

The Female Face of Migration

Background paper

Movements of people searching for a better life, livelihood or refuge, or rushing to flee natural disasters, are as old as humankind. People migrate within their own countries, mainly from rural to urban areas, as well as across borders. Whilst the vast majority of those who move today are still internal migrants¹, international migrants reaches the figure of 200 mln. people.² The share of international migrants in the world's population has remained remarkably stable at around 3 percent over the past 50 years, despite factors that could have been expected to increase flows³. However, in some regions the percentage is higher: for example, in Europe it is 8.8%, and in North America 13.5%.

This paper specifically addresses the issue of female migration, whilst the whole range of problems regarding male migration, such as exploitation relating to agricultural work, is not covered in this overview.

Since the early 1980s, increasing number of women – both single and married, and often better educated than men – have been moving on their own to take up jobs in other countries. According to data from the United Nations Population Division, obtained mostly from population censuses and covering both documented and undocumented migrants, the number of female migrants grew faster than the number of male migrants between 1965 and 1990 in the most important receiving countries, industrialised as well as developing.⁴ Indeed, approximately half of all international migrants today are women.⁵

Therefore, in recent years the term “feminisation of migration” has become commonly used. However, the term is misleading and may give rise to debates on the appropriateness of its use, insofar as it suggests an absolute increase in the proportion of women migrants, when in fact by 1960 women already made up nearly 47% of all international migrants, a percentage that increased by only two points during the following four decades, to about 49% at present.⁶ However the aggregate stability hides trends at the regional level.⁷ Nevertheless, even if in some regions female migration flows have increased, the real change of the last decades has

¹ According to the Human Development Report 2009, an approximate number of internal migrants is 740 mln people, almost four times as many as those who have moved internationally. Among those who moved across national borders, over a third moved from a developing to a developed country. Most of the world's 200 mln international migrants moved from one developing country to another or between developed countries (Human Development Report 2009, UNDP, p.1).

² Human Development Report 2009, UNDP, p.2

³ Demographic trends – an aging population in developed countries and young, still-rising populations in developing countries – growing employment opportunities, combined with cheaper communications and transport, have increased the “demand” for migration. However, those wishing to migrate have increasingly come up against government-imposed barriers to movement (Human Development Report 2009, UNDP, p. 2).

⁴ Chammartin G., The feminisation of International migration, International Migration Programme, ILO

⁵ Human Development Report 2009, UNDP, p. 25.

⁶ Feminisation of migration, 2007, INSTRAW

⁷ Human Development Report 2009, UNDP, p.25

occurred **in the way they move**: more women are now migrating independently in search of jobs, rather than as “family dependents” travelling with their husbands or joining them abroad. The relatively equal shares of women and men in migration flows may hide significant differences in the circumstances of movement and the opportunities available.⁸ It caused the significant change in the level of awareness on the part of migration experts and other stakeholders about the significance of female migration, regarding such aspects as the increasingly important role of women as remittance senders; the working conditions of jobs, such as domestic work and caregiving jobs taken by migrant women; the changing role of women in the family and in the community; the phenomenon of mobility orphans; and the vulnerability and exposure of migrant women to different kinds of risks, including trafficking. Some experts call the current era “The Age of Migration” because five phenomena characterise current migration: its *globalisation* (there are a greater number of countries affected by migratory movements); its *acceleration* (reflected in an increased volume of migrants); its *differentiation* (migrants moving to a single country belong to a variety of ethnicities and groups); its *politicisation* (domestic policies, bilateral and regional relations and national security policies of States are being increasingly affected by concerns about risks of international migration and vice-versa); and its *feminisation*.⁹

In this perspective, this document aims at overviewing the recent trends in migratory flows and at describing main aspects of female migration nowadays in order to stimulate reflection on possible actions that should be taken to defend the dignity of female migrants and promote human development of women themselves as well as their families.

Female migration in figures and trends

For long time women have remained invisible in studies on migration. Their socio-economic contributions and unique experiences have not been taken into account. In the 1960s and 1970s migration theories often assumed that most migrants were male, and that women were merely wives and dependents who followed their husbands. Consequently, migration was portrayed as purely a male phenomenon. Yet, women have always been present in migratory flows, traditionally as spouses, daughters and dependents of male migrants. Moreover the past decades have seen an increase in women autonomous migration as the main economic providers or “breadwinners” for their families¹⁰.

Men and women show differences in their migratory behaviours, face different opportunities and have to cope with different risks and challenges, such as vulnerability to human rights abuses, exploitation, discrimination and specific health risks. Therefore, it is becoming increasingly obvious that migration is not a “gender¹¹-neutral” phenomenon. From the very moment they decide to migrate, women’s experience as migrants differs from that of men.¹²

Regional migration flow trends are one of the indicators of the feminisation of migration. Females currently represent over half of international migrants in the more developed areas, and slightly less than half in the less developed and least developed areas of the world. These variations reflect biases regarding “male” and “female” labour, as well as differences in wages

⁸ Ibid, p.26

⁹ Castles, Stephen and Miller, Mark J. (1998) *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*. The Guilford Press, New York, in *The Feminisation of Migration: Dreams and Realities of Migrant Women in Four Latin American Countries*, by Cecilia Lipszyc, p.8

¹⁰ World Migrant Stock: The 2005 Revision Population Database, United Nations Population Division, <http://esa.un.org/migration/p2k0data.asp>

¹¹ The term *gender* is understood as grounded in biological sexual identity, male and female.

¹² INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS, p.45

and standards of living, government policies and employment practices. The presence of refuge sites (other facilities and/or forms of protection) are also crucial factors when migrants and refugees have to decide where to migrate.¹³

By 2005 there were slightly more female than male immigrants in the world's regions, except for Africa and Asia.¹⁴

North America is an exception, as female immigrants have outnumbered male immigrants there since 1930, and in 2005 they accounted for as much as 50.4% of the total migrant population¹⁵.

Europe and *Oceania* are reporting growing portions of female immigrants, which have surpassed the number of males since 2000 and account for as much as 53.4% and 51.3% of total migration, respectively. Amongst migrants to Australia, women have outnumbered men in the last three decades. Here migration flows have seen an increase in the number of women – married and unmarried – who migrate alone or in the company of other women.

In 2005 in *Asia* female migrants constituted 44.7% of total migration,¹⁶ but the number of women migrating from some countries has surpassed that of men. For example, in the Philippines 65% of those who left the country to work or live abroad in 2005 were women. In 2002, twice as many women as men migrated from Sri Lanka to other countries. Between 2000 and 2003, 79% of the people who migrated from Indonesia to work were women.¹⁷ The majority of Asian women migrate to neighbouring East Asian countries and the Middle East.

Latin American and Caribbean women are also highly mobile. By 1990, immigrant women from Latin America were the first in the developing world to reach parity with male migrants and in 2005 they constituted 50.3% of total migrations from this region.¹⁸ They migrate mainly to Europe, North America and anywhere in South America. The feminisation of migratory process is evident among migrants moving from Central and South America to Spain, where in 2001 70% of all migrants were women from Brazil and Dominican Republic. The migration flows from this region to Italy are also dominated by women and in 2000 70% of the arrivals from 13 of 30 Latin American countries were women. Caribbean migrant women outnumbered men to North America since 1950s and are well represented in skilled categories.

¹³ Female migrants: bridging gaps throughout life cycle, Selected papers of the UNFPA-IOM Expert Group Meeting, New York, 2-3 May 2006, organized by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), p.29

¹⁴ The overview of the female migration trends according to the regions is taken from *A Passage to Hope: Women and International Migration*, State of world population 2006, UNPF, p.23

¹⁵ World Migrant Stock: The 2005 Revision Population Database, United Nations Population Division, <http://esa.un.org/migration/p2k0data.asp>

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ It is also important to note, however, that the proportion of female migrants in countries such as the Philippines and Sri Lanka has, in fact, been declining in recent years. In Sri Lanka, the share of woman migrants were as high as 75 per cent in 1997, then dropped to 67 per cent in 2000, and to 56 per cent in 2006. In the Philippines, where feminisation of migration was particularly pronounced, only 48 per cent of annual new hire deployment is now women (2007) compared to the rate of 72 per cent recorded in the year 2001. In terms of re-hire migrants in the Philippines only 38 per cent of them were women in 2007. There are several factors that contributed to this reverse feminisation or a proportionate decline of women among migrant groups in these countries. The first reason is the overall increase in the migration of men in most countries of Asia. The second factor contributing to the reversal or reduction of the feminisation trend are the policy changes directly affecting the deployment volume and the destination of female workers. These changes include: a) an introduction of minimum wage for domestic workers by the governments of the Philippines and Sri Lanka, and, b) enforcement of a stricter measure to monitor the deployment of entertainers to Japan. The third and the most pervasive and structural factor behind de-feminisation is the gradual upwards skilling of the general workforce in the respective origin countries. More women attend secondary and higher education as well as skills training, and equip themselves for more skilled jobs at home and abroad. This means that there are less available workers who will take interest in domestic work that is the main resource of labor for migrants (International Conference on Gender, Migration and Development *Manila, September 25-26, 2008, IOM*)

¹⁸ World Migrant Stock: The 2005 Revision Population Database, United Nations Population Division, <http://esa.un.org/migration/p2k0data.asp>

In *Africa*, widespread poverty, disease, land degradation and high male unemployment that pushes women to take on the responsibility of providing family income are all contributing to a steady increase in female migration, and at a faster rate than the global average. By 2005, 47.4% of the 17 million immigrants in Africa were women, up from 42.3% in 1960. Most African women migrate within the region, but they are also moving to North America and Europe. For example, in migration flows from Cape Verde to Italy, female migration accounts for 85%. However, socio-cultural norms continue to limit female mobility only in *Arab* countries. Although reliable data are scarce, it is generally accepted that male emigrants far outnumber women.

The feminisation of migration parallels two other transformations that affect women: the *feminisation of poverty* and the *feminisation of work*.¹⁹

The feminisation of migration gives rise to specific problematic *forms of migration*, such as the commercialised migration of women and girls as domestic workers and caregivers, often resulting in the trafficking of women for labour and sexual exploitation.

The above trends, which show the increased mobility of women in almost all regions of the world, and the increasing number of women migrating as breadwinners, make the feminisation of migration more tangible.

Factors determining female migration

Movements of people from one area to another if it isn't caused by some natural disaster are primarily the direct result of inadequate economic and social opportunities in the country of origin and (presumably) superior opportunities in the area of immigration. Women as well as men migrate with the hope for better living conditions, to support their children, to escape political chaos etc. However, as the recent Human Development Report highlights, there exists the dynamic interaction between individual decisions and the socio-economic context in which they are taken.²⁰

Impoverishment and the need to support family provide women and men alike with strong reasons for migrating. **However, poverty does not always contribute to decisions and capabilities of women to migrate. It also depends on state and community settings, traditions and on family and individual circumstances.**

Among other factors that may contribute significantly to the decision to migrate are for example, increasing labour demand on the service market in countries of destination, family obligations, unemployment, low wages, limited social and economic opportunities and the desire to expand their horizons. Women generally face more drastic decision-making and financial restrictions than do men, which can pose obstacles to freedom of movement. Yet income-earning opportunities can empower women and loosen traditional constraints on female mobility.

Economic and social upheaval can also provide the impetus to leave: educated women unable to overcome employment discrimination in their own country migrate in search of an opportunity to find work that is more likely to better utilise their skills and that is better paid.

Female migration is also motivated by other non-economic factors, including surveillance by communities and patriarchal traditions that limit opportunity and freedom, getting out of a bad and abusive marriage, fleeing from domestic violence, and desiring equal opportunities.

¹⁹ Female migrants: bridging gaps throughout life cycle, cfr. p.29

²⁰ "Recognition of the role of structural factors in determining human movement has had a deep impact on migration studies. While early attempts to conceptualize migration flows focused on differences in living standards, in recent years there has been growing understanding that these differences only partly explain movement patterns. In particular if movement responds only to income differentials, it is hard to explain why many successful migrants choose to return to their country of origin after several years abroad", Human Development Report 2009, UNDP, p. 13.

Discrimination against certain groups of women – single mothers, unmarried women, widows or divorcees—also drives many to move elsewhere.

A significant number of women still migrate as wives, and therefore their migration status is tied to that of their spouses. In many countries, if domestic violence occurs, women risk losing their residence rights if they decide to leave their spouses.

Women also migrate for the purpose of marriage. Arranged marriages are quite common in some cultures, especially among emigrants from the Indian subcontinent, where both men and women migrate for this purpose. For many, arranged marriages can lead to a lifelong supportive partnership, but some of them can be accurately described as “forced”. Moreover, mail-order bride businesses²¹ can act as facades for recruiting and trafficking women.

Other “contributory” factors that are usually taken into account when considering migration are women’s age, their power position within the family and their stage in the life cycle (whether they are leaving children behind or not), the capacity of the household to do without them, and the presence of other women able to replace them in their domestic activities.²²

Migration processes with a female focus should be more closely scrutinised in order to prevent hidden risks and promote new opportunities for women and their families. Women’s decisions to migrate depend on many factors: labour market conditions, discrimination and exclusion, unfavourable legislation, risks, the impact on people “left behind”, etc.

As well as problems and risks, women migration also brings new opportunities. In societies where the migration brings the increasing contact between different countries and their people, the living entails new existential challenges and transcultural dialogue between different groups and subgroups gains more importance.²³ Given the formative role that women play in the receiving societies, and given that they are usually charged with the care of children in their early childhood years – the most malleable years in a person’s life – they have a great influence on the openness of new generations to other cultures. Indeed, depending on the kind of relationship they establish with the local population, and with other migrants, they can be agents of transculturality.²⁴

Looking deeper into *Levels of poverty, inequality and their influence on female migration*

Poverty and inequality between man and women in the access to the full range of information to make a decision are powerful forces influencing female migration. However, the level of poverty and gender inequality affects the size of migration. Experts define it as a *migration hump*: migration of women is most likely to occur at the intermediate stages of economic

²¹ In Russia, for example, nearly 1,000 agencies offer intermediary services, with an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 Russian women emigrating every year on fiancée visas: According to the Department of Justice, 80,000 have entered the United States in the past ten years. In addition, mail-order bride businesses can be an instrument to traffic women — including those that send Russian women to toil in the sex industries in Germany, Japan and the United States. Worried about the possibility of abuse, the US passed a law in 2005 authorizing consulates to share information with would-be brides regarding their husbands-to-be (*Passage to Hope*, p.25).

²² The Feminisation of Migration: Dreams and Realities of Migrant Women in Four Latin American Countries, By Cecilia Lipszyc Sociologist, Professor, Researcher, President of the Asociación de Especialistas Universitarias en Estudios de la Mujer (Association of University Specialists in Women’s Studies, or ADEUEM), Montevideo, 13, 14 and 15 April 2004 p.11

²³ Integration: A Process Involving All, Caritas Europa, 2007, p. 10.

²⁴ Seminar on "The Role of Migrant Women in the Promotion of Multicultural Identities" (Rome, 5-6 September 2007), PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE

development and when improvements in the status of women can be noticed.²⁵ Extreme impoverishment makes international migration unlikely, simply because people have few resources for migration, and transportation as well as communication structures are poor, while higher educational levels stimulate aspirations for suitable employment, increase knowledge about the world and capacity for action.

The same happens when the level of inequality between men and women is high. When women get married as children or as young adolescents, receive little and poor-quality education, bear many children at young ages, lack access to credit and banking and have few rights, they lack both the decision-making capacity and resources to migrate.²⁶

Migration can contribute to gender equality and **empowerment** of women by providing women migrants with income and status, autonomy, freedom, and the self-esteem that comes with employment. Women become more assertive as they see more opportunities opening up before them.²⁷ Moving to a new country exposes women to new ideas and social norms that can promote their rights and enable them to participate more fully in society. It can also have a positive influence on achieving greater equality for them in their country of origin²⁸.

On the other hand, women from poor environments who have experienced lack of opportunities and violence are likely to become easy targets for traffickers, who promise them a richer economic and social future abroad whilst luring them into forced labour, in most cases forced prostitution, sweat-shops and inhumane domestic work conditions.²⁹ In this case, prevention efforts, such as providing information on possible risks along the whole migration route (including countries of transit and destination) and how to avoid them, are vitally important.

Occupational categories for migrant women are concentrated in the service sector

The most obvious reason for addressing inequality issues of migration processes is that women workers dominate the international migration of care services workers³⁰ and tend to be concentrated in the most vulnerable jobs of global production systems.³¹

Women and men are differently, often unequally, positioned in the economy, perform different socially determined responsibilities, and face different constraints; thus, they are unlikely to respond in the same way to policies and market signals.³²

Examples: Migration policies that are framed as gender neutral and are applied to all, disproportionately affect women in practice.

Migration policies of Western European countries are one example. They are not openly biased by sex. However, in some countries restrictions have been imposed on admissions of migrants for occupations typically taken up by women. The case of Switzerland is notorious since no

²⁵ Female migrants: bridging gaps throughout life cycle, p.31

²⁶ Ibid, p.31

²⁷ Ibid, p.25

²⁸ *A Passage to Hope*, p. 21.

²⁹ A reflection on the complex dynamics between Migration and Development, Caritas Europa, *EDITED DRAFT 20-10-2008*, p.28

³⁰ The trend of hiring more women than men (this trend began in 2004, although, the literature in fact as early as 1993 (Castles), already noted the presence of more women being consistently hired) continues to the present as the global system moves to expanding service occupations, contractual and flexible labour (both of which need more female labour), while Western countries are aging, and the younger population are moving away from service occupations. Thus, Western governments and developed countries are opening their doors to migrant labour from developing countries to do the service occupations, most often without consciousness of whether their national values and policies are ready to accommodate them. In the literature, this event is referred to as the *feminisation of labour*, leading to a major stream of women in migration (Quilted Sightings: A Women and Gender Studies Reader, Philippine Copyright © 2008, Miriam College – Women and Gender Institute (WAGI), p.11).

³¹ ILO/Discussion paper/Gender dimensions of globalization

³² Ibid.

immigration quotas exist for domestic workers, yet many undocumented women from a number of developing countries work as domestics in middle and upper middle class households. Germany is also a clear example of male-biased migration policies. All four legal means of migration for work are dominated by men.³³

In general, when official legal recruitment initiatives take place, they are usually aimed at construction workers and farm labourers. Exceptions to this rule are the Gulf states (as well as Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and China) where domestic work is recognised as necessary.³⁴ However, such recognition does not mean that conditions are fair for migrant women. In fact, there are many cases of lack of respect of contract rules and sometimes very serious abuse in the Gulf states.

Some migration policies that purport to defend migrant women's rights actually create so many obstacles for women wishing to migrate that they end up limiting their opportunities for regular migration. This is unlikely to stop migration flows, which find other illegal channels. However, illegal migration has long-term effects on all aspects of people's lives, as they are forced to live without rights and are exposed to violence over long periods.

Experts observe that women and men circulate differently in the global economy³⁵. Whilst men overwhelmingly constitute the majority of skilled professionals in the information technology and scientific sectors, women have tended to cluster around the welfare and care professions, such as the education, health and social sectors, which have been open in only a few countries like the US and the UK, and more recently in some Middle Eastern countries.³⁶

When women enter a country of destination on the basis of labour market skills³⁷, the occupational categories open to them are often limited to service occupations such as *domestic workers, nurses or caregivers, work in the service sectors* (waitressing, etc.). Except for the nursing profession, the migration of highly skilled women is relatively invisible. For example, in the case of Japan, the only regular occupation available to female temporary migrant workers is entertainer. Another example is Canada, where the Live-in Caregivers Program ensures that for a great number of women the only way to enter the country is as a caregiver, regardless of their higher professional qualifications.³⁸ Moreover, legislation in certain countries is so restrictive that unqualified women cannot even apply for a visa.

Due to the fact that care work and nursing remain traditional female roles and tend to be given out more frequently to the low paid overseas workers, certain migration channels are now wide open for female employees. But these jobs are frequently unstable, marked by low wages, by absence of social services and by poor working conditions. Therefore, even when migrating legally, women are relegated to jobs where they can easily become subjects to discrimination, arbitrary employment terms and abuses, trafficking and prostitution.³⁹

³³ Ibid, p.39

³⁴ The feminisation of international migration, Gloria Moreno Fontes Chammartin, International Migration Programme ILO

³⁵ International labour contracts are highly gendered. Women are nearly exclusively found in the service sector and domestic and care-giver work and entertainment work. The number of women in factories is also increasing but remains small in comparison to the service industry (ILO:2007).

³⁶ Quilted Sightings: A Women and Gender Studies Reader, Philippine Copyright © 2008, Miriam College – Women and Gender Institute (WAGI), p.42

³⁷ Entry status of women can also have far reaching effects on their ability to enjoy social rights and entitlements including access to language training, job training and ultimately their ability to gain legal citizenship (Quilted Sightings: A Women and Gender Studies Reader, Philippine Copyright © 2008, Miriam College – Women and Gender Institute (WAGI), p.42).

³⁸ Quilted Sightings: A Women and Gender Studies Reader, Philippine Copyright © 2008, Miriam College – Women and Gender Institute (WAGI), p.42

³⁹ *A Passage to Hope*, p.29

Domestic work is the largest sector that attracts migrant women but remains invisible for legislation norms

Domestic work is one of the largest sectors driving international female labour migration.⁴⁰ In developed countries women have rapidly entered the labour market, but a corresponding shift of a share of household responsibility to men has not occurred. Furthermore, a lack of family-friendly policies and childcare facilities makes hiring nannies and domestic workers essential for those who can afford it. Other factors that created the demand in domestic workers are declining social benefits (owing to welfare reform and privatisation) and increases in the longevity and size of the elderly population. These all have spurred massive outflows of women from Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and now also increasingly from Africa. In Spain, for example, approximately 50% of annual immigrant quotas are allocated for domestic workers. Most Asian domestic workers head to the Middle East, where prosperity is driving the demand.

Domestic work worldwide is an unregulated sector of the labour market as no labour laws and standards exist⁴¹; women are therefore at high risk of being exploited and/ or badly treated.⁴² It is also defined as a “dead end” from the perspective of labour mobility: it does not provide specific skills on the job, it does not open the way for other occupations and it rarely allows continuation of formal education. It can also involve interminable work hours (10-12 w.h. a day with very few rest days), abuse by employers, instability due to informal employment, lack of monitoring of work-place conditions, no or little social security protection and access to legal and health services, restrictions to mobility and communications, no legal redress⁴³ and it can become an obstacle to the formation or consolidation of own families for women.⁴⁴ These often create the social isolation of most domestic helpers and their inability to integrate effectively

⁴⁰ Domestic work is one of the few occupations where legal migration of women workers has been recognized to be necessary in the Gulf States, as well as Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan. These countries receive thousands of women migrants for domestic work every year and their numbers are increasing in importance when compared to numbers of male migrants (Chammartin Gloria, *The feminisation of international migration*, International Migration Programme ILO)

⁴¹ Laws for work in private households exist in only 19 countries (Passage to Hope, p.52). In 1965, the ILO’s General Conference adopted the “Resolution concerning the Conditions of Employment of Domestic Workers” that urged member States to make all practicable efforts to promote the introduction of protective measures for domestic workers, such as hours of work and other conditions of employment, as well as the training of such workers in accordance with International Labour Organization standards.

In a number of countries labour codes do not cover domestic work. In other countries not only are household helpers not considered workers per se, but they are not protected under any other national legislation. In addition, there exists no international convention specifically conceived to protect their rights. Ironically, it is precisely because domestic workers are employed within the “private sphere” that there is resistance to recognizing and regulating the domestic work relationship....

ILO has prepared several comprehensive reports that have recognized that domestic work is mainly performed by local or foreign workers, mostly women. These reports have recognized that domestic work remains invisible and excluded from the scope of labour legislation since it is done in houses (not considered workplaces) of private persons (not considered employers). In consequence, migrant domestic helpers are not normally considered employees themselves and their work is undervalued (Chammartin Gloria, *The feminisation of international migration*, International Migration Programme ILO, p.41).

⁴² A reflection on the complex dynamics between Migration and Development, Caritas Europa, *EDITED DRAFT 20-10-2008*, p.27

⁴³ Quilted Sightings: A Women and Gender Studies Reader, Philippine Copyright © 2008, Miriam College – Women and Gender Institute (WAGI), p.58

⁴⁴ The Feminisation of Migration: Dreams and Realities of Migrant Women in Four Latin American Countries, By Cecilia Lipszyc Sociologist, Professor, Researcher, President of the Asociación de Especialistas Universitarias en Estudios de la Mujer (Association of University Specialists in Women’s Studies, or ADEUEM), Montevideo, 13, 14 and 15 April 2004, p. 11

with the receiving country that can have serious psychological impacts on women over the time.⁴⁵ Moreover, many domestic workers wind up running two households, their employers' as well as their own, from afar. Both they and their employers continue to shoulder disproportionate responsibilities. Women spend 70 per cent of their unpaid time caring for family members and this contribution to the global economy remains largely unrecognized.⁴⁶

When girls migrate to do domestic work, they are doubly vulnerable: first, they are deprived of education and consequently of a better future and, secondly, they are more exposed to violence, as such migration occurs through illegal channels.

On the one hand, growing demand in the domestic labour market fulfils migrant women's need to have a job to ensure their families' survival, and on the other hand, it causes the "care drain" phenomenon⁴⁷. It has been noted that as women leave their own families to work abroad as domestic workers⁴⁸, girls in the family of origin may end up leaving school to take up household responsibilities in the absence of their mothers.

Brain drain or brain waste?

The migration of skilled and educated women, like men, represents a loss in terms of investments in their education and training at home as well as their potential contribution to the wellbeing of their communities of origin. It is usually called as a *brain drain* phenomenon. When significant numbers of the most educated citizens leave the country, that country stands to lose its critical human capital that, in the long term, will reduce the GDP growth of the country.⁴⁹

Female migration flows to domestic service conceals the reality that a significant number of women are in fact professionals who have chosen to devalue their qualifications as a temporary measure to gain entry to the labour force with the hope that they can someday utilise their credentials for more appropriate jobs. But relocating overseas, women often lose continuity of employment, and opportunities for career development.

This kind of migration deeply affects not only the development of communities of origin but also, and more significantly, migrant women themselves. Many of them who used to work as professors, engineers, managers due to the lack of opportunities in their countries are compelled to take on jobs like cleaning hotel rooms, garages, etc. This phenomenon has been described no more as *brain drain* but as *brain waste*.⁵⁰

Moreover, professional accreditation barriers and language difficulties can lead to devaluation or devalorisation of actual merit and experience as well as racial discrimination, cultural and

⁴⁵ Quilted Sightings: A Women and Gender Studies Reader, Philippine Copyright © 2008, Miriam College – Women and Gender Institute (WAGI), p.44

⁴⁶ *A Passage to Hope*, p. 25

⁴⁷ This phenomenon is usually discussed in the framework of global care chains, i.e. networks formed by own families of migrant workers and families of their work. The families that hire migrants in destination countries clearly benefit from this work which responds to daily concrete necessities of *care crisis* (caused by aging population and a change in social roles and aspirations of women that more often tend to pass care responsibilities to hired domestic workers). And in countries of origin, migration has a strong impact on households which are forced to reorganize tasks and responsibilities and to invent new forms of care in spite of physical separation (Global Care Chains, UN INSTRAW, working paper 2, 2007, p. 3-5)

⁴⁸ According to studies of INSTRAW sometimes men take on a greater responsibility for care giving as a result of women's migration (although they do not tend to be primary care giver), while other times they remain uninvolved (Global Care Chains, UN INSTRAW, working paper 2, 2007, p. 3).

⁴⁹ Straubhaar, 2000 in B. Lindsay Lowell (2001) "Policy Responses to the International Mobility of Skilled Labour, International Labour Organization, International Migration Branch, Geneva, p. 2

⁵⁰ Susan Forbes Martin "Women and Migration" UN Division for the Advancement of Women Consultative Meeting on Migration and Mobility and how these affect women. Malmo, Sweden, December 2-4, 2003.

systemic barriers to care and legal protections, social isolation and lack of political participation in community life. There exist some reports that observed that the psychosocial impact of non accreditation leads to "erosion of skills, loss of technical idiom and diminishing confidence in ones capabilities".⁵¹

Remittances of women differ from those of men

Female migration produces a change of the role of women in their families and communities of origin. As women are increasingly migrating on their own and fewer as "dependents" of their husbands or male relatives, they assume the role of main economic providers and heads of households. Women also play an important role in different stages of migration, as caregivers for those left behind, as managers of remittances, and as emotional supporters of migrants in different circumstances.

Women play a key role as recipients and managers of **remittances**. Data reveals that women use remittances primarily for food and education⁵². This supports the hypothesis, already sustained in other areas such as food security, that the greater women's control over the household's monetary resources (whether it is as remitters which maintain strict supervision over the use of the remittances they send, or as administrators of remittances received), the greater the tendency to invest in the overall well being of the household.

The remittances sent by women differ from those sent by men in their relevant volume, frequency and sustainability over time. Although the amounts sent by men and women are basically similar, women send a larger part of their salary than men do, given the wage discrimination in the receiving country. Women's remittance strategy is sustained by keeping a tight control over expenses (while men reserve greater amounts of money for personal spending) and often requires perseverance in their jobs as live-in domestic workers, in order to save as much of their salaries as possible. This often makes it impossible for them to project some advancement in their careers as professionals, investments in education (for example, to take language courses) or capacity-building which would allow them to access other labour sectors outside of domestic service. This also affects their own construction of social capital which would help improve their integration into the society of their destination country.⁵³

Beyond financial remittances, the social remittances of migrant women (ideas, skills, attitudes, knowledge etc.) can also promote socio-economic development, human rights and gender equality. Migrant women who send money transmit a definition of what it means to be female. This can affect how families and communities view women.⁵⁴

How female migration influences the "left-behind"

⁵¹ Canadian Task Force on Mental Health, 1988, p. 33.

⁵² DEVELOPMENT AND MIGRATION FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE, INSTRAW. SEVENTH COORDINATION MEETING ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION, Population Division Department of Economic and Social Affairs United Nations Secretariat, New York, 20-21 November 2008, p. 3.

⁵³ Additionally, women show a tendency to favour more members of the extended household, as they are often responsible for providing numerous family members with different levels of financial maintenance. Many women trying to support their families are forced to prolong their stay in the destination country or even ask for credit with the high interest rates attached to such services that put their own survival at risk in the destination country. Women also demonstrate a greater willingness to respond to unexpected situations in their households of origin. Finally, women prove to sustain their remittance sending practices over a longer period of time. (DEVELOPMENT AND MIGRATION FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE, INSTRAW. SEVENTH COORDINATION MEETING ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION, Population Division Department of Economic and Social Affairs United Nations Secretariat, New York, 20-21 November 2008, p. 3).

⁵⁴ *A Passage to Hope*, p. 29

Female migration not only changes the economic role of women, but also, and above all, their **role in the family**. Some studies of migration processes and impacts today recognise that migration influences not only the person herself but also her family, especially those left behind⁵⁵. Their lives are reshaped in a complex manner by the departure of key household members.

The lack of clear concrete policies to preserve the family unit, and poor implementation of family reunification provisions, increase and magnify the detrimental social consequences of migration. Most families cannot take their children with them due to overly restrictive migration policies.⁵⁶

Women who leave their families in order to support them are subject to a huge psychological and emotional burden. They provide love and affection to their employer's children or relatives in order to improve the quality of the lives of their own children, whom they sometimes never see for many years. Moreover, the fact that women can neither afford nor have the legal right to bring their own families works to the advantage of employers, as they are less distracted at work.⁵⁷

Such untimely separation of family members creates a new generation of children (so-called mobility orphans) who grow up without the tangible presence and influence of their parents or adults in their lives. "The fundamental definition of a parent is being altered, from the primary carer, physically, mentally and emotionally, to a mere provider of material goods".⁵⁸ Departures of parent(s) even with the best intentions to secure the future of the family significantly affect other family members especially if they are very young⁵⁹, and they are being deprived of the basic nurture needed during the formative period of their psychosocial and moral development. This is defined as *deficit care*, which means children are unable to go through formative care during the period when they need it most in terms of their developmental psychosocial growth. It has been noted that such situations pose a threat to the psychosocial development of the personality of the child⁶⁰ with long-term effects on individuals and societies.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Study conducted by the Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People-Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (ECMI-CBCP)/Apostleship of the Sea-Manila, the Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC) and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration in 2003, estimated (based on statistics and assumptions) that out of a total of 3,463,540 Filipino families with at least one child in the 10-to-12-year age group, there were around 2.7 per cent or 91,790 of deployed migrant workers with at least a child in that age range left behind (SMC, 2004). Finally, what is distinctive for this country is that the majority of the children have been left behind by their *mothers*, given that female migrants outnumber their male counterparts in the Philippines.

Sri Lanka is facing a similarly severe "deficit" in mothers as some 600,000 women (around 60 to 80 per cent of the total legal migrant population) leave the country for work each year. Based on the latest available statistics, out of 858,000 migrants in 2000, 590,420 were women. Within this group, 75 per cent were married and 90 per cent of these married women have children (Save the Children, 2006). According to a study conducted by Save the Children (2006), this meant that approximately one million Sri Lankan children are being left behind by their mothers.

⁵⁶ The Social Costs of Labour migration, Caritas Europa, Caritas Europa Migration Forum, 17-19 September 2009.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Even if there is no authoritative figure of the number of children left behind and much depends on inferences and estimates drawn from existing data on labour migration and other household data, such statistics suggest that tens of millions of children around the world are being left behind by their migrant parents (so called, mobility orphans), mostly lower-skilled workers from developing countries. Thus far, little is known about the duration children are separated from one or both parents. (THE COSTS OF (IM)MOBILITY: CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND AND CHILDREN WHO MIGRATE WITH A PARENT *Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Theodora Lam*)

⁶⁰ "A study last year by Ms. Rosemarie G. Edillon, Asia Pacific Policy Center highlighted the effects of expatriate parents among different age groups, pointing out that the critical age of adolescence (13-16) as the most vulnerable to social costs, saying, "This has been the reason why teenage pregnancy and drug abuses become rampant." Meanwhile, children below 13 years old are said to be "easier to please" as they are more satisfied with monetary and material benefits. These younger children are thinking that technological advances such as cellular phones are quick solutions in

Migration of women who are mothers gives rise to the so-called “grandmothering” phenomenon. Grandmothers’ care and attention to children is often expressed via less restrictive measures that are often attractive to children because their natural impulses are given more freedom of expression. However, this translates into children being spoiled by grandmothers rather than being guided to mature growth.⁶²

The 2003 Philippine Study⁶³ showed that children with absent mothers tend to have more difficulties academically and performed more poorly in terms of their physical and emotional health. In a study on children in Sri Lanka left behind by their mothers, some negative behaviours were noted, including loss of appetite, weight loss for children under five years of age, and temper tantrums among those of all ages, especially adolescents. As some examples from Latin America show, the children of absent mothers are doubly discriminated against: first, they are deprived of their mothers’ caring, and secondly, they are despised at school as children of absent mothers⁶⁴. In some cases mobility orphans who remain with older caregivers have more emotional needs and are unable to communicate with their older carers. Unfortunately, the situation is worse for children with mental and physical disabilities. Their already marginalised position in society can degenerate further in the absence of a parent.

Some studies demonstrate that Filipino children with absent mothers showed poorer social adjustment and suffered from impeded social and psychological development. Although the migrant parent contributes significantly to the improvement of the material standard of living, this is frequently at the cost of the child’s mental well-being and stability. It has also been proven “that children with parents who have not migrated obtain better qualifications than those whose parents are abroad. Emotional deprivation, coupled with poor supervision and guidance, inevitably lead to increased vulnerability of children and their marginalisation within society at large”.⁶⁵

The traditional allocation of the main household and educational responsibilities to women within the family unit is often an obstacle to the equal participation of both parents in family duties, which could otherwise partially mitigate the negative impact of female migration on the whole family. Moreover, this traditional vision contributes to discrimination against women’s capacity for professional and human development, and could be partly overcome by empowering women in their human rights and raising men’s awareness of gender equality and responsibility-sharing.

Female migration also affects marital relationships. Under the strain of geographical distance and difficult circumstances, many of them divorce and remarry in their receiving countries. “This is evident in Romania, where women who work abroad have a divorce rate of 37%, almost four times the national average”⁶⁶.

connecting with their parents” in *Quilted Sightings: A Women and Gender Studies Reader*, Philippine Copyright © 2008, Miriam College – Women and Gender Institute (WAGI), p.12.

⁶¹ The importance of the presence of parents, especially mothers, during the formative process of the child was highlighted by psychology and its experiments. Psychologists like Kohlberg and Piaget, both of whom dealt with the moral development of the child, formulate that during the first 12 years of life, basic moral development of the young takes place. The presence of parents is crucial during this period as in the safe family environment children learn to love, trust and communicate. Actually, the child progresses through stages in order, and one cannot get to a higher stage without passing through the stage immediately preceding it. Moral development is growth, and like all growth, takes place according to a predetermined sequence.

Other psychologists as J. Bowlby proved that deprivation of maternal caring during the first phase of life effects the mental health of the child and can develop pathologies in him (especially from 0 to 3 years old).

⁶² *Quilted Sightings: A Women and Gender Studies Reader*, Philippine Copyright © 2008, Miriam College – Women and Gender Institute (WAGI), p. 7

⁶³ THE COSTS OF (IM)MOBILITY: CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND AND CHILDREN WHO MIGRATE WITH A PARENT *Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Theodora Lam*

⁶⁴ Source: field work, Caritas Ecuador.

⁶⁵ The Social Costs of Labour migration, Caritas Europa, Caritas Europa Migration Forum, 17-19 September 2009.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

The specific situation of female refugees

Another aspect of female migration regards **women refugees**. People who live in places of conflict sometimes have only one option in order to escape violence and poverty: fleeing to other countries. But in some cases, for example people fleeing from Colombia, they cannot even apply for refugee status, and therefore remain without any protection and become even more vulnerable.

Women, children and the elderly are considered the most vulnerable, and represent an estimated 80% of a “typical” refugee population. Women refugees are usually the most vulnerable members of societies, victims of violence, sometimes systematic, including rape, and they often migrate with their children and other family members.⁶⁷ In spite of such a big number of female refugee population only a minority of women are granted refugee status. This is primarily because gender-related causes of persecution are rarely accepted as valid grounds for refugee status and because women often lack the education (literacy) and administration skills to complete the bureaucratic application process.⁶⁸

Women and girls face many dangers and obstacles throughout the entire refugee experience. Many of them are violated and have special needs relating health issues⁶⁹.

Challenges of healthcare for migrating women

In general, **health status** of migrant women depends a lot on health education of women, type of occupation, the access to services and to the information about them in the receiving countries, the knowledge of language and the level of discrimination and racism on the part of health-care providers. Migrant women often come from the countries where poor health is a fact of life. Many possess little information regarding health matters. Health status may be further compromised by the stress of adjusting to a new country and violence and sexual exploitation.⁷⁰ Moreover, migrant women can be exposed for discrimination while receiving pregnancy-related services: studies in the EU have found that migrants receive inadequate or no antenatal care and exhibit higher rates of stillbirth and infant mortality.⁷¹

Gender issues in return migration

⁶⁷ Female migrants: bridging gaps throughout life cycle, Selected papers of the UNFPA-IOM Expert Group Meeting, New York, 2-3 May 2006, organized by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), p.34

⁶⁸ Jennifer Harris, *Refugee Women: Failing to Implement Solutions*, Human Rights Brief 7, Issue 3, 2000, on: <http://www.wcl.american.edu/hrbrief/v7i3/refugee.htm>

⁶⁹ Passage to Hope, pp. 57-58

⁷⁰ Pregnancy-related problems among migrants have been a major problem throughout the EU, where studies have found that migrants receive inadequate or no antenatal care and exhibit higher rates of stillbirth and infant mortality. One United Kingdom study found that social exclusion and being non-white were among the main predictors of severe maternal morbidity. Other research in the country reveals that babies born of Asian women had lower birth weights and that perinatal and post-natal mortality rates were higher among Caribbean and Pakistani immigrants than in the general population. Hospital-based studies also show that African women delivering in France and Germany had higher rates of pregnancy complications and perinatal death than their native counterparts. Turkish immigrants in Germany also had higher rates of perinatal and neonatal mortality, and rates of maternal mortality tended to be higher overall among immigrant women. In Spain, premature births, low birth weight and delivery complications are especially common among African and Central and South American migrants (Passage to Hope, p. 36).

⁷¹ A *Passage to Hope*: p.36.

The decision to return is linked to structural and individual factors as well as policy interventions⁷². All these aspects hold important gender dimensions:

- Structural aspects like the situation in the host and home country contain gender aspects as for example the access to and demand of the labour market for women as well as the degree of emancipation and the position of women in society in general.
- On the personal level individual attributes such as age, gender and family circumstances as well as social relations form the individual return decision, whereby social relations are again strongly determined by gender.
- Policy interventions such as incentives and disincentives for instance can be gender biased in their design by not contemplating the role of women in their home societies and offering male-oriented reintegration assistance.

Problems associated with return and reintegration⁷³ such as a difficult relation between returnees and the local communities; stigma and feelings of being a failed migrant; frustration with the political climate, corruption and the position of women; high expectations of family and friends on the returnee; feeling estranged upon return; suffering identity conflicts; nostalgia for the host country are all aspects with important gender implications and have to be considered in all stages of the return migration.

During the migration process there are often changes of gender constructions and of the identity- and life drafts and in order to address these there is a need for gender-sensitive return counselling and a gendered approach to return and reintegration programs.

Studies have found for example that female returnees often report the loss of the gendered gains made in metropolitan societies upon return⁷⁴. This can take on the form of being more dependent on male family members and/or women being less likely to work due to societal expectations and constraints with more time spent on domestic work, child care, food preparation, etc⁷⁵. Another theme expressed by female returnees was the need to conform to local gender norms, especially those connected with female respectability⁷⁶.

UNMIK⁷⁷ advocates that the sustainability of return migration is only possible when a gender and age perspective that incorporates fundamental approaches to physical security, human security, economic and social welfare are included and maintained at all levels of the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, strategies and action plans.

Gender seems to positively affect the sustainability of return and reintegration. A study on circular migration and permanent return migration in Albania found for instance that women and tertiary educated are more likely to permanently return⁷⁸.

In Ghana, some unpublished studies suggest that female migrants are more likely to **return** and invest back home. This is because women tend to re-integrate more easily because of the long-term contacts they have maintained. They often find the way to reinsert themselves in petty trading or the informal business with the capital they have acquired. A significant

⁷² See Black R. et al., 2004, Understanding Voluntary Return, Sussex Centre for Migration Research, Publication of the UK Home Office

⁷³ See also Gent S. and Black R., 2005, Defining, measuring and influencing sustainable return, Policy Brief No. 3 July 2005, Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, University of Sussex

⁷⁴ Condon S., 2005, Transatlantic French Caribbean connections: return migration in the context of increasing circulation between France and the islands. In: Potter, R. B., Conway, D., and Phillips, J. (eds) The experience of return migration: Caribbean perspectives. Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, pp. 225–244.

⁷⁵ Conway D. and Potter R., 2006, Caribbean Transnational Return Migrants as Agents of Change, Geography Compass 1

⁷⁶ Phillips, J. and Potter, R. B. (2005). Incorporating race and gender into Caribbean return migration: the example of second-generation “Bajan-Brits.” In: Potter, R. B., Conway, D., and Phillips, J. (eds) The experience of return migration: Caribbean perspectives. Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, pp. 69–88.

⁷⁷ UNMIK, 2006, Revised Manual on Sustainable Return

⁷⁸ Vadean F. and Piracha M., 2009, Circular Migration or Permanent Return: What Determines Different Forms of Migration?, IZA Discussion Paper Series, IZA DP No. 4287

number of women returnees move into self-employment and employ others, a potential strategy for poverty reduction and for stimulating private sector entrepreneurship.

Generally, successful repatriation is accompanied by action to regain economic livelihoods and to protect women during the process of return. In this period development assistance is crucial and it is essential that women be active and influential participants in the planning process for such returns. On return it is very important to provide women with the full range of information on which to make the decisions. If the areas of return are characterized by beliefs, practices and laws that handicap women and cause gender inequalities, then refugee women may face significant barriers in re-establishing themselves and their families.⁷⁹

Gender-based discrimination, persecution and violence like rape, forced circumcision or sterilization as well as cultural burdens placed on women are other essential specific aspects of female return migration.

Regarding the return of victims of human trafficking it is essential to make a thorough needs- and risks assessment before return, to organize long-term assistance by local NGO's and to ensure that the return decision is voluntary so as to avoid the victims becoming a target for traffickers again^{80 81}.

Migrant women in legal framework

Globalisation has ushered in increasing migration for labour at the same time as has resulted in decreasing regulation of the labour market, growth in the informal sector, and the emergence of new forms of exploitation. In the midst of these trends, many governments are tightening migration controls. This interplay of competing incentives sets the scene for exploitation of those most desperate: irregular border-crossers, those in the informal sector, and the poor. For women, these trends spell increased vulnerability to exploitation and abuse, and continuing inequality with men.

Migrants' human rights are at stake in countries of origin, transit and destination. Taken together, existing UN and ILO Conventions provide extensive protection for women migrants, but they operate in a fragmented and scattered manner: moreover, it is sometimes not obvious that they could be fruitfully applied to women migrants when the focus is on the single variable of 'migration status'.

Neither of the ILO's migrant worker-specific Conventions (Nos 97 and 143) mentions the feminization of migration or the specific vulnerabilities of female migrants in certain jobs such as domestic work. Despite this, a wide range of ILO Conventions – including those concerning remunerations (Nos 95, 100 and 131) discrimination (No.111), occupational health and safety (No 155), and freedom of association and right to organise (Nos 87 and 98) are relevant for women migrant workers.

What remains an enormous problem – one common to human rights in general – is gap between theory and practice, i.e., actual implementation by states. A number of recent studies have shown that possibly the most important root causes of non-ratification or non-implementation is lack of political will. Analyses that identify the myriad protections that the states have already agreed extend to migrant women will serve as a tool for advocates

⁷⁹ Female migrants: bridging gaps throughout life cycle, Selected papers of the UNFPA-IOM Expert Group Meeting, New York, 2-3 May 2006, organized by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), p.35

⁸⁰ Willemsen E., 2006, A Safe Return for Victims of Trafficking in People Trafficking: upholding rights and understanding vulnerabilities, Forced Migration Review 25, published by Oxford Refugee Studies Centre

⁸¹ Moreover, it was noticed that owing money to people back home entraps victims in a particularly remorseless way as returning with nothing seems unacceptable to many and consequently being re-trafficked may be preferred to returning empty handed to one's family and/or community. (Kelly L., 2005, „You can find anything you want“: a Critical Reflection on Research on Trafficking in Persons within and into Europe in Data and Research on Human Trafficking: a Global Survey, IOM)

particularly Caritas organisations seeking to increase the political will to implement those standards.

In synthesis there is evidence that female migration has its specific features, which are sources of risks, but also opportunities. It is not only an increase of figures that induces to talk about Feminisation of Migration, but rather the fact that women increasingly migrate independently from families and become the breadwinners of their family. This has sometimes dramatic implications on the families, and more specifically on the children left behind (orphans of mobility, grandparenting, psychosocial implications, role of husbands). However the decision to migrate and its factual happening depend very much on the social and economic contexts and the level of poverty and gender equality. In places with a high level of poverty and significant gender inequality, migration is not likely to happen. Another interesting feature is that female migration is clustered around a labour demand in the care sector where predominately jobs performed by women are found. Female migration of highly qualified persons is less visible than the one of men. Apart from the still existing wage inequality (the gender pay gap on the average is 17% according to ITUC in 2008) female migrants often work in either highly unregulated sectors or in those with low wages. In spite of that, their attitude concerning remittances is different than that of men: they keep their expenses under tight control and invest in the well being of the family as a whole. We can perhaps conclude that women are more focused on the well-being of others than in their own advancement, even when they have the skills to take up better positions. And it should certainly not be forgotten that during the migration journey, women are double if not triple vulnerable (as a woman and as a migrant, aggravated by specific forms of migration, flight, trafficking and undocumented migration). The political response still seems to think in male categories. Although the issue of rights for women is in almost everyone's mouth, it has not translated into a migration policy that takes the specific needs and rights of women into consideration. This makes them easy prey for smugglers and traffickers. It could thus be concluded that migration for women bears a high price, with little rewards, apart from more personal freedom. This is by no means meant to depict women as the victims of circumstances who have no say and no influence. On the contrary many of them are brave, outspoken and an example to others. And this is probably part of the solution. There is the need of more of them to speak out and claim their rights.

Caritas recognizes that mobility is vital to human development and movement is a natural expression of people's desire to choose how and where to lead their lives⁸², therefore together with other civil society organizations, has a great responsibility to educate women (leaders) about their rights, to provide them spaces for the development of their own life-projects, but also for legal guarantees, protection and care in order for them to develop their potential and make choices. Having said this, it becomes evident, that this debate goes beyond the area of migration, but affects all the areas of our Caritas work, emergencies, integral human development, climate justice and peace and reconciliation. The upcoming Forum on Women, Migration and Development provides us with an opportunity to look at the potential of our own work to make a change in women's (and thus families') life.

⁸² Human Development Report 2009, UNDP, p.18