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**Policy Brief**

***Female Migrants***

**United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)**

Women and girls are increasingly migrating on their own, no longer just to accompany husbands or other family members. Globally, females constitute almost half of the international migrant population, and in some countries, they are the overwhelming majority.

The phenomenon of female migration is not adequately addressed in migration policies. Policymakers have yet to acknowledge the particular challenges and risks faced by migrating women and girls and bring their issues to the forefront of the migration and development agenda. Among the major challenges that need to be addressed with appropriate policies and programmes include protection of the human rights of female migrants and equal access to education, decent employment, and health, legal and social services.

Gender plays an important role in all aspects of the migration experience. Women and girls face different challenges. The need to integrate the gender dimension in managing migration and to address the particular needs of female migrants is essential to promote safer migration and to fully reap its benefits.

The migration of females has tremendous potential. It can have an empowering effect for women and girls, positively influencing gender equality by opening up new opportunities and a chance for greater independence and self-confidence. It can be a vehicle for enhancing the status of females. Migration can permit women and girls to escape conflict, personal violence, discrimination, cultural restrictions or oppressive gender roles. Migration can offer better education and employment opportunities and access to health care for women and girls. The migratory experience can also provide increased financial independence and decision-making power.

But the migration of females can also pose significant challenges. Female migrants often face multiple discrimination on account of their nationality, immigration status as well as gender.

Migrant girls are particularly vulnerable because they experience a double jeopardy – they are young and female. Females typically have less access to information about and fewer opportunities to, migrate legally and often have less preparation than their male counterparts to cope with conditions en route and in the countries of destination. Few know their rights and even fewer will demand them.

Education and skills enhancement opportunities for females are typically more limited in sending countries, which means that many migrant women and girls are more likely to find themselves in the lowest-paid and least attractive jobs. As female migrants frequently end up in low-status, low-wage production and service jobs and often work in gender-segregated and unregulated sectors of the economy, such as domestic work, they are exposed to a much higher risk of exploitation, violence and abuse. They are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Trafficked women and girls are more exposed to sexual violence and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. In some cases, the trafficking experience involves unwanted pregnancy as well as forced abortion.

A particular challenge for female migrants is access to appropriate and affordable social, legal and health-care services. Both short and long-term health risks challenge the well-being of many female migrants who are particularly vulnerable to abuse and violence. Many migrant women and girls do not access health and social services because of high costs or language or cultural barriers. Many lack information about entitlements. Those who are in an irregular situation may be afraid to seek health-care information and services because of fear of deportation. As a result, untreated minor conditions may worsen into serious illness. Of particular concern are the many women and girls who fall prey to traffickers and are afraid to seek medical treatment, including reproductive health care or legal services. As a result, female migrants are often disproportionately affected by reproductive ill-health.

## **Recommendations**

International migration and development policies must be designed and implemented with a human rights and gender perspective. Respecting and protecting the human rights of migrants, in particular female migrants, enables them to contribute more fully to development and to share in its benefits. Policies must be comprehensive and inclusive and must be based on the principles of non-discrimination, empowerment and participation.

### **Address the needs of female migrants**

- Put in place structural, legal and institutional measures to ensure access of women and girls to formal migration channels and to formal sectors of the economy which offer more protection and labour rights.
- Encourage pre-departure training for migrant women and girls to make them aware of their rights.
- Invest in young people and strengthen human capital by ensuring empowerment, education and employment of youth to catalyze development in the world's poorest regions and stem the tide of out-migration.

- Provide meaningful job opportunities and decent employment for all sectors of society to stem the need for economic out-migration.
- Provide female migrants with equal access to affordable migrant-friendly services including education, health-care, including reproductive health services, decent employment, and social and legal services, taking cultural, religious, linguistic and gender needs into account.
- Address the social costs of female migration, including children and elderly left behind, with liberal family reunification policies.
- Pursue a comprehensive approach to anti-trafficking based on a human rights framework and consisting of both repressive strategies targeting the perpetrators as well as empowerment strategies targeting the victims of crime. Put in place monitoring policies, institutional mechanisms and law enforcement tools for reporting grievances in both sending and receiving countries to ensure that victims have recourse to the criminal justice system and legal aid, and that perpetrators are brought to justice.
- Monitor vulnerable sectors of the economy, including the garment industry, sweat shops, the sex industry and domestic work and enforce labour standards to detect trafficking and exploitative situations.

#### **Facilitate advocacy on migration issues**

- Increase public awareness of the issue of migration to help ease tensions that often arise between native and foreign-born populations and to dispel myths, fears and xenophobic reactions to incoming migrants.

#### **Promote policy dialogue on migration issues**

- Support increased dialogue, networking and partnerships among all stakeholders to promote policies that address the challenges of female migration. Such policy dialogue could include national and regional consultations that involve senior government officials at all levels, civil society, the private sector and migrant associations from sending and receiving countries.
- Include female migrants in discussion on issues that affect them.
- Include the issues of migrant women's and girls' health, rights and empowerment in dialogues aimed at advancing development.
- Promote South-South cooperation and collaboration to ensure equal opportunities for women and girls to migrate legally and protection of human rights during the migration process and in country of destination.

## **Improve data and research**

- Build capacity of countries to gather, analyse and utilize migration data for policy formulation and programme planning to address the needs and ensure protection of female migrants. Data should be disaggregated by age and sex to make female migrants more visible to policymakers.
- Support research to increase understanding of the migration processes of females and to address their needs, particularly social and health-care needs. Support studies that focus on the linkages between female migration and development, the root causes of female migration, the impact of migration on gender equality and women's empowerment, female labour migration in a globalized economy, the impact of remittances on female remitters and on females receiving remittances, and the challenges of irregular migration of females.
- Encourage consulates abroad to gather information on migrant women and girls in the diaspora and to assist in the protection of their rights.

The face of a migrant is no longer just a male face. Women and girls will continue to migrate in large numbers, both legally and illegally. The challenge is to address the lack of adequate policies and mechanisms to maximize the benefits of female migration for countries of origin and destination as well as for the migrants themselves.