

Title: “Contributions of women migrant workers to development: going beyond remittances”

Background Note prepared for the GFMD Third Thematic Meeting

Recognizing the contributions of women migrants to economic and social development in countries of origin and destination and addressing their specific needs.

8 September 2015, Geneva

Women constitute approximately half of the 247 million individuals, who live and work outside of their country of origin.¹ Contrary to popular discourse, which has painted women as passive actors who either migrate alongside their families or stay behind in the country of origin, recent decades have seen an increase in the feminization of labour migration.² These migratory flows are in part influenced by the lack of decent work for women in countries of origin, and the increase in the demand for female labour in destination countries.³

Feminization of Labour Migration

While feminization of migration generally refers to the increase in international migration of women, female labour migration tends to be heavily concentrated in occupations that are traditionally associated with specific gender roles. Although many women migrants are highly skilled and well educated, employment restrictions for migrants, coupled with the deskilling prevalent in gendered labour markets, as well as stereotypes around migrant women in destination countries, can impact their job prospects.⁴ Indeed, many migrant women participate in low-skilled and precarious jobs in manufacturing, agricultural, small-scale entrepreneurial, service, as well as in the care sector including nursing, elderly and childcare, cleaning and other related work in households and in public and private institutions. In the case of agriculture and manufacturing, notions around women as docile, nimble and obedient workers, have contributed to their increasing presence in these sectors, as employers try to capitalize on the perceived advantages of migrant women’s labour. Other jobs,

1 See <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1288990760745/MigrationandDevelopmentBrief24.pdf>

2 See Datta et al, 2010: 94

3 See <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2013/12/gender-on-the-move>, p. 38

4 IOM:

http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/index.php?main_page=product_info&cPath=41_7&products_id=1428

such as care work, are seen as a natural extension of women's gender roles. Women migrants who work in the care economy carry out a wide spectrum of activities necessary for every day reproduction of human life, the environment and the economic system. This sector has received increased attention from a variety of scholars and researchers for its highly gendered nature, presence of precarity, lack of regulation and rapid growth.

Global Care Chains

Aging populations, declining fertility rates and increasing female labour participation, have resulted in a care deficit in many wealthier economies often made worse due to lack of affordable public care services and health sector retrenchment in the wake of the global financial crisis. The changing economic landscape, however, has not changed the gendered responsibilities for reproductive activities, with many women facing a double burden in terms of their labour obligations, in both private and public spheres.⁵ Where the need to reorganize and redistribute care duties across families and societies is neglected, care is essentially outsourced to migrant labour - leading to a growing commodified, "feminized" and foreign low-wage care market within an expanding Global Care Chain.^{6,7}

While links in the Global Care Chain typically begin with an unmet demand for care in the Global North, increasingly countries with middle income states and countries in the Global South are recruiting greater numbers of migrant care workers.⁸ Further, migrant women, who leave their country to provide care in high and middle income countries, are, in turn, assigning their own caregiving responsibilities either to a paid care worker or a family member. In cases where the care duty is transferred to a paid care worker, the chain continues, until the care needs of the family at the end of the chain are met by a family member. Throughout the chain, the labour needs are typically met by women, and at each stage in the chain, the value of the reproductive labour reduces.⁹

While there is diminishing value assigned to this form of labour, the performance of care work is essential to the sustenance and reproduction of life, including the maintenance and reproduction of the labor force that secures economic growth and development. Care work can take the form of both physical and emotional labour, much of which happens within private homes, and is commonly considered to be an extension of women's essentialized gender roles. As a result, it represents one of the least regulated sectors in which women migrants work, is often inflected with legal

⁵ Bauer and Osterle, 2013: 462

⁶ Leon in Bauer and Osterle, 2013: 462

⁷ Hochschild, A.R. (2000). Global care chains and emotional surplus value. In W. Hutton, & A. Giddens (Eds.). *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism*. London: Jonathan Cape.

⁸ ANNEX to Roundtable 2.2 Background Paper1 "Uncovering the interfaces between Gender, Family, Migration and Development: The Global Care Economy and Chains"

⁹ Hochschild, A.R. (2000). Global care chains and emotional surplus value. In W. Hutton, & A. Giddens (Eds.). *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism*. London: Jonathan Cape.

uncertainties and contingent on women's relationships with their employers.¹⁰ Therefore, when care is provided as a commodity, it is highly precarious, and usually under-valued and under-paid.

Economic Remittances and Contributions to Development

With migrant remittances regularly surpassing the amount of foreign direct investment and overseas development aid in many developing countries, there has been increasing attention to leveraging labour migration for economic growth and development. The increasing feminization of migration has further drawn the attention of governments, international and civil society organisations, to the potential for women migrant workers to contribute to the economic development of home and host countries.¹¹ This focus has largely been on the contributions that women migrant workers make through their economic remittances to countries of origin. Though their wages are typically lower, women migrants are more likely to send home a higher proportion of their earnings more frequently and their remittances are more likely to be spent on health, education, family and community development.¹²¹³ Whilst there is little in the way of sex-disaggregated data on remittances, it is reported that by sending a higher proportion of their often lower wages, migrant women are responsible for half of the World Bank's estimated \$582 Billion in global remittances.¹⁴ In countries such as Nepal, women migrant workers - mostly domestic workers - contribute about 50% of migrant workers' remittances, or around 23% to Gross Domestic Product (GDP).¹⁵

It has been argued that the extent to which economic remittances can promote development (economic and social) is reliant on whether the migration and the remittances form part of a "virtuous cycle" for local economic development. Such a cycle typically includes formalized remittance corridors and financial services and the ability to invest the remittances in a way that generates spill overs to local economic activity. This has been described as promoting "inclusive financial democracy", using remittances to generate an ability to do more, not just buy more¹⁶ or simply enable more migration. This approach to linking economic remittances to development has been criticised for viewing migrants and their families as homogenous group sharing the wish to

10 Hennebry, J. (forthcoming). *A Journey Through the Margins: Women Migrant Workers, Labour, Exploitation, and Empowerment*. International Migration Research Centre: Report prepared for UN Women.

11 See <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2013/12/gender-on-the-move>, p. 35

12 See <http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/~media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2013/managing%20labour%20migration%20in%20asean%20concerns%20for%20women%20migrant%20workers.pdf>, p.8

13 Orozco, M; Lowell, L., Schneider, J. (2006). *Gender-Specific Determinants of Remittances: Differences in Structure and Motivation*. Washington DC: The World Bank.

14 <http://ir.westernunion.com/News/Press-Releases/Press-Release-Details/2015/Western-Union-Pays-Tribute-Women-Move-US-291B-Globally-to-Loved-Ones-Half-of-582-Billion-in-Global-Remittances/default.aspx>

15 UN Women (2013) *Contributions of migrant domestic workers to sustainable development*

<http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/~media/7148BD87A4F7412D8CBD10482146276F.ashx>

16 See, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2013/12/gender-on-the-move>,

engage in the formal financial sector, whereas commonly the opposite is true, with the informal financial sector offering speed and trust that the formal sector has yet to match.¹⁷

In order to maximize the multiplier effect from remittance expenditure, many parallel investments have to be made, including investment in infrastructure and social protection. Social protection (transfers) can, however, affect the amount being remitted in the first place and, as such, the relationship between remittances and social protection is complicated and needs more interrogation.¹⁸ Similarly, much more research needs to take place into how remittance services can be used to bank the unbanked and in particular increase women's financial access and assets.¹⁹

Social Remittances and Contributions to Development

The issue of social remittances- transfers of practices, norms, identities and social capital has been largely under studied and under reported.²⁰ Social remittances, develops the idea that the contributions of women migrant workers can reach further than the act of transferring money. For instance, when a woman's new earning capacity has the effect of elevating her status in her family and/or community, she may have more influence on how that money is spent, as well as other significant decisions that she might previously have been excluded from.²¹ While the experiences of migrant women can inform and change social, cultural and political norms and can influence positive social change across households and communities in sending and destination counties, migration also allows for origin countries to reap significant benefits from the transfer of knowledge, ideas, practices, skills and technologies.²²

Within the context of the global care chain, social remittances are more complicated especially where they relate to gender norms. Where a woman's migration has the impact of leaving her children to be cared by another un/low paid woman, but provides for the ability to educate, feed and clothe her children, the impact of her migration could be seen as reaffirming gender norms and roles in one context but providing the potential that the same gender norms can be challenged and reformed in another.

17 See, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2013/12/gender-on-the-move>,

18 See, <http://www.wiiw.ac.at/do-social-transfers-crowd-out-remittances-evidence-from-bosnia-dlp-3201.pdf>

19 See,

<http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/discussionpaper-genderremittancesandassetaccumulation-en.pdf>

20 Levitt, P. (2001). *The Transnational Villagers*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

21 Temin, M. et al.: *Adolescent Girls and Migration in the Developing World Policy Brief*, Population Council (New York, 2013), p. 8. Available at: <http://www.popcouncil.org/research/girls-on-the-move-adolescent-girls-migration-in-the-developing-world> [accessed 10 July 2015].

22 See

<http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/~media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2013/policy%20paper%20for%20the%20pregfmd%20vi%20high%20level%20regional%20meeting%20on%20migrant%20domestic%20workers.pdf> p.23

Social remittances are also not as predictable as economic remittances and are harder to measure. The socio-political benefits that result from women's labour migration will largely be related to the experience of the woman and the individual woman herself. The structural barriers to women migrant workers' empowerment (as discussed below) are the same barriers that prevent women from realizing the socio-political benefits of their migration, either because of gender and cultural norms or misguided policies.

Social and Economic Contributions to Destination Countries

Whilst much of the focus is placed on migrant contributions to countries of origin, there has been little analysis of the migration and development nexus in relation to the contributions of migrant women workers to host economies. In particular, the economic and social benefits that host countries gain as a result of their women and men being available to participate in the productive labour market, at the same time as balancing work and family responsibilities in increasingly ageing societies. The recognition of the value added by migrant workers to care economies is particularly pressing in the context of growing global care deficits. In the United States of America alone, the care sector is expected to grow by 70% over the next ten years.²³ As the ILO's World Employment and Social Outlook 2015 underscores, similar trends can be observed globally.²⁴ Women migrants in the care economy increasingly fill care deficits left by lack of affordable public care services and health sector cut-backs that are not responding to the reduction in national women undertaking reproductive tasks.²⁵

Over the past ten years, migrant workers accounted for 47% of the increase in the labour force in the United States and 70% in Europe; such expansion of the labour force has both direct and indirect effects on a destination countries' economic growth.²⁶ In addition to adding to the labour force, migrant workers commonly contribute more in taxes and social contributions than they take in benefits.²⁷ Migrant workers also bring skills, supplementing the stock of human capital without costing the destination country in terms of investments in education and human development. Nurse migration from the Philippines, for example, responds to a demand for skilled medical specialists in destination countries. By bringing in nurses from the Philippines, destination countries gain vital skills without any prior investment in these migrants' human capital. In the meantime, the Philippines, which has invested in the education of these individuals, is left with a gap in its labour force.²⁸

²³ See, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2012/10/02/healthcare-job-growth/1600255/>

²⁴ ILO (2015) *Women and the Future of Work – Taking care of the caregivers*
http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/genericdocument/wcms_351297.pdf

²⁵ *Ibid* p.33

²⁶ See, <http://www.oecd.org/els/mig/OECD%20Migration%20Policy%20Debates%20Numero%202.pdf>

²⁷ See, <http://www.oecd.org/els/mig/OECD%20Migration%20Policy%20Debates%20Numero%202.pdf>

²⁸ Lorenzo et al 2007: 1406

Exploitation and Vulnerability

Throughout their experience, the development potential of migrant women is constrained by their heightened vulnerability to precarious employment with insufficient levels of social protection. Women migrant workers face a number of barriers to protection and decent work, such as: exclusionary policies which limit access to gender-sensitive services, health care, or legal support for migrants; employer power, often enhanced by migration status tied employment; isolation and lack of access to information on rights and protections; family separation and dependence on remittances; as well as sector specific risks. Frequently, they are subject to restrictive gendered immigration and emigration policies, such as: skill level or financial requirements for permanent entry; sector-specific programs which channel women into gendered streams of entry via temporary work permits; bans on women's emigration applied to specific sectors (most commonly domestic work) or age restrictions on women's migration, etc.. Such restrictions do not typically mitigate the costs associated with women's labour migration and, conversely, frequently push women to pursue migration through irregular, unregulated and unprotected channels – often with the assistance of unregulated recruiters and other intermediaries.

Whether migrating through regular or irregular channels, women migrant workers often face the risk of economic exploitation as well as physical and sexual violence from these intermediaries and employers, with little access to legal protection or justice.²⁹ While forced labour is a risk for many individuals using irregular channels, migrant women are more susceptible to being trafficked for sexual exploitation, constituting 98% of all such victims.^{30,31,32}

Women migrants are commonly employed in low skilled, low paid, and informal sectors, and many deliver desperately needed, yet insufficiently valued, care services.³³ Women migrant workers arguably face a triple jeopardy in the care sector with each of the three elements acting to further undervalue and undermine the work of the female migrant. Women as workers typically command lower value than men in the workplace, regardless of their sector or occupation; the work they do (i.e. carework, cleaning) is typically undervalued because it is seen as women's work; and migrant workers can be competitively cheap and flexible.³⁴

Many migrant women also face gendered vulnerabilities that are specific to their sector of labour market insertion. In the care sector, for example, they are often isolated in private homes and/or with restricted movement, and without access to legal or social protection, the situation of migrant

²⁹ See, <http://progress.unwomen.org>, p 92

³⁰ According to the ILO, globally, almost 21 million people are victims of forced labour, and 14.2 million are victims of forced labour exploitation. About 11.4 million are women and girls and 29% of all victims of forced labour are migrants. See, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_182004.pdf

³¹ See, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/v-work-ga.htm#traf>

³² Donovan, 2013

³³ See, <http://progress.unwomen.org>, p.92

³⁴ Dyer et al, 2007

care workers can commonly contravene relevant international human rights standards, including the ILO Convention concerning decent work for domestic workers (No. 189). The low status of domestic and care work contributes to its invisible, informal and unregulated nature. Domestic workers are rarely covered by labour laws and commonly have their migration status tied to a single employer.³⁵ These gaps in protection for domestic workers also exist in countries known for better working conditions. The UK recently abolished the domestic worker visa, replacing it with a “tied visa” that prohibits the workers from changing employers within six months, leading to more cases of abuse and unpaid salaries.³⁶ The “tied visa” which names employers on work permits is commonly used in Canada as well, across a range of sectors.³⁷ The human rights abuses that migrant care workers face can range from physical, psychological and sexual violence, to labour abuses including excessive work hours without rest or additional pay. Furthermore, limited access to health and education services, coupled with family separation or delays in family reunification, can have long-term deleterious effects on the health and well-being of women workers and their children.

A number of other factors also limit the potential benefits from women’s migration. Limited access to information and support networks can reduce women’s ability to access decent work opportunities and successfully exercise their labour rights. The high cost of formal remittance services or the uncertainty associated with informal remittances, significantly diminish earnings and heighten economic risk.³⁸ Further, women workers may also lack control over remittance spending and usage once funds are transferred home. Each of these factors can reduce the benefits reaped by households and families from women’s earnings.

Upon returning home, women may face stigma, a pervasive lack of reintegration services or employment opportunities, which can impact themselves and their dependents adversely.^{39,40} Restrictive laws and practices governing women’s access to and control over property can limit their ability to invest and acquire assets in their home countries. Limited access to financial services and products in home and host countries, a lack of financial literacy, insufficient support for capacity building, investment or income diversification can also reduce women’s ability to channel their earnings into concrete and realizable benefits. Often entangled with gender norms and stereotypes, all of these factors constrain migrant women from realizing the full benefits from migration and limit their contributions to households and economies.

35 See, <http://progress.unwomen.org>. P.34

36 See, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/31/uk-migrant-domestic-workers-face-serious-abuse>

37 Hennebry, Jenna. Falling through the cracks. Migrant workers and Social Protection. Global Social Policy, 2014

38 Orozco 2007; others.....Hennebry, 2008;

39 See

<http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/~media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2013/policy%20paper%20for%20the%20pregfmd%20vi%20high%20level%20regional%20meeting%20on%20migrant%20domestic%20workers.pdf> p.30

40 This phenomenon is not specific to children who remain in the country of origin, as transnational mothering and extended separation can have a negative impact on the development of children who migrate with or follow their parents, as well as those that are left behind. See, <http://progress.unwomen.org>, p.134

Impacts on Migrant Women and their Families

A focus on the economic contribution of women migrant workers, and the presumption that social development follows economic development automatically, fails to account for the lived realities of women, the power dynamics at play and the broader vulnerabilities and precarity experienced by women migrants.⁴¹ Further, it neglects the longer term costs and consequences for women migrants, focusing on their development role and the benefit of their labour as it extends far beyond their families.

Although the migration of women can have a positive effect on the labour force and the economy in countries of origin, it can be associated with various costs for the migrant. Throughout their journey, women can face financial, emotional, physical and psychological costs of migration. Indeed, migration can be an expensive process for women, who may incur high levels of debt because of high recruitment fees, travel and living costs associated with migration.⁴² The financial burdens of migration can also increase a migrant's vulnerability to exploitation in the workplace. In turn, this can be associated with long-term psychological, physical and emotional costs for the migrant. For instance, in the case of care work, the long hours spend in the home of the employer, coupled with the emotional nature of this work can manifest in the physical exhaustion and psychological harm of migrants.⁴³ Furthermore, a migrant's extended absence from her country of origin and her family can increase her exposure to emotional stress and have psychological repercussions.

The impact of the migrant's absence can also be associated with social costs, and extend into the private sphere, effect family relations and the well-being and development of children. While migrant women are undertaking work abroad, gender norms and expectations put pressure on them to also continue their care duties with their families back home through regular contact and by sending remittances.⁴⁴ Women are increasingly reliant on ICTs to be able to discharge the double burden of migrant work and parental duties. This transnational parenting has fostered transnational families, defined by material connections and a need to perpetuate family ties across borders, as opposed to the traditional family unit within a home.⁴⁵

Advocacy, Policy and Governance Responses

There are several conventions at the international level that seek to respond to the situation of women migrant workers, improving labour rights, providing greater protection and preventing exploitation and abuse. The UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All

⁴¹ Petrozziello, 2013: 75-90

⁴² Asis, M. M. B. (2005). *Preparing to Work Abroad: Filipino Migrants' Experiences Prior to Deployment*. Rep. N.p.: Scalabrini Migration Center. Print.

⁴³ Parreñas, R. S. (2001). *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

⁴⁴ Yeates, 2011a: 1119

⁴⁵ Yeoh et al, 2005: 308

Migrant Workers and their Families (ICRMW) is a key instrument for the protection of migrants' rights. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) General Recommendation No. 26 seeks to strengthen protections for women migrants in all situations, including those with irregular status. A number of ILO Conventions also respond to the situation of migrant women, the most recent of which is the ILO Domestic Workers Convention No. 189 and its supplementing Recommendation No. 201, which has sought to extend basic labour rights to all domestic workers and, recognising the specific needs and vulnerabilities of migrants among them, includes a set of provision aimed at protecting migrant domestic workers from exploitation and abuse at all stages of the migration cycle.⁴⁶ Alliances such as the ILO's fair recruitment initiative also have tremendous potential to reduce unscrupulous labour recruitment and increase vigilance and oversight to ensure the terms and conditions of employment of migrants placed abroad. Securing migrants women's rights through these conventions and initiatives can enhance their wellbeing and welfare and also greatly contribute to the development potential of their migration decisions.

The contribution of women migrant workers to the social and economic development of countries of origin and destination was also firmly recognized at the 2013 High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development.⁴⁷ The development potential of migration was also underscored in the post-2015 development agenda articulated at the GFMD in Stockholm (2014). Moreover, in recommendations presented to the UN Secretary General,⁴⁸ the importance of addressing human rights challenges, heightened vulnerabilities and protection gaps were highlighted in order to fully realize and maximize the economic and social contributions by migrants and their families.

In addition to formal and normative global processes and instruments, transnational migrant organisations have also undertaken positive and effective work that has had the impact of shaping government responses. This has included the advocacy that led to the development of the ILO Convention 189; and the advocacy of British NGO Kalyaan which led to the formation of a regularization programme for abused domestic workers.

Notwithstanding the growing level of international attention to women migrant workers' rights and their role in development, greater efforts are needed by national governments to adhere to international human rights norms and obligations, as well as create development-friendly migration policies that enhance capacities and foster economic growth *beyond remittances*. There are still too few policies implemented that seek to realise the potential of women migrant workers specifically,

⁴⁶ Other relevant ILO Conventions include: Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97), Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143) and accompanying recommendations, Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181).

⁴⁷ See [A/69/207](#)

⁴⁸ Recommendations on including migration in the post-2015 Development Agenda from the 7 th Summit Meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, Stockholm 14-16 May, 2014

such as initiatives which enhance and develop gender-sensitive services that provide information and support to migrant workers to access decent work, have their skills recognised, claim their wages, demand their rights, minimize remittance-sending costs and create income diversification opportunities, and seek access to justice in situations where there is exploitation or abuse. Additionally, evidence-based regulation informed by the voices of migrant women, as well as recognition of their social and economic contributions in both countries of origin and destination are needed to challenge perceptions, shift the discourse, and foster truly gender-sensitive approaches to migration and development governance.