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Gender and Migration

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A monthly ECW issuance aiming at raising the gender awareness and responsiveness through highlighting the gender dimensions in various fields.

Despite the common misconception that it is mostly men who migrate; half of the 195 million international migrants worldwide are women.

There are different kinds of migration such as **voluntary** international or internal, and **forced** migration including trafficking, international and internal displacement due to wars and conflict.

Since the subject of gender and armed conflict has already been addressed in a previous issue, this Newsletter will tackle the gender dimension of International migration pertaining to international migrant workers.

It is important to examine the gender dimension of migration because gender roles, relations and inequalities not only affect those who migrate, but also impact the economic and social situation in labor- sending and labor-receiving states.



Special events in the ESCWA Centre for Women

▶ ECW will be holding a sub regional workshop on Gender Mainstreaming for the National Machineries for Women From 5 to 7 February 2007 in Amman

▶ ECW will be holding an EGM on the impact of wars and armed conflict on the advancement of women in the Arab region on March 13, 2007 in Abu Dhabi

▶ ECW will host the third session of the Committee on Women from 14-15 March 2007 in Abu Dhabi

What is the Migration Cycle?

Migration might provide new opportunities to improve women's lives and change oppressive gender relations; but it can also give rise to gender discrimination and expose women to new vulnerabilities such as exploitation, trafficking and abuse. Migration can provide a vital source of income for migrant women and men and earn them greater autonomy, self – confidence and social status. At the same time, migration may negatively and disproportionately impact female migrants, especially irregular migrant workers, who may face stigma and discrimination at every stage of the **migration cycle**.

According to the international Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICMW), adopted in 1990, and entered into force in 2004:

“The entire migration cycle of migrant workers and members of their families

comprises preparation for migration, departure, transit and the entire period of stay and remunerated activity in the state of employment as well as return to the state of origin or the state of habitual residence”.¹ Before departing as migrant workers, women may be faced with gender-biased procedures and corrupt agents. During transit, and at the destination women may experience verbal, physical and sexual abuse, poor housing and lodging, sex-segregated labour markets, low wages, long working hours, insecure contracts and precarious legal status . Moreover, upon their return to the source country, they may be faced with broken families, illness and poverty.²

1- The International Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICMW) 1990/2004, on <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/cmw.htm> accessed at : December 15 , 2006.

2-Jolly & Reeves, Gender and Migration, Bridge, 2005

Highlights:

3-How Does Migration Impact Women?

4- Migration: Those Who Are Left Behind.

5- Recommendations: How to Mainstream Gender Concerns in the Migration Process.

6- Facts and Figures.

7- Matrix: Gender and Migration.

How Does Migration Impact Women?

"Women tend to be pushed into illegal channels or to the "unprotected" informal sector where exploitation and poor working conditions are widespread."

Skilled workers tend to be awarded more rights than unskilled ones. While male migrants usually undertake work that is classified as 'skilled' such as joining middle or higher management positions in the manufacturing sector, women frequently undertake unskilled work as they become domestic workers, care takers, entertainers, or garment-workers in the host state.

In labor-receiving countries, policies managing immigration often give greater rights and possibilities for regular migration to those taking up jobs usually performed by men. As such, women tend to become more vulnerably pushed into illegal channels or to the "unprotected" informal sector where exploitation and poor working conditions are widespread. Therefore, the impact of migration on women workers includes low status occupations and jobs, poor working conditions, exploitation and low earnings.³



3-Piper, N., 2005, 'Gender and Migration', background paper for Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) and appendix to the GCIM Global Report on Migration, Recommendations to the UN Secretary General .

Export Processing Zones (EPZs)

Poor working conditions and exploitation are not limited to the informal sector; female migrants working in EPZs also face a number of human rights violations, harsh working conditions, and possibly sexual abuse. Women account for as high as 90 per cent of total export processing zone labour force. This high percentage is explained not in terms of social or economic factors but rather by the nature of export processing zones industries. The two most important export processing industries (electronics and textiles) whether in the developed or developing countries have high percentage of female migrant labour-force. The low skill needed, high degree of manual dexterity and the ability to concentrate on repetitive jobs for longer periods attract more of female than male labour.⁴

A recent Oxfam report has revealed that in China's Guangdong province, one of the world's fastest growing industrial areas, young female migrants working in EPZ s face 150 hours of overtime each month in the garment factories—but 60 percent have no written contract and 90 percent have no access to social or health insurance.⁵

Moreover, many female migrants working in EPZs may face during high season excessive unpaid overtime work (up to 20 hours a day) and severe health problems such as backache, respiratory, and kidney problems arising from restricted monitored access to the toilet amongst other factors.⁶



4-Labour and Employment Conditions in Export Processing Zones, A Socio-Legal Analysis on South Asia and South Pacific, by Mohammed Ahmadu, can be accessed at http://www.vanuatu.usp.ac.fj/journal_splaw/Working_Papers/Ahmadu1.htm.

5- Oxfam, 2004, accessed at <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2004/feb2004/wome-f25.shtml>

6-Oxfam, 2004, accessed at <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2004/feb2004/wome-f25.shtml>

"Many female migrants working in EPZs may face excessive unpaid overtime work and severe health problems such as backache, respiratory, and kidney problems arising from restricted monitored access to the toilet amongst other factors."

Entry status:" illegal "or "dependent spouse"

In addition to exploitation at the workplace, female migrant workers may face severe consequences and discrimination depending on their entry status to the labor-receiving state, whether as illegal female migrant workers; or as "dependents" of a male migrant worker who is a member of their family (usually the husband).

False documents may mean that women are more likely to get caught by the authorities in the country of origin or destination.⁷

Moreover, as irregular migrants, these unskilled female workers are not entitled to family reunification such as family visits, which encourages permanent settlement and family separation.

Family reunification, which is a human right found in the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICMW); should be enjoyed by all migrant workers. It is the right of every individual to be able to unite with members of his/her family. Due to their illegal status, female migrant workers usually do not undertake family visits because they fear that these visits might preclude them from re-entering the territory of the labor-receiving states ultimately costing them their jobs. This situation encourages family separation and the breaking up of households.

When their entry status is "dependents" of a male migrant worker, many women face discrimination since they might be prohibited from working in the host state. Furthermore entry status often determines residency and employment rights, ability to gain legal citizenship, access to social services such as health and education, access to language training and income security programmes. Women tend to have fewer entitlements due

to their different entry status –if women are viewed as "dependents" their rights may be legally based on the migration and residency of their husbands, keeping some women in possible abusive relationships.⁸

7- Lean Lim, L., Landuyt, K., Ebisui, M., Kwar, M. and Ameratunga, S., 2003, An Information Guide – Preventing Discrimination, Exploitation and Abuse of Women Migrant Workers, Geneva: ILO. Accessed at <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/gems/advocacy/protect.htm>.

8- Jolly & Reeves, Gender and Migration, Bridge, 2005



"Entry status often determines residency and employment rights, ability to gain legal citizenship, access to social services such as health and education, access to language training and income security programmes. "

Deskilling

In addition to exploitation at the workplace, and discrimination because of their entry status, many female migrant workers experience "deskilling" when they travel and work abroad. In countries undergoing economic transition such as Eastern Europe, and Russia; there is a growing trend of women unemployment and deskilling. Russian Women, for instance, with high school and graduate level education are migrating in great numbers to Thailand to become sex-workers. Additionally, women from the Philippines, holders of university degrees are increasingly traveling to the **Arab Gulf Region** to work as housemaids. This deskilling phenomenon is widespread in the Philippines, Eastern Europe, and Latin America.⁹

9- Jolly & Reeves, Gender and Migration, Bridge, 2005.



Trafficking

Deskilling is not the only trend related to female migration. Trafficking is another far more serious violation to women's human rights which is also directly linked to female migration. According to experts, there are an estimated 2 million persons, mainly women and girls, trafficked annually constituting approximately 2.3 % of female migrants.¹⁰

The main international legal framework on trafficking, the Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (2000); defines trafficking as follows: "Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs."¹¹

Because they seek a better life and income-generating employment, most female migrant workers apply for jobs in their countries through recruitment agencies and they are instantly made to believe that they will be working as street vendors, care takers, housemaids, or in the manufacturing business in the country of destination.

Associating with the wrong recruitment agency might lead to catastrophic outcomes such as trafficking. Once recruited, these women are then trafficked into the country of destination, kidnapped against their will and forced into illegal prostitution and sex-work. This circle of servitude is hard to escape. Because of their illegal status; these women can not request the assistance of the legal authorities: they have no where to run and no one to turn to. If ever they were able to escape from their traffickers and return to their countries, they might be faced with stigma and discrimination at home. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, the root causes of migration and trafficking greatly overlap. The lack of rights afforded to women serves as the primary causative factor at the root of both women's migrations and trafficking in women. While such rights inevitably find expression in constitutions, laws and policies, women nevertheless continue to be denied full citizenship because governments fail to protect and promote their rights. According to the UN Rapporteur, by failure to protect and promote women's civil, political, economic and social rights, governments create situations in which trafficking flourishes.¹²

10- Ibid

11- The UN Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (2000).

12- Pearson, E., 2000, Global Human Rights and Trafficking in Persons: A Handbook, Bangkok: Global Alliance Against Traffic In Women (GAATW). Accessed at http://gaatw.net/books_pdf/Human%20Rights%20and%20Trafficking%20in%20Person.pdf



Migration: Those who are left behind:

Trafficking, deskilling, discrimination due to their entry status, and exploitation at the workplace, are some of the problems faced by female migrant workers; but what happens to women when it is their husbands who leave the household to work abroad?

When males migrate for better work opportunities, females are often left behind to head households and care for families. This may lead to either more women empowerment as patriarchal controls loosen and women are able to act more independently, or to additional challenges as women are left behind to deal with added responsibilities and discriminative patriarchal structures.

Migration may challenge traditional gender roles – absence of one spouse may leave the other spouse with both greater decision-making power and a greater burden of responsibility and labor. Where men migrate from rural to urban areas, women are left with a greater burden of agricultural labor, but at the same time may have more control over what crop to grow and how revenues are used.

Although women may sometimes gain economic independence, confidence and

greater freedom through male migration, yet one has to bear in mind that there are negative outcomes to that process. Family separation and the risk of HIV/AIDS infection are some of these negative outcomes, with those migrating desiring intimacy and connection in new environments, and possibly infecting those "who are left behind" in the household.

Labor migrants, may be more likely to have unsafe sex due to: "isolation resulting from stigma, discrimination and differences in languages and cultures; separation from regular sexual partners; desire for intimacy, comfort and pleasure in a stressful environment; sense of anonymity; power dynamics in buying or selling sex; and lack of access to health and social services, information and condoms".¹³

Despite the negative outcomes of female migration, mobility may sometimes represent an opportunity for women to gain economic independence, confidence and better quality of life. It should be associated however with regulatory mechanisms, policy and institutional checks to prevent any abuse.

13-Inter-Agency Group on AIDS, 2004.



Recommendations: how to mainstream gender concerns in the migration process?¹⁴

If women and men are to benefit from the empowering and development potential of migration, a shift is needed to a gendered human rights approach to migration. The key elements of such an approach could be:

- Immigration and emigration policies that enable women as well as men to take up opportunities that safe and regular migration may offer, and which will foster the positive impacts of migration for the social and economic development of migrants, and the receiving and sending countries. This would include measures to ensure sufficient regular channels for women's entry, to avoid their being pushed into risky irregular channels. Bilateral agreements between sending and receiving areas which protect women migrants' rights should take gender concerns into consideration in order to protect female workers.
- Mobilize around and support for international rights frameworks that offer protection for women migrants to ensure that governments ratify and adhere to such. This includes not only those relating to migrants such as ICMW, and trafficked peoples (Palermo Protocol), but also women-specific frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), UN Resolution 1325 and the Beijing Platform for Action.
- Support for the acknowledgement and realization of the rights of migrants throughout the migration process, including providing pre-departure information on legal rights, facilitating remittances, ensuring access to basic services such as housing, education and health, and supporting migrant organizing and solidarity between different migrant groups to address issues of exclusion and isolation.

14- Jolly & Reeves, *Gender and Migration*, Bridge, 2005.



Interesting Facts And Figures

- In 2000 there were 175 million international migrants in the world, meaning one out of every 35 persons in the world was an international migrant ¹⁵
- 25 per cent of all international migrants are in Asia, 23.3 per cent in North America, 18.7 per cent in Europe, 16.8 per cent in the former USSR, 9.3 per cent in Africa, 3.3 per cent in Latin America and 3.4 per cent in Oceania. ¹⁶
- The Philippines is the largest exporter of migrant labor throughout the world, the majority of whom are women. Mexico is the second largest exporter of migrant labor throughout the world. The majority are male and leave to work in the USA¹⁷
- Female migrants constitute 33% of the foreign work force in Oman and UAE, 20 % of that in Bahrain and Kuwait and 15 % of that in Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

15- Ibid

16- Ibid

17- Ibid

Matrix: Gender and Migration¹⁸

The Impact of Migration	Gender issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migration may be a response to poverty – but may or may not result in a better life for women and men. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there opportunities for both women and men to migrate? Are spouses and families entitled to “family reunification”? Including unskilled women migrant workers?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migration may be a response to gender discrimination or constraining gender norms – challenging these may open new possibilities for social and economic development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the sex-segregated labour market in the destination country affect who benefits from migration? Does this affect the opportunities for entry, including whether regular or irregular?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Returning migrants may gain kudos as well as bringing home new skills and enhanced career opportunities. However, if migrants have undertaken sex work, for example, they could be stigmatized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do gender norms and policies restrict women’s ability to move through regular channels? Does this push women into more dangerous irregular channels?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migration may lead to higher incidence of HIV/AIDS for those migrating and those left behind. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do gender norms and policies restrict women’s ability to move through regular channels? Does this push women into more dangerous irregular channels?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If migration is in the form of trafficking, women may experience further discrimination, exploitation or violence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does migration change gender relations? And, if so, is this in a positive or negative way?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are women and men migrants (and those they may leave behind) at greater risk of contracting HIV?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does migration affect when women migrants return and how prepared they are for reintegration?

18- Ibid

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.escwa.org.lb

About Our Organization...

The ESCWA Centre for Women was established on October 1, 2003, following the Commission’s adoption of Resolution 240(XXII). This resolution, recognizing that a fundamental part of development is the empowerment of women, called for the creation of a Committee on Women comprising the member countries, and for the establishment of a women’s Centre at ESCWA. The Centre continues and expands on the work carried out by the Women Empowerment and Gender Mainstreaming Team, formerly a part of the Social Development Division at ESCWA.

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