



35th International Geographical Congress 2024, Dublin

Global Change and Human Mobility: Exploring gender perspectives in migration studies:
unveiling intersectional dynamics

The transformative power of migration: life stories of immigrant women (El Hierro - Canary Islands)

Josefina Domínguez-Mujica

26/08/2024



The Re-Place project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe Framework Programme for Research and Innovation under grant agreement no. 101094087.

1. Life stories of immigrant women (El Hierro Island)

Gender and migration. Preliminary considerations

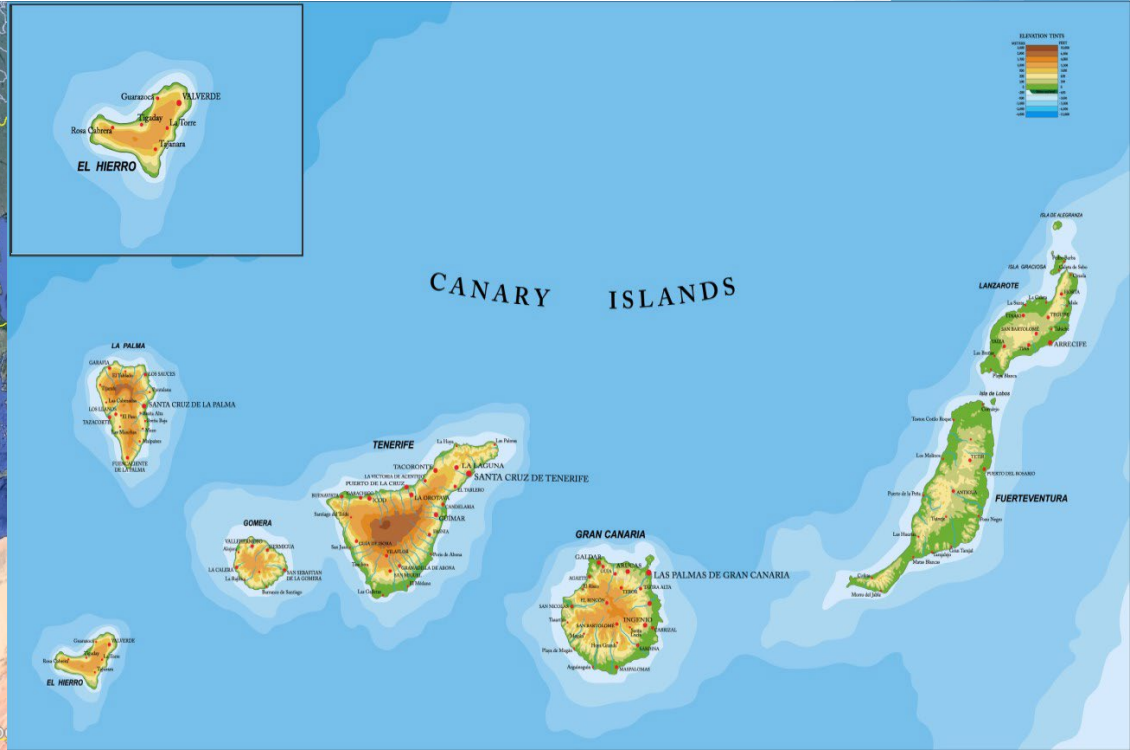
- Gendered understandings of international migration emerged slowly in the 1970s and 1980s according to the economic and social transformations brought about by globalisation and transnationalism- They has become a fruitful research arena.
- Immigrant women represent an increasingly varied group, according to their sociodemographic and economic profile, education levels, migrant and family statuses, and motivations for their mobility.
- International migration in recent times has become increasingly feminised, particularly because of the feminization of skilled migration; the demand of domestic and care work supporting the social reproduction of households; and the increasing lifestyle migrations.
- The most important factors currently contributing to the growth of the women immigration in El Hierro are the free movement of persons within countries of the European Union; the social and legal capital of descendant of former emigrants; and the labour demand of tourism sector and the business opportunities of active tourism.
- Immigrant women living in El Hierro provide life stories both linked to an independent migration project and that to a partner or family migration/reunification.

2. Life stories of immigrant women (El Hierro island)

2.1. Location

Outermost Region of the European Union

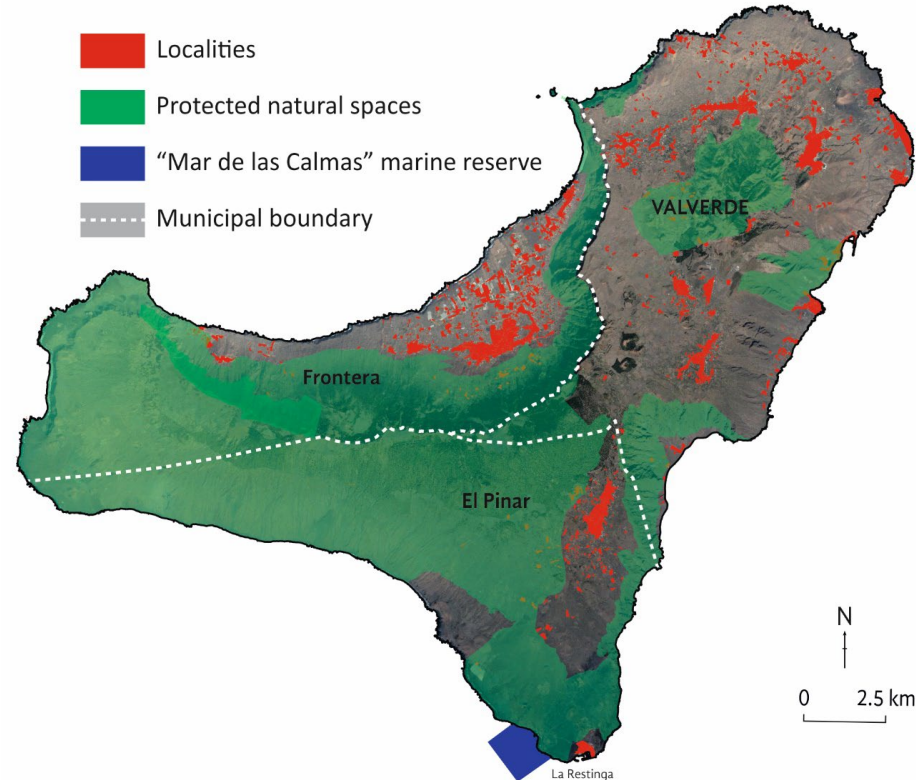
El Hierro: Southwestern edge of the Canary Islands



2. Life stories of immigrant women (El Hierro Island)

2.2. Natural environment

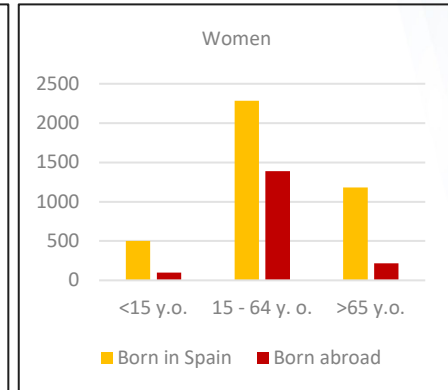
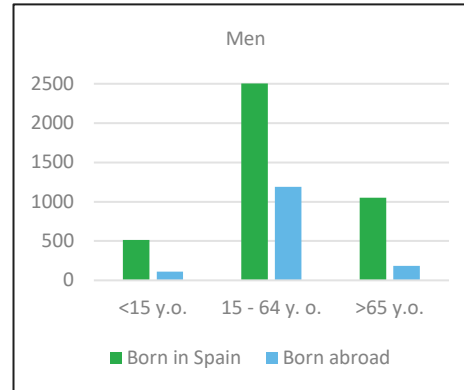
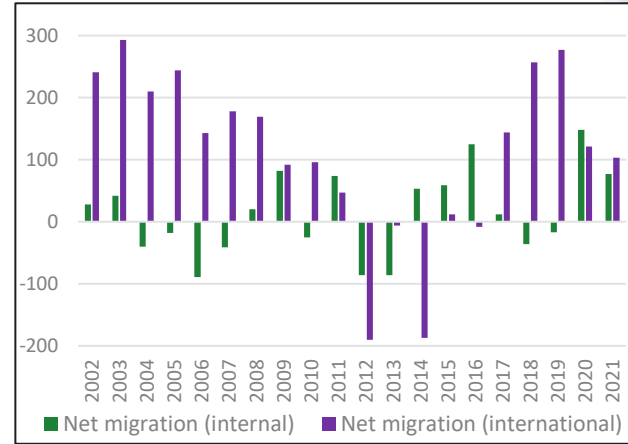
- ✓ The youngest Canary island in geological terms, with an age of 1.12 million years.
- ✓ 268.71 km² of surface and the highest relative concentration of volcanic cones in the Canary Islands.
- ✓ A last volcanic eruption (submarine) in 2011 next to the marine reserve.
- ✓ 58% of the island's surface is qualified as protected natural space.
- ✓ UNESCO designed El Hierro as Biosphere Reserve in 2000 and as Geopark in 2014 (a strategic model for local development).



2. Life stories of immigrant women (El Hierro Island)

2.3. Population's evolution

- ✓ El Hierro is the less populated of the Canary Islands: 11,659 inhabitants (2023 census).
- ✓ Historically, the population evolution was marked by emigration due to limited productive resources.
- ✓ From the nineties the population evolution rests on the rate of net migration from other Spanish areas and, especially, overseas.
- ✓ The foreign-born population constitutes 28% of the total population.
- ✓ Immigrant workers and entrepreneurs, lifestyle immigrants and former emigrants and their descendants (Cuba and Venezuela) prevail.
- ✓ The rate of immigrant women is 114 for every 100 men born abroad being the percentage of the women adult higher than that of men.



3. Life stories of immigrant women (El Hierro Island)

Qualitative Methodology

- ✓ Content of the 12 in-depth interviews through a qualitative analysis

Categories	Subcategories
Sociodemographic and labour profile	Birthplace
	Nationality
	Age at emigration and age (2024)
	Length of residence
	Education level
Migration profile	Business/work
	Factors promoting emigration
	Initial contact with El Hierro
	Way of emigrating
Transformations due to the migration process	Migratory capital
	Personal change
	Labor-economic change
	The most valued thing about living in El Hierro
	Main problems living in El Hierro
	Future perspectives of mobility

4. Life stories of immigrant women (El Hierro Island)

The most outstanding results

Sociodemographic and labour profile

Birthplace: the most of them in small and middle towns. **Urban provenance.**

Nationality: German (3); Venezuelan (2); Venezuelan and Spanish (2); French (1); Italian (1); Swedish (1); Czech and Polish (1); Ukrainian (1). **European and Latin American.**

Age at migration: average 40.9; five women in the thirties; five in the forties; one in the twenties; one in the fifties. **A decision taken at a mature/advanced adult age.**

Age today: average 54.9 years old. Except for the two youngest, they are not raising children today. Another three raised their children in El Hierro and the rest (8) did it before emigrating or they have not had children. **Scarcely contribution to the birth rate** of the local population.

Length of residence: an average of 13.8 years. **A sign of rooting.**

Education level: 9 interviewees with tertiary studies; 3 with secondary. **High level of training, allowing them to maintain a mid-high socioeconomic status and to overcome the process of deskilling.**

Business/work: all of them working before migrating and in El Hierro. **Different activities from those in origin,** linked to tourism sector and, especially, to active tourism sector (6); to hotel management (2); to restaurant management (2); to public administration (management of the public livestock cooperative) (1); to education (headmaster at distance) (1).

4. Life stories of immigrant women (El Hierro Island)

The most outstanding results

Migration profile

Factors promoting emigration: The attraction for El Hierro environment; business perspectives in active tourism; hiring of workers by international companies in alternative tourist activities (**lifestyle reasons**); flee the difficult economic and political situation in Venezuela; practices in a Master degree to acquire skills to work in business (**economic reasons**); turn their lives around after divorce; forced by her husband after taking away her son (**personal/family reasons**).

Initial contact with El Hierro: spending increasingly longer holidays (**tourism**); descendants of former emigrants spending periods of island vacations; new contact for family reunification (**family contacts**); new contact for friendship recommendations (**acquaintances contacts**).

Way of emigrating: **with husband or partner** (childless couple) (5); **family migration** (3); **family reunification** (husband/father, the pioneers) (3); **alone being the pioneer of family reunification** (1).

Migratory capital: **without** previous migration history (3); previous **internal** migration (3); previous **international** migration (3); **history of migration** of her parents, grandparents and other family members (3). **Different migratory capital profile.**

4. Life stories of immigrant women (El Hierro Island)

The most outstanding results

Transformations due to the migration process

Personal change: family reunification; consolidation of the relationship with partner/husband; break up of the relationship with partner/husband; transformation of the relationship between lovers into a solid relationship as couple; relationships with a new partners (**changes in affective/personal relationships**) (9); Labor environment (**professional adaptation to gain the company's trust**) (1); security (**to live with absence of fear of kidnapping or robbery**) (2).

Labor-economic change: From researcher at Paris University to co-manage a diving company; From IT worker in Telefunken to sports technique in a chain of diving centers; From physician to manage a hiking company and a travel agency; From worker in Citibank (American bank) to be hired as tourism guide; From technician in a hospital to manage a hiking, cycling and cave visiting company; From auditor in a multinational company to work in an organic farm (after doing a voluntary work - woofing) and as tourism guide; From administrative in a distribution company to be employed in a restaurant as kitchen assistant and then as cooker and owner of a restaurant; From operations manager of a business dedicated to banana production and distribution to manager of El Hierro Livestock Farmers' Cooperative; From home babysitter (public employment) to work in her family restaurant; From civil servant (teacher) to management a hotel business; Sharing the work in Sweden with long stays in El Hierro where she writes books and a blog on El Hierro; From lawyer to work as kitchen assistant, then management a little family hotel (**workers in origin and workers in El Hierro; a complex process of deskilling and reskilling; the most of them histories of professional-economic success through a radical change of their labor-economic specialization**).

4. Life stories of immigrant women (El Hierro Island)

The most outstanding results

Transformations due to the migration process

The most valued thing about living in El Hierro: El Hierro environment and its sustainability protection. The quality of life, the quality of marine water, to work with local products. The good level of healthcare system. The tranquility, to live with open doors; the friendliness and kindness of people. (**Environment and people, the most frequently statements**).

The main problems living in El Hierro: Bureaucratic issues for managing the businesses. Every goes very slow. Scarce frequency of the public road transports and of the air travel tickets. Poor pharmacy services. Shortage of housing for renting (not for holidays). Scarce of little hotels. Too many tourists during the summertime. (**Bureaucratic issues and the scarce of housing, the most frequently statements**).

Future perspectives of mobility: to stay in El Hierro (9 women, **the oldest**, many of them saying that they will share living in El Hierro with periodic visits to family living abroad). **The youngest** of the interviewees don't say anything about **the distant future** (3).

5. Life stories of immigrant women (El Hierro Island)

Sentences revealing the transformations in the lives of the women interviewed due to the migration process. Final remarks

- ✓ *“We didn’t plan to change our lives. It was the island that changed our lives”* (referring to a new pace of life and to a new economic support because of the emigration).
- ✓ *“First the island, then the house, then the company”* (describing the process of change and rooting).
- ✓ *“We live in a paradise. I feel like part of the island”* (the most common description).
- ✓ *“It is ideal for raising the children”* (statement of the low number of young mothers interviewed).
- ✓ *“The people of El Hierro have jobs they can choose from, migrants do not”* (relating the initial difficulties of labour migrants to thrive and marking differences with local people).
- ✓ *“I was studying Education, but my husband was here, and he told me: come, and I left all that and I came”* (a case of explicit subordination in the story of interviewees).
- ✓ *“My relationship with my partner ended abruptly because he fell in love with a friend of mine who was 25 years younger than me. This was the push I needed to come to El Hierro because I couldn’t live near them”* (love conflicts triggering emigration).

Thanks for your attention

