilled / face difficulties entering the labour market or exercising their profession.
- **Broader reflection:**
  - What is needed to build resilient societies? Are stratified entry programs aimed at facilitating the mobility of the highly skilled the answer?
  - Are the highly skilled inherently resilient? Or are the trailing spouses the hidden support system absorbing the social shock of rapid relocation?
- **Gender responsiveness:**
  - What happens when we broaden our understanding of what we mean by **skill**? What if we were to make **social reproduction** our goal, not just economic competitiveness?



# Toward a gender analysis of resilience among 'high-skilled' migrant workers (2)

- “It appears that it is largely in the less state-regulated male professions, such as IT, where knowledge is most easily transferred across borders. And these skills, as well as those in finance and management, are seen as the driving forces of the global knowledge economy (Castells 1996; Kofman 2004). Yet clearly reproduction is also central to globalizing economies” - Kofman and Raghuram (2015: 16)

# Toward a gender analysis of resilience among 'high-skilled' migrant workers (3)

- “The state uses the **social reproduction** undertaken by women, including the work they do within the community in order to subsidise the private sector. Labour is being delivered by migrant women to the state which is then used to underwrite capital. Focusing on social reproduction, thus, asks **new questions about the relationship between migrant women and the production of capital**. This is particularly important given the growing emphasis on productivity and workfare as a global rhetoric which is shifting the outlines of welfare states. Given that women and men are increasingly being asked to be productive and in a context where the modes of production are being capitalized and privatized, how then does social reproduction articulate with and underwrite production?” (Kofman and Raghuram (2015: 182-3).

# Building Migrant Resilience in Cities/Immigration et résilience en milieu urbain



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