This Policy Brief was prepared by IOM as a background document for the Workshop on Gender and Internal Migration
The objective of this policy brief is to give a general understanding of gender-specific issues related to the subject of internal migration and its impact on development in Asia.

1. **Definition of a gender-specific approach to internal migration.**
2. **Why is the gender-specific approach essential to internal migration and development?**
3. **Existing data and indicators in Asia.**
4. **Approaches and policies in Asia.**
5. **Research gaps.**
6. **Questions for discussion.**

1) **Definition of a gender-specific approach in internal migration**

- Gender analysis explores the differences between men and women so that policies, programmes and projects can identify and meet their particular needs in order to respond to gender-specific equity objectives. Gender is relational and concerns the interaction and power relations among men and women (IOM 2005).
- Gender refers to the social roles and relations between people, analyses how such relative power is used and shared and institutionalized in family, community and State structures.
- Gender means socially constructed characteristics ascribed to men and women. Gender specificities change over time and are deeply influenced by the migration experience.
- Adopting a gender-specific analysis of internal migration allows to define the differences and similarities between the respective migration behaviours of men and women, as well as the impact of cultural, social, economic and political environments on gender specificities.
- The gender analysis at the individual level allows a better understanding of the motivations and constraints to migrate.
- The gender analysis at the collective level provides an insight into how internal migration and the departure of one or more persons of different sex affects the household and community.
- The gender investigation offers a better understanding of internal migratory flows: what motivates women and men to move, and what are the resulting migration trends.

2) **Why is the gender-specific approach essential to internal migration and development?**

**Gender differentiated driving factors motivating migration**
Mobility is determined by cultural, social, economic and political factors. Human capital, existing networks, labour demand, wage differentials, land ownership, access to information, and more, are all elements that will impact on the decision to leave, and on the resulting migration experience. All these elements have gender specificities not only within the Asian context, but worldwide. In terms of motivations and constraints leading to migration, the gender characteristics will influence the decision or the obligation to move.
Differentiated contribution of internal migrants to development in home and host regions
There is growing evidence that men and women migrants have different attitudes towards the eventual return to their home regions or maintaining contact with their families. Differences among men and women behaviour were also apparent in terms of the size, frequency and regularity of financial remittances and types of investments that migrants make. Moreover, if men are the principal migrants, then women who have stayed at home become the main receivers of remittances and they tend to invest more in health, nutrition, education and the general wellbeing of the families.

Discrimination has been identified as a key barrier to the contribution to be made by women migrants to development
Inequalities women face as employees (access to skilled jobs) and entrepreneurs (access to credit) limit their potential contribution to development.

Gender differences in internal migration flows have a direct impact on the definition of development policies
Development policies can target very diverse areas of concern: access to employment, business creation, credit, networks, education, social security, health systems, housing, transportation, sanitation and more. The migration experience and potential contribution of the migrant to development are directly related to the access migrants have to the above-mentioned sectors. Men and women migrants will have differentiated access and behaviours; thus, development policies should target accordingly these groups.

Labour migration and gender-specific features
Internal migration is often driven by employment possibilities in another location. The growth of particular industrial and economic sectors will attract a labour force that, to a certain extent, will be female (services, textile etc.) or male dominated (heavy industry, construction etc.).

Impact of internal migration on changing gender roles
Whether men or women migrate, there will be an impact on the household organization and the wellbeing of the family. For those leaving, internal migration can result in either empowerment or, on the contrary, increased vulnerability and even victimization. Likewise, for those remaining the departure of men or women from the household will have a specific impact according to the migrant’s status and role at home before leaving (main wage earner, young daughter, mother etc.). A number of studies analyse how migration affects gender roles and what changes it will entail. In regions such as southern China or the Philippines, where more women migrate, men have often assumed greater childcare responsibilities; however, surveys have shown that upon their return, women again take over the childcare or, in some instances, had to organize such services from abroad without the men actually taking on any additional workload or responsibilities.¹ In Bangladesh, migration did not cause a major change in gender roles within the family, and other women from within the

extended family became involved in carrying out the respective tasks previously assumed by the migrant.

3) **Existing data and indicators**

- Gender indicators are **quantitative and qualitative benchmarks** used for measuring or assessing the achievement of results.
- **Gender disaggregated data** means collecting information about men and women separately.
- **Individual level data**: quantitative data on who is migrating, and qualitative data about motivations and constraints.
- **Collective level data**: gathering knowledge on migration impacts on households, the role of social networks as a factor for migration.
- **Sectoral approaches**: on specific issues such as trafficking, incidence of disease, or employment, data will be more easily available by gender groups.

Despite the lack of data on female migration in Asia, many countries experience migration flows dominated by women to the extent that women may be said to have advanced from secondary to primary migrants. For instance Japan, the Philippines and Thailand have rural-urban flows that are female dominated, while in south Asia males dominate.

4) **Approaches and policies**

**Gender specificities of internal migration in Asia**

Women have always accounted for a significant share in migratory flows. But if previously they were often dependent on and secondary to male migrants, today, they are moving as primary migrants. It is not only the quantitative aspect of female migration, but also the qualitative dimension (e.g., how women move today, in what capacity and for what purpose) that underlies the term “feminization of migration”, itself based on the changing roles of women and men within the family and society, including greater access for women to education and the work force. Women are not widely perceived as equal actors in migration, nor as of equal importance.

Rural to urban migration in south Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh) is still mainly male dominated, though female participation is increasing. In Japan, the Philippines and Thailand women dominate migration flows, while only a slight female majority can be observed among the flows in the Republic of Korea and Indonesia. In eastern Asia women mostly migrate to urban locations without their families. In south Asia, the mobility of women is more constrained, but with the global relocation of light industries to areas where labour is cheap, opportunities for women in sectors perceived as female oriented are increasing.

A number of different policy approaches are targeting the gender specificities of internal migration. They all tend to focus on a better understanding of the migration of women,

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4 UNESCAP, www.unescap.org
both in a negative (exploitation, vulnerability) and positive dimension (empowerment, learning new skills, gaining independence).

**Migration as a process of the empowerment of women**

A study conducted in Bangladesh showed that upon return migrant women had improved their chances to find (better) employment at home as well, often better paid than before they migrated. Migration offers women the opportunity of self-realization, exposure to a new social, cultural and professional environments and personal and economic independence. The migration of a female member of the family is not without its effect on the children and husband. The education, or better education of the children, for example, can be made possible through the resulting higher income. However, many girls have to take up household responsibilities in the absence of the mother and are not able to attend school. The effects of women migrating as primary actors can have a number of important impacts on the women themselves and on their households. Not least, by sending back remittances, women contribute to a great extent to the financial support of the family. It is, therefore, highly desirable and necessary for development policies to take into account the potential positive dimension of migration and to strive to maximize its benefits.

**Programmes supporting vulnerable women migrants: anti-poverty, information, access to services and protection of rights**

Poverty and the lack of opportunity are part of the causes and motivations to migrate; but they can also both trigger and hinder internal migration. Given the lower income of women, often combined with less control over the family income, women face more difficulties to move than men. Women might also be restricted in their access to information before migrating and suffer gender discrimination; they are vulnerable to sexual exploitation during their stay abroad, and lack access to basic resources such as health care, clean water, sufficient food or land. In addition, gender-based labour markets tend to channel women into domestic, service and sex sectors, that are often unregulated and pay poorly.

Pre-recruitment awareness sessions and pre-departure orientation training are also key to preparing women migrants to face the new challenges. For example, “the power to choose”, a programme conducted by the IOM in the Philippines, supports women migrant workers to confront the new personal challenges linked to migration.

In April 2004, the Chinese authorities and the International Labour Organization (ILO) launched a project to combat trafficking in girls and young women for labour exploitation within China (CP-TING project). The project aims to develop cheap, fast and transparent labour migration channels especially geared towards those with low education and skill levels. It was set up in collaboration with the Chinese authorities through the All-China Women’s Federation, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and a range of other ministries and representatives from three ‘sending’ provinces (Anhui, Henan and Hunan) and two ‘receiving’ provinces (Jiangsu and Guangdong).

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7 Ibid.
The UK development agency Action Aid assists sex workers who are internal migrants, and their children. Many women were trafficked and forced into the sex industry, and Action Aid is helping them and their children by offering them education and health services. The Edhi Foundation, an NGO in Pakistan, is one of the largest voluntary welfare organizations in Pakistan providing comprehensive cover for emergency services. It also runs shelters for indigent and homeless women and children. They have provided refuge to many women and children victims of trafficking.

**Policies restricting female migration**
In many countries, women generally face more and greater disadvantages prior to and during the migration process. In Bangladesh, for example, international migration by women generally was prevented between 1981 and 1988, and the migration by unskilled women was again restricted between 1997 and 1998.\(^9\) UNIFEM, for example, supports the lifting of restrictions on women migrating, and to ensure safe conditions for women to migrate and to strengthen their capacity to be able to recognize and protect themselves against potentially exploitative situations. There is little evidence about internal migration restrictive practices.

**Policies facilitating gender-specific internal migration**
It is more difficult to identify and define policies that aim at encouraging the internal migration of either men or women. Even when no restrictions are imposed on such movements, this does not necessarily reflect an official policy to actually refrain from doing so, nor one that encourages migration as a means to promote the development potential of migration, particularly of women migrants.

**Migration and development in host areas: services specific to women and men migrants**
The objective of the UNESCO project “Together with Migrants” in China is to address the problems of urban poverty and the social and economic exclusion faced by the young, in particular young female, migrants. The project is designed to facilitate the integration of this target population into their respective urban societies in China and Mongolia by providing them with access to better living conditions, social services, recreational activities and vocational training. In Bangladesh the NGO Nari Udyog Kendro (NUK) addresses governance and gender issues in the development process and caters to the housing needs of the city’s low-income and migrant women workers and female students.

**Migration and development in sending areas: community development programmes (supporting the family and the community)**
The Kimidi Multisectoral Development Society (KMDS) in Orissa, India, a male-dominated migrant-sending region, assists women to mitigate the adverse impact of male out-migration. The ADB trains migrant women to help them to diversify their employment activities. Action Aid Bangladesh carries out various programmes on environment, education, development and gender equity. It also acknowledges urban slum settlements as magnets for economic migrants and seeks to help the poor to improve their freedom, security, and dignity. Action Aid Pakistan is carrying out a community development (Lok Sangat) programme through a comprehensive approach of microfinance, education, gender and sanitation projects.

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Bringing together concerns about migration and gender equity objectives
BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), an NGO in Bangladesh, pursues an economic development programme (EDP) to cover both rural and urban areas, and is active in promoting gender equity.

5) Gaps
- Gender awareness in the area of internal migration is still limited.
- Gender disaggregated data is lacking.
- The focus is rather on women studies instead of a general gender differentiated approach.
- Often the negative aspects of female migration are stressed, with insufficient attention to cultural changes induced by migration, and the increasing economic impact (access to credit, enterprise creation, female social networks etc.) resulting from the migration of women and their role as providers through remittances sent to their families.
- There are still too few analyses of the needs, priorities and resources of internal migrants that also give sufficient regard to gender differences and inequality.
- There is only limited analysis of the local cultural, social and economic context that underlies gender differentiated migration behaviour.

6) Questions
- What gender-specific indicators and statistics can improve the available knowledge of internal migration and its contribution to development?
- What programmes and projects pay specific attention to gender differences of internal migrants? What are the lessons learnt?
- How can gender-specific development policies in host and home regions benefit migrants?
- What are the policies that can support equality and equity for migrants?
- How can employment opportunities and labour standards affect gender-specific migration?
- How can women achieve recognition as equal partners in migration and development?