

Gender & Migration



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Assisting demobilized soldiers and other internally displaced persons in their return home.

GENDER – NOT JUST ANOTHER WORD FOR WOMEN

Gender is about the differences between men and women and how they are perceived. For migrants, gender is perhaps the most important single factor shaping their experience – more important than their country of origin or destination, their age, class, race or culture.

WOMEN AND MEN ON THE MOVE

Until the early 1980s, most migration studies focused on economics. Male migrants were seen as the main economic players and women were often seen as passive followers – the guardians of tradition and stability at home.

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But perceptions are changing. Migrant women now account for almost 50% of all migrants and are increasingly migrating to find jobs as individuals, although many still migrate as dependants.

Women's roles are also changing – in the family, the community and the workplace – and consequently in the dynamics that drive migration. As economic decision-makers, they are emerging from the margins as key players in the migration equation.

Traditionally with less access to resources and less decision-making power than men, women can be empowered by migration. Education, work experience and economic independence abroad can release women from traditional roles and enable them to exercise their rights more effectively.

MIGRATION IS DIFFERENT FOR MEN AND WOMEN

But migration holds more dangers for women than men. They are more vulnerable to physical, sexual and verbal abuse when travelling. And they are more likely to fall prey to human traffickers for the sex industry.



Victims of trafficking from Congo returning home.

However, in some cases, men are also the target of trafficking, and since the focus is usually on women, these men can find themselves in an even more precarious situation.

Migrants move between two cultures – their culture of origin and the culture of their new home. Psychosocial pressures and divergent sets of cultural expectations often bring marginalization in the host country and the dual responsibility of work and family hit women hardest.

As women and foreigners, migrant women often face double discrimination in the labour market. Their status as “dependants” often limits their access to employment, social and health programmes, and their residence may depend on their relationship with an employed male partner. If the relationship changes, a migrant woman may lose her legal status and face deportation.

IOM'S GENDER POLICY

In 1995 IOM adopted a gender mainstreaming policy.

“IOM is committed to ensuring that the particular needs of all migrant women are identified, taken into consideration and addressed by IOM projects and services”.

Gender mainstreaming is now an integral part of IOM's work. It tries to ensure that women and men are provided with equal opportunities to develop and utilize their skills and to participate in decisions affecting their lives.

Mainstreaming works **upstream** to sensitize policy-makers in gender issues, and **downstream** to ensure that the needs and contributions of migrant men and women are addressed by the organization's programmes, projects and services.

Here are some examples of gender mainstreamed projects implemented by IOM throughout the world:

Counter-Trafficking

Voluntary return and reintegration of trafficked and other vulnerable migrant women and children in the **Mekong region in South-East Asia**. This project is establishing a sustainable cross-border working arrangement in six countries by strengthening the ability of governments and NGOs to provide voluntary return and reintegration assistance to the victims, and to promote the necessary cooperation in the region to counter trafficking effectively through legal, administrative, policy and advocacy measures. Targeted research also provides timely information on trafficking in the countries concerned and maps the regional networks and routes that facilitate the trade.

Solida, Director of the IOM-supported Battambang Reception Center:

“It's all step by step. There are many things to do, many children to help. But they are all Cambodian children. Like bamboo shoots they need a chance to grow. That is what we aim to do, to help them grow, with warmth, care and dignity.”

Linda Manning/IOM 2002



Children attend the school set up in the Battambang Reception Center.

Mass Information

In April 2000, IOM launched one of the first information campaigns principally targeting potential clients of trafficked women forced into prostitution in Kosovo. Poster slogans such as: *You pay for a night – She pays with her life*, brought home to clients how they were contributing to the perpetuation of this form of modern slavery but at

the same time the campaign also empowered the victims.

“We are not victims any more, we are survivors.”



IOM 2000

Anti-trafficking campaign poster.

In the wake of Hurricane Mitch in 1998, a community-oriented radio soap opera was produced in 2002 in Costa Rica. The project aimed at contrasting the negative results of the lack of preparedness by local communities with positive results that

could be achieved before, during and after natural disasters strike. This educational tool also aimed at preventing irregular migration and generated discussion about gender roles in the disaster context and beyond. This was done

through the use of non-sexist language, the non-perpetuation of gender roles, recognition of women’s capacities and potential. The drama succeeded in recognizing and highlighting the triple role women play in society: productive, reproductive, and as active community participants. Equally important was the emphasis on the burden that men carry as family providers, which is one of the main reasons for migration and the taking of risks during the migration process.

Liliana Berta Herrera, Radio Progreso, Honduras



Residents of La Guacamaya listen to the radio soap opera “Hurricane season”.



Lauren Engle/IOM 2002

Aduei on her way home from school.

Movements

In 2001, some 2,500 young Sudanese refugees awaiting resettlement in the US attended an IOM cultural orientation programme. The young men and women discussed the meaning of gender equality in Sudanese and American culture and were given advice on sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS.

They were given information about US laws and customs regarding marriage, divorce and the interaction between men and women.

Aduei, a Sudanese girl resettled to the US:

“I am everything. I am Jewish, Muslim, Christian. Religion is being used as a tool for hate... Some just use it to push things (their own agendas)...”



Pindie Stephen/IOM 2001

Sudanese refugees learn about US currency in Cultural orientation class.

Technical Cooperation

In Azerbaijan’s Nakhichevan province in 2000, IOM developed micro-credit projects targeting women to give them access to seed capital for income generation activities. The project was designed to reduce poverty, while increasing self-sufficiency among women from low-income, migrant and refugee families.

Bahar, one of the women participating in the marketing cooperatives:

“I earn US\$30 to 40 per month depending on the sales. But we gain much more than money. We gain confidence in ourselves and respect from neighbours; we have grown as a team and helped each other improve our skills and earn more money. This will certainly guarantee our success in life.”

As part of the IOM’s Capacity Building in Migration programme in Azerbaijan, IOM supports a comprehensive training programme for border guards. The programme enables border guards to effectively examine travellers and documents. Since the start of the training courses in July 2001 a total of 39 newly recruited female border guards completed the training. Employing female officers has contributed to changing the traditional military structure.



IOM 2000

Yoghurt factory in Azerbaijan.



Passport check - Ilaha Imanova at work.

Ilaha Imanova, Border Guard:

“The theoretical knowledge we received became a good basis to be applied in practice...Since I started one year ago, I am pleased and satisfied with my job. I want to develop my career and become a senior officer. My father would be proud to see me here.”

Assisted Voluntary Returns

IOM’s Return of Qualified Afghans (RQA) programme facilitates the effective participation and active engagement of qualified and skilled Afghan nationals residing outside Afghanistan in the reconstruction and capacity building process of their home country. Over 6,000 qualified Afghans have applied to the programme to date and nearly 20% of the applicants are women (as of early November 2002). IOM also supports the Afghan Ministry of Women’s Affairs by providing staff and other resources.



Maliha Zulfacar meets an old friend in Kabul.

Dr. Mahila Zulfacar, Doctor of Sociology and Deputy Minister of Higher Education for the Interim Administration has returned to Kabul with the IOM-RQA:

“We, Afghan scholars and intellectuals, now have a responsibility to use those unexpected 15 minutes of fame awarded to us today by putting our skills and experience to work for Afghanistan.”

Migration Health

Post-conflict family and child support in Cambodia. This project aims at contributing to the psychosocial rehabilitation of children and their families from rural communities affected by years of armed conflict. Many have been exposed to various forms of physical trauma and general health problems caused by separation and loss of family members, alcohol/substance abuse, and underlying poverty. In addition, these women and children – and, to a lesser extent, men – are often vulnerable to human trafficking and sexual abuse. A proposal has recently been made to expand the geographical coverage of the project as well as to include a comprehensive awareness component on the issue of trafficking. This would contribute to limiting the vulnerability of the population to trafficking which, in this area of NW Cambodia, is a prime target for traffickers.

Labour Migration

In Haiti and the Dominican Republic, IOM is assisting authorities to deal with a “revolving door labour migration”: There are an estimated one million Haitians living and working in the Dominican Republic, many of them without legal documentation. While these Haitians are filling a gap in the Dominican lower wage labour market, Dominicans themselves leave their country in search of a better life in the United States or Europe. IOM projects are aimed at improving migration management, renewing migration legislation and promoting migrants’ rights. Special focus is given to the vulnerability of migrant women to trafficking and abuse.

José Altamonte, a Dominican migrant, states that it is especially the women working abroad who contribute to the well-being of the communities at home:

“If it wasn’t for those brave women, we’d all be dead here. These women send money back, they build houses, open small businesses, buy small pieces of land and build houses that they later rent out. Without emigration this entire community would be starving.”

Post Conflict

IOM organized a Workshop on “Trust Building and Peace Enhancement through Better Communication among Somali Women” in Hargeisa, Somaliland in March 2001. As part of IOM’s focus on consensus building through women in post-conflict situations, this brought together 25 Somali women from the diaspora in the Middle East, Europe and North America, as well as other parts of former Somalia.

IOM’s mainstreaming strategy is also reinforced through gender focal points designated at all levels of the organization, at Headquarters and in the field, capitalizing on existing in-house expertise. The selected staff members devote part of their time to the promotion and incorporation of gender mainstreaming into broad aspects of policy making, programme development and staffing.

The HQs Working Group on Gender Issues (WGGI), composed of staff who are committed to gender mainstreaming from a wide range of departments, contributes to the integration of a gender dimension throughout IOM’s work. IOM has a policy of equal opportunity and treatment of men and women staff members.

Gender Landmarks

1995: The Working Group on Gender Issues is established and the Council adopts a gender policy

1997: A Gender Issues Coordinator is appointed and a Plan of Action on Gender Issues for 1998-2002 is approved.

1998: An Overall Gender Mainstreaming Strategy is adopted and is operating with the support of Gender Focal Points throughout the world.

