

Thematic Meeting Three

Recognizing the Contributions of Women Migrants to Economic and Social Development in Countries of Origin and Destination and Addressing Their Specific Needs

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I would like to begin by thanking Ambassador Mehmet Samsar, our GFMD Chair for being a HeForShe and for focusing on a theme not always on top of the agenda. Women migrants are often invisible in the policy area of migration. We are here today to focus not only on their needs and rights but also their contribution to economic and social development and to sustainable development more broadly. UN Women supports migrant women around the world and is delighted to be part of this auspicious meeting.

Women make up approximately half of the 247 million people who work outside their countries of birth. Moreover, in recent years there has been an increase in the autonomous migration of women for work, particularly in feminized sectors in labour importing countries in the north and south. This is in part the result of a lack of decent work for women across the globe, coupled with a rising demand for care work in developed and middle income countries.

Migration is an area where women are as equally represented as men. Yet, in this moment it is important to remember that desperate migration has a woman's face too — we must remember that she may be fleeing with or without her family, escaping conflict, exploitation, instability, deprivation, natural disaster, humanitarian crisis and violence including sexual violence and enslavement, and may be victimized by unscrupulous intermediaries and face greater dangers in transit and in destination countries. Women migrate by choice as well, in search of economic self-sufficiency and empowerment and gender equality, and in the process they contribute to the economies of both home and host countries.

Recognizing migrant women's contributions

- Recognizing the contributions of migrant women workers requires that we enumerate the stocks and flows of migrants and note the increasing visibility of women in the global remittance economy which totals an estimated of USD 530 billion, according to the latest World Bank figures, and outstrips official development assistance (ODA) and trade revenues for many countries. Furthermore, it also requires that we look at the push and pull factors, observe how and where women migrants are moving, with what resources and for what purposes, how they are contributing their labour and their creativity to host and home as well as transit countries, and evaluate their often overlooked contribution of social capital.

The contribution that migrant women make through their care-related labour is often undervalued, frequently under-priced and commonly occurs in precarious and insecure labour markets in many contexts.

- A key feature of the feminization of migration has been the rising demand for care work and care workers in the global north. Women migrants are increasingly being “imported to care” to fill care deficits left by lack of affordable public care services, health sector cut-backs and gaps in care provision caused by the increased labour participation of women, and demographic shifts in ageing societies.
- Our recent flagship report “Progress of the World’s Women,” which explores the interface between transforming economies, women at work and their rights at work as well as the realization of their socioeconomic rights, underscores that migrant women’s labour

contributes to the care economy around the globe in a host of community, personal care and health-care services.

- In many cases women's migrant labour in these occupations and sectors is comparatively cheaper than that of non-migrant women workers. As a result, migration subsidizes the care deficit. In Australia, estimates are that foreign-born workers make up more than 25 per cent of all care workers. In Austria and Israel this figure rises to 50 per cent and in Italy 72 per cent.^[3] The majority of these occupations are feminized and the majority of these foreign-born workers are women.
- The labour surplus generated by this care work has yet to be adequately calculated, but since remittances are sent out of labour earnings it is likely to dwarf the contributions in terms of remittance flows.

Contributing to development

- Much of the debate about the contributions of migrants to development has centred on remittances as a very visible and significant flow of funds from host to home countries.
- Yet in the discourse about how to enhance 'remittances for development,' and more recently the "role of remittances in financing for development," relatively little attention has been given to the gender dimension of the process of accumulation of assets by individuals and households. This is somewhat surprising since women make up around half of the world's international migrants and play central roles both as remitters and as recipients of international remittances.
- For instance, the World Bank estimates that migrant domestic workers sent home as much as \$61 billion in remittances from the six countries that make up the Gulf Cooperation Council in 2011. In more than two thirds of households receiving remittances in Latin America, women are the primary recipients.
- Without a doubt, at the macro-level remittances can change the financial landscape in countries of origin. They provide much needed foreign exchange, can bolster ailing economies and compensate for capital flight. But remittances can also contribute to rising inequalities in home countries, sharpening the distinction between those who have access to foreign exchange and those who do not. They also contribute to rising real exchange rates, raising the cost of exports, changing the productive structure of the economy and frequently reinforcing the incentives to migrate.

Like those of men, women migrants' remittances can change the financial landscape in countries of origin with positive externalities but also negative impacts.

- While remittances constitute important financial flows from more developed to less developed countries and regions, we must remember that they are private flows transferred between women remitters and their families and households as well as between men remitters and women recipients primarily for consumption. These remittances lift those individuals and households out of poverty and even have an intergenerational poverty eradication effect when these funds are invested in education, shelter, infrastructure, well-being, health care and small businesses as is the case when women are involved. But we must be mindful that there is often a social cost that in many communities migrant women and their families pay when mothers are separated from their children, or when husbands are separated from wives and daughters.
- Remittances contribute to human capital formation, job creation and entrepreneurship, compensate for incomplete or inadequate social protection and help to ensure a greater resilience in crises. They are used to repay debts, to respond to emergencies and to substitute for aid. They can also be saved and invested.

^[3] OECD (2011) *Help Wanted*, Providing and Paying for Long-Term Care. Paris: OECD.

Despite the instrumental interest in these flows, there has been relatively little research on whether migrant women and men generate different levels of savings from their work abroad and utilize their savings from migration in different ways.

- There may be important gender differences in the type of remittances sent home, the expectations for their use and the channels used that should be considered as we discuss leveraging development with these remittances.
- It is important to recognize that men and women migrants may differ not only in how much they manage to save abroad, but also in the manner through which they transfer their savings to the country of origin, for what purpose and for whose benefit. Women tend to remit a greater portion of their wages, for a longer period of time, and to send a wider range of goods, letters, clothes, medicines and gifts that communicate important social remittances and maintain family ties.
- We have evidence that women migrant workers often save and remit a larger proportion of their earnings than male migrant workers,^[1] despite the fact that their earnings are **consistently lower than their male counterparts**. Moreover, migrant women appear to remit more regularly and consistently. After times of economic slowdown, women tend to increase the amount they remit. A recent study in Latin America found that women increased both the amount and frequency of remittances sent home from 2009 to 2013, while men sent the same amount of money with the same frequency.[2]

Migration can be a pathway to women's economic empowerment and autonomy, boosting their social status and promoting equality in the country of origin. However, this is not always a given and can work in perverse ways.

- The “migrant economy” not only replicates gender inequalities in the labour market but further compounds them in terms of gender pay gaps, income differences, lack of access to pensions, precarious claims on social protection and exposure to greater vulnerability at work.
- Women migrants are commonly employed in low skilled, low paid and informal sectors. Whether migrating through regular or irregular channels, they often face the risk of economic exploitation as well as physical and sexual violence with little access to legal protection or justice.
- While forced labour is a risk for many individuals using irregular channels, migrant women are more susceptible to being trafficked for sexual exploitation, constituting 98 per cent of all such victims.
- Many migrant women also face gendered vulnerabilities that are sector-specific. For instance, women in domestic work can be particularly vulnerable to not only exploitation, but also sexual and physical violence, as national labour laws often do not cover this sector and the workers live and work in isolated conditions with little protection.

^[1] An INSTRAW-IMO (2008: 51) study, drawing upon the 2002 Spanish Wage Structure Survey, calculates that among Colombian migrants in Spain who remit to the northwest (AMCO) region, women remit approximately 40% of their wages while men remit 33%. INSTRAW and OIM . 2008. Género y remesas. Migración Colombiana del AMCO hacia España. Santo Domingo: UN-INSTRAW. http://www.remesasydesarrollo.org/uploads/media/Informe_Colombia_Final_Web.pdf. Another study of Salvadorians in the US reports that women remit 11% and men 9% of their earnings. Santillan, D. and M. E. Ulfe. 2006. Destinatarios y usos de remesas. Una oportunidad para las mujeres salvadoreñas? Working Paper #78, Serie Mujer y Desarrollo. Santiago: ECLAC, Women and Development Unit. www.remesasydesarrollo.org/uploads/media/lci2455e.pdf. Accessed March 28, 2013.

^[2] According to a study by the Inter-American Dialogue among 2000 Latin American and Caribbean migrants in five U.S. metropolitan areas, women made 13 remittances to their home country in 2013 and 11 in 2009, with each remittance averaging \$207 and \$189 respectively, as opposed to men who remitted 12 times in 2013 and in 2009 at \$232 and \$229 respectively.

- Despite migrant women's important contributions in labour earnings and in surplus labour value, migrant women's potential to enhance development is constrained. Bridging this gap will unleash the full development potential of migrant women workers.

Actions, policies and campaigns to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of women's migration affirming and building on their breadwinner status and their socioeconomic capital are necessary.

- Understanding and respecting these differences may yield far greater returns for human development than we have yet to imagine.
- But to really leverage development, we must recognize and respect the sacrifice that these flows represent and ensure that the human and financial cost of sending women to work abroad are compensated and factored into labour, social protection and economic policies of sending and receiving countries and of the enterprises involved. The human cost of separating families — mothers from their children, wives from husbands, children from their parents — is high and so is the economic cost, indebting many through payments to agents, sometimes in vain, in the hope of earning a decent wage and securing a new and better life in a host country.
- Leveraging development is not just about developing and floating diaspora bonds or even about reducing remittance transfer costs. The World Bank estimates that efficient remittance sending produces a \$100 billion dividend per year and that is important too. But it is about ensuring the human, cultural and economic rights of migrant women and their families. It is about ensuring that the financial architecture protects their interests, banking for the unbanked in meaningful ways, and facilitates migrants' access to stable, transparent and accountable financial services and products that meet their needs and aspirations. In the case of women, it is to ensure that migration becomes a means to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment and rights in both destination and origin countries.

Meeting challenges and upholding rights: In the face of all the challenges women migrant workers face, they show tremendous resilience and creativity that has seen them take global advocacy for women migrant workers' rights, and specifically domestic workers' rights, to a new level.

- In their use of information and communication technology, migrant mothers are also demonstrating creative ways of transnational parenting and, in so doing, creating continuous multidirectional links between countries, through which sociopolitical and cultural norms are being transferred back and forth.
- These new insights into the realities of women migrants place them as global and transnational citizens, making contributions that are not restricted to states of origin or destination, and have the potential to affect development at the global level, for the benefit of all.
- To maximize migrant women's contributions to development in home and host countries we first need to protect and defend their rights. An important set of international commitments exist that can enhance the development contributions of migrants and particularly migrant women.
- The international normative framework that responds to the situation of migrant workers through the UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families (ICRMW) is a key instrument for the protection of migrants' rights. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) General Recommendation No. 26 seeks to strengthen protections for women migrants in all situations, including those with irregular status. In addition, ILO Convention 189 in support of decent work for domestic workers, has sought to extend basic labour rights to all domestic workers, even those employed in private households.

- Securing migrant women’s rights through these conventions and initiatives will enhance their well-being and welfare and also greatly contribute to development in home and host countries.

We cannot talk about facilitating migrant women’s contributions to home and host countries in the absence of commitments to their fundamental rights and freedoms as workers and global citizens.

- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) framework includes a number of goals, targets and indicators that will enable us to mainstream migration into development and monitor the fulfilment of migrant’s rights. It is notable that these targets include several that explicitly refer to migration and migrants, including:
 - 8.7: To take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms;
 - 8.8: To protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment;
 - 10.7: To facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies;
 - 10.3: by 2030, to reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent;
 - 16.2: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.
- But above all, SGD 5 to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” enshrines our commitments to gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls and the full realization of their human rights. This goal has shown to be essential for the achievement of sustainable development and for building peaceful, just and equal societies.
- SDG 5 must be applied to migrant women, ending all forms of discrimination and inequality in law and practice. It vows to eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation, universal access to sexual and reproductive rights and health, valuing and recognizing unpaid care work and State provisioning and sharing within households and community, leadership and participation in all aspects of public, economic and political life, etc. All of these rights fully apply to migrant women and entail both source and destination countries to adopt policies and measures to promote that at both ends. Gender-sensitive targets in 11 other goals apply too.
- I would suggest that you keep these goals and targets in mind as we consider migrant women’s contributions to development today.
- If we are successful, these commitments will not exclude migrant women, but embrace them fully. They will ensure gender equality in the workplace, the home and the public sphere. They will empower women and girls throughout the world to take their rightful place at the migration table, to claim their rights, and to contribute to a more just and equal future.

Closing message:

- I am delighted to applaud this thematic dialogue precisely because it focuses on the fundamental rights and freedoms at the centre of our collective commitment to development. These are rights that underpin migrant women and men’s real and significant contributions to development.

- I am delighted that UN Women can be a part of this meeting. We are engaged in supporting migrant women's rights and organizing their rights across the globe. We undertake normative work and support intergovernmental agreements. We have three specific UNGA resolutions on migration, violence against migrant women workers, and trafficking. Our participation in the UN system, our coordination work with women migrant workers and our interagency work as part of the GMG gives us a unique view into the situation of migrant women. UN Women will chair the GMG next year and we will work closely with the other GMG members to highlight the role of women migrants in development. We also work actively with ILO, IOM and OHCHR in this area. In Asia Pacific and Latin America and increasingly in Africa, we have programmes to support women migrants and engage on related policies and normative concerns. We provide active support to women migrant workers in countries of origin. We have worked on model contracts, pre-departure trainings and supported Convention 189. We have a variety of knowledge products on different aspects of this convention and migrant and domestic worker rights. I know that these topics will be discussed here and their importance underscored today.
- I wish you a very productive meeting and look forward to the substantive and constructive discussions that unfold today.