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Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC

Briefing

Women on the move
Migration, gender equality and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

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Key messages

- Women migrate as much as men. Migration data must be disaggregated by sex and age, and migration policies must take account of how gender shapes different migrants' needs.

- Migration can increase women's access to education and economic resources, and can improve their autonomy and status.

- Female migrants and refugees are at greater risk of exploitation and abuse, including trafficking.

- Highly skilled women have high rates of migration but many are employed in low-skilled jobs.

- Unskilled female migrants work in less-regulated and less-visible sectors than male migrants. Most migrant domestic workers are women and adolescent girls.

- Migration creates empowerment trade-offs for individual women and girls, and between different groups of women and girls. These trade-offs matter for gender equality and for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

1 Introduction[1]

This policy brief gives an overview of the opportunities, risks and vulnerabilities female migrants and refugees[2] face and the implications for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It describes the realities of migration for women and adolescent girls, focusing on the experiences of those working in a range of 'care' professions, from domestic workers to nurses and doctors. Mobility and employment create opportunities for female migrants, but gender norms – shared ideas about the different capabilities and 'natural' roles of women and men, girls and boys – also create vulnerabilities, as do institutional failures to address discrimination. Gender norms, prevalent in all countries, are a root cause of the gendered division of labour (whether paid or unpaid work), violence against women and girls, and women's lack of decision-making power – all of which have particular consequences for female migrants. While gender stereotypes and expectations also shape the migration experience of men and boys, this brief focuses on female migrants because they are most likely to be 'left behind' in progress towards the 2030 Agenda.
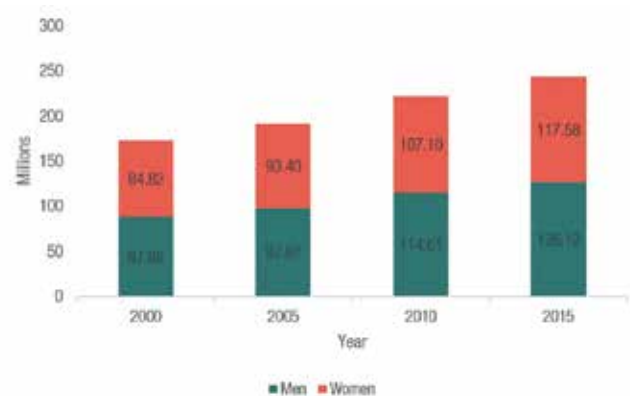
After briefly exploring current migration trends, Section 2 describes how gender norms and relations shape decisions about why and when women and girls migrate, and their experiences of migration. We highlight how the socioeconomic characteristics of individual female migrants and the countries they migrate from and to influence whether migration is likely to increase their capabilities and/or vulnerabilities, and how. In Sections 3 and 4 we use the concept of the global care chain to expand this discussion. We examine the experiences of skilled and unskilled female migrants and explore how the feminisation of labour leads to empowerment trade-offs for individual migrants, as well as between groups of women and girls.

In Section 5 we make recommendations about how the international community can ensure that female migrants and refugees are not excluded from the benefits of economic and social progress and the 2030 Agenda. We argue that migration can contribute to women and girls' capabilities and freedoms, but can also expose them to new or increased risks. Migration policies must reflect the different needs and risks women and girls face, and actively manage these trade-offs.

1.1 Migration trends

People have always moved across borders. In 2015, the global number of international migrants reached 224 million, up from 173 million in 2000. However, as a proportion of the world's population, the number of migrants has remained relatively stable over the past 40 years at around 3%. Europe and Asia host the most international migrants (76 million and 75 million respectively), while southern Europe and Gulf States are the regions with the highest growth in labour migrants (UN DESA, 2016a).

Figure 1: Total number of international migrants by sex

Source: UN DESA (2016b)

In general, women migrate as much as men: in 2015, almost half (48%) of all international migrants were female (see Figure 1). From 2000 to 2015, women and girls' migration to developing countries (15.8%) increased more rapidly than to developed regions (6.4%) (UN DESA, 2016b). The proportion of female migrants to Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern America and Oceania increased, but the proportion going to Africa and Asia decreased (UN DESA, 2016a).

Regarding forced displacement, in 2015 the number of refugees worldwide rose to 21.3 million – the highest level since the Second World War. Refugees comprise approximately 8% of the total number of international migrants, and 47% of refugees were girls and women in 2015 (UNHCR, 2016).

2 Migration and the SDGs

The challenges addressed by the SDGs contain many important gender dimensions. Gender-specific actions and solutions are needed to reduce women and girls' poverty and insecurity and to promote their access to economic and sustainable growth, as well as to health, education, and justice. Policy-makers and practitioners must understand how gender inequalities influence progress on each goal and target. They should support measures that target harmful gender-related practices, reduce gender discrimination, and increase women and girls' choices and decision-making power.

A handful of the SDGs have targets that relate directly to migration. These include:

- Goal 5 on gender equality and women and girls' empowerment;
- Goal 8 on growth and decent work;
- Goal 10 on reducing inequalities;
- Goal 16 on peaceful, inclusive societies and access to justice for all; and
- Goal 17 on global partnership on sustainable development, which includes improving data.

Target 10.7, for example, is to 'facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies' (UN DESA, 2016c). However, this target is gender-blind; effective implementation requires a gender lens to capture the specific needs of female migrants. Other targets are not related directly to gender and/or migration but are nonetheless relevant. For instance, Target 8.10 seeks to improve access to financial institutions, which is important for women's ability to receive and send remittances.

As Table 1 shows, SDG 5 and SDG 8 are particularly important to the wellbeing of female migrants and refugees in ensuring they are not left behind in progress towards the 2030 Agenda.

Table 1: Women and girls, migration and the 2030 Agenda

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls	
Selected targets	Migration challenges
5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.	Migrant and refugee women and girls may experience violence at all stages of the migration process, whether at home or in the community. Gender-based violence or conflict-related sexual violence may force women and girls to migrate, and they may be subject to violence during transit (e.g. at refugee camps) or at their destination (e.g. by an employer). Irregular migrants and young migrants are at greater risk of violence, trafficking and exploitation. Migrant girls are more likely to be trafficked or experience sexual exploitation than boys (Temin et al., 2013).
5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM).	Girls facing harmful practices such as FGM or forced marriage may use migration as a means of escape (Temin et al., 2013). Migration can expose girls and young women to different social norms and practices (including FGM) in new locations (Goldberg et al., 2016). Migrant communities may use early marriage as a coping strategy in the face of girls' insecurity or economic hardship.
5.4 Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.	11.5 million (17.2%) of the world's 67.1 million domestic workers are international migrants; 8.4 million (73.4%) of migrant domestic workers are women or adolescent girls (ILO, 2015). Actions that increase the value of domestic work, including changes in underlying gender norms, would reduce women's burden of unpaid work and enhance the wellbeing, dignity and status of paid and unpaid care and domestic workers, including migrants.

Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all	
Selected targets	Migration challenges
8.5 Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men.	Many host countries limit or bar refugees from employment opportunities. Similarly, migrant spouses may be prevented from working. Female migrants and refugees that do work may experience deskilling or be confined to 'feminine' jobs, often paid or valued less than other work. Ensuring full and productive employment and decent work requires access to work that is aligned with refugees' and migrants' skills and qualifications. It also means improving social and economic value afforded to work typically performed by women and girls.
8.7 Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking, and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour.	Migrants (particularly irregular migrants and children) are at risk of forced labour, trafficking, and exploitation and abuse. To eradicate these forms of labour requires improving labour standards, increasing the opportunities for decent work, protecting migrants, and prosecuting the perpetrators of such violations.
8.8 Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular female migrants, and those in precarious employment.	Protection of labour rights is particularly important for migrants, particularly women and children, who are at greater risk of exploitation or abuse. Female migrants in stereotypically feminine roles (such as live-in care and domestic work) are frequently isolated and therefore more vulnerable to exploitation, violence and abuse.

3 Gender norms and women and girls' migration

Men and women migrate for similar reasons – to get an education, to find work, to get married, or to flee persecution or harm. However, migration is very much a gendered phenomenon; gender norms and expectations, power relations, and unequal rights shape the migration choices and experiences of women and girls as they do men and boys.

Gender norms affect when and why people migrate. Women usually have less control over the decision to migrate than men – a decision more likely to be taken by their family (Yeoh et al., 2002). Where women and girls lack autonomy, this challenges the distinction between forced and voluntary migration – and particularly so for adolescent girls. Gendered expectations may also guide family decisions. For instance, families may believe that girls or young women are more likely than male family

Box 1: Refugees and forced displacement

Refugee women and girls are subject to gender inequalities and discrimination. Conflict can exacerbate gender-based violence, and sexual violence is commonly used as a tactic of war. The state's failure to protect women and girls from gender-based violence can spur migration.

When they are displaced from their homes, women and girls are more vulnerable to violence and abuse, particularly if not accompanied by male relatives. The risk of human trafficking may also increase. When displacement results in female-headed households, women may struggle with the additional burdens of fulfilling both traditional male and female roles within the family. Female migrants (especially in cases of forced migration or displacement) may be forced into prostitution or sex work to survive or provide for their families.

Displacement can disrupt social and gender norms and bring added pressures for men and women alike, as well as increasing the vulnerabilities faced by women and girls. Male refugees in temporary camps may no longer be able to provide for their family as the breadwinner. Domestic violence by a spouse or family member can increase as families experience psychosocial trauma and as male refugees struggle with feelings of inadequacy and loss of control within the family.

Women and girls in refugee camps typically continue to be responsible for fetching the family's firewood and water, often going beyond the camp walls where they face increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence. Even within camps, women and girls are exposed to increased risks of violence from other refugees. As is the case among some Syrian and Rohingya refugees, for example, displaced families may choose early or forced marriage for their daughters as a strategy to cope with economic hardship or perceived risks of sexual violence. During times of crises, states may be less able to protect and provide adequate services, further disadvantaging vulnerable refugees, including women and girls.

Sources: Bukachi et al. (2010); UNHCR (2008); Women's Refugee Commission (2016); De Berry and Petrini (2011); UNHCR and World Bank Group (2015).

members to send home remittances regularly, or the eldest daughter may be expected to migrate so that the family has money to send her siblings to school (Kanaiaupuni, 2000).

Not all decisions for girls or women to migrate are taken by families. Indeed, some adolescent girls and women migrate in order to escape family control that can lead to harmful practices such as forced or early marriage or female genital mutilation (FGM) (Temin et al., 2013). At the same time, gender norms may limit women and girls' migration; at the household level, families may prevent them from migrating for fear of 'moral corruption' or difficulties in marrying (Shaw, 2005). At the national level, rather than addressing the causes of gender discrimination or the risks female migrants face, some governments have banned female migration as a means to protect women and children – a measure that contravenes women's human rights.

Gender also shapes the migration experience, regardless of whether migration is voluntary or forced (see Box 1). Female migrants, particularly girls, have less information, less education, and fewer options for regular migration, which puts them at greater risk of exploitation and abuse, including trafficking (UNFPA, 2015). Farah (2006) reported that 80% of trafficking victims were estimated to be female. Girls migrating alone are particularly vulnerable (Temin et al., 2013). Female migrants tend to be more averse to risk than men, however, and prefer to migrate through regular channels and when social networks are in place (Fleury, 2016). Migrants often establish networks for social support; this enables other women and girls from their community to follow (Temin et al., 2013) and reduces the stigma caused by breaking traditional gender norms (De Haas, 2009).

Gender norms and social norms in migrants' country of origin and destination also influence the outcomes of migration for women and girls. Such norms determine whether migration empowers women and girls and/or exposes them to harm, and in what ways. Women are more likely to migrate to countries with less discriminatory social institutions than their country of origin, which also tend to offer greater economic opportunities (Ferrant et al., 2014; Ferrant and Tuccio, 2015). However, there are also instances of women migrating from countries with very high levels of discrimination to countries with similarly high levels of discrimination, possibly because the decision to migrate may not have been solely theirs (Ferrant et al., 2014) or they were driven by economic hardship.

The act of migration may change social and gender norms, for migrants as well as for their home communities. In addition to improving women's autonomy, self-esteem and social standing, migration can also provide women and girls with new skills and their families with remittances. These new resources can change power dynamics within families and households. Migrants may also influence their home communities to adopt more equitable norms around education, marriage, fertility rates, and gender roles in the household and community. However, while migrant women may return home with new norms and skills, they may also face resistance or stigma and struggle to reintegrate into their families and communities (Sijapati, 2015).

When a woman migrates with her spouse, even to a more liberal country, discriminatory gender norms from the home community (such as restrictions on women's movement outside the home) may still govern household relations, leaving women more isolated and vulnerable. For example, Kabeer (2000) found that employment had greater empowerment effects for Bangladeshi women who migrated to cities to work in factories than for those that migrated to London and performed piecework in the isolation of their own homes.

Migration may also bring changes in gender roles for men. Women's migration may mean that men who stay behind take on more unpaid care responsibilities, though other female family members often take on the additional burden. Remittances from migrant workers also make a vital contribution to source economies and to the household income and wellbeing of migrants' families (Fleury, 2016). However, realising the benefits of remittances depends on who receives and controls them; women are more likely to invest in children's education and health, while men tend to invest in assets such as cars (De and Ratha, 2005).

4 Gender norms, labour market segmentation and the global care chain

Gender is a key factor in the employment opportunities that are open to migrants. Most societies valorise men as natural leaders, decision-makers and breadwinners, placing them at the centre of the public and productive spheres, while women are relegated to the role of natural homemakers and carers, confining them to the domestic and reproductive spheres. In many countries though, simple productive-reproductive or public-private gender dichotomies have come under stress as women have entered the labour force in greater numbers. While it is now more acceptable that women perform productive roles, norms about reproductive and domestic work are, in some cases, proving very resistant to change and men are not doing their equal share of unpaid domestic and care work (Evans, 2016; Samman et al., 2016; Wojczewski et al., 2015). Time-use surveys show that women *in all countries* spend more time on unpaid care than men, ranging from around 2 weeks more in the Nordic countries to more than 10 weeks more in Iraq, Mexico and Turkey (Samman et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the labour market – including migrant labour – remains highly segmented by gender, as well as by class and ethnicity. Men are perceived as stronger and more capable of manual labour and, as a result, are more likely to work in mining, industry, transport, trade and construction. Men are also overrepresented in management

positions. By contrast, women are perceived as nurturing and are concentrated in 'feminine' sectors related to care (e.g. health, teaching, cleaning, cooking, service industries) or entertainment, or in factory positions that prefer workers to be 'nimble' or meticulous (ILO, 2015; de Villard and Dey de Pryck, 2010; Ghosh, 2009; UNFPA, 2006; IOM, 2009, 2011). Gendered labour opportunities then influence where male and female migrants move to. Countries with higher demand for construction workers are more likely to recruit or attract male migrants, whereas countries seeking domestic workers and nurses will attract more female migrants (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003).

The gender segregation of labour and the feminisation of domestic and care work also mean that, even when female migrants have legal rights, they are less likely to be enforced than the rights of male migrants. This is because unskilled female migrants tend to be more isolated and less aware of their rights than unskilled migrant men working in relatively better-regulated, visible and better-paid sectors, such as construction, mining and agriculture (Garcia et al., 2002).

In sum, the intersection of gender norms and market economics has three consequences for female migrants:

1. They are concentrated in unskilled, undervalued and low-paid sectors, often employed as domestic workers in hard-to-regulate private homes;
2. Skilled and unskilled migrants often face intersecting gender and racial discrimination and have a triple burden of managing paid employment alongside unpaid domestic and reproductive responsibilities;
3. Female migrants are less able to advance their own interests than male migrants; they have less decision-making power within the home and – whether migrating alone or as a dependent – are less likely to have the time or capabilities to engage with political decision-making and policy processes (O'Neil and Domingo, 2016).

The expectation that women, not men, are responsible for unpaid domestic and care responsibilities therefore influences labour market segmentation and the economic opportunities open to women, including migrants. The feminisation of labour then intersects with inequality and discrimination based on class and ethnicity within and across countries, creating global care and healthcare chains. Both *societal* factors and the *individual* characteristics of women and girls therefore determine the empowerment effects of migration – particularly migrants' socioeconomic status, and the sector they work in after migrating, as well as they type of work they do. Changing this situation requires a shift in gender stereotypes and expectations – one that changes harmful masculinities and limiting femininities – as well as addressing class and other forms of discrimination.

4.1 Unskilled female migrants and domestic and care work

Most migrant domestic workers are women and girls – approximately 75% of the 11.5 million estimated in 2013 (ILO, 2015). Indeed, domestic work is the most common employment for girls under the age of 16 (UN OHCHR, 2015). While nearly 80% of domestic workers are in low- and middle-income countries, 79.2% of *migrant* domestic workers are in high-income countries. South-East Asia and the Pacific is the region with the highest levels of female migrant domestic workers (24%), followed by northern Europe, southern Europe, and western Europe (22.1%), then Arab States (19%) (ILO, 2015). Levels of migration and destination vary by country of origin; for instance, 86% of female labour migrants from Sri Lanka are employed as domestic workers in the Middle East (IOM, 2015).

The feminisation of domestic and care labour creates a global care chain, a term coined by Arlie Hochschild to describe 'a series of links between people across the world based on the paid and unpaid work of caring' (Wojczewski et al., 2015: 131). As ageing populations and women's increasing participation in the global labour force create more demand for paid domestic and care work, the women who fill those positions then rely on female relatives to care for their own families, creating a chain effect (UN OHCHR, 2015). Migrants' families (particularly female relatives such as mothers or eldest daughters) who take over unpaid domestic and care work may find that doing so limits their own ability to take up economic or education opportunities (Azcona, 2009; Wojczewski et al., 2015). Rather than leading men, employers or governments to play a greater role in the provision of domestic and care needs, the effect of women entering the workforce in greater numbers is to pull in even more women as paid carers.

Despite the high demand for and numbers of domestic workers in many countries, domestic and care work is less socially valued than other types of work – something that is reflected in lower pay and fewer labour regulations compared with other sectors (Petrozziello, 2013; Temin et al., 2013). For example, 40% of countries do not offer protection for domestic workers within national labour laws (UN Women, 2012). Some countries, like Mexico, include domestic work in labour laws but afford such workers fewer rights and protections than workers in other occupations (European Union et al., 2014). Other countries may include protections in national labour laws but invest little or no resources in enforcement. Enforcing the rights of domestic workers is particularly difficult given that many live in their employer's home, hidden from public view.

Since paid domestic work mostly takes place in private homes, it increases the risk of abuse and mistreatment (Fleury, 2016; Oishi, 2002; Piper, 2005; Temin et al., 2013; UN OHCHR, 2015). Domestic workers often receive low pay, work long hours, may suffer from insufficient sleep and (depending on their employer) may have difficulty in receiving time off or pay (Temin et al., 2013; Piper, 2005;

UN OHCHR, 2015). For example, in Ethiopia, migrant girls doing domestic work are more likely to experience sexual abuse and rape by employers than other girls, in part due to their social isolation and dependence on their employers (Temin et al., 2013). In Gulf countries, migrant women are often marginalised and experience difficulties claiming their wages and with their legal status (Wojczewski et al., 2015). Yet, despite these risks, women and girls are still driven to migrate, usually pulled by the potential for better economic opportunities and increased income (see Box 2).

4.2 Skilled female migrants and healthcare work

Skilled female migrants also face gender segregation and tend to work in 'feminine' professions, such as education, health, social work, and nursing (Piper, 2005). In high-income and upper-middle-income countries, various factors have combined to create a global healthcare chain – demographic changes (ageing populations and declining fertility rates), shifts in gender norms (more women entering the workforce) and gaps in health and social care systems (availability of trained nurses, adequacy of welfare provision). Some countries have active, even 'aggressive' recruitment policies (UNFPA and IMP, 2004) and bilateral agreements to plug gaps in their healthcare

Box 2: The global care chain and the experiences of unskilled female migrants

Many unskilled women and girls migrate for domestic work to improve their and their families' economic wellbeing, but they also often face new or increased risks. These trade offs from migration vary in types and scale, however, and are informed both by individual and country characteristics.

Recently, there have been growing numbers of Ethiopian adolescent girls migrating to Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia to do domestic work. The main driver is increased income, particularly given the pressures on sustainable livelihoods in Ethiopia – one of the world's poorest countries – due to worsening agricultural cycles, shortage of land, limited job opportunities and increasing unemployment. However, poverty is not the only driver. For adolescent girls, migration offers an escape from early marriage, oppressive social norms, and the lack of control over their lives. Now, the established culture of migration, a growing reliance on remittances and peer pressure also motivate young Ethiopians to migrate.

Though migration brings many benefits, the costs can be high. Young migrant domestic workers risk serious violations of their human rights, including exploitation, physical and sexual violence, trafficking, abuse, isolation, incomplete wages or even non-payment, long work hours, racial and religious discrimination, and psychological and mental trauma. For Ethiopian girls in Saudi Arabia, these experiences are far too common, both in transit and when they reach their employer's home. One returnee girl said: 'I was beaten by the daughters in the house and the daughter next door. They would use their hands or whatever object they asked me to fetch – spoons, cans, whatever. The beating was daily – even if one daughter wasn't beating me, the other was'. Young Ethiopian girls encounter the difficult trade-offs between economic gains and empowerment, and exploitation and abuse. With few options for a fulfilled life at home, many adolescent girls leave feeling optimistic that their experience will be a positive one.

Ecuadorian women migrating to Spain as domestic workers also face a trade-off – in their case, between increased economic opportunity and family income, and separation from their family and discrimination in the destination country. Domestic work in Spain provides a far superior income for Ecuadorian women than most job opportunities available to them at home, where they face age and gender discrimination when seeking employment. Women also have better, more stable opportunities in Spain than Ecuadorian men, so families often decide that it is best for women to migrate. Ecuadorian women are highly marketable in Spain given that they are native Spanish speakers and their general categorisation as nurturing carers and housekeepers. Migration also enhances Ecuadorian women's autonomy, agency, and worth. By contributing financially to their families, women often gain greater decision-making power in the household. For single Ecuadorian women, migration also provides an alternative to marriage.

Many Ecuadorian women who migrate to Spain are themselves mothers who are forced to leave their own children behind as they care for other children abroad. This separation is one major cost of migration. In many cases, Ecuadorian women prefer other female relatives (a grandmother or aunt) to care for their children, rather than their spouse. Ecuadorian migrants also face discrimination as foreigners in Spain; like many migrant women, they experience deskilling and occupy lower-level positions, primarily employed as domestic workers regardless of their education or experience.

While Ethiopia and Ecuador both provide examples of female migration for domestic work, they illustrate how individual factors as well as the broader political and institutional context of the destination country influence women's experiences of migration. Ethiopian adolescents in Saudi Arabia, for example, are especially vulnerable not just because of their age and lack of voice but also because of the lack of legal protection for women in the Middle East and the lack of recourse to justice when their human rights are violated.

Sources: Jones et al. (2014); Dudley (2013).

system (Wojczewski et al., 2015). For instance, in the UK in 2012, 22% of nurses and 35% of medical practitioners were born abroad (Jayaweera, 2015). In addition to push factors in their countries of origin, the prospect of better wages and/or working conditions draws trained nurses, doctors and other healthcare professionals to wealthier countries in the global North (e.g. Canada, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, the UK and the USA) and the global South (e.g. Saudi Arabia and South Africa).

Conversely, this migration of skilled workers can weaken healthcare systems in developing countries, sometimes referred to as 'brain drain'. Since women from developing countries have less access to tertiary education and high-skilled positions, when they migrate there are higher relative losses of human capital than when skilled males migrate (Docquier et al., 2009), though the picture is mixed depending on the countries involved. The chain of displacement and replacement is not just in one direction, from developing to developed countries. For example, the demand for migrant

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Box 3: The global healthcare chain and the experiences of skilled female migrants

Despite skilled female migrants being the fastest-growing category of migrants, little attention has been paid to their experiences. There are few qualitative studies documenting the growing number of foreign-trained female doctors and the experiences of migrants working in the health sector, particularly those working outside Anglo-Saxon countries.

To fill this gap, Wojczewski and colleagues (2015) interviewed 34 migrants in Austria, Belgium, South Africa and the UK who trained as nurses or doctors in sub-Saharan Africa. Temporary 'deskilling' was a common experience, with validation of qualifications, retraining, and certification meaning that migrants were unable to practice as nurses or doctors for between two and 10 years. Doctors in particular reported having to do other jobs such as care work while they repeated lengthy training. Some reported permanent inability to work in their profession and 're-domestication' when financial, reproductive, or care responsibilities meant retraining was not an option.

Formal regulations and bureaucratic capacity in destination countries have a significant impact on migrants' experiences. For instance, interviewees complained that in South Africa, the validation of foreign certificates and registration with the nursing council could take two years. The recognition of qualifications was reported to take two to three times longer in Austria and Belgium than in the UK. Social attitudes and employment rights (and their enforcement) are also important. Many of the black (but not white) African doctors and nurses in the study reported experiencing racial discrimination from co-workers and patients.

In Greece, Lazaridis (2006) also found informal barriers (cultural, attitudinal, organisational and practical) as well as formal barriers to women's occupational mobility in her study of 'quasi-nurses' – people (often migrants and usually women) employed to care for families' elderly or sick relatives either in their own home or in hospital. Before the economic crisis, the demand for quasi-nurses was driven by three main factors: Greek women entering the labour market out of economic necessity; inadequate social welfare provision by the state; and social norms that frown upon families who do not care for their elderly relatives at home. Families were also driven to hire quasi-nurses to care for their sick relatives during their hospital stays because of the shortage of nurses (doctors outnumbered nurses in Greek hospitals), and the overlap between the informal and formal care sectors in Greece, similar to other southern European countries.

A 'hierarchy of labour' in Greece based on intersecting forms of discrimination means that women from marginalised ethnic groups and without legal status experience the worst employment conditions. Many women (including skilled women) who migrate to Greece, particularly those without documents, have little choice but to work in the informal sector. Only one out of the 18 interviewed migrants working as quasi-nurses had nursing qualifications. All had higher education or professional experience but were unable to pursue their chosen career (e.g. accountancy, engineering, teaching).

The women reported experiencing discrimination and insecurity. According to a Bulgarian migrant, 'I came to Greece because I heard that whoever comes here makes money… It wasn't an easy decision to take as I left behind my husband and children… The job was to look after a family with three children; the money was very little, only 40,000 drachmas in the late 1990s, when other women were paid for similar job 120,000 drachmas, but I took it… When we fell out, they refused to let me have my passport back. I got it back only after I complained to the agency about it. The job was hard. I was not allowed to have a day off or to go out, because they were afraid that I would not return'.

The lack of solidarity among quasi-nurses and hostility between Greek and migrant workers undermined collective action to improve conditions. However, in some cases, interviewees reported that working in a private home sometimes led to a bond with the employer, based on the elderly person's dependence on the migrant employee, which enabled her to negotiate better wages and conditions.

Sources: Wojczewski et al. (2015); Lazaridis (2006).

workers in the UK's National Health Service (NHS) is fuelled by a shortage of UK-trained nurses but also by their migration to the USA and other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.

Today, rather than accompanying or joining spouses, women are more likely to be the 'lead migrant'. In fact, highly skilled migrant women not only have higher rates of migration than low-skilled women, they are also more likely to migrate than highly skilled men. The demand for skilled migrants can also incentivise people in developing countries to gain further education and professional qualifications, a phenomenon known as 'brain gain'. However, as Arends-Kuenning et al. (2015) found in the Philippines, these societal gains have costs for individual families. Often it is a family decision to invest in private education and the pay-off on the investment is only realised if the individual family member is able to complete their training, migrate, and secure a high-skilled and well-paid job.

Migration to a wealthier country can provide improved career opportunities and skills acquisition for women, as well as a better quality of life and increased security (employment or otherwise) for themselves and their families. If they do return home, migration can also transfer skills to less-developed countries (UNFPA and IMP, 2004; Lorenzo et al., 2005). At the same time, many highly skilled migrant women are employed in low-skilled jobs, indicating a gap between expectations and opportunities in destination countries. Migrant nurses and, in particular, doctors can face an extended process to get visas, have their qualifications validated and register with the relevant bodies, during which time they may need to take up less-skilled work (see Box 3). Employers may not recognise migrants' qualifications or experience and re-training may be necessary, or migrants may need to improve their language skills.

Deskilling and perceived devaluing of female migrants is common (Piper, 2005). Differences in national regulations may mean that migrant nurses are unable to continue to undertake routine duties in the destination country. Racial discrimination on the part of recruiters and co-workers may mean that they are forced to accept positions they are overqualified for, or do not have the same opportunities for career progression as co-workers (Ghosh, 2009; Wojczewski et al., 2015). Nursing and healthcare positions typically do not offer the same benefits (e.g. housing, relocation expenses) as male-dominated, white-collar positions (Piper, 2005). Female migrant workers therefore face a double penalty in terms of labour market segregation and discrimination; they are more likely to work in less well-paid and rewarded sectors because of their sex, and are more likely to work in lower-skilled positions in that sector because of their ethnicity and migrant status (European Commission and OECD, 2005).

Point-based immigration systems influence these dynamics. For example, when Canada awarded no or negative points to health qualifications in the 1990s, many trained Filipinos entered the country through domestic labour programmes instead (Kofman, 2004). When women migrate as dependents, the labour market or social norms may mean they are unable to continue to do a job they have been trained for (Ghosh, 2009). Governments also control the labour market through the issuing of professional licences and certificates: 'In Canada, certification requirements are often described as a form of systemic discrimination, in that criteria are created which are applied to the Canadian-born and foreign-born alike, but which disproportionately restrict the access of the foreign-born to trades or professions' (Piper, 2005: 9).

5 Conclusions and policy recommendations

Migration implies trade-offs for women and girls, in that it can offer new opportunities but can also expose female migrants and refugees to new or increased risks. For women and girls to benefit from mobility, policies must support the empowerment and economic benefits of migration *and also* increase protection of female migrants. This is especially important for the most vulnerable migrants and refugees, such as adolescent girls and low-skilled female workers in highly unregulated markets. Female migrants are also not a homogenous group; they have different socioeconomic characteristics. Policy will only amplify the empowerment effects of migration and mitigate increased vulnerabilities if the specific needs of different women and girls, as well as men and boys, in different countries are understood, and policy and programmes are tailored accordingly.

Migration is most likely to empower women and girls when it occurs through regular channels, when they can make informed choices, and when they have access to legal protection, services and social networks in countries of origin and destination. Achieving this requires actions at different levels – from the community to the international – and cooperation within and across sectors (international organisations, government agencies, the private sector and civil society). The recommendations below set out key actions for the SDG monitoring agencies, specialist United Nations (UN) agencies (e.g. the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)), relevant national government agencies (home offices, labour departments, national statistics agencies), and civil society organisations, but they are not exhaustive. In addition, countries vary greatly in their political context and leadership on gender and migration issues. Further work is therefore needed to analyse the political and social barriers to progress in different countries of origin and destination and to tailor strategies accordingly.

Conclusion 1: Women migrate as much as men, so migration policies must be gender-sensitive and data must be disaggregated

Recommendations: get the basics right – data, policies and advocacy

- Ensure that all **key national, regional and global processes and mechanisms on migration** (e.g. the Colombo Process and the Global Forum on Migration and Development) as well as advocacy organisations and agencies (e.g. IOM and UNHCR and key non-government organisations (NGOs) such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC)) focus on female migrants and recognise how gender affects migration experiences and outcomes. SDGs 5, 8, and 10 are important advocacy tools.
- Include specific **objectives, targets and milestones on female migrants and refugees** in key migration and asylum policies, programmes and monitoring systems, and specifically SDG 10 on inequality, and target 10.7 promoting orderly and safe migration.
- Work with international networks such as the Global Partnership for Sustainable Data Development and invest in the capacity of national agencies to **collect and use sex- and age-disaggregated data on international migrants** in countries with high levels of female migrants or where they are most exposed to risks.
- Target specific initiatives such as the recently established High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment to address female migration issues as part of **decent work agendas and efforts to promote women's economic empowerment.**
- Provide financial support and political backing to **national campaigns and initiatives** focusing on community education, awareness raising, networking and training to combat xenophobia and increase awareness of migrant and refugee contributions to society (paid and unpaid).

Relevant SDG targets

10.7: Orderly, safe and responsible migration
17.8: Increase significantly the availability of high-quality and reliable data

Conclusion 2: Female migrants and refugees are less visible than male migrants but they are more vulnerable and exposed to greater risk

Recommendations: prioritise and enhance protection policies and mechanisms

- Ensure that opportunities to **promote safe and regular migration** consider gender factors and do not reinforce gender discrimination and disadvantage through a focus on traditionally male employment sectors.
- Introduce **mandatory gender training** for agencies that have most contact with female migrants, including immigration authorities, the police and health service providers.
- Support **national and sub-national resource centres for migrants** that provide advice, information and support services (e.g. legal advice, information on sexual and reproductive health services) for women and girls, regardless of their legal status.
- Increase **access to basic services** such as health, education, social protection and psychosocial support for all female migrants and refugees, including dedicated resources for returnees.

Relevant SDG targets

5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres
5.6: Universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights
8.7: Eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery
10.7: Facilitate orderly, safe and responsible migration, implement planned and well-managed migration policies
16.1: Reduce all forms of violence and death everywhere
16.2: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all violence and torture against children
16.3: Promote the law to ensure equal access to justice for all

Conclusion 3: Female migrant workers are less likely than men to make the most of the economic and social opportunities of mobility

Recommendations: regulate and improve working conditions for all female migrant workers

- **Improve monitoring and enforcement of labour standards,** policies and legal frameworks for female migrant workers to support decent work, eliminate abusive and illegal employment, and reduce discriminatory practices in the workplace. The OECD and the International Labour Organization (ILO) are well-positioned to lead these improvements in high-

income countries where most migrant domestic workers are found.

- Strengthen **domestic and regional regulations to speed up access to and integration in the labour market** for migrant women in destination countries, including regional collaboration for better recognition of qualifications.
- Support a global initiative and campaign to **increase awareness and recognise the social and economic value of care and domestic work** and to promote the equal sharing of unpaid work by men and women.
- **Increase temporary and permanent work permits for migrants and refugees and their families** (e.g. spouses of migrants, or refugees awaiting resettlement in camps or urban settings).
- **Improve migrants' access to financial institutions** for general financial inclusion and for sending/receiving remittances.

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Relevant SDG targets

5.4: Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work
8.5: Achieve full and productive employment for all
8.8: Protect labour rights and promote safe working environments
8.10: Improve access to financial institutions, including remittance flows
10.c: Reduce transaction costs of migrant remittances

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