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**Argentina: International migrants and gender inequality  
in the labour market**

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## 1 CONTEXT

Argentina has proved to be, until the first half of the XXth. Century, an example of the role that international migrations from Europe have played in the growth, composition and spatial distribution of its population, the shaping of its labour force and its contribution to the social and cultural development of the country.

Since the second half of the XXth century, together with the decrease in international migrations, two novel phenomena are outlined: the change in the composition of external migration, which turns to be almost exclusively originally from bordering countries, and the emergence of a negative balance regarding the Argentinean migration.

Thus, at the same time that Argentina becomes the core of a regional migration subsystem in the South Cone, where workers from Chile, Bolivia, Uruguay and Paraguay merged in the last decades, it also becomes a caterer for professional, technical and qualified labour force which heads mainly for the U.S.A. and Canada, and in a smaller proportion for Europe. This double inclusion in the category scheme-as an expeller of part of the population towards the North American migration system and as a host country in the small regional subsystem- constitutes a peculiar aspect of a society that still perceives itself as a product of European immigration.

The population movements arriving from neighbouring countries have a longstanding tradition and have been taking place since long ago in transfrontier areas which are integrated due to shared economic, social and cultural folkways. Later, and particularly as from the 60's the bordering migration flows increasingly headed towards the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, which is at present the main destination for those immigrants, and has become the core of the Southern Cone migration subsystem in Latin America.

The incidence of the bordering migrants on the total Argentinean population has had scarcely any variation along this century: they represented between a 2% and 3%, since 1869, date in which the first National Population census took place, until the beginning of the 90's, being notorious the persistence and maintenance of these flows.

In 1991, the bordering migrants represented 2.6 per cent of the 32,6 million inhabitants in the country. However, as a consequence of changes in the composition of international streams, their presence among the whole universe of foreign immigrants tends to rise, representing at present over half of the immigrants who were born overseas. This situation, together with their preferential settlement in Buenos Aires and the suburbs, contributes to their greater social visibility.

Despite the fact that the relative representation of these migrants has not varied, the amount of immigrants has been increasing along this century with varying intensity. According to Marshall (1983) the periods of greater migration are linked to an increase in labour demand due to expansive processes in the Argentinean economy. In addition, there is the influence of the political and economic situation in their countries of origin, which create strong expelling conditions and affects the changes verified in the presence of the various nationalities.

In spite of the fluctuations in the Argentinean economy and its increasing deterioration since the mid 70's, the immigration arriving from bordering countries continued increasing and catering for a labour demand which was generated mainly, at least until 1991, by the informal sector. The pieces of research aiming at investigating the role of the bordering workers and their insertion patterns in the regional labour markets (Marshall, 1979, 1983 and Maguid, 1995, 1997), show the persistence of selective insertion patterns of immigrants from bordering countries in certain specific segments of the labour market. Until 1991, a greater diversification by sectors enabled the adaptation of the quantity and direction of the migratory

flows from bordering countries, to the additional labour force demand generated by certain segments of labour employing this workforce: some industrial activities, the construction industry, trade and services and in particular, private services such as domestic service in the case of women. It is important to point out that these migrants also play an additional role when performing jobs not accepted by the native population due to low wages or poor employment conditions.

Later, deep changes in the Argentinean economy have logically affected the functioning of the labour market. Since 1993, a dramatic increase in the unemployment rate took place, specially in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, accompanied by an increase in the labour offer, consisting of women and aged people mostly- and a decrease in the level of employment.

This situation aggravated between 1993 and 1996 when the gap between the labour offer and the proportion of those who were effectively engaged became wider still; and as a result the rate of unemployment continued increasing. Thus, after a long period of stability (1974 to 1992) in which the unemployment rate corresponding to the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area was inferior or close to 6%, it climbed to 9.6% in 1993 and continued rising up to a top 18.8% in 1996. Later, it began to drop and stabilised around a 14% up to the present.

The deepening of the employment problems is also expressed through a notorious increase in the percentage of under-employed<sup>1</sup> and the non-recorded work under wage. At the same time, an income distribution structure highly unequal tends to consolidate.

Findings from a recent research on the impact of these transformations on the role of the bordering migrants in the metropolitan labour market (Maguid, 1997), show that an important reassignment of work by sectors has taken place both for the native working population as for the neighbouring one, but the later are the least favoured being progressively relegated to more reduced niches in the labour market. The segments able to absorb labour become narrow and only remain those which have traditionally been more flexible and unfavourable in terms of salaries and employment conditions: the construction industry for male workers in which their weight increases in spite of the fact that the total employment for that sector decreases, and the service sector for women, particularly the domestic service. On the other hand, it also indicates that the increase in unemployment would have taken place all the same without the affluence of migrants towards the metropolitan labour market.

This process was accompanied by an increasing female composition of the flows, phenomenon, which is shared by other migratory sub-systems.

The trend towards an increasing female composition of the flows is verified when estimating through indirect demographic methods, the migration balances between 1970-80 and between 1980-90 (Maguid and Bankirer, 1995). The net balance of the neighbouring countries had a slight increase and is basically explained through the contribution of women. Analogous conclusions are drawn from a study regarding the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (Lattes and Bertoncetto, 1997).

Consistently, the female presence among the bordering migrants who reside in the country rose remarkably between 1980 and 1991; the index of masculinity dropped from 100.4 to 92 males every 100 women. In the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area the preponderance of women has been steady since 20 years ago with a rising trend: the masculinity index dropped from 90 to 83 during the 80's and continued descending to just 81 males every 100 females in 1999.

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<sup>1</sup> It is an indicator of the degree of under-utilization of the work force which is operationally defined as the proportion of employed who work less than an average work day due to lack of work.

On the other hand, the economic participation of women has increased in the last decades. The women residing in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area are the ones who present the highest activity rate in the total country with a strong increasing trend, rising from a 37.3% rate in 1991 to 46.2% in 1999. This dramatic increase in the activity of women is observed in this area in particular while in the rest of the country the levels have been kept constant or have only showed slight increases. In addition to an increase in the participation, there is a common phenomenon to women across the country: the absence of intermittence, that is, the absence of fluctuations in the entrance and exit from the labour market linked to the female life cycle (Cerrutti, 2000; Maguid, Cacopardo and others, 2000). In this context the activity rate of the bordering females of the Metropolitan Area in particular, is still higher, being 51.2 % towards 1999, that is 5 percentage points above the average female population as a whole.

Various studies have shown that the participation of women in labour is strongly associated not only to their social and demographic characteristics, but also to the stages in their reproductive cycle and the survival strategies of the families to which they belong. Migrations are part of those strategies, particularly among the families of the most vulnerable groups along their life cycle (Bethencourt, 1992)

It is beyond doubt that the spatial movements of women as those of men should be understood within the frame of the macro-structural determinants of the territorial mobility which are generated in certain historical moments. However, it cannot be ignored that the female and male migratory models are not necessarily parallel, and in the case of women there are other co-existing factors with complex interactions, such as: who exerts the power at home, the importance attached to their social and sexual behaviour, the completion of certain farming activities, and the demand for domestic service in the large cities (Szasz, 1999). In this sense, more importance is placed on the migration strategies in order to understand the behaviour of both male and female as part of the decisions made by the family in terms of who leaves and who remains in the places of origin, either temporarily or for longer periods; who works outside the home and who is in charge of the domestic tasks at their destination.

This involves capturing the previous and subsequent role assumed by the migration within the household structure and the links between the migratory, labour and marriage patterns (Courgeau and Bacaïni, 1997). It also involves highlighting the peculiarity of female migration and pulling her from invisibility, which means, to stop considering the female as a passive follower, and the male as a public, economic being and therefore taking the leading role in the migration (Gregorio Gil, 1998). It is clear that neither the population censuses nor the household surveys can describe the origin of the processes which generate the migration. Neither can they describe the quality and complexity of the social and family interactions surrounding the decision of migrating, staying or returning. Instead, they allow an approach to the trends and characteristics of the migrants. Donna Gabaccia (1996), in reference to the use of censuses as a source for establishing the history of female migrants, states that the censuses do not reply to the questions which arise, but they remind us that they should be posed.

## **2 PURPOSE AND METHODS**

Within the context described and having scarce previous information on the characteristics of female migration in Argentina ( Recchini de Lattes and Mychaszula, 1991; Cacopardo and López, 1997; Cacopardo, 1999; 2000 a, b), the specific purpose of this study is to identify the existence of gender differences in the participation level and insertion patterns in the labour

market of females and males arriving from bordering countries. In this sense, it is of interest to determine whether these differences actually respond to the migratory condition or their causes have to be looked for beyond this condition in the case they persist with equal strength among the non-migrant population. Therefore, the comparison between the bordering migrant population<sup>2</sup> and the non-migrant Argentinean population will appear throughout the analysis.

The data are drawn from the Permanent Household Survey (PHS), which the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses has applied for over two decades in the main urban agglomerates of the country. Its main objective is to measure the dynamics of the labour market, and it is carried out twice a year.

The Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (BAMA)<sup>3</sup> has been chosen to advance in the research on the issue proposed because it concentrates almost half of the migrants arriving from bordering countries and it presents the greatest levels of female economic participation.

In the first place, the analysis will focus on the differences in the levels and participation patterns in the labour market according to sex and migratory status<sup>4</sup>. Then, the life cycle and family background of the women are analysed through certain variables such as: marital status, their status within the household, the amount of children, the income level and the home educational achievement.

### **3 PARTICIPATION AND INSERTION PATTERNS IN THE BUENOS AIRES METROPOLITAN AREA'S LABOUR MARKET**

In the past, the bordering Argentinean provinces were the prime destination for the migration arriving from the neighbouring countries. After 1960 the immigrants became increasingly attracted to the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area: the proportion of bordering migrants heading towards the area increased from 25 to 47 per cent between 1960 and 1991. These movements were parallel to the streams of internal migrations. In addition to the metropolitanization of the migration system, this region is the only one where all the nationalities are represented<sup>5</sup>. The concentrating role performed by the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area not just in terms of population and labour force but also in relation to capital, investments, banking and commerce, suggests the convenience of perceiving it as a "global city", in terms of the world system theory<sup>6</sup> to interpret the migration processes in Argentina. Regarding this point, Balán (1992) holds that by the mid- 80's , the South Cone had emerged as a migration sub-system with Buenos Aires as its core.

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<sup>2</sup> The migrant population is defined by its place of birth. In this case, the non-migrant population or native from the BAMA, is the population born in the BAMA; bordering migrant population are the ones born in Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay. Those born in other countries are not taken into account due to their poor weight and ageing age structure.

<sup>3</sup> The BAMA includes the City of Buenos Aires and 19 districts in the suburban area.

<sup>4</sup> Even though the age, the seniority in the migration and the educational level are variables of utmost importance when associated to differences in the economic participation, they cannot be disaggregated if a representative sample is to be preserved.

<sup>5</sup> In 1991, from the population living in the BAMA, 43% were Paraguayans, 28% Uruguayans, 15% Bolivians, 12% Chileans and only 2% Brazilian.

<sup>6</sup> The world systems theory holds that the economic globalisation process is favourable to the constitution of global cities which concentrate the financial and productive power. They require highly skilled labour which in turn demands poorly skilled workforce to cater the services, demand catered by the migrants (Castells, 1989; Zlotnik, 1992 and Massey, 1993).

Therefore, this area is worth the analysis for comparing the gender differences in the level and patterns assumed by the groups under study.

### 3.1 Economic activity, unemployment and under-employment.

A brief look on the demographic profile of the bordering labour force shows that over half of them are aged between 30 and 49 years old. Furthermore, they constitute a population far more aged than the non-migrant or native: only the 20% and 16% of male and female economically active bordering migrants concentrate in the younger ages, between 14 and 29 years of age, against a respective 41% and 43% of the non-migrants.

To this fact might contribute various non-exclusive factors: On one hand, the decrease in the intensity of immigration as a consequence of the economic crisis, which would be ageing the age structure of the migrants. It is also possible that part of the eldest migrants who used to live in other areas of the country, due to the crisis in the regional economies shifted their course and directed towards the Metropolitan Area<sup>7</sup>.

The composition by sex is similar among these populations, with the predominance of males as shown by a 139 sex ratio.

Regarding the educational profile, the distribution is highly differentiated between both groups. Among the bordering migrants the weight of those that completed or surpassed the secondary level of education is remarkably reduced: almost 22% for both sexes, against a 49% of non-migrant males and a 68% of the females belonging to that universe. (**Table 1**).

The advantage enjoyed by the MBAA's native women is not shared by the active bordering females, who present an educational background slightly lower than that of their fellow males and obviously remarkably lower than the native women. On the other hand, it must be noted that around 60% of the migrants of both sexes concentrate in the intermediate levels of education.

**Table 1. Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, 1999: Economically active population by educational level, sex and migratory status**  
(EAP aged 14 and over)

Educational level	BAMA Natives		Bordering immigrants	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Amount	2.085.764	1.502.175	185.456	133.478
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
Up to incomplete primary	3,5	2,0	17,2	21,7
Complete primary or incomplete secondary	47,9	30,0	60,5	57,6
Complete secondary and higher education	48,6	68,0	22,3	20,7

Source: INDEC, Permanent Household Survey. Special Processing. October 1999.

The presence of the bordering migrants in the metropolitan labour market remained quite steady during the 90's, with a slight increasing trend, both in quantity as in its relative representation. In 1999, they constituted 6% of the economically active population, 7% of the unemployed and 6% of the under-employed.

<sup>7</sup> The greater growth of the bordering migrants aged 40 years and older has already been acknowledged by Lattes and Bertoncello (1997) for the 1980-1991 period.

They continued being a minority with little incidence in the dynamics of employment because most of the labour force is composed by natives of the MBAA (66%) and by internal migrants (25%); those migrants born in non-bordering countries constitute a scarce 3%.

The increasing female composition of the flows original from neighbouring countries and the increase in female participation in labour, of both migrant and non-migrant women, is still insufficient to reach the gender parity in the labour market towards the end of the XXth century.

Even though the women constitute 55% of the potentially active migrants, proportion higher than that of the natives (52%), their representation within the bordering workforce is just a 42%, similar percentage to the one of the natives. This is primarily due to the fact that the gender gap regarding the participation in the labour market is more pronounced among the bordering population..

As shown in table 2, the bordering migrants from both sexes and, particularly the males participate with greater intensity in the economic activity than their native counterparts, suggesting once more the labour-based nature of the flows. Although in both groups almost half of the women are active- which is considered to be a high proportion within the Latin American context- the female activity rates are remarkably lower than to the those of the males, but among the migrants the gaps broaden. However, it is convenient to consider that except for Uruguay, in the rest of the countries of origin, the female activity rates are considerably lower (FLACSO, 1995), which reflects that the migration works as a facilitating device for allowing women into the world of work.

**Table 2. Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, 1999: Activity, unemployment and under employment rates by migratory status and sex.** (Population aged 14 and over)

Rates (%)	BAMA Natives		Bordering Migrants		Gender gaps (1)	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	BAMA natives	Bordering migrants
Activity	73,7	48,4	88,0	51,2	0,7	0,6
Unemployment	13,1	16,5	17,3	18,0	1,3	1,0
Under-employment	10,3	19,3	9,7	25,1	1,9	2,6

(1) Gender gap: Quotient between the female and male values

Source: INDEC, Permanent Household Survey. Special Processing. October 1999.

The migratory status strongly conditions the unemployment levels in detriment of both male and female bordering immigrants who present higher unemployment rates, particularly in the case of the males. However, while there are almost no gender differences among the migrant workers, they *do* exist among the native population, to the point of placing their own women at unemployment levels almost similar to those of the immigrants.

Regarding under-employment it draws our attention the fact that the gender gaps are wider than those gaps deriving from their migratory nature. In the case of males it seems that the probability of being sub-utilised due to lack of work is independent from the place of origin: almost 10% of the employed migrants and non-migrants are under-employed. Its counterpart is that the inequality suffered by women is shared by both groups, although it becomes worse

in the case of the migrants: the percentage of native under-employed females duplicates that of the men and, among the migrants it is 2.6 times higher.

The high female under-employment level could be explained by the fact that women are more flexible when accepting a job, however unstable or precarious it might be. A quarter of female migrants working under conditions of under-employment help balance their unemployment levels and get closer to the men's, shortening the gap.

### 3.2 Occupational insertion patterns

The data analysed so far show that the females find it more difficult to get a job and, when they eventually find it, an important proportion are incorporated under unfavourable conditions. The gender differences vary according to the migratory status: regarding unemployment they become deeper among the natives while, considering under-employment they become deeper among the migrants.

It is worthwhile to look into the labour insertion patterns assumed by the groups under study; particularly those patterns associated to precarious employment conditions and with low income levels.

Table 3 reports the distribution of the groups under study according to the category or status and the qualification of the occupation they perform.<sup>8</sup> Within the occupational status, the domestic service is considered separately due to its significant weight among the females, though from the concept involved it should be studied as part of the paid work or wage earners.

**Table 3. Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, 1999: Occupational Status and skill level by migratory condition and sex.**

(Employed aged 14 and over)

Occupational Status	BAMA Natives		Bordering Migrants		Gender Gap (1)	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	BAMA Natives	Bordering Migrants
Amount	1.812.534	1.254.645	153.391	109.435	0,7	0,7
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0		
Employers	6,7	3,0	3,4	1,9	0,4	0,6
Own-account workers	19,6	13,2	29,8	22,6	0,7	0,8
Wage-earners	72,3	73,6	66,1	35,3	1,0	0,5
Domestic service	0,0	8,4	0,0	36,3	///	///
Unpaid family worker	1,4	1,8	0,7	3,9	1,3	5,7
<b>Skill level</b>						
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0		
Professional and technical	31,0	40,4	13,3	9,3	1,3	0,7
Operational	49,3	30,0	71,1	29,8	0,6	0,4
Non-skilled	19,8	29,6	15,6	61,0	1,5	3,9

(1) Gender gap: Quotient between the female and male values.

<sup>8</sup> The PHS from the INDEC uses a National Occupation Classification System which allows the distinction of types of occupational qualification according to the knowledge and skills required by the tasks, the tools used and the complexity of the activities performed in each occupation.



/// /// The calculus is not done because the denominator's value is zero; the gender gap is totally favourable to women due to absence of males in this category.

Source: INDEC, Permanent Household Survey. Special Processing. October, 1999.

The results show that the patterns assumed in the relationship between the workers and the productive world are strongly conditioned by their migratory status and by the gender issue, which acquires special relevance regarding those immigrants from neighbouring countries. Among the MABA natives, there is a noticeable predominance of wage earners among both sexes, surpassing the 72%. In the second place, although far behind, are the own-account workers, who are males rather than females. The gender gap becomes more marked in the "employer" category (status), in which the percentage of males more than doubles the females', who perform the domestic service as a third option, activity which involves almost exclusively native and bordering migrants.

The distribution of the bordering migrant males presents a pattern similar to that of their fellow natives, but in this case with a lower quota of wage earners (66%) and a highly inferior quota of employers; these differences compensate with a higher percentage of the migrants working on their own-account.

However, in the case of the female migrant workers, in addition to their migratory status, gender inequality occurs, provoking greater segregation among migrant women who have the domestic service as their main option.

In fact, 36 per cent of them work as domestic servants, percentage four times bigger than that of native women, and a similar quota work as wage earners (35%). Thus, while no gender differences appear in the native wage earners, among the bordering migrants the percentage of women under wage is half of the men's percentage.

Although the proportion inserted as employer and own account worker varies according to the origin of those employed, the gender gaps which appear in these categories are shared by both migrant and non-migrant.

The workers without wage represent a small proportion of the employed, however a broad gender gap takes place among the bordering migrants. This reflects an alternative in the insertion chances of bordering women, more related to family enterprises.

The data shown in table 3 referred to occupational qualification lead to question those positions which hold that the bordering immigrants work mainly in non-skilled tasks, showing that this situation is only true in the case of women.

Over 70% of the bordering males perform jobs which require operational qualification- in skilled manual jobs- and only 16% perform non-skilled tasks, which do not demand previous knowledge. Regarding the qualified operational occupations, they are over-represented in relation to the native males, and an inverse relationship appears in the highly qualified occupations, either professional or technical. These results show coherence with the migrants' educational structure which has already been mentioned above, a 60% of them had intermediate educational levels – complete primary or incomplete secondary- which enables them to perform operational tasks and only a 22% surpass the secondary level, a lower proportion to the one reached by the MABA natives (see table 1) .

The gender differences are polarised in the case of the native workers due to the fact that the females have advantages in the quota performing professional or technical occupations. - showing as well the greater educational level of the female population in that region- but in the other end, the non-skilled occupations where they have greater weight, they are at disadvantage.

In the case of migrant female, gender inequality crosses all qualification levels: they achieve lower proportions to those of men in the most skilled occupations and quadruplicate men in occupations of lower hierarchy; 61% of these women perform non-skilled tasks, this is partly explained by the weight of domestic service.

It is worthwhile to point out that their little chances of having access to better positioned occupations do not coincide with their educational level; as shown in table 1, 22% of them had not been able to accomplish their primary school, this is a low figure if compared with the ones who work in non-skilled occupations such as: the domestic service, cleaning non-domestic service in hospitals, offices, etc. or as travelling or marginal sellers.

As indicated before, since the beginning of the '90s, Argentina starts to undergo a stage of deep changes in the economic regulation model, which have repercussions in the labour market; one of the most dramatic consequences was the staggering rise in unemployment, accompanied by increasing under-employment and an increase in the tertiary sector in detriment of the industrial one.

According to Berger (1998), the contraction of jobs in the MABA industry, basically specialised in the production of intermediate and capital goods, was the result of an imports opening process, over-rating the national currency which brought about problems in the access to the external market as in the survival of many companies due to the competitiveness levels required. Those subsisting industries were inclined to increase the productivity through the reduction of employment, the adoption of new equipment, and mainly, the introduction of labour flexibility devices that implied an increase in the intensity of work and job precariousness. At the same time, the financing intermediary and the external suppliers of services to companies gained importance. This could contribute to the explanation of the increase in the number of available work positions related to transportation, financial activities and company suppliers.

In this context it is relevant to inquire into which sectors of the economy in the Metropolitan Area continue absorbing bordering work force and how the inequalities are expressed according to migratory status and gender, both present in the labour market since a long time ago.

Regarding women, when the distribution by branch of activity is analysed according to gender (see Maguid, Cacopardo and others, 2000), it is verified that still at the end of the 90's persists a segmentation linked to gender. The females fit into branches of activity that in the market are associated to the typical domestic functions, socially viewed as typical of the female world, such as social, educational and health services, and obviously the domestic service.

**Table 4** shows the distribution of the groups under study and the gender gaps by branch of activity. Two groups are considered within the manufacturing industry according to an intensive use of the work force and the degree of technological development. The first group: A, gathers the great sectors of "Food, Drinks and Tobacco" and "Textiles, Clothes and Shoe-making"; group B gathers the industries of Chemical Products, Refineries, etc."; "Metal products, machinery and equipment, other manufacturing industries and "Electricity, Gas and Water".

Besides, in the first group predominate occupations traditionally associated to the female world of work and in the second, activities assigned to the males by the social imagery, thus it is possible to do a different interpretation of this classification regarding the historically ascribed role for each gender.

The results confirm that, within the frame of a recessive market, both migrants and women present a segmented insertion and that the gender differences, once more, become greater in the case of migrant females.

The males born in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area insert in similar proportions of about 20% in the Industry- mainly in those from group B, the more dynamic ones-, in the Services and in the Commerce. As a whole these great three sectors concentrate 58% of the native male work. Then come the branches linked to circulation, such as Transport and Communications and the Financial Services, which absorb 28%, displaying very similar quotas between them.

**Table 4. Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, 1999: Distribution of the occupied according to branch of economic activity by migratory status and sex.**

(Employed aged 14 and over)

Branch of activity	BAMA Natives		Bordering Migrants		Gender Gap	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	BAMA Natives	Bordering Migrants
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	0,7	0,7
<b>Total Industry</b>	<b>19,8</b>	<b>12,7</b>	<b>23,8</b>	<b>16,6</b>	<b>0,6</b>	<b>0,7</b>
Group A	5,1	6,0	11,7	15,6	1,2	1,3
Group B	14,7	6,7	12,1	1,0	0,5	0,1
<b>Construction</b>	<b>8,5</b>	<b>0,5</b>	<b>37,2</b>	<b>0,0</b>	<b>0,1*</b>	<b>0,0*</b>
<b>Total Commerce</b>	<b>18,3</b>	<b>14,7</b>	<b>11,0</b>	<b>16,6</b>	<b>0,8</b>	<b>1,5</b>
<b>Restaurants and Hotels</b>	<b>2,9</b>	<b>3,4</b>	<b>2,0</b>	<b>3,0</b>	<b>1,2</b>	<b>1,5</b>
<b>Transport/ Storage and Communications</b>	<b>15,4</b>	<b>4,8</b>	<b>5,1</b>	<b>3,1</b>	<b>0,3</b>	<b>0,6</b>
<b>Financial Services and others</b>	<b>12,8</b>	<b>15,5</b>	<b>4,9</b>	<b>5,5</b>	<b>1,2</b>	<b>1,1</b>
<b>Total Services</b>	<b>20,1</b>	<b>37,2</b>	<b>13,9</b>	<b>15,5</b>	<b>1,9</b>	<b>1,1</b>
Management and Social Services	11,9	33,0	1,4	8,7	2,8	6,2
Repairs and others	8,2	4,2	12,5	6,8	0,5	0,5
<b>Domestic Service</b>	<b>0,6</b>	<b>9,2</b>	<b>0,0</b>	<b>37,8</b>	<b>15,3</b>	<b>///</b>
<b>Other branches</b>	<b>1,6</b>	<b>2,0</b>	<b>2,1</b>	<b>1,9</b>	<b>1,3</b>	<b>0,9</b>

Group A industries: Food, Drinks and Tobacco; Textile, Clothing and Shoe-making.

Group B industries: The rest.

\* The gender gap is zero, maximum value of male over-representation due to the absence of females in the construction industry.

/// The calculus is not done because the denominator's value is zero; the gender gap is the maximum in favour of women due to the absence of males in this category.

Source: INDEC, Permanent Household Survey. Special Processing. October, 1999.

On the other hand, the native women concentrate mainly in the Services(37%), preferably in management and social services such as health and education.

In the second place, but in lower proportions, around 15% concentrate in the Financing Services and Commerce respectively. The Manufacturing Industry absorbs a 13% equally distributed among A and B groups and a 9% works in private homes with domestic service.<sup>9</sup>

The capacity for absorbing bordering workforce appears to be more restricted to a few sectors, which concentrate the males on one side and the females on the other, broadening the gender gaps. For the male migrants it is the Construction the main sector for insertion, absorbing 38%, while for the females, the domestic service concentrates a similar proportion.

However, a significant percentage of bordering males (24%) accomplish the insertion in the Manufacturing Industry with even quotas close to 12% in each of the A and B types; the over-representation achieved in this sector in relation to the natives is explained by a greater percentage who work in less dynamic industries (12% among the bordering migrants against a 5% among the natives). In the third place they fit in the Services, almost exclusively in Repair Services and other activities such as: garbage collection, building porters, hairdresser activities and in the Commerce, although in very inferior proportions than the previous ones and than those held by the male and female natives.

As it has been stated before, the females concentrate in the Domestic Service and then achieve proportions close to 16% in the Manufacturing Industry, Commerce and Services respectively. In this case, in contrast with the other two groups who are also segregated either due to their origin or their gender –the male migrants and the native women-, they only perform tasks in type A industries, which require a more intensive use of the workforce.

It is also important to point out that they denote the greatest concentration in the retail commerce, including marginal or mobile selling or small shops. Their participation in the Services concentrates in the Health Sector and other Social Services, in which they perform cleaning activities, being minimum their participation in the Public Administration and Education.

As a consequence of the different distributions presented by each sex according to origin, the sign of the gender gaps is shared by migrants and non-migrants in most of the branches. This is clearly shown when the gaps reach their maximum potential, regardless of their migratory status: this happens in the Construction, where there is no female presence, and in the Domestic Service where their presence is almost exclusive.

The gender distance is similar among natives and migrants in group A industries, in the Restaurants and Hotels, and in the Financial Services, where women are slightly over-represented. The gap is also positive for the females in the Public Administration and Social Services, being even more noticeable among the bordering females.

Moreover, there are also shared gaps in the inverse direction, this means: lower proportion of females than males. In the type B industries, the relegation of females is more exacerbated among the bordering migrants; the opposite takes place in the case of Transport and, in the Repair Services the same happens.

The Commerce sector stands out, with a predominance of retail trade, because the direction of the gender gap differs according to the migratory status: there is an under-representation of

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<sup>9</sup> The percentage of domestic service according to the classification by Branches differs slightly from the one which appears in table 3 in all groups, due to the fact that the last mentioned was defined according to occupation.

females among the employed natives, and on the contrary there is a remarkable gap in favour of women among the bordering migrants.

This would be the only sector absorbing an important quota of workers in which the migratory status changes the direction in the gender gap. On the contrary, in the rest of the economic activities, the direction of the differences between females and males remains, though with various degrees of intensity.

In synthesis, although the migrant workers' structure by branches is so segmented, the gender differences are not distant from those of the native population. This implies that the migrant female and male insertion by branches of activity repeats in general the direction of the gap differences prevailing in the MABA's labour market, turning them deeper in various sectors.

For acknowledging the quality and the strength of the labour relationship, it is important to analyse the job precariousness, that is the non-recorded, temporary, or part-time job or the hidden wage earners as we call them, which are various ways for expressing a feeble insertion in the labour market. (Beccaria and Orsatti, 1990; Pok, 1999). This is a relevant issue in Argentina due to a rise in labour precariousness in the past two decades. An indicator used, which is close to describing this phenomenon, is the lack of discounts in the wage-earners' paycheque on account of their future pension plan.

**Table 5. Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, 1999: Percentage of wage earners with precarious insertion by migratory status and sex.**

Sex	BAMA natives	Bordering Migrants
Male	36,7	45,1
Female	36,4	64,9
Gender Gap (1)	1,0	1,4

(1) Gender Gap: Quotient between the female and male values.

Source: INDEC, Permanent Household Survey. Special Processing. October, 1999.

A quite considerable portion of the MABA natives, over a third, does not enjoy this benefit and in this case the situation does not prove to be different for males or females. The bordering migrant status aggravates the precarious insertion, but this is far more noticeable among the females in this group, reaching a 40% gap regarding their peers from the opposite sex (**table 5**). The strong segregation of female migrants in the domestic service, a branch that has traditionally avoided the social security regulations, as well as the mobile and unstable activities, lead to this situation of labour precariousness.

Another way of approaching the differences due to migratory status and sex is through the labour income. The average hourly income of the wage-earners or paid workers is considered, including the domestic service, due to the fact that for the rest of the occupational categories or status, this information is unreliable.

In the universe of the wage earners, the average hourly income is substantially higher among the MABA natives than among the bordering migrants, and within each universe no sex gaps can be seen. If considering the occupational qualification, the highest incomes corresponding to the MABA natives persist compared to the bordering migrants in all categories, except for the non-qualified females, but the direction of the gaps diversifies (**table 6**).

The females in both groups who perform professional and technical tasks, are the only ones who earn lower income than men, due to the fact that in the rest of the qualification levels the female's incomes are slightly higher. But the advantage of females grows in the most

relegated occupations because among the non-qualified bordering migrants this gap indicates a 60 % higher income. This exemplifies the case of the persistence of a labour niche for migrant females through the domestic service. Although this sector is known for its precarious insertion- it allows them to reach higher income levels than the ones achieved by the males in occupations such as porters, hodmen and other unskilled activities.

Although this differs from the results in other Latin American countries that show that within the strata with minimum wages the females earn lower income than the males (García, Blanco and Pacheco, 1991), it is important to make clear that the higher wages earned by the women in these occupations do not necessarily imply better living conditions due to labour instability and lack of all type of social security protection.

**Table 6. Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, 1999: Wage earners Average hourly Income by migratory status, sex and occupational qualification.**

Occupational Qualification	BAMA Natives		Bordering Migrants		Gender Gap (1)	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	BAMA Natives	Bordering Migrants
Total	4,4	4,6	3,2	3,2	1,0	1,0
Professional and Technical	8,2	6,9	6,5	3,9	0,8	0,6
Operational	3,3	3,6	2,9	3,0	1,1	1,0
Non-skilled	2,5	2,9	2,1	3,3	1,1	1,6

Gender Gap: Quotient between the female and male values.

Source: INDEC, Permanent Household Survey. Special Processing. October, 1999.

#### 4 THE FEMALES' FAMILY BACKGROUND

When considering economic participation and female international migration, a set of changes appear, which are connected to the inclusion of women in the labour market and to the compatibility of the domestic and non-domestic roles in a context of probable absence of family support networks. In this sense, although it is difficult to show these interrelations, it is important the inclusion of factors related to the life cycle and the family background of these migrant females, and their confrontation with the non-migrant females.

The female activity level is closely linked to the stages in the life cycle which have been indicated in this study through the marital status, the presence of children in the household and the status in the household presented in **table 7**.

In both groups their participation in labour is influenced by their marital status, the females co-living with a partner present a lower activity level, with a similar rate regardless of their migratory status. But it must be pointed out that the difference verified in the activity between the ones co-living with a partner or married and the single ones is even greater regarding female migrants. That is why the greater labour participation achieved as a whole, can only be attributed to women who are single, divorced or widows.

When considering the activity rates according to the amount of children under 6 years old in the household, it can be verified that the non-migrants follow an expected pattern: a constant

decrease in the activity with the increase in the number of children, with a more abrupt descent as from the presence of the second child. Instead, the behaviour of the bordering women indicates that the participation level reduces together with the presence of one or two children but rises considerably when there are three or more. This suggests a peculiar activity insertion pattern: among the migrant females the relationship between labour activity and number of children could be influenced by unavoidable economic pressure exerted by a greater amount of children in the household, possibly associated with the absence of the spouse or partner and to the adoption of various strategies regarding child minding.

The activity level according to the position in the household shows that being the head is a strong attribute regarding female work, both among the non-migrant and migrant females, although displaying higher intensity within the last mentioned, with a 76% rate, that is 50% higher than the average. Instead, among the spouses, daughters and other migrant relatives the activity level is always lower. This means that the greater activity of migrant females is strongly conditioned by the behaviour of the female household heads- mostly single or without partner- status implying a greater job engagement in the single-parent household. The female headship is, without doubt, a situation far more frequent among the bordering females, given that 35% of them are heads, against a 16% of the MABA natives.

**Table 7. Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, 1999: Female activity rates by migratory status according to factors associated to the life cycle.**

(Female population aged 14 and over)

Factors	BAMA Natives	Bordering Migrants	Migration Gap (1)
<b>Total</b>	48,4	51,2	1,1
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Single	50,7	61,4	1,2
Married/consensually married	45,4	44,7	1,0
Separated/divorced/Widow	51,1	63,3	1,2
<b>Amount of children under 6 years of age in the household (1)</b>			
None	49,8	54,9	1,1
One	51,4	44,9	0,9
Two	37,7	43,3	1,1
Three or more	24,9	61,0	2,4
<b>Status in the household</b>			
Head	59,2	76,5	1,3
Spouse	45,5	42,1	0,9
Daughter	48,5	43,1	0,9
Other relative	34,6	27,6	0,8

Migration Gap: Quotient between the values of the bordering migrant females and the MABA natives  
(<sup>1</sup>) corresponds to the universe of heads and spouses.

Source: INDEC, Permanent Household Survey. Special Processing, October 1999.

In fact, it can be verified that the various factors associated to the life cycle affect in a lower degree the activity levels of the women born in the MABA in comparison to the bordering

ones. This coincides with the absence of intermittence in the female participation curve as a whole, already mentioned in the first part of this study. Instead, and according to what has been observed in a previous study (Cacopardo, 2000b), the bordering migrant females do present intermittence according to age regarding their economic activity, fact more closely linked to situations of lack of labour and family protection, due to their status as foreigners.

In order to establish the relationship between the female's activity and the household's social and economic background, two proxy indicators of this context are considered. On one hand, the household's educational achievement, that is the average number of years of study of all the members who are old enough to reach the highest level of 12 schooling years and, on the other hand, the household's income per capita quinary (**table 8**).

In general it can be stated that, regardless of the migratory status, to a higher educational achievement and to a higher income level in the household, follows an increase in the female activity rate. But it can be observed that when the educational achievement of the household is low, that is to say when the average is less than 7 years of schooling, the difference in the activity levels grows bigger (close to 60%) regarding the non-migrant females. This coincides with what is taking place in the lowest income levels, in which the activity level of the migrants is remarkably higher. In consequence, while the female native activity rates assume a rising trend with a favourable household background, among the female migrants it seems to be assuming a U shape, that means a strong economic inclusion of women in situations of both, greater and less vulnerability in the household. Therefore, it expresses the greater pressure suffered by the bordering females belonging to the poorest homes for inserting in the world of work.

**Table 8. Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, 1999:  
Female activity rates by migratory status according to social and economic factors of the household.**

(Female Population aged 14 and over)

Factors	Activity Rate		Migratory gap (1)
	BAMA Natives	Bordering migrants	
<b>Household's Educational Achievement (2)</b>			
Low	34,6	54,5	1,6
Intermediate	42,8	47,3	1,1
High	60,2	62,1	1,0
<b>Household's Income Quinary per capita</b>			
I (lowest 20%)	33,4	43,7	1,3
V (highest 20%)	64,2	68,2	1,1

(1) Migratory Gap: Quotient between the bordering migrant females and the native females.

(2) The household's educational achievement is the average years of schooling of the household members aged 18 and over. High: 12 years of schooling and over Intermediate: between 7 and 11 years of schooling. Low: less than 7 schooling years.

Source: INDEC, Permanent Household Survey. Special Processing. October, 1999.



## 5 CONCLUSIONS

This study's approach is set on the characterisation of an aspect of the international migration arriving from bordering countries: the occupational status and insertion patterns of males and females in the Buenos Aires labour market, through the analysis of the gender gaps according to the migratory status.

Without ignoring the multiple macro-structural factors, the family strategies and migratory networks which interact in the population's mobility process, in this opportunity only issues concerning the labour market have been considered, which can be investigated through the information collected by the household survey of the Argentinean statistical system.

In a scenario of serious unemployment, deteriorated work conditions and reassignment of sectorial employment, the spaces for bordering migrant workforce become more restricted and remain only those which have been traditionally more flexible. In this context, the greater levels in the activity of bordering females and males reinforce the labour nature of these flows. Besides, the female activity rate is higher compared to the one in their country of origin, which shows migration as a device which favours the access of women into the world of work. This results in a gender gap in the level of activity very similar to that recorded for the population born in the MABA.

There is no doubt that the unemployment levels are particularly conditioned by the migratory status of both sexes, in the sense that bordering males and females present higher unemployment rates and there is a reduced gender gap between them. However, concerning unemployment, the gender gap is even greater than the one resulting from the migratory status and reaches its maximum expression among the bordering migrants due to the high proportion of under-employed females. Regarding this point, it can be supposed that the bordering females are more flexible when accepting their jobs and therefore, they balance their unemployment levels with those of men at the expense of working under more unfavourable conditions.

Regarding the labour insertion patterns, one of the most remarkable facts is the similarity in the quota of wage-earners: male and female natives on one side, and bordering migrant males on the other side, resulting in a low gender gap among the natives and a great one among the bordering migrants in detriment of the females due to their strong segregation in the domestic service. When considering the qualification of the tasks performed, it can be stated that although the migratory status implies differential insertion patterns, it cannot be said that the bordering migrants are mostly engaged in non-skilled tasks; this situation is only true for the females. Gender inequality among the bordering migrants crosses all levels due to the fact that the females do not insert as much in the more qualified occupations but grow in those with lower hierarchy, regardless of their educational level. The structure of the immigrants by branches is highly segmented- males in the construction and females in the domestic service-.in spite of that, the gender differences aren't too distant from those belonging to the native population. It seems that, in general, the insertion of the bordering migrants by branches of activity repeats the direction in the gender differences existing in the MABA labour market, turning them greater still.

The migratory status aggravates the labour precariousness and deepens the gender inequality linked to the performance of domestic service activities, of mobile or marginal sales and of other non-domestic cleaning activities, which are carried out by the female bordering workers.

The income by equal time or working hours, is an indicator which clearly shows that the average income of the natives is higher than that of the bordering migrants, and that gender gaps are not detected in either of the universes. When considering the type of occupation performed through qualification, the direction of the gaps diversify, due to the fact that native and bordering females performing professional and technical tasks earn lower income than men. However, in the rest of the activities the female incomes are higher, being more noticeable among the non-skilled migrants. This could be explained by the existence of labour shelters for the women in the MABA labour market – one of the most important is the domestic service, with a more stable demand-, which are eventually associated to unstable and precarious work relationships.

Concerning what has just been mentioned, it is convenient to point out that within the frame of a recessive market, it has been proved that the absence of gender inequality in the income of the least qualified occupations is due to a deterioration in the situation of the males more than to the progress in the situation of the females.

By the means of various indicators associated to the family background of women it results that, among the immigrants, their economic participation is more linked to the stages in the life cycle, observed through the marital status, the presence of children and the status in the household. The high participation rates of the female heads and of the women with greater amount of children are outstanding. This could be strongly associated to situations of greater lack of family and labour protection due to their double status as women and foreigners.

On the other hand, it is also verified that with an increase in the social economic standard of the household, the participation level of female natives and migrants increases. However, it is necessary to point out that the bordering females belonging to the households in the lowest strata, outnumber in their economic participation level those born in the MABA bearing the same condition.

The various results that are derived from this study suggest that the status of being originally from a bordering country to Argentina acts as the main determinant of the chances of access and insertion in the labour market. Moreover, the gender inequality shared by native and bordering migrant females, reinforces the previous point. Nevertheless, among the last females the gap differences become greater in detriment of the women, particularly concerning under-employment, precariousness and chances of access to better-qualified occupations.

At the same time, these findings lead us to pose new questions on how the factors associated to gender, to individual qualities, to the family strategies and to the characteristics of the labour market in the host societies, combine in the immigrant's insertion process. The answer to these questions involves progressing towards an interdisciplinary approach, which complements quantitative analysis with qualitative techniques.

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