



Integrating Gender into the Roundtable Sessions of the Global Forum on Migration and Development: The ILO Contribution

Background Note for the Global Forum on
Migration and Development

May 2007



Roundtable 1: Human capital development and labour mobility: Maximizing opportunities and minimizing risks

Session 1.1: Highly skilled migration: balancing interests and responsibilities.

Available statistics concerning migrants' occupations and employment status are scarce and rarely gender disaggregated. It is therefore almost impossible to provide for accurate figures on the rate of female skilled migration movements. Evidence suggests that skilled women's participation in migration movements is increasing, especially in some female dominated sectors such as education and health. An important consequence of the loss of qualified professionals in these sectors is that the impacts are felt more severely on women left behind through deterioration in maternal, reproductive and child health services as well as reduced numbers of teachers which can reinforce gender gaps in educational access. These impacts in turn are detrimental to poverty reduction and other development goals.

The "invisibility" of skilled female migrants as subject of research and international debate, might be linked to a variety of factors linked to the specificity of women migration patterns and modalities, and partially attributable to an insufficient capacity to adopt a gender approach to international migration and development issues. Skilled migration has long been considered male dominated, lead by the idea that skilled women do not migrate internationally or do so as accompanying dependents.

The phenomenon of de-skilling seems to be particularly significant for skilled female migrants, though much research remains to be done. Gender roles within the households are also very likely to have an important impact on how women may be more likely to accept occupation that do not correspond to their qualification and skills, and how this might affect women themselves, their families and the host and origin countries.

Attracting back skilled migrants requires gender responsive economic growth - including addressing labour market discrimination, gender sensitive employment creation and human resource development strategies; rule of law - including legislative efforts to address equality and discrimination, property rights, labour standards; and good governance - including respect of the human rights such as those on equality. Incentive schemes need to analyse existing structural inequalities between men and women and recognise that different strategies may be needed to attract them back. They should also have disaggregated indicators to measure outcomes. Both a mainstreaming approach and an affirmative action approach may be appropriate areas such as investment opportunities, business development support, training opportunities, assistance with housing, taxes, banking etc. Co-development strategies offer opportunities for integrating gender responsive development into agreement-based migration regimes for highly skilled to better protect sectors at risk in developing countries. Ensuring that wider development goals such as PRSPs and MDGs¹ are taken into account in migration agreements is one way to ensure that migration of skilled workers is not detrimental to wider poverty alleviation efforts.

Session 1.2: Temporary labour migration as a contribution to development: sharing responsibility

Labour market segmentation is an important issue in temporary migration, with women making up a large proportion of low-skilled labour. Their concentration in occupations unprotected by labour legislation heightens vulnerabilities which may be accompanied by

¹ Linking migration to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) would enable developed countries to avoid recruiting skilled workers from some of the least developed countries, and enable poor countries to meet their MDG commitments without the loss of qualified professionals, particularly in health and education fields. Of the eight MDGs, the following six are particularly important when linking migration and development: Goal 1, on halving extreme poverty; Goal 2, on universal primary education; Goal 3 on gender equality; Goal 4 on reducing child mortality; Goal 5 on improving maternal health; and Goal 6 on combating HIV/AIDs, malaria and other diseases.



informal employment status and irregular migration status. Women at this end of the labour market tend to be the least informed about the costs and benefits of migration, have few opportunities for upgrading their skills, and are more exposed to exploitative and abusive working conditions. Countries of origin can significantly alleviate these vulnerabilities by encouraging regulated migration through incentives packages such as tax, insurance, pensions, training opportunities and pre-departure orientation. Developed countries can also reduce vulnerabilities by regulating recruitment agencies, providing legislative protections for all categories of work, enforcing contracts and allowing migrant workers to organise and have freedom of movement. Restrictive migration policies tend to have the unintended consequence of driving migration of low-skilled workers underground and increasing their risks of exploitation. Bilateral agreements are important vehicles for formalising these rights and obligations, and when grounded in gender analysis can be a crucial means of protecting the rights of migrant women workers at the lower end of the labour market.

Session 1.3: The role of other-than government partners in strengthening the developmental contribution of temporary labour migration.

The ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration, adopted in 2005 by its constituents, provides practical guidance to trade unions and employers organisations, in addition to governments, on developing, strengthening and implementing migration policies and practices within a rights-based perspective. It offers a wide range of guidelines, principles and examples of good practices which can assist social partners in strengthening their roles to contribute to the developmental contribution of temporary migration.

ILO Convention No. 181, Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 is a key instrument for regulating and monitoring private recruitment agencies. The convention provides guidelines for legislation and practices to promote safe and managed recruitment policies among private agencies in areas such as licensing, fee arrangements, marketing, codes of conduct and enforcement of regulations among others. When used to support migration policies it has proven to be vital in reducing the vulnerabilities of all migrant workers and women in particular. Advocacy by social partners and NGOs have also been essential in reducing women migrants' exposure to exploitation and providing redress in cases of abuse. Civil society groups also play important roles in providing information, services and assistance to some of the more vulnerable groups of migrant workers including women. These actors can play important and innovative roles in facilitating the discharge by women migrant workers of their responsibilities to their families and children left behind.

Session 1.4: How can circular migration and sustainable return serve as developmental tools?

Circular migration is most beneficial when voluntary. Evidence suggests that a continuous cycle of temporary migration for low-skilled women workers is often the result of lack of employment opportunities, labour market discrimination and poverty in their home countries. The social costs for families left behind, particularly children, are well known. Countries of origin need to address the root causes of migration in order to make it a genuine choice for low skilled women. Gender responsive employment creation strategies, an enabling environment for business development and legislative and institutional reforms to address gender discrimination provide a macro framework for sustainable return of migrant women. At a meso level, mainstreaming of relevant institutions accompanied by a targeted approach to extend services for women may be appropriate. For individual women, access to pre-departure training and reintegration packages are essential for providing the sorts of information, incentives and services which can assist their sustainable return to their home communities.



Roundtable 2: Remittances and other diaspora resources: Increasing their net volume and development value

Labour market supply and demand factors continue to fuel the growth of female migration. Levels of remittances sent by women have grown accordingly, making them significant contributors to the development of their countries of origin. Like all aspects of the migration phenomenon however, remittances are not gender-neutral. The amounts of money remitted, the channels used and the impacts on development are all gender differentiated. Although knowledge gaps persist there is some evidence that women may remit a larger proportion of their income and remit for longer periods than men. Women may also be more likely to use informal channels, partly because of lack of information about formal channels, limited access to social networks, lower rates of literacy and complicated banking procedures. Women may also be concentrated in occupations such as domestic work, services and entertainment, which are characterised by ‘invisibility’, lack of mobility, isolation and low wages. Where their migration status is irregular and their employment status is informal they are even less likely to use formal methods of transfer. For women who receive remittances, there is some evidence that they prioritise family needs, such as for example food, education and health care, over productive investments and are more likely to spend remittances on consumables, thus in part reflecting the gender division of labour within the household. The development potentials of this type of spending should not be dismissed, given the widespread evidence in other contexts that these expenditures by women have been shown to significantly reduce poverty levels and develop human capital in the longer term.

Sending remittances has been shown to increase the status and autonomy of women who remit, however empowerment is maximised when women are able to retain control over how remittances are spent. Beyond monetary remittances, social remittances – values, ideas, skills - generated from the migration experience can also transform gender relations and impact in positive ways on development.

Given all the above mentioned factors, initiatives to maximise the productive potential of remittances must take into account the gender division of labour within the labour market and the power relationships within the household.

Session 2.1: Improving the formal transfer of remittances and reducing costs

Efforts to increase the use of formal transfer methods among women and their families need to focus on financial literacy, targeting specific financial products to women such as savings and credit facilities and enhancing women’s access to information about potential investments. Such information is most effective prior to departure, and indeed financial literacy training and access to efficient, cost-effective remittance systems can be important incentives for registered and regulated migration. Practices which discriminate against women such as the need for the approval of a male family member to open an account or apply for loans, requirements for identity documents, land and property deeds and complicated written application forms should be eliminated. Financial services providers have often been slow to recognise the economic potential of women migrants and women who receive remittances. They need to ensure that their products are tailored to the needs of women and find ways to provide outreach to women in isolated areas. While IT and new technologies provide important opportunities for reducing transfer costs and increasing formalisation in general, gender gaps in IT access and abilities may reinforce marginalisation of women from formal methods of transfer.

Session 2.2: Increasing the micro-impact of remittances on development

Maximising the micro impact of remittances from women goes beyond enhancing women’s financial literacy though this is clearly important. Women often have limited access to social security, insurance and pensions. Linking remittances with these products can considerably reduce social protection gaps for women. At the same time women need opportunities for the productive use of remittances. Harnessing women’s economic potential through remittances requires ensuring that women are able to take advantage of income and employment opportunities. Tax incentives, savings schemes, business advisory services, training



opportunities, entrepreneurship programmes and simplified procedures for starting businesses can channel remittances into productive activities. Women often have limited access to these services or lack of knowledge about their availability. Both mainstreaming and affirmative action interventions for these incentives and services may be required. Addressing labour market segmentation and discrimination is also critical. Occupational segregation often limits the choices and vision of women, concentrating them in market saturated, traditional 'female' activities with low viability and sustainability. Support to upgrading women's skills capacities in demand-driven sectors, eliminating discrimination in access to productive resources including land, inheritance, property, networks, information and technology can maximise the micro-impacts of remittances for women and considerably contribute to the economic development of communities of origin as a whole.

In discussions of remittances it is important that 'productive investment' is not narrowly defined. Evidence that women are more likely to spend remittances on family welfare such as education, health and nutrition of children, should be seen in the wider context that such spending constitutes an important investment in future human capital and has been shown to be a major contributor to reducing poverty in the longer term.

Session 2.3: Increasing the macro impact of remittances on development

Although remittances have become one of the largest sources of foreign exchange for some countries of origin, this should not engender complacency about state responsibilities for development, employment creation and social protection. In the longer term, relying on remittances is an unstable course for an economy as migrant's ties to their home country become looser and opportunities for investment and return remain scarce. Addressing the root causes of the labour migration of women in countries of origin is particularly essential: labour market discrimination, high unemployment, limited access to productive resources and poverty. At the macro level, commitment towards pro-poor growth strategies and gender-sensitive employment creation can maximise the impacts of remittances while at the same time making migration a genuine choice for women. Human resource policies to harness the new skills of returned migrant women can have multiplier effects, since it has been demonstrated that trade and foreign direct investment are particularly attracted to women's labour. Investing remittances into export oriented growth and providing opportunities for returned migrant women to upgrade their skills can enhance a country's competitive edge in the global economy.

Macro-economic modelling for the use of remittances needs to be grounded in an understanding of the gender division of labour in the household and the economy which can reveal entry points for enhancing gender equality in fiscal, financial, human capital development, trade and sectoral policies.

Session 2.4: Working with the diaspora for development

Diasporas can be important sources of development through technology transfers, investments and trade. Collective remittances have helped migrants engage in local development projects in their home communities. However, there is evidence that women's participation in such movements may be limited due to social, cultural and economic reasons. Diaspora networks may reinforce traditional gender roles and responsibilities of home communities and increase women's time burdens in voluntary community roles. Decision making about development projects may also be gendered, with many projects not benefiting women but oriented towards generated male employment in countries of origin. Both countries of destination and origin can play important roles in unleashing the development potential of women in diaspora movements. Countries of destination can ensure freedom of association, encourage the formation of migrant associations and provide legal and social protection for vulnerable categories of work where women are often concentrated. Information dissemination and allowing greater mobility, visibility, representation and networking of women migrants can considerably empower women to play a greater role in diaspora movements. Countries of origin can ensure that women are able to maintain stronger ties with home communities



through technology, print and broadcast media and internet and using these channels to provide information about investment opportunities and development projects.

Roundtable 3: Enhancing policy and institutional coherence, promoting partnerships

Session 3.1: Measuring progress on Migration and Development Impacts: Latest

Initiatives

Identifying knowledge gaps is critical to enhancing policy coherence between migration and development. Gendered knowledge gaps are apparent in both disciplines whether in mainstream policy or in specific sectors where many women are concentrated. Although important, sex disaggregated data and gendered language are not enough in themselves to provide an accurate picture of either migration or development. What is required is an analysis of the underlying structural inequalities facing women in all stages of the migration cycle and in the labour market and economy as a whole. Data collection, methodologies, indicators, tools, statistics, terminology, and policy guidelines need to be informed by gender analysis. While acknowledging the difficulty of gaining accurate information about women's situation due to their invisibility and isolation in certain sectors, as well as their informal and irregular status in some circumstances, efforts need to be reinforced to overcome obstacles at a methodological level. Despite important protection issues, knowledge gaps on the gender dimensions of migration and development should avoid emphasising only vulnerability but rather broaden their focus to encompass an analysis of women as dynamic economic agents capable of transforming societies and economies.

Session 3.2: Coherent Policy Planning and Methodology to Link Migration and Development

Gender analysis has often been lacking in Ministries and institutions linked to both migration and development issues resulting in gender blind policies. The result is that impact is never gender neutral. Policy making in both disciplines has been plagued by false dichotomies of the separation of the economic and social - in which measures for women are often relegated to the under-resourced 'social'; or mainstreaming versus gender specific - in which an either/or approach risks marginalising women from mainstream policy or not recognising the specific vulnerabilities of certain groups of women. Enhancing the capacities of relevant staff in gender analysis is an important step in developing appropriate policy responses and linking the two policy areas of migration and development. Global commitments such as the MDGs and national development frameworks such as PRSPs provide important opportunities for enhancing gender equality both as a goal in itself and a key **means** of achieving wider development goals. It is important that this instrumentalist view of gender equality informs both migration and development policies and the linkages between the two.

Session 3.3: Co-development initiatives at different levels of government

A co-development framework provides important entry points for enhancing equalities and the socio-economic status of women in both countries of origin and destination. Local economic development in origin countries supported by destination countries, when linked to institutional and legal reform to promote equality has the potential to be a major catalyst for development and a means of unleashing the socio-economic potential of women. Gender analysis needs to be integrated into every level of co-development partnerships. It provides an opportunity for countries of origin to avoid using migration as a last resort to solve unemployment, particularly of low skilled women, and for countries of destination to meet their labour market needs without compromising human rights and labour standards. Efforts by both countries of origin and destination can reduce gender based constraints and vulnerabilities at every stage of the migration cycle from pre-departure, migration to reintegration.

Session 3.4 Regional Migration Consultation Processes and Development



Accurate information, disaggregated data and gender analysis needs to be integrated into all RCP processes and strategies. Moving beyond border control issues and orienting towards development can enable RCPs to be a major vehicle for enhancing gender equitable development. Many of the issues mentioned in 3.2 on gender equality within policy formation are relevant here.