

Expert Group Meeting

Sixty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 69)

‘Beijing +30: Emerging issues and future directions for gender equality and women’s rights’

Virtual, 13–15 August 2024

Beijing Platform for Action 30-Year Review

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* The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of UN-Women, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.

1. Introduction

Migration is a powerful tool for economic growth and social transformation. It offers opportunities for migrants to improve their lives and contribute to the development of their countries of origin and destination. However, migration is not experienced equally by all. Gender plays a crucial role in shaping every stage of the migration process—from the decision to migrate to the challenges faced during and after migration.¹ Migrant women and girls face multiple intersecting forms of discrimination that exacerbate gender inequalities. These intersecting identities, such as race, ethnicity, age, and migration status often compound their vulnerabilities, leading to greater risks of gender-based violence (GBV), economic exploitation, and social exclusion.²

The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, emphasize the critical importance of addressing these gender-based disparities to achieve sustainable and inclusive development. These frameworks recognize that gender equality and women’s rights are a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world.

2. Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work

Labour migration is a significant contributor to global economic development. For many migrants, the decision to move is driven by the pursuit of better economic opportunities. Studies show that migrants often experience substantial income increases, improved access to education, and better health outcomes after relocating to more developed countries.³ Despite these benefits, migrant women face significant gender-based disparities in the labour market. Globally, women make up 41.6 per cent of the international migrant workforce but are disproportionately concentrated in informal and precarious jobs, particularly in the domestic and care sectors.⁴ These jobs are often characterized by low wages, long hours, and lack of social protection.⁵ Moreover, migrant women frequently face barriers to accessing regular migration pathways, which increases their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.⁶ Educational disparities further exacerbate these challenges, as migrant women often find their qualifications unrecognized,

¹ “Gender and migration: Trends, gaps and urgent actions”. In International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2024). *World Migration Report 2024*, M. McAuliffe and L. Oucho (eds.). IOM, Geneva.; UN Network on Migration (UNNM) (2023). *GCM Implementation Guide for Governments and all Stakeholders*.

² IOM (2024). *Addressing Women Migrant Worker Vulnerabilities in International Supply Chains*.

³ World Bank (2016). *Migration and Development: A Role for the World Bank Group*.

⁴ International Labour Organization (ILO) (2018). *Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers: Results and Methodology*; International Labour Organization (ILO). (2020). *Who are the women on the move? A portrait of female migrant workers*.

⁵ “Gender and migration: Trends, gaps and urgent actions”. In IOM (2024). *World Migration Report 2024*, M. McAuliffe and L. Oucho (eds.). IOM, Geneva; European Union (2021); de Lange and Vankova (2022).

⁶ International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE) (2021). *From vulnerability to resilience: sex workers organising to end exploitation*.

limiting their access to regular migration routes and increasing their vulnerability to exploitation in recruitment processes.⁷

3. Poverty eradication, social protection and social services

Migration has long been a strategy for escaping poverty.⁸ Remittances sent by migrants to their families in their countries of origin play a crucial role in poverty reduction and economic stability.⁹ Despite generally earning less than men, migrant women remit a larger share of their income, which is often used to fund essential services such as education and healthcare for their families.¹⁰

While migrant women play a vital role in providing essential social services, they often encounter barriers in accessing vital services like health, education, social and child protection, and decent work, especially when in irregular situations. They also have specific needs for healthcare, especially for sexual and reproductive health and protection in cases of violence.¹¹ However, migrant women are frequently excluded from social protection schemes due to their employment in informal sectors.¹² Jobs with high concentration of women include domestic work and caregiving, are often not covered by labour laws, leaving migrant women without access to benefits such as health insurance, maternity leave, or pensions.¹³ Globally, 15.7 percent of women domestic workers are migrants, yet only 43 percent of countries provide social protection coverage for domestic workers, and a mere 14 percent extend these rights to migrant domestic workers.¹⁴ Additionally, migrants with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) face compound challenges due to discrimination and lack of legal protections, further limiting their access to social services. This lack of social protection exacerbates the vulnerability of marginalized migrant populations to poverty, particularly in times of crisis. Targeted social protection, healthcare, education and other essential service policies must address the diverse needs of migrant women, considering intersecting factors like migration status, sexual orientation, disability, age, and ethnicity.

4. Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes

The risks associated with irregular migration routes, including detention, exploitation, and GBV disproportionately affect migrant women, who often resort to these pathways due to limited access

⁷ European Institute for Gender Equality (2020). *Migration*.

⁸ IOM (2024). *Submission to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2024*.

⁹ Mosler Vidal, E. (2021). *Leave No Migrant Behind: The 2030 Agenda and Data Disaggregation*. IOM, Geneva.

¹⁰ UN-Women (2017). *Women Migrant Workers and Remittances*. UN-Women, New York; Hennebry, J., J. Holliday and M. Moniruzzaman (2017). *At what cost? Women migrant workers, remittances and development, Research Paper*. Research Paper.

¹¹ UN-Women (2020). *Access to social protection for all migrant women*.

¹² UN-Women (2020). *Access to social protection for all migrant women*.

¹³ ILO (2017). *World Social Protection Report 2017-2019: Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*. ILO, Geneva.

¹⁴ UN-Women. (2020). *Policy brief: Migration and social protection*.

to regular migration routes.¹⁵ Furthermore, certain groups of migrant women are particularly at risk, including undocumented migrants, those dependent on a spouse or partner for their residence status, asylum seekers, sex workers, women with diverse SOGIESC, women with disabilities.¹⁶ Evidence demonstrates that women and migrant of diverse genders are more at risk of GBV when in immigration detention.¹⁷ Risks faced by migrant women and girls throughout their migration journey may translate into human trafficking. Globally, 69.2 percent of victims with known gender were women and almost two thirds (61 percent) are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation,¹⁸ but also increasingly for labour exploitation, primarily in domestic work and hospitality.

Migrant women and girls in their diversity face many barriers to accessing support in case of GBV or human trafficking, including cultural and language barriers, fear of deportation, in immigration detention, and lack of knowledge about available services.¹⁹ Strengthening legal frameworks and improving access to services for survivors are critical steps to ensure the safety and dignity of migrant women and girls in their diversity. In terms of progress, examples such as the World Bank Enhancing Community Resilience and Local Governance project in South Sudan, implemented by UNOPS and IOM, included a strong emphasis on women's empowerment and the inclusion of marginalized groups, to enhance community participation and mitigate GBV risks.²⁰ International frameworks like the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration emphasize the protection of migrants from all forms of violence, while the Istanbul Convention serves as a good practice model for providing legal protection and support services to GBV survivors.²¹ Despite these commitments, implementation remains uneven across regions.

5. Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions

Migrant, displaced and diaspora women and girls in their diversity, including those with disabilities, diverse SOGIESC and those from marginalized ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, must be recognized as agents of change and included in decision-making processes at all levels. The role of migrants, including migrant women, has for long been recognized

¹⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), IOM and Mixed Migration Centre (2024). *On this journey no one cares if you live or die. Abuse, Protection and Justice along Routes between East and West Africa and Africa's Mediterranean Coast. A route-based perspective on key risks. Volume 2.*

¹⁶ *Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility (2023). Gender-Based Violence and Disability Inclusion Factsheet.*

¹⁷ IOM (2021). *World Migration Report 2022*. M. McAuliffe and B. Khadria, eds. IOM, Geneva.

¹⁸ Between 2002 and 2022, 206,725 individual cases of victims of trafficking were identified. The nationality and gender data are not available in all cases; therefore, may not be representative of the entire population. For more information, please see *Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative*.

¹⁹ UN-Women (n.d.). *Leaving no-one behind: Access to social protection for all migrant women.*

²⁰ Migration Network Hub (n.d.). *Enhancing Community Resilience and Local Governance Project in South Sudan (ECRP) – Phase I and II.*

²¹ Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) (2022). *GREVIO's (Baseline) Evaluation Report on legislative and other measures giving effect to the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). Norway.*

as central in peacebuilding efforts, as well as in reconstruction and development.²² Despite their critical roles in peacebuilding, development, and community resilience, their participation is often overlooked, and they remain marginalized.²³ Gender stereotypes portray women as victims and caretakers rather than agents of change.²⁴ Strengthening gender-responsive institutions are crucial to ensuring that the voices and experiences of migrant women and girls in their diversity shape policy and practice.

Several initiatives have been launched to strengthen the participation of migrant women in policy development, such as in the Kyrgyz Republic, where IOM utilized innovative community-based solutions to shift gender norms which underpin structural barriers to women's participation, promoted their contribution to conflict mitigation and peacebuilding processes with local authorities. Furthermore, IOM's multistakeholder initiative, the Gender and Migration Research Policy Action Lab (GenMig) is another positive example, but broader efforts are needed to ensure that migrant women are fully recognized as agents of change across all sectors. This includes investing in leadership development programmes, supporting migrant women's organizations, and ensuring that migrant women are included in peace and security initiatives.²⁵

6. Peaceful and inclusive societies

Migrants, diaspora, and displaced persons in their diversity are entitled to dignity, equality, and freedom. Inclusivity that embraces the full diversity of migrants strengthens social cohesion and enhances the effectiveness of policies. The unique experiences and perspectives of migrants across different genders are vital for bridging cultural divides, fostering mutual understanding, and building resilient communities. However, rising xenophobia, anti-migrant rhetoric, and faltering progress on gender equality as a result of increasing gender pushbacks, and deepening racial and religious discrimination threaten positive contributions and undermine social cohesion.²⁶

To build peaceful and inclusive societies, it is essential to combat xenophobia, gender, racial and religious discrimination at all levels. This includes implementing policies that promote intersectional and gender-responsive change for the empowerment, and social inclusion of the diversity of migrant women and girls, as well as supporting initiatives that celebrate diversity and foster intercultural dialogue. For example, the European Union's Action Plan

²² "Peace and security as drivers of stability, development and safe migration", IOM (2021). *World Migration Report 2022*. M. McAuliffe and B. Khadria, eds. IOM, Geneva; UNSC (2000). *Resolution 1325*.

²³ Overseas Development Institute (2016). *Women on the Move: Migration, Gender Equality and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; UN-Women (2016)*.

²⁴ UN-Women (2023). *Women are increasingly at-risk in conflict, underrepresented in peace processes, according to UN Secretary-General report*.

²⁵ Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Government of Germany. (2024). *Migration and gender*.

²⁶ The Council of Europe (2022). *Migrant Women Rights are Human Rights*.

on Integration and Inclusion emphasizes the importance of combating segregation in schools to foster inclusivity.²⁷

7. Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation

Migration can be an effective climate change adaptation strategy, especially as environmental degradation and climate change disproportionately impact migrant women and girls.²⁸ As climate change accelerates, more people are forced to migrate due to loss of livelihoods, disasters, and environmental degradation, and in many communities women from vulnerable communities are often left behind to care for older persons and children.²⁹ When women do migrate, it can increase their vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation, especially on irregular and unsafe migration routes.³⁰ However, there is limited analysis of the nexus between gender equality, climate change and environmental degradation, and migration.

The active participation of migrant women and girls in environmental governance is essential to protect the rights and livelihoods. There is encouraging progress, as more countries refer to gender equality and gender responsive approaches in their National Adaptation Plans (NAP) documents.³¹ However, more needs to be done for NAPs and their implementation to address the gender dynamics of climate migration, such as Mozambique's NAP does.³² What is more, only half of the NAPs in 2022 considered women as agents of change in adaptation, in addition to being a particularly vulnerable group.³³

Gender-responsive strategies for climate change adaptation as well as disaster risk reduction which are inclusive of the diversity of migrant women and girls are crucial.³⁴ For instance, in Kenya, a project engages migrant and diaspora communities to strengthen climate resilience through blue economy initiatives and empowers women in coastal farming and waste management. Similarly, in Mexico, the Institute for Women in Migration is collecting data on climate-displaced women communities to inform better protection and policy responses.³⁵ Governments and international

²⁷ European Commission (2020). *Action plan on integration and inclusion*.

²⁸ UN-Women (2022). *Policy brief: Ensuring safe and regular migration for women and girls in the context of climate change*.

²⁹ IOM (2024). *Gender, Migration, Environment and Climate Change*; UN-Women (2022). *Poverty deepens for women and girls, according to latest projections*; UN-Women (2022). *Policy brief: Ensuring safe and regular migration for women and girls in the context of climate change*.

³⁰ International Institute for Environment and Development (2022). *Climate Change, Migration, and Vulnerability to Trafficking*. Women's Resilience to Disasters Knowledge Hub.

³¹ Dazé, A. and C. Hunter (2022). *Gender-Responsive National Adaptation Plan (NAP) Processes: Progress and promising examples*. NAP Global Network Synthesis Report, 2021–2022. June 09, 2022.

³² Ministry of Land and Environment (2023). *Mozambique National Adaptation Plan*. National Directorate of Climate Change, Maputo. Mozambique.

³³ Dazé, A. and C. Hunter (2022). *Gender-Responsive National Adaptation Plan (NAP) Processes: Progress and promising examples*. NAP Global Network Synthesis Report, 2021–2022. June 09, 2022.

³⁴ Migration Network Hub (n.d.) *Engaging migrants and diaspora communities for an inclusive and climate-resilient blue economy*.

³⁵ Migration Network (n.d.). *Collecting data about women's climate change displacement in Mexico*.

organizations must prioritize gender-responsive environmental policies that protect migrant women's rights, promote their involvement in climate change and environmental decision-making and solutions.

Conclusions and policy recommendations

While the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration has recognized the importance of gender-responsive migration, many regions and countries still lack comprehensive policies and investment to address the unique challenges faced by migrant women in their diversity and contribute to transformative, and sustainable change to uphold migrant women's rights. Fewer still actively engage with migrant women and girls in their diversity as key stakeholders in policy and decision making rather than only as victims of migration related challenges. Sustainable and inclusive development will not be achieved without the meaningful engagement of marginalized groups, achieving gender equality and leveraging the benefits of migration. Migrant women and girls in their diversity must be part of this change, which requires concerted and coordinated global action which IOM is committed to addressing with stakeholders. Key recommendations to support progress on Beijing Platform for Action commitments include:

- (a) **Develop gender-responsive labour migration pathways** to address the needs of women in their diversity and promote decent work, and skills recognition in both formal and informal sectors.
- (b) **Strengthen social protection systems** to ensure migrant women in their diversity have access to essential services, including healthcare, education, and social protection, regardless of their migration status.
- (c) **Enhance legal frameworks and access to services** to protect migrant women and girls in their diversity, regardless of their migration status, from GBV, trafficking, and exploitation, ensuring survivor-centred approaches in policy and service provision.
- (d) Invest in gender-responsive institutional change, intersectional approaches and promote the meaningful participation of migrant women to strengthen their decision-making processes at all levels, supporting their leadership in political and development forums.
- (e) **Foster inclusive and cohesive societies** by combating xenophobia, anti-migrant discrimination, and gender equality pushback. Action must include promoting the integration and social inclusion of the diversity of migrant women and girls, especially those facing racial and religious discrimination.
- (f) **Implement gender-responsive environmental policies and ensure gender-responsive climate financing** that address the specific challenges faced by the diversity of migrant women in the context of climate change and environmental degradation.