
Commission on the Status of Women
Fiftieth session

27 February-10 March 2006

Agenda item 3 (b): Emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men

Gender Dimensions of International Migration

Note by the Secretariat

I. Background

1. In his report on the strengthening of the United Nations to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session,ⁱ the Secretary-General highlighted the importance of focusing more comprehensively on migration, to better understand the causes of international flows of people and their complex interrelationship with development. In its resolution 58/208, on international migration and development, adopted at its fifty-eighth session, the Assembly called upon the United Nations system to continue to address migration issues, including a gender perspective and cultural diversity, within the broader context of the implementation of agreed economic and social development goals and respect for all human rights.
2. At its fifty-eighth session in 2003, the General Assembly decided to devote a high-level dialogue to international migration and developmentⁱⁱ. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its sixtieth session on the organizational details of the high-level dialogue, bearing in mind that, inter alia, the purpose of the high-level dialogue is to discuss the multidimensional aspects of international migration and development in order to identify appropriate ways and means to maximize its development benefits and minimize its negative impacts. The Dialogue should have a strong focus on policy issues, including the challenges of achieving the internationally agreed development goals.ⁱⁱⁱ The High-level Dialogue will be held from 14 to 15 September 2006.^{iv}
3. The General Assembly decided at its sixtieth session that the High-level Dialogue will consist of four plenary meetings and four interactive round tables.^v The General Assembly also noted that the Commission on Population and Development, the Commission on Social Development and the Commission on the Status of Women will consider the issue of international migration within their respective mandates by the time of the High-level Dialogue, and invited their inputs through the Economic and Social Council.^{vi}
4. The Commission on the Status of Women will consider the issue of international migration and development under its sub-item entitled “Emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men”, through an expert panel. The outcome of the panel will be a Chairperson’s summary.

II. Attention to the gender dimensions of international migration

5. The Programme of Action from the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 included a number of specific references to issues of particular concern to migrant women and refugees. It stated that national admission policies should not be discriminatory in nature and that Governments should give special attention to protecting women and child migrants. The Programme of Action urged Governments to recognize the importance of family unity in framing immigration policies and encouraged efforts to foster the positive effects of international migration, including remittances and technology transfer. The Conference highlighted the need to combat trafficking in migrants, with special emphasis on the need to protect women and children trafficked for sexual exploitation and coercive adoption.

6. The Beijing Platform for Action recognized that migration and consequent changes in family structures had placed additional burdens on women, especially those who provide for several dependants.^{vii} It called on governments to ensure the full realization of the human rights of all women migrants, including women migrant workers, and their protection against violence and exploitation; introduce measures for the empowerment of documented women migrants, including women migrant workers; facilitate the productive employment of documented migrant women through greater recognition of their skills, foreign education and credentials, and facilitate their full integration into the labour force.^{viii}

7. The outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly observed that the patterns of migratory flows of labour were changing. Women and girls were increasingly involved in internal, regional and international labour migration to pursue many occupations, mainly in farm labour, domestic work and some forms of entertainment work. It noted that while this situation increased their earning opportunities and self-reliance, it also exposed them, particularly the poor, uneducated, unskilled and/or undocumented migrants, to inadequate working conditions, increased health risk, the risk of trafficking, economic and sexual exploitation, racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia, and other forms of abuse, which impair their enjoyment of their human rights and, in some cases, constitute violations of human rights. The General Assembly called for the mainstreaming of a gender perspective into national immigration and asylum policies, regulations and practices, as appropriate, in order to promote and protect the rights of all women, including the consideration of steps to recognize gender-related persecution and violence when assessing grounds for granting refugee status and asylum.^{ix}

8. At its thirty-third session in 2002, the Commission on Population and Development focused on the theme population, gender and development. It adopted resolution 2000/1, which reaffirmed the commitment of Member States to the implementation to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. It requested the Population Division of the United Nations Secretariat to continue to incorporate gender perspectives in all its research on population policies, levels and trends, including, inter alia, the analysis of demographic, social and economic data disaggregated by age and sex as well as the gender dimensions of migration. At its thirty-ninth session in 2006, the Commission on Population and Development will consider the theme of “International migration and development” at its thirty-ninth session in 2006.

9. In 2003, a Global Commission on International Migration was established, with a mandate to provide the framework for the formulation of a coherent, comprehensive and

global response to the issue of international migration. In its report, the Commission recognized that all societies are characterized by gender inequalities, and that such inequalities affect migrants. It underlined the need for migration policies and programmes to be gender-sensitive, to give special attention to the social situation and inclusion of migrant women, and ensure that women are empowered by the migration experience.^x

10. In 2004, the Commission for Social Development considered the theme “International migration and migrants from a social perspective” as an emerging issue. The need for determined forms of cooperation to address the vulnerability of migrant women and children to exploitation and abuse was highlighted in the Chairman’s summary of the panel discussion.

11. The General Assembly has increasingly focused on issues related to women and migration, such as violence against women migrant workers, trafficking in women and children, and the impact of armed conflict on women and girls who may find themselves in temporary or permanent refugee or displaced situations. The most recent report on violence against women migrant workers provides information on the legal, policy and programmatic measures introduced by Member States as well as activities undertaken by entities of the United Nations system and other organizations to address violence against women migrant workers.^{xi}

12. The General Assembly considers the issue of trafficking in women and children on a biennial basis, on the basis of information provided by the Secretary-General in his reports to the Assembly. Trafficking in women and children was last considered in General Assembly resolution 59/166 of 20 December 2004, paragraph 14, where Governments were encouraged, in cooperation with intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, to undertake campaigns aimed at clarifying opportunities, limitations and rights in the event of migration so as to enable women to make informed decisions and to prevent them from becoming victims of trafficking.

13. The vulnerability of specific groups of women migrants have also been highlighted. The 2002 World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid highlighted the needs of specific groups of migrants, such as older migrant women. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous peoples, recommended that the United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes, as well as Member States, strengthen their work on migration and its effects on indigenous people and provide appropriate services to displaced refugee and migrant women and girl children victimized by trafficking.^{xii}

III. World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women and International Migration

14. In its resolutions 54/210 of 22 December 1999 and 58/206 of 23 December 2003 the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to update the *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development* for consideration by the General Assembly during its fifty-ninth session. The 2004 *World Survey* focused on women and international migration. It contained a set of recommendations that provide the basis from which Governments can begin to develop gender-sensitive policies and programmes aimed at maximizing the benefits of migration and minimizing the negative impacts.^{xiii}

15. The *World Survey* highlighted that migration of women has always been an important component of international migration. As of 2000, 49 percent of all international migrants

were women or girls, and the proportion of women among international migrants had reached 51 percent in more developed regions. Women often migrate officially as dependent family members of other migrants or to marry someone in another country. Female migrants are, however, increasingly part of worker flows, moving on their own to become the principal wage earners for their families. Most women move voluntarily, but women and girls are also forced migrants who have fled conflict, persecution, environmental degradation, natural disasters and other situations that affect their habitat, livelihood and security.

16. A gender perspective is essential for understanding both the causes and consequences of international migration. The *World Survey* noted that the migration experiences of women vary considerably depending on whether movement is voluntary or involuntary and whether entry into the host society occurs legally or not. Gender inequality can be a powerful factor in precipitating migration when women have economic, political and social expectations that opportunities at home do not meet. Migration can empower women to exercise greater autonomy over their lives, both those women who migrate and are exposed to new ideas and values and increased access to resources, as well as those women who remain behind when their husbands or children migrate and assume new roles and responsibility for decisions affecting the social and economic well-being of their families.

17. Migrant women contribute to the economic development of both their country of destination through their competencies and skills, as well as to their countries of origin through financial contributions from remittances and the improvement of their own education and skills. In countries of origin, women underwrite the migration of others, in particular through their income-generation activities. The remittances from women migrant workers that may be used to improve the well-being of other family members and foster economic growth and in this way act as resources for development.

18. The trafficking of women and girls for prostitution and forced labour is one of the fastest growing areas of international criminal activity. Trafficked women frequently originate from regions where opportunities for women are low and where they lack independent access to resources to alter their situations. These women and girls may believe they will work in legitimate occupations but find themselves trapped in forced prostitution, marriage, domestic work, sweatshops and other forms of exploitation that constitute a contemporary form of slavery. Preventive activities must include education about the dangers of trafficking, in combination with the provision of economic opportunities at home and legal channels of migration for women who might otherwise resort to utilizing smugglers and traffickers.

19. The *World Survey* points out that refugee women and girls face particular problems regarding their legal and physical protection. In many camps, the physical facilities increase the likelihood of protection problems increasing the vulnerability of women and girls to sexual violence and exploitation. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has issued specific guidelines on gender-related persecution that recognize that gender inequality can influence the causes and type of persecution or harm suffered by women.

20. In the past decade, a number of international, regional and national laws dealing specifically with migration and with provisions applicable to migrant women have been adopted. The human rights of migrants are also set out in a number of international instruments, including the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Many provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women are of particular importance to migrant women. Nevertheless, many national laws on emigration and immigration of

voluntary migrants include discriminatory provisions that affect protection of migrant women. Other legal provisions have a disproportionately negative impact on women, even though they appear neutral.

21. The lack of data on women and migration has made it increasingly difficult to assess the full implications of international migration for women. Data on international migration are lacking in terms of availability, quality and comparability. Administrative and census data provide useful, but minimal, information about migrants. There is recognition that special surveys are needed that consider the intersection of sex, age, nationality, education and occupation.

III. Issues for consideration

22. During the interactive expert panel, participants may wish to focus on and discuss ways and means to ensure:

- Greater recognition of the contribution of women migrants to the economic development of host countries and countries of origin, and identification of means to enhance their contributions; including by reducing the costs for and increasing the security of remittance transfers;
- Increased understanding of the impact of immigration policies, laws, regulations, and practices on women migrants;
- Development of strategies to fully incorporate gender perspectives into national policies, legislation, and programmes on immigration;
- Development of strategies to promote and protect the human rights of women migrants, both in their country of origin and country of destination, and ensuring women migrant's protection from violence and abuse, including for those who work in the informal economy;
- Increased ratification and implementation of all international legal instruments that promote and protect the rights of migrant women and girls, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families;
- Enhance empowerment of and opportunities for migrant women, including through access to productive employment and decent work, access to safe housing, education, language training, health care and other services;
- Increased implementation of existing policies and guidelines on protecting and empowering refugee and displaced women, such as the *Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women* from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees;
- Increased collection, compilation and utilization of information and data on women migrants, including sex-disaggregated statistics;

- Identification of areas where research is needed on the causes of migration of women, impact of migration and ways to enhance the empowering effect of migration, including for women left behind when men migrate as well as for women who migrate.

ⁱ (A/57/387)

ⁱⁱ General Assembly resolution 58/208, International development and migration

ⁱⁱⁱ General Assembly resolution 58/208, paragraph 10 (a) and (b), International migration and development

^{iv} See report of the Secretary-General "International migration and development, including the question of convening of a United Nations conference on international migration and development to address migration issues (A/56/167)

^v General Assembly resolution 60/227, paragraph 5, International migration and development

^{vi} General Assembly resolution 60/227, paragraph 18, International migration and development

^{vii} Beijing Platform for Action, paragraph 47

^{viii} Beijing Platform for Action, paragraph 58 k

^{ix} Outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, paragraphs 41 and 68 (i)

^x Report of the Global Commission on International Migration, Migration in an interconnected world: New directions for action, October 2005, paragraph 2 and 41)

^{xi} Report of the Secretary-General on Violence against women migrant workers, A/60/137

^{xii} E/2004/43, paragraphs 65 and 89 (h)

^{xiii} 2004 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women and International Migration. The World Survey on the Role of Women in Development is a flagship publication of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). It is prepared every five years.