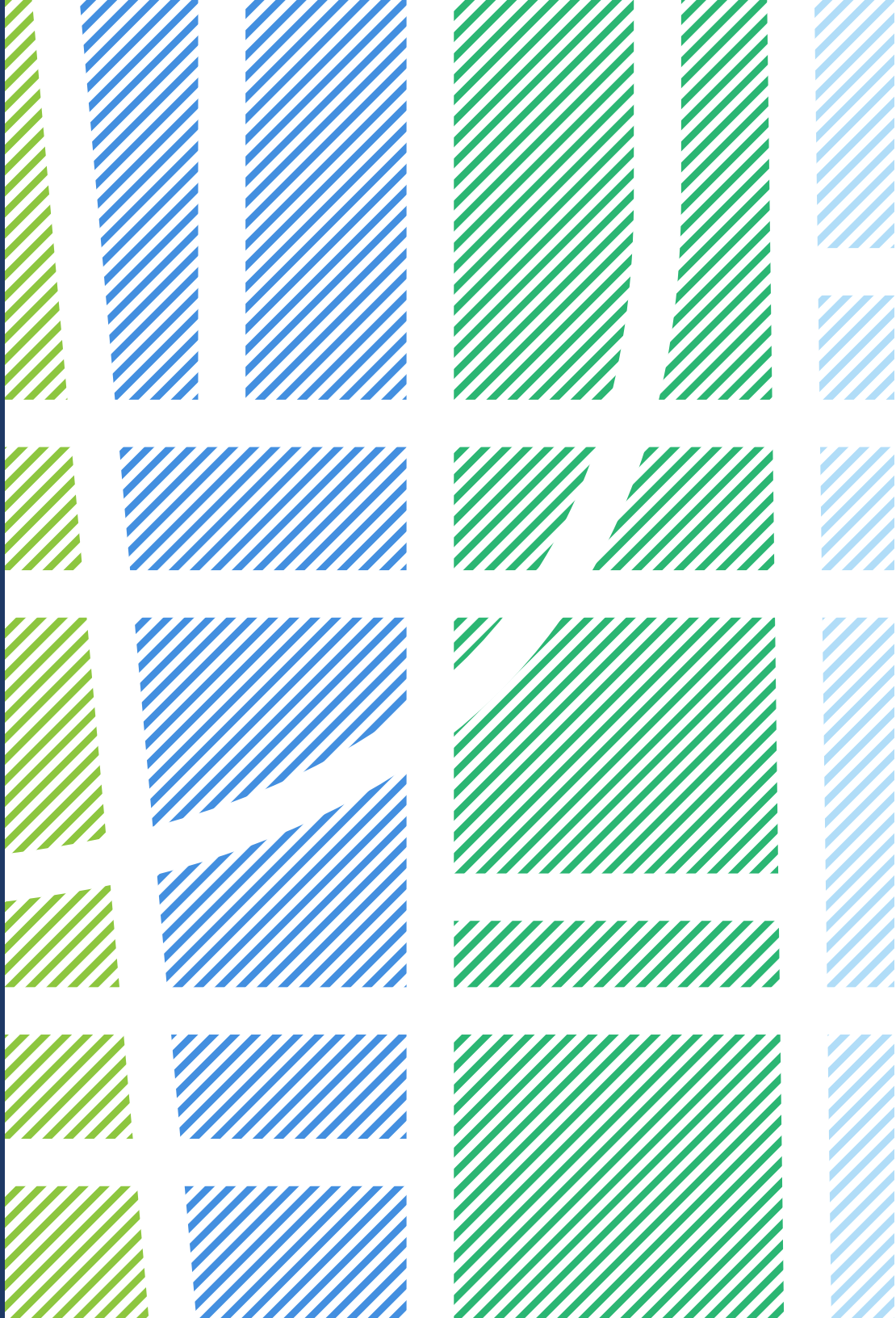


# The Global Migration and Health Initiative (GloMHI)

Expanding equity, inclusion  
and access for migrants in Toronto

City Research Insights  
Volume 2, Issue 2

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**As the School of Cities gears up to focus on a key theme for 2022/2023 – migration, belonging and thriving – our second issue of Volume 2 of Cities Research Insights features the work of an important network of researchers dedicated to increasing knowledge about the intersection of migration and health in Canada and around the world.** The Global Migration and Health Initiative, also known as GloMHI, is a multidisciplinary collective of applied researchers – academics, practitioners, advocates and students – focused on social justice and health equity approaches to studying human migration. GloMHI's Co-Directors, **Denise Gastaldo**, Associate Professor at the Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing and co-founder of the Centre for Critical Qualitative Health Research at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, and **Andrea A. Cortinois**, Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream at the Human Biology Program, Faculty and Arts and Sciences, and the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, are faculty at the University of Toronto leading the GloMHI network, which operates independently from the University.

Since its creation in 2015, GloMHI's members have contributed to important research funded by a wide array of public sector agencies focused on studying global determinants of health related to migration in Canada. Many of these studies focus on Toronto and have contributed substantially to our understanding of the urban migration experience across a wide range of migrant populations.

**In this issue of City Research Insights, we focus on two of GloMHI's projects that have contributed considerable knowledge to our understanding of equity issues for migrants living in and around Toronto. Below, we discuss these projects that focus on migrant caregivers and trans Latina women, present some key findings from the research network, and consider the policy implications of this important work.**

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## Project 1:

# Migrant Caregivers in Toronto

Research currently being undertaken by members of the GloMHI network, including **Dr. Cortinois** and **Dr. Gastaldo**, compares the lived experiences of two migrant populations in Toronto: Indigenous people moving from their communities of origin, often located in rural areas, and temporary foreign workers (TFWs) (see Box 1 on page 4). TFWs included in the research are employed as live-in caregivers in and around the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and are primarily women who have come to Toronto from the Philippines as a part of the TFW Program.

While these two groups seem quite disparate on the surface, they have several key characteristics in common. For example, members of both groups have relocated to Toronto, which has long acted as a landing ground for newcomers – whether migrating internationally, from rural areas or neighbouring cities – in pursuit of educational and employment opportunities (see Box 2 on page 4). They also share in common their experiences of colonialism that continue to impact both populations in comparable ways, producing geographic displacement, social dislocation and, often, the ‘fracturing’ of families and communities. This research investigates the similarities and differences with regards to how the two groups live through and interpret the experiences of separation inherent in migration.

The research has so far investigated the migration experiences of Filipina women enrolled in the TFW program who work as caregivers in Toronto households. Some early findings of this project are highlighted in the Key Findings section on pages 8-9.

## GloMHI Team members

### **Andrea A. Cortinois,**

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### **Marium Jamil,**

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### **Frances Recknor,**

Member and Assistant Professor, Baylor College of Medicine's Human Trafficking Program

PHOTO  
Helena Lopes





## Canadian urban centres as migration hubs

BOX 2

Migration drives significant change in cities, particularly in Canada where the immigration rate is one of the highest per population of any country in the world. As urbanization continues to shape settlement patterns globally, large urban centres like Toronto and Vancouver act as migration hubs in Canada. Migration contributes significantly to the cultural vitality and diversity of cities, while at the same time presenting significant challenges to municipal governments to support and provide essential services to newcomers. Migrants – both documented and undocumented – provide many essential services in and around cities including caregiving, farming, construction, cleaning and delivery work but often grapple with challenges accessing the same rights and services as permanent residents and citizens.

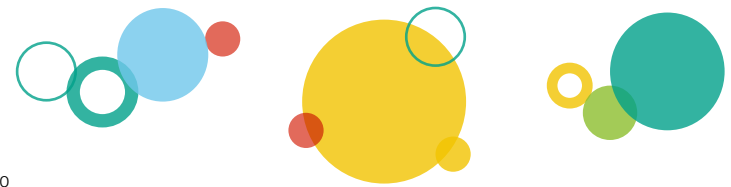


PHOTO  
Maarten van den Heuvel

## Defining temporary foreign workers (TFWs)

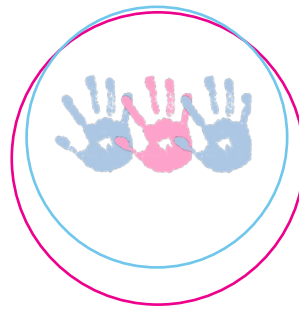
BOX 1

Migrant workers are defined by the International Labour Organization as international migrants who are currently employed and seeking employment in their present country of residence. Temporary foreign workers, or TFWs, are migrant workers who work in a foreign country for a limited period of time on a work visa. According to the OECD, TFWs make up three times the number of permanent migrant workers in OECD countries. In Canada, like in other countries, increased numbers of TFWs has led to increased migratory precarity and costs for workers looking to establish themselves in the country.

In Canada, many migrants come to the country under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, intended to be used when employers are facing short-term skills or labour shortages that cannot be filled by Canadians or permanent residents. Many TFWs work in private residences providing care to children, seniors, or others with medical needs. The TFW program in Canada has become a central pathway for permanent residence for migrants, whose employer can apply on their behalf after certain criteria are met, including working under the program for three years.



# Trans Latinas Rompiendo Barreras



The “Trans Latinas Rompiendo Barreras” (TLRB) project studies methods to increase belonging and wellbeing amongst migrant trans women in Toronto. TLRB took place in 2017 and 2018, and was a collaboration between members of GloMHI at the University of Toronto and frontline workers at the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples (CSSP) in Toronto, as well as members of the trans Latina community who participate in the group Trans Latinas Ontario (TLO).

This project entailed the delivery of front-line programming to participating trans Latina women designed to target the social and economic exclusion they experience as they “navigate the intersecting challenges of being transgender and being migrants” (Bilbao-Joseph, 2018: pg. 2). Programming entailed two main activities: twelve biweekly workshops and a monthly self-care and peer advocacy drop-in group that was organized by workshop graduates. Workshop topics included sessions on self-care, social integration and economic inclusion. The project also entailed an evaluation that measured the impact of the program via pre- and post-intervention surveys, focus groups, hand mapping, field notes, participants feedback forms, and workshop facilitator notes (see Box 3 and page 6).

“**Trans Latinas do not have access to the same health services as their gender-conforming peers. Stigma, discrimination, transphobia and ignorance are still prevalent among larger Spanish-speaking communities, affecting transwomen’s well-being.**”

– from the *Trans Latinas Rompiendo Barreras Project Report*



PHOTO  
Celeste Bilbao-Joseph

## Outcomes of the TLRB Project

BOX 3

The evaluation of the TLRB project revealed that the intervention had a positive impact on participants’ knowledge of social and health services in the GTA, improved their social network, and increased their self-confidence. Participants also experienced greater feelings of self-empowerment and felt more in control of their lives. By the end of the workshops, many also had new employment or social opportunities, and engaged in more healthcare and self-care activities. The evaluation shows that interventions that are designed alongside community partners and that target social and economic skills can be useful for increasing feelings of wellbeing and belonging amongst trans migrants.

# Hand Mapping

Hand mapping as a method to facilitate expression of complex migratory journeys

Hand mapping is a qualitative method that uses drawing and storytelling as a way to generate knowledge. Hand mapping entails the subject tracing their own hand, and using the drawing to narrate their experience of migration where each finger and the palm are different parts of the journey. This method can be successfully employed with vulnerable populations who have multi-layered, intersectional experiences that more traditional methods of gathering data tend to miss.

“In hand mapping, participants draw an outline of their own hands and then are invited to orally and visually narrate a journey, in this case, participants’ migratory and gender journeys. The method is designed to facilitate the expression of complex issues through drawing, collage, dialogue and storytelling, allowing researchers and participants—particularly those with experiences of marginalization—to collaborate revealing perspectives that are often invisible in scholarship and practice.”

(Gailits et al., 2021)



Examples of workshop participant hand map  
COURTESY Trans Latinas  
Rompiendo Barreras

# GloMHI Policy Implications

The following policy considerations highlight what policymakers can do to increase equity and service access in the lives of migrants in Toronto.

## 1 **Separate access to permanent status for migrants from economic gains for Canadian employers.**

Many immigration policies, including the Temporary Foreign Worker Program described in this issue, are designed with a focus on employment for migrants by employers in Canada. Because these programs require employers to apply for permanent status on behalf of their employees, they can produce precarious situations for foreign workers. Even if they work under unfair or exploitative conditions, Many TFWs can't risk leaving their jobs. Policymakers have the power to change this policy so that permanent status becomes the start of migrant workers' journey, rather than something that is hard to reach.

## 2 **Create a pathway whereby migrants who lose work permits can regain them.**

Currently, migrants who lose their work permits end up falling out of legal status with no means to regain their legal status, rendering them undocumented migrants. This means that the Canadian immigration system actively participates in the production of undocumented migrants.

**“Canadian colonial history has dramatically affected Indigenous people and immigrants over the centuries and continues to shape our current relations. Toronto has been both an exciting place where thousands of immigrants and Canadian-born residents respectfully share resources and cultures – a ‘happy mosaic’ – and a site of economic exclusion, racism, and cultural loss.”**

**– Dr. Gastaldo and Dr. Cortinois**

## 3 **Policymaking processes are ill-equipped to deal with issues relevant to non-citizen migrants.**

The work of policymaking focuses almost exclusively on Canadian citizens and, consequently, is centered on issues relevant to permanent residents and citizens. The 1.5 million people who live and work in Canada without status aren't able to vote and have minimal mechanisms to pressure elected officials and policymakers to advance equitable laws and regulations.



# Key Findings from recent GloMHI initiatives

## Migrants have a very different experience of the City of Toronto than other urban residents.

GloMHI's early findings from the study of TFW caregivers shows that TFWs have an experience of Toronto characterized by a high degree of social isolation and a lack of geographical knowledge of the city. Many TFWs who work as caregivers spend the majority of their time in a private residence, and are often not able to fully participate and engage in city life due to their long hours of work and low wages. Their regular use of public transportation systems forms a core experience in their lives, and is the main way in which they get to know the limited locations in the city with which they're familiar.

## Migrant workers labouring in essential jobs often fill the gaps left behind by systemic failures.

The high cost of housing in Toronto requires many families to earn two incomes to make ends meet, creating the challenge of being both a "good parent" and a "good employee" as both adults in two-parent families work outside of the home, leaving less facetime with their children. At the same time, childcare and eldercare options in Toronto and across Canada are often beyond the budget of average households, and there are few if any affordable or subsidized options. Women migrants brought in as caregivers through the TFW Program often fill this "caregiver gap" created by multiple overlapping systemic failures.

## Urban inequities are amplified in the lives of migrants.

The inequities that many BIPOC and other vulnerable Torontonians experience are often amplified in the lives of migrants as they interact with multiple overlapping systems that create intersecting experiences of inequity. Precarious employment with low wages is a common experience amongst migrants, which makes affording independent housing – especially in Toronto, one of the most expensive cities in Canada – extremely challenging. The desire for permanent resident status or citizenship often keeps migrants in Toronto for multiple years, and the lack of benefits or vacation time means that many migrants aren't able to visit their own families, sometimes going for years without seeing their children. Migrants often also live in time poverty, working extremely long hours without time for themselves, foreclosing opportunities to build social networks or familiarizing themselves with the city.



PHOTO COURTESY OF  
MigrantRights.ca,  
June, 2021

### Status For All March

On September 18, 2022, hundreds of demonstrators marched in Toronto to demand status for all migrants. Groups like the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change and the Migrant Rights Network continue to call on the Canadian federal government to grant permanent status to undocumented people in Canada. There are at least 1.2 million people in Canada each year on temporary work or study permits, or who have refugee claimant permits.



## The Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Program in Canada can influence high levels of employment precarity and leaves migrant workers open to exploitative labour practices.

While the TFW Program is designed to provide migrants with a pathway to permanent residence, the fact that employers apply for PR status on behalf of their employees after up to three years of work leaves women migrant caregivers in highly precarious situations. TFWs cannot leave their position within those three years, even if their employer engages in exploitative practices. This might include forcing TFWs to work extremely long hours – often as many hours as they’re in the home – for six or even seven days a week. Despite these challenges, many choose to come to Toronto over other global cities because of the ability to apply for permanent residence through the TFW program.

### Nothing for us, without us.

Methods utilized by GloMHI projects often follow decolonization practices increasingly adopted to build inclusivity and equity in research. Research from a decolonization framework approaches migrants as experts of their own experience who share their knowledge with researchers rather than as research “subjects” from whom data is collected or extracted. Another key feature of this framework is centering community by ensuring that community partners are involved in aspects of the research process such as research design, recruitment and knowledge mobilization. Additionally, a decolonization framework requires that the benefits of research participation are shared by both researchers and participants. Benefits for participants may include financial compensation at an expert-level fee, community- and network-building, and support accessing various social services when appropriate.

### Policy work for migrant health tends to leave out temporary migrants.

Because the work of changing policy is strategic and opportunistic, it often focuses on issues that are winnable and that align with other factors that drive the workings of a social system. This means that advocacy for health coverage for immigrants and migrants prioritizes the extension of health insurance to those who have applied, or intend to apply for, citizenship. Other categories of temporary migrants are often left out of these advocacy efforts altogether. This highlights the way in which what might be called the “cultural politics of healthcare access [falls] back on a normative attachment to Canadian citizenship” (Landolt, 2021).







PHOTO Deena Ladd  
COURTESY StatusForAll.ca  
Sept, 2022.

## What's next for this project?

As the GloMHI network continues to produce knowledge at the intersection of migration and health, there are several developments on the horizon:

- GloMHI will continue to gather data for their project comparing TFW migrant caregivers with Indigenous individuals who have recently settled in Toronto. GloMHI has recently begun recruitment for the second phase of their research, and will soon begin the process of generating knowledge in relation to their Indigenous participants' experiences of migration.
- GloMHI is also currently investigating the possibility of formal non-profit status. This would enable GloMHI members to perform work in new ways – including through consultancy and research contracts – and would represent an exciting development for the network.
- GloMHI network researchers are also collectively continuing to think through how to decolonize knowledge production, and how to implement decolonized techniques throughout their research projects.

**Learn more about the GloMHI initiative [here](#).**

Sign up for our [newsletter](#) to keep up-to-date!



# Interview with Denise Gastaldo and Andrea Cortinois

*This interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

## Tell me a little bit about GloMHI and your work with the network. What gap does GloMHI address, and what contribution has GloMHI made to the study of migration and health?

**Andrea:** When I joined the Dalla Lana School of Public Health in 2014, there was no course on migration. There also wasn't a formal group of colleagues interested in migration. To have the largest school of public health in Canada in one of the most multicultural cities in the world without a set of activities focusing on migration surprised me. I knew a few people who were interested in the topic, including Denise and a few others, and I think GloMHI became an opportunity to have our own space of reflection and learning that was open to colleagues, and not necessarily just academic scholars within U of T.

**Denise:** The first thing we did when we started GloMHI was to ask our community partners what they wanted to study rather than setting the agenda. That's how we generated new members, and also how the Trans Latinas project was created. It was the Centre for Spanish-Speaking People group that identified that there was no data available about how to help this specific group of immigrants in Toronto. We're always trying to be responsive to community partners and their needs. The fact that we bring together a group of people who think about the phenomenon of immigration with that kind of responsiveness to community partners, that makes us unique.

**Read the full interview here.**



**Andrea A. Cortinois** is an Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream at the University of Toronto, cross-appointed between the Human Biology Program, Faculty of Arts and Science, and the Dalla Lana School of Public Health. He teaches both graduate and undergraduate courses in global migration and health, and global health. Over the past 30 years, Dr. Cortinois has worked as a journalist, researcher, educator, and manager of health-related interventions on four continents, mainly in the Global South. Dr. Cortinois' research interests include the impact of the global economic regime and the planetary environmental crises on displacement; migration as an intermediate determinant of health; and the social costs of migration in countries of origin.



PHOTO  
Horst Herget

**Denise Gastaldo** is an Associate Professor at the Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing and Dalla Lana School of Public Health, and was Director of the Centre for Critical Qualitative Health Research at the University of Toronto between 2014 and 2018. Dr. Gastaldo's academic work focuses on health equity, in particular exploring migration and gender as social determinants of health, both in Canada and internationally. As a methodologist, she has systematized body-map storytelling as a research methodology for the health sciences and is currently developing strategies to decolonize health research.

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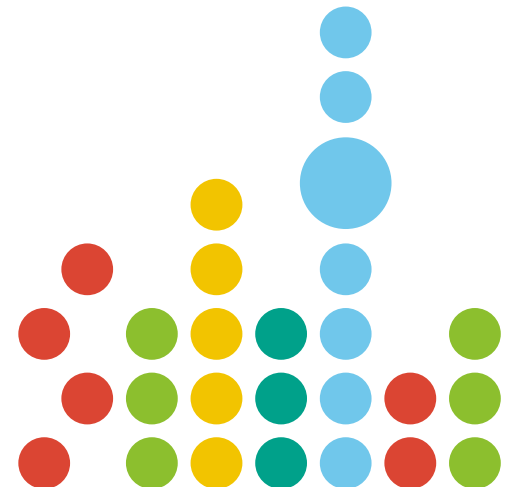
# About the School of Cities

The School of Cities is a solutions incubator for urban-focused researchers, educators, students, practitioners, and the general public to explore and address the complex global challenges facing urban centres. A living laboratory, the School leverages urban data and lived experience to improve policy and decision-making, and collaborates with communities around the world to make cities and urban regions more sustainable, prosperous, inclusive, and just.

## About City Research Insights

*The Global Migration and Health Initiative (GloMHI)* is the second issue in the second volume of the *City Research Insights* series, designed to link the urban research being conducted at the University of Toronto with the public, other institutions, and decision-makers.

With this series, the School of Cities seeks to leverage our extraordinary community of urbanists and urban-oriented researchers to create a rich, multidisciplinary community of urban faculty, researchers, and students across disciplines and perspectives. In addition to facilitating interdisciplinary research projects, partnerships and funding opportunities, we provide a hub for urban-focused interdisciplinary and collaborative learning.



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Unless otherwise noted, all information is based on the work of the researchers. Bilbao-Joseph, Celeste, et al. 2018. Trans Latinas Rompiendo Barreras Project Report; the Global Migration & Health Initiative website, available at <https://www.glomhi.org/>

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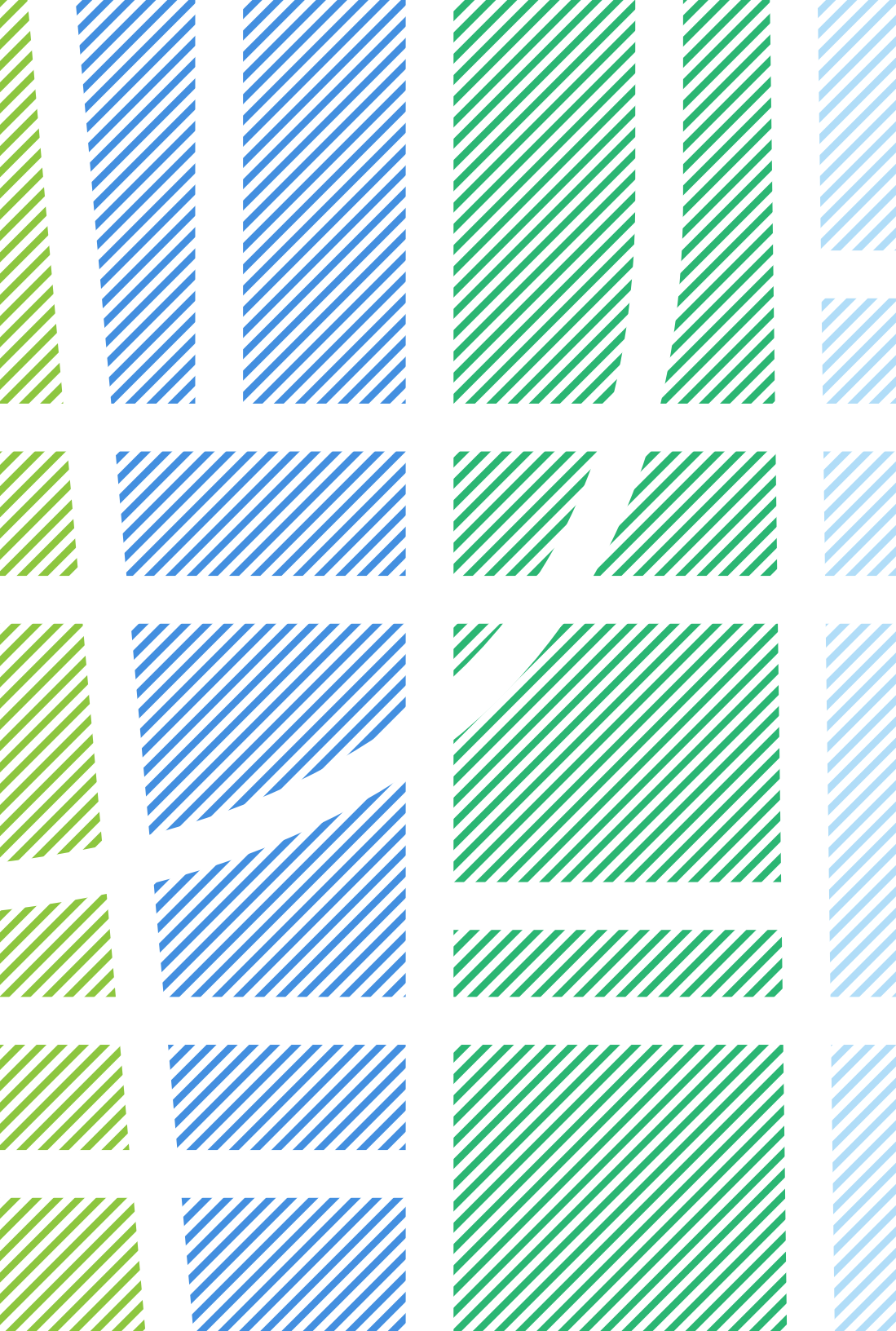
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