Income Trajectories of Latin American Refugee and Non-Refugee Immigrant Workers in Canada[1]

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Abstract

Monitoring labour market outcomes of immigrants such as their earnings over time is crucial to pinpointing a successful economic integration. Over the past decades, thousands of Latin American immigrants have been admitted to Canada as permanent residents. Using a sample of tax filers drawn from the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB), this study explored the income trajectories of 60,060 male and female Latin American refugee and non-refugee workers aged 25-54, who immigrated during the period from 2000-2009. Employment earnings of male and female Latino workers were observed at three tax reporting years: 2010, 2014, and 2018. Six immigrant intake class groups were examined: economic class principal applicants, economic class spouses or dependents, family class, government-assisted refugees (GARs), privately sponsored refugees (PSRs) and landed-in-Canada (LICs) refugees. The study found that, between 2010 and 2018, the average employment earnings of workers grew by approximately one quarter of their initial amount. Notable income improvements, however, were not seen across the board. Economic class principal applicants, as well as their spouses and dependents, had the strongest earning trajectories while landed-in Canada refugees and family class immigrants displayed moderate ones. Government-assisted refugees and privately sponsored refugees ranked at bottom levels across the three tax year observation points, having the lowest starting points and the shallowest earning trajectories. Multivariate analysis using cross-classifications found that, controlling for other covariates such as gender, university education and/or region of admission, immigrant intake class was a strong predictor of employment incomes. Although average incomes increased over time for all groups, government-assisted refugees and privately sponsored refugees experienced the greatest income penalties of the six immigrant intake classes examined. The march towards economic integration, thus, appears to be faster for some Latino immigrant workers and slower for others.

Keywords: Canada, refugees, non-refugees, Latin America, income trajectories

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1.0. Introduction

Latin American immigrants enter Canada as permanent residents under three broad intake class categories: economic, family and refugee classes. Primary applicants under the independent class must meet minimum human capital requirements and are selected via a point system. Immigrants with immediate family members already living in Canada need not meet specific skills or financial criteria, but they are required to have a sponsor (typically the family member) who has agreed to provide financial support for a period of three to ten years following arrival. Members of the refugee class are admitted according to humanitarian considerations through the various resettlement and in-house refugee protection programs (Yu et. al, 2007). The refugee resettlement program involves the selection of refugees overseas either as Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs), who are referred by UNHCR and supported through federally funded Resettlement Assistance Program, or as privately sponsored refugees (PSRs), who are sponsored and supported by voluntary groups. Persons making claims through the in-Canada refugee protection system are referred to as refugee claimants, and if accepted by the Immigration Refugee Board, become Landed in-Canada refugees (LICs). The latter is also called "protected" persons.

Over the last decades, economic crises and political upheavals have pushed thousands of Latin Americans to seek admission to Canada. It is estimated that in the 1981-2015 period, approximately 435 thousand immigrants from the Latin America region were admitted as permanent residents: 35% as an economic class (152 thousand), 39% as a family class (170 thousand) and 26% as refugee class (113 thousand individuals)[2]. The present historical juncture in Latin America is described as a period of "uncertainty and change" (ECLAC, 2019). Economic downturns, health crises, rising social conflict, political mobilization and socio-economic restructuring are forces that are struggling to take over the present direction of social change.

Immigrant waves[3] from Latin America to Canada have risen or fallen as a consequence of the strength/weakness of migratory push-pull factors and the immigration policy developed in response to them (Mata, 1985; Simmons,1993; Armony, 2012). Although the influx of economic and family class arrivals from Latin America has been steady in the last decades,

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[2] Estimate based on an extrapolation of immigration and 2016 census statistics: Sources: (1) 1965-1979: Table 14, Immigration Statistics, Employment, and Immigration Canada; (2) 1980-2015: Permanent Residents – Ad Hoc IRCC (Specialized Datasets) - Admissions of Permanent Residents by Country of Citizenship (Q1-Q2 2016 ranking), 1980 - Q2 2016; (3) Special Table EO2695, 2016 Census of Canada.

[3] Canada is presently experiencing the arrival of immigrants from the fifth wave named as "Professional-Technological" by Canadian scholars (Mata, 2022). The Eurolatino or Lead, Andean, Coup and Central American immigrant waves preceded this present one in time.

some changes in the refugee composition of inflows have occurred. In contrast to previous years where government-assisted and privately sponsored refugees were dominant intake classes from Latin America (e.g. during the Chilean and Salvadoran crises occurring in the 70s and 80s), admissions under the in-land refugee protection criterion have been rising. For instance, between 2015 and 2021, about 17 thousand citizens from Mexico and 12 thousand from Colombia requested asylum while residing in Canada. These claimants represented about 12% of total claims made in Canada during those years[4].

What can we expect in terms of the income trajectories of Latin American refugee and non-refugee immigrants in Canada after their arrival? What are the typical earning trajectories, starting earning points and rates of income growth? Previous research using longitudinal and survey data has found that, in Canada, economic class entrants, particularly principal applicants, perform well in labour markets and tend to display strong earning trajectories compared to family and refugee class entrants (McHale and Rogers 2009; Shields et. al. 2010; Abbott and Beach, 2011; Pythean et. al, 2013; Sweetman and Warman, 2013; Mata and Pendakur, 2020). Given their limited human capital endowments , bouts with unemployment and fewer job opportunities, refugees are among the most negatively impacted by changing labour market conditions and fluctuations in the business cycles (Wilkinson and Garcea 2017; Lightman and Good Gingrich 2018). Economic integration also appears more difficult for some refugee groups compared to others: PSRs have been observed to have a long-term economic advantage over GARs (Kaida, Hou, and Stick 2020).

In the case of Latin American immigrants and using Canadian 2016 census data, Hernandez and Mata (2021) have found that these face stubborn income gaps compared to Canadian-born persons of equal qualifications. The most notable employment barriers included the lack of official language skills, employer discrimination and the devaluation of foreign credentials. Regardless of immigrant intake class at entry, many find employment niches in low-paid occupations within secondary labour markets[5]. Using a sample of Latin American immigrants drawn from the IMDB database, this study explores the earning trajectories of non-refugee and refugee workers from Latin America. Six immigrant intake class groups were chosen for analysis: (1) economic class principal applicants, (2) economic class spouses and dependents, (3) family class, (4) government-assisted refugees or GARs, (5) privately sponsored refugees or PSRs, and (6) landed-in-Canada refugees or LICs. The paper focused its attention on the

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[4] Source: Table-Canada, Asylum Claimants by Top Twenty-Five Countries of Citizenship (November ranking), Province/Territory* of Claim and Claim Year, January 2015 - November 2021, IRCC

[5] While primary markets are composed of specialized, higher paid jobs and employment stability and mobility, secondary markets consist mostly of low-paid, low-status jobs that offer little protection and are usually dead-end. Typical primary labour market jobs include professional and management positions, while secondary labour market jobs are those found in sub-niches such as transportation, retail sales, domestic help, care of the elderly, catering and cleaning.

general picture of income trajectories of Latin American immigrant intake classes, starting earning points, rates of earning growth, and the role that gender and education as well as region of admission might have in defining these earning trajectories. The study adopted a short- to medium-term perspective in following the employment incomes of one specific cohort of arrivals (2000-2009) highlighting economic outcomes up to 8 years after arrival. A separate analysis for male and female workers was undertaken. Data explorations conducted in the study included tabular analysis and multiple regression analysis.

2.0. Data Source, Definitions and Sample Characteristics

The IMDB is a Canadian administrative database that links immigrant landing data to income tax data. It provides detailed information on the receipt of employment income and average total employment income[6]. A special table (SCS-504) was drawn from the IMDB master file which selected 60,060 Latin American immigrant tax filers aged 25-54 who received employment income in the year preceding the tax reporting years of 2010, 2014 and 2018 respectively. All immigrants had entered Canada in the period 2000-2009. The sample consisted of citizens from the following Latin American countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, EI Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela[7]. The IMDB special table provided information on their income sources, regions of the landing, age, gender, educational levels, immigrant intake categories of admission (economic, family, and refugee) and country of citizenship as well as three tax reporting years.

In the IMDB, total employment income is defined as the sum of income from three sources: T4 wages and salaries (from paid jobs), net self-employment income (self-employment income or loss from a business, profession, commission, farming or fishing), and other employment income (e.g., research grants, royalties, employee profit-sharing plans). Any Latin American worker reporting a positive amount of T4 wages and salaries or other employment income, or a non-zero amount of gross self-employment income was included in this sample.

Out of the 60,060 Latin American tax filer workers of the sample, about 40% (n=24,345) were economic class entrants (principal applicants as well as spouses or dependents), 31% were family class (n=18,605) and 29% (n=17,110) refugee class entrants. Landed-in-Canada

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[6] This dataset is currently administered by Statistics Canada. For more information on the IMDB please visit https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/..

[7] Countries chosen represent leading sources of Latin American immigration to Canada. Latin America is defined here as a geographical region comprising Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries of North, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean, except Puerto Rico due to its special status. Citizens from these countries are referred to as Latinos in the paper.

refugees were the largest refugee group comprising (21% of total sample members or about 12,385 individuals) followed by government-assisted and privately sponsored refugees (7% and 1%, n=4,250 and n=475 respectively). Most Latino tax filers did their tax reporting from the Quebec and Ontario provinces of Canada (40% and 37% respectively). While male workers were over-represented in the principal applicant economic class (67%), female tax filers were more commonly found among economic class spouses and dependents as well as family class entrants (75% and 63% respectively). Reflecting their admission selection criteria to Canada, 87% of principal applicant economic class entrants had attained educational degrees equivalent to a bachelor's degree or higher, 69% among spouses and dependents. About 64% of in-land-Canada refugees had similar educational profiles. Lower levels of education (secondary level or less) were more frequently seen among GARs and PSRs (about 61% or higher).

Table 1 displays the country of citizenship composition of the Latino tax filer sample. Half (50%) of the sample was made-up of Colombian citizens followed by Mexicans (14%), Brazilians (7%), and Venezuelans (7%). Although Colombian citizens were the most numerous in all immigrant intake categories, they were strongly predominant in the three refugee categories (70% among GARs, 97% among PSRs, and 57% among LICs). Mexicans, Brazilian, Argentinean and Peruvian citizens were more commonly found in economic and family class intake classes.

Table 1: Country of citizenship of Immigrant Intake Classes *, IMDB Sample of Latin American Immigrant Arrivals 2000-2009, Tax Years 2010, 2014 and 2018

Country of Citizenship	E:PA	E: SD	Family	GARs	PSRs	LICs	Total Sample
Argentina	10%	9%	5%	1%	0%	1%	4%
Bolivia	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%
Brazil	14%	15%	9%	0%	0%	1%	7%
Chile	3%	3%	3%	1%	0%	1%	2%
Colombia	22%	22%	28%	70%	97%	57%	50%
Cuba	5%	5%	8%	4%	0%	3%	4%
Ecuador	2%	2%	3%	1%	0%	1%	1%
EI Salvador	3%	2%	5%	2%	1%	3%	3%
Guatemala	1%	0%	2%	2%	1%	2%	1%
Honduras	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%
Mexico	16%	17%	19%	11%	0%	20%	14%
Nicaragua	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Peru	11%	11%	9%	5%	0%	6%	7%
Uruguay	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%
Venezuela	12%	12%	6%	2%	0%	3%	6%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	**15,380**	**8,965**	**18,605**	**4,250**	**475**	**12,385**	**60,060**

*Symbols: E: PA=Economic Class Principal Applicant, E: SD=Economic Class Spouses or Dependents, Source: Special Table SCS-504, Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB)

4.0. Descriptive Findings

4.1. Average employment incomes of Latino workers improved over time but not equally for all immigrant intake classes

Between 2010 and 2018, the average employment earnings of Latino workers grew by approximately a quarter of its initial amount (23%). The average income for male workers of all intake classes rose from $62.4 thousand in the tax year 2010 to $72.8 thousand in 2014 and $77.4 thousand in 2018. The corresponding figures for females were $45.8, $51.3 and $55.9 thousand respectively. Although the employment earnings for female workers increased with a longer stay in the country, these were found 26% lower than their male counterparts in tax year 2010, 30% lower in tax year 2014 and 28% lower in tax year 2018.
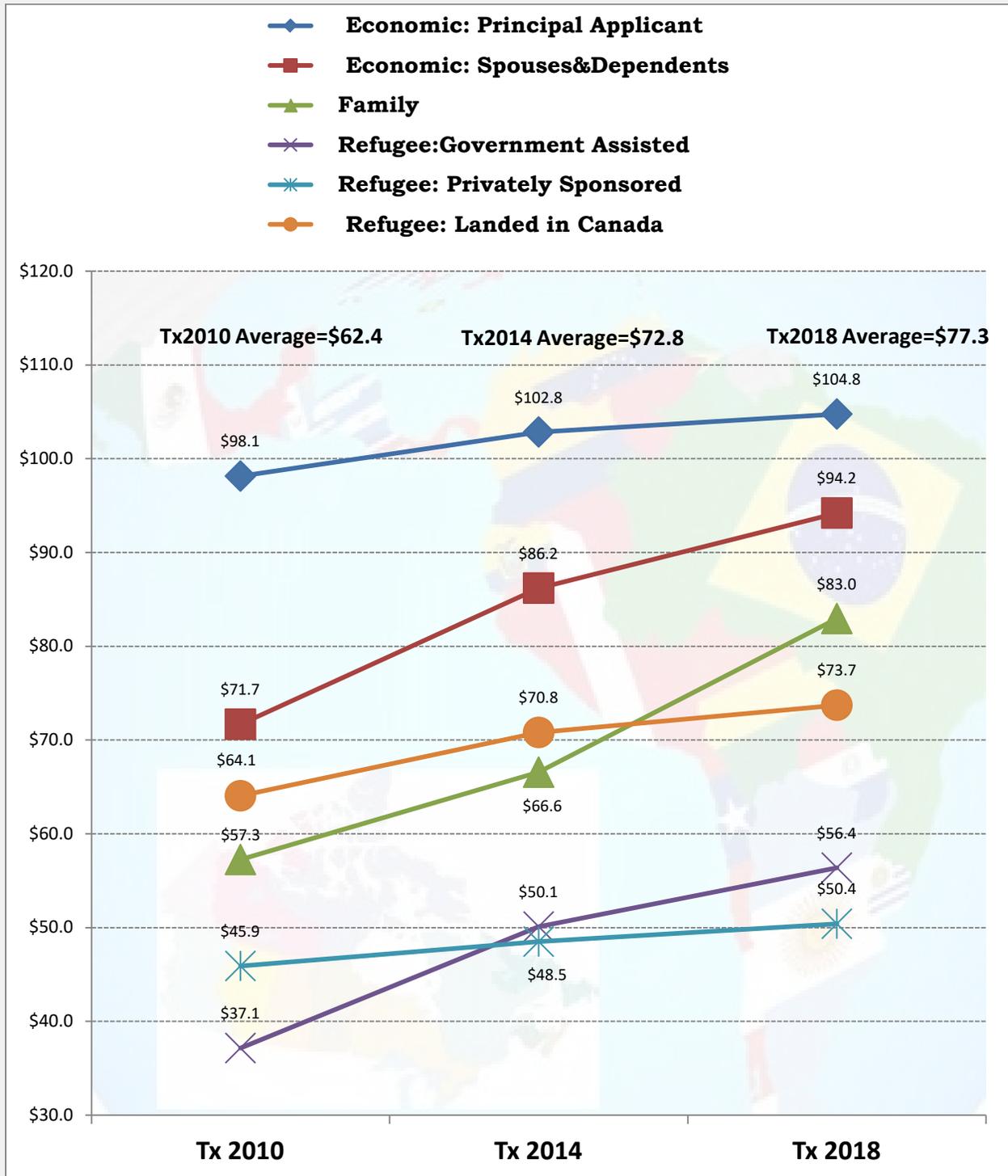
Chart 1 summarizes the patterns of growth in employment income for the various Latino immigrant intake classes by gender. In terms of starting averages (2010 tax time), there was a visible hierarchy of incomes for both males and females with economic principal applicants as the top income earners and GARs as the bottom ones. Male and female GARs and PSRs had the lowest starting points of income trajectories within the 8 year observation period (about 50% or lower compared to their economic class counterparts in the case of males and 54% in the case of females). Inter-tax rates of income growth (every four years), however, revealed notable income improvements made by family class male workers ($12.8 thousand), economic class spouses and dependent male workers ($11.3 thousand), and female GARs workers ($10.3 thousand).

Chart 1: Starting Average and Inter Tax Income Growth (in thousands Can$) of Male and Female Workers aged 25-54 by Gender and Immigrant Intake Class, IMDB Sample of Latin American Immigrant Arrivals 2000-2009, Tax Years 2010, 2014 and 2018
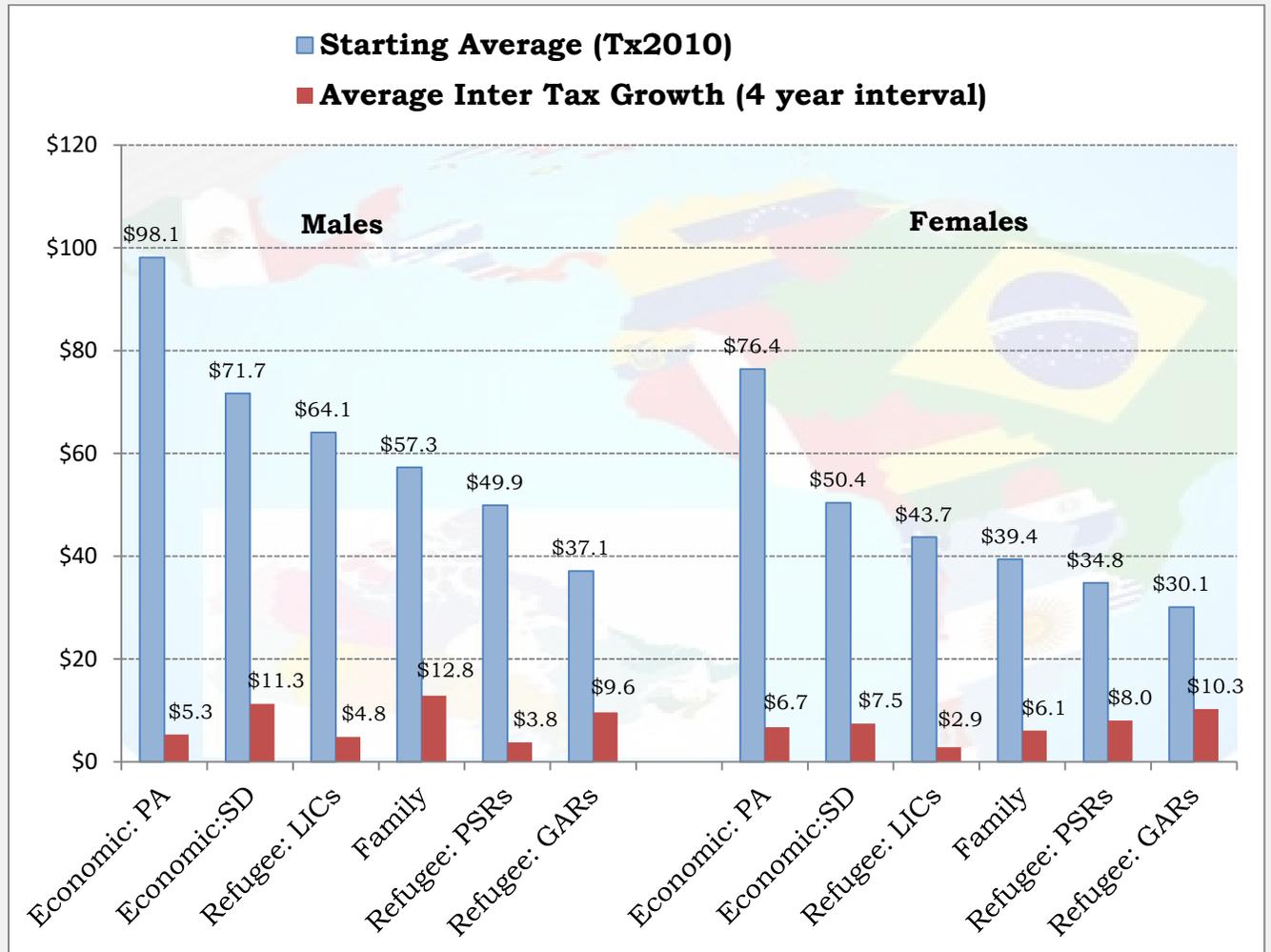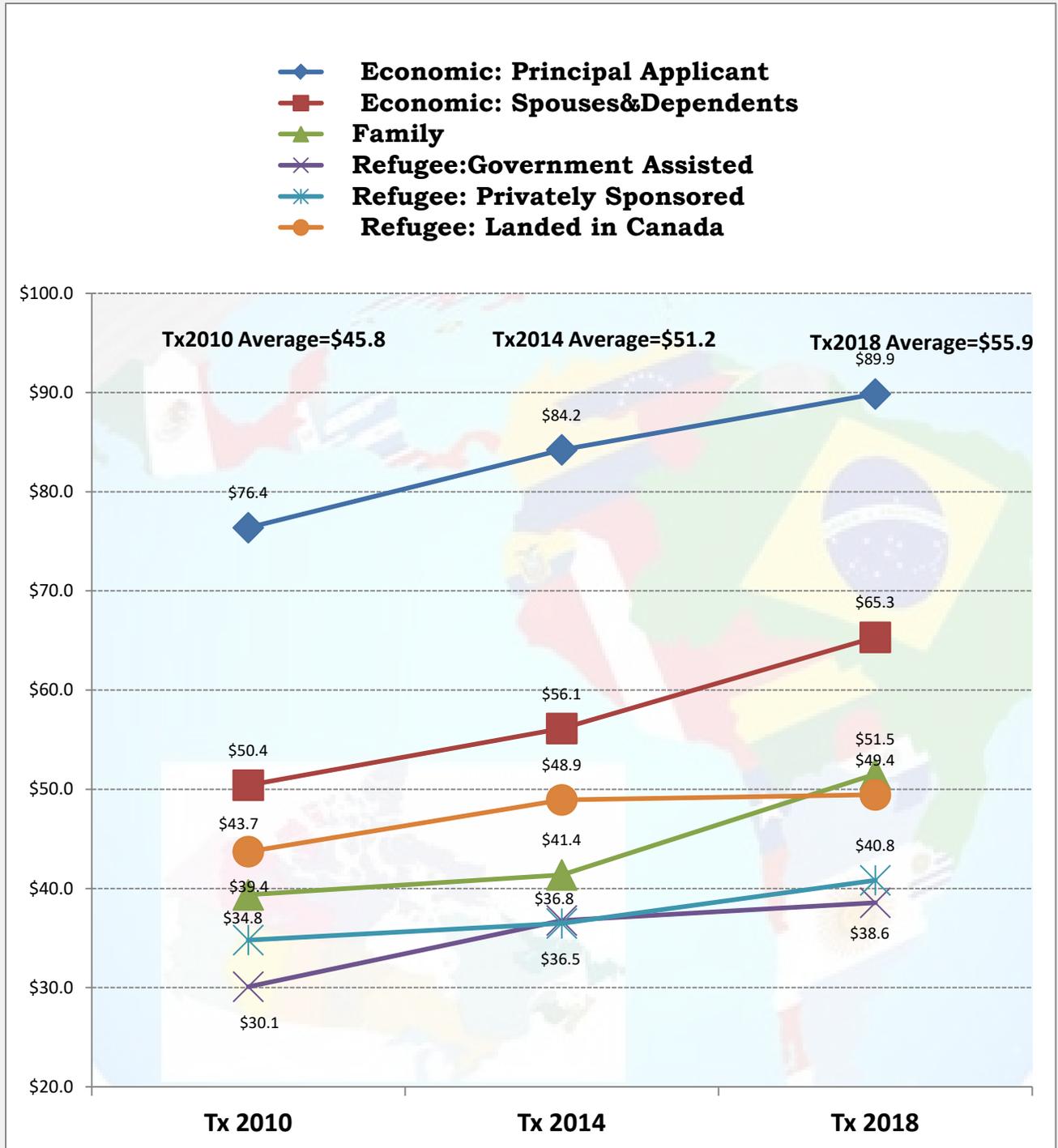

Source: Special Table SCS-504, Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB)

Chart 2: Average Employment Incomes (in thousands Can$) of Male Workers aged 25-54 by Immigrant Intake Class, IMDB Sample of Latin American Immigrant Arrivals 2000-2009, Tax Years 2010, 2014 and 2018

Legend:
- Economic: Principal Applicant
- Economic: Spouses&Dependents
- Family
- Refugee:Government Assisted
- Refugee: Privately Sponsored
- Refugee: Landed in Canada

Tx2010 Average=$62.4   Tx2014 Average=$72.8   Tx2018 Average=$77.3

Category	Tx 2010	Tx 2014	Tx 2018
Economic: Principal Applicant	$98.1	$102.8	$104.8
Economic: Spouses&Dependents	$71.7	$86.2	$94.2
Family	$57.3	$66.6	$83.0
Refugee: Landed in Canada	$64.1	$70.8	$73.7
Refugee: Government Assisted	$37.1	$50.1	$56.4
Refugee: Privately Sponsored	$45.9	$48.5	$50.4

Source: Special Table SCS-504, Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB)

Chart 3: Average Employment Incomes (in thousands Can $) of Female Workers aged 25-54 by Immigrant Intake Class, IMDB Sample of Latin American Immigrant Arrivals 2000-2009, Tax Years 2010, 2014 and 2018

Source: Special Table SCS-504, Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB)

4.2. Strong earning trajectories for economic class workers, moderate trajectories for family class and Landed-in-Canada refugees, weaker trajectories for government-assisted and privately sponsored refugees

Chart 2 displays the earning trajectories of Latin American male workers across the three tax observation years. Economic class principal applicants had the highest earnings, hovering around 100$ thousand across the three tax observation points. Steeper earning growths were also observable for economic class spouses and dependents as well as family class entrants, reaching an average of 94.2$ and 83$ thousand respectively at the tax year 2018. Latino LICs' earnings kept close pace with family class trajectories reaching 73.7$ thousand in the same tax year. The earning trajectories of male Latino GARs and PSRs were visibly "flatter", not surpassing 55$ thousand at all three tax years. The earning trajectory picture for females was similar but at lower levels of earnings (see chart 3). Except for economic class principal applicants, intake class groups appeared more closely "packed" in terms of their earning trajectories (see chart 3). The average earnings of economic class principal applicants rose from 76.4$ thousand in the tax year 2010 to 89.9$ thousand in the tax year 2018. Notable improvements in average earnings were observed also for economic class spouses/dependents: from 50.4$ thousand in the tax year 2010 to 65.3$ thousand in the tax year 2018. The average incomes of female GARs and PSRs were situated at the bottom of the income hierarchy hovering below 40$ thousand across the three tax observation years.

4.3. Multivariate Findings

To explore employment income variations in the context of multivariate analysis, selected cross-classifications were extracted from the special IMDB table. These cross-classifications contained summary information on income in the three tax years for various combinations of gender, educational levels, and the Canadian regions of admission of workers. In total, 265 cross-classifications of workers were drawn from the table (123 male records and 142 female records). To ensure reliable estimates, each cross-classification had a minimal count of 200 workers. In the multivariate analysis, thirteen dummy variables (0,1) representing memberships in the various socio-demographic and residential categories were used as predictors of earnings in weighted standard OLS (Ordinary Least Squares) and mixed-type linear regression models.

4.3.1. Controlling for other covariates, immigrant intake class-related variables were found to be strong predictors of earnings

The first multivariate analysis exploration provided a cross-sectional view of employment earnings, assessing the importance of intake class predictors in the presence of other covariates such as gender, educational level, and region of admission predictors. Chart 4 presents the results of four OLS regression models where predictors were included sequentially along with the average employment incomes at the three tax observation years. The chart presents the cumulative adjusted R^2 statistics, which refer to the proportion of explained variance in the dependent variable adjusted for the number of predictors present in the models. Before the inclusion of immigrant intake predictors in model 3, the proportion of variance explained was 37%, 45%, and 39% respectively. After their inclusion, the explained variances of OLS regressions increased to about 60%, 68%, and 62%[8].

Chart 4. OLS Regression Results*: Cumulative Adjusted R^2 changes in Four Prediction Models of Employment Incomes (thousands Can$) at Tax Years 2010, 2014 2018, 265 Cross-classifications, IMDB Sample of Latin American Immigrant Arrivals 2000-2009
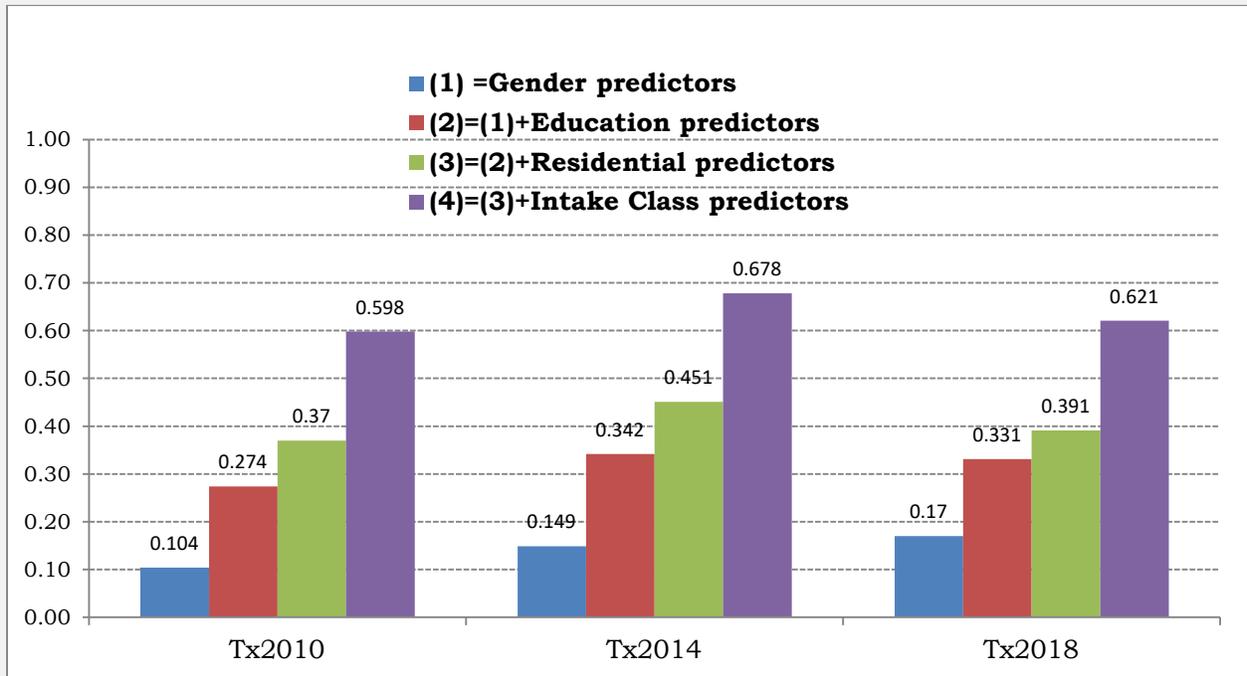
* Number of predictors: (1)=1, (2)=2, (3)=8, (4) =13. Source: Special Table SCS-504, Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB)

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[8] Incremental variance increases were found to be statistically significant at the p<.05 level using F tests.

4.3.1. Despite income gains made by a longer stay in Canada, greater income penalties were experienced by government-assisted and privately sponsored refugees

The second multivariate analysis exploration incorporated the time dimension in the regression models and the cross-classifications became clustering units for panel-type mixed regression models with random intercepts. The analytical aim here was to estimate changes in the earning intercepts and determine the effects of inter-tax time, university education. region of admission and time in Canada. Results of these mixed regression models for male and female workers are presented in table 2. Examination of the fixed effects on the random intercepts of earning trajectories revealed that both time in Canada (inter tax time) and university education had a positive effect for male and female workers (about 8$ thousand and 21$ thousand respectively). The most negative effects from intake class memberships on the random intercepts were observed for GARs and PSRs (higher than 65$ thousand in the case of males and 42$ thousand for females). In terms of the region of admission, admission to Quebec and other regions outside Ontario depressed intercept incomes in a significant way, particularly for male workers (no less than 15$ thousand).

Table 2: Random Intercept Regression Model Results: Estimated Effects of Socio-demographic, Intake Class, Region of Admission and Inter Tax Time by Gender of Worker, Tax Years 2010, 2014 and 2018, IMDB Sample of Latin American Immigrant Arrivals 2000-2009

Socio-Demographic, Intake Class and Region of Admission Predictors	Parameter Estimate (thousands Can $)	Std. Error (thousands Can$)	Z test	Sig.
Males				
University Education	$20.8	$3.6	5.76	0.00
Economic Class: Spouses & Dependents	-$34.2	$5.9	-5.81	0.00
Family Class	-$47.9	$5.3	-9.03	0.00
Refugee Class: government-assisted (GARs)	**-$65.4**	$6.1	-10.72	0.00
Refugee Class: privately sponsored (PSRs)	**-$79.9**	$14.6	-5.48	0.00
Refugee Class: landed-in-Canada (LICs)	-$46.4	$5.6	-8.31	0.00
Alberta region admission	$17.1	$5.7	3.01	0.00
B.C. region of admission	-$6.6	$5.4	-1.22	0.22
Quebec region of admission	-$20.2	$4.5	-4.44	0.00
Other regions of admission	-$15.6	$7.9	-1.97	0.05
Inter Tax Time Increase (4 years)	**$8.3**	$1.1	7.46	0.00
Constant	$96.3	$5.8	16.51	0.00
Females				
University Education	$21.5	$2.5	8.75	0.00
Economic Class: Spouses & Dependents	-$22.3	$3.9	-5.73	0.00
Family class	-$32.2	$3.8	-8.41	0.00
Refugee Class: government-assisted (GARs)	**-$42.1**	$4.6	-9.06	0.00
Refugee Class: privately sponsored (PSRs)	**-$46.5**	$14.7	-3.17	0.00
Refugee Class: landed-in-Canada (LICs)	-$30.0	$4.1	-7.27	0.00
Alberta region of admission	$8.3	$3.7	2.24	0.03
B.C. region of admission	-$4.9	$3.6	-1.37	0.17
Quebec region of admission	-$7.5	$3.3	-2.27	0.02
Other region of admission	-$19.7	$4.6	-4.33	0.00
Inter Tax Time Increase (4 years)	**$6.6**	$0.8	7.73	0.00
Constant	$57.4	$4.3	13.41	0.00
Reference Groups: Non-University Education, Economic Class, Principal Applicant, Ontario region admission Intercept Variances: Males=255.7 Can $, Females=118.4 Can $ Wald Chisq: Males=335.7 p<.01, Females=369.78 p<.01				

5.0. Post-Explorations Reflections

Before discussing the findings of this analysis, it is important to mention some shortcomings present in the IMDB data and the scope of analysis. Earning trajectories of Latino immigrants were estimated for a single cohort of immigrants (2000-2009) at three points of observation (tax years 2010,2014 and 2018). This "snapshot" analytical approach makes it difficult to evaluate how each yearly cohort changed their income trajectories at specific points in time. Also, employment income covers a wide range of income sources including wages but, regrettably, the working IMDB table did not provide breakdowns on these sources. Limited sample counts, in some cases, made estimates of earnings less reliable. Finally, the sample of Latino tax filers was restricted to citizens from the leading 15 source countries and a wider spectrum would have been desirable.

Despite these data limitations, however, some interesting exploratory findings emerged from the study. Between 2010 and 2018, the average employment earnings improved by about a quarter of their original size for both non-refugee and refugee Latino workers in Canada. The pace of this improvement, however, varied significantly according to the immigrant intake class at entry. Multivariate analysis of cross-classifications found that immigrant class in conjunction with gender and university education were found to be strong predictors of immigrant earnings. Economic class workers, particularly principal applicants, outperformed immigrants who entered under family or humanitarian considerations. Economic class individuals entering as spouses and dependents also displayed strong upwards income trajectories. This story was fairly similar for male and female workers. Landed-in Canada refugees and family class immigrants also displayed moderate upward trajectories while government-assisted and privately sponsored refugees had the lowest starting points and displayed the shallowest earning trajectories.

Another interesting finding of the study pertains to the moderate to strong earning trajectories of landed in Canada refugees (LICs) compared to the other two refugee categories. Relative higher levels of human capital and more familiarity with local labour markets may be potential drivers of their superior earning trajectories to GARs and PSRs. Many Latino LICs have been reported to experience a "precarious" legal status before their formal admission to the country (see Goldring and Landolt, 2021). Their efforts to obtain a secure status in the country often include an active search for temporary jobs and the development of various economic survival strategies while waiting for their status to be regularized in Canada.

If employment income is a reliable indicator of economic integration, the march towards this goal appears faster for some Latino immigrant intake groups, and slower for others. From a policy perspective, the findings of the study are both promising and discouraging. The selection process appears to work well for Latino immigrants selected under the points system. The discouraging part of the story is that humanitarian efforts for a quick economic integration are hampered by the slow income mobility of Latino GARs and PSRs after a few years of arrival to Canada. Despite a wide spectrum of government services and the support of friends and relatives, economic outcomes for these refugees were disappointing[9].

The earning trajectories of refugee and non-refugee Latino immigrants may substantially improve when there is better recognition of their foreign credentials, adequate official language, and skill training as well as discrimination-free market transition programs to match immigrants' transferable skills and capabilities. These are key in opening the job market and reaching a higher stage in terms of their march towards economic integration in Canada.

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[9] It should be noted that the small IMDB counts for privately sponsored refugees in the Latino sample made employment income estimates less reliable compared to other refugee groups.

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