

E-Policy Brief Nr. 8:

Gender & Migration

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Introduction

This is the eighth edition of a series of e-Policy Briefs published by the Africa-Europe Platform, a European-wide network of African diaspora organisations. The main purpose of these e-Policy Briefs is to enhance knowledge among diaspora organisations on key migration and development (M&D) policy issues as well as to raise policymakers' awareness on the views of African diaspora organisations on key M&D policy issues.

In this edition, attention will be paid to the topic of gender and migration. The feminization of migration and relevant terminology will be examined as such. Also, various definitions such as 'gender mainstreaming' and 'gender-biased', will be considered briefly. The most important legal instruments will be described, so that this subject can be positioned within a relevant legal framework.

Despite the fact that many development actors, researchers, government officials, and other stakeholders are aware of the importance of a gender sensitive approach to migration, in reality this seems difficult to realise and implement. This e-policy brief will touch upon some recommendations in order to successfully 'engender' migration policies.

Finally, some good practices of women (women's organisations) in the diaspora as change agents will be highlighted. Successes of diaspora women can be well seen, for example, in the field of peace-building. Therefore this field will illustrate actions of women in the diaspora.

The release of this e-policy brief coincides with the third and last expert meeting of the EADPD project, which took place on 13 and 14 November 2013 in Brussels. The topic of this e-policy brief corresponds to one of the workshops given during the meeting.

If you are interested in contributing to upcoming e-policy briefs or if you would like to share your ideas for future topics, please contact us by e-mail: info@aeplatform.org.

2. Gender and migration: feminization of migration

Whilst the vast majority of those who currently migrate are internal migrants, some 200 million people migrate internationally. The share of international migrants in the world's population has remained the same at around three percent over the past 50 years.¹

Since the early 1980s, the number of women that move on their own to live and work in other countries has increased. The number of female migrants grew faster than the number of male migrants between 1965 and 1990 in the main receiving countries, industrialised as well as developing.² Indeed,

¹ Human Development Report 2009, UNDP, p.2

² Chammartin G., The feminisation of International migration, International Migration Programme, ILO





“What is “gender”?”

Gender is not biologically given: Gender is a term used to describe socially constructed roles for women and men that are socially learned, that can change over time and that vary widely within and across cultures. By contrast, sex identifies the biological differences between men and women.

Gender does not only refer to “women”: Gender includes both women and men. Belonging to one gender or the other can create differences of experience. Visibility is a prerequisite for gender sensitive policies and is taken into account in the concept of gender mainstreaming.

Gender is intersectional: Talking about gender does not imply that all women or men are alike, but categories such as race, ethnic minority status, age, marital and/or socio-economic status are also important factors. Gender affects, and in fact often reinforces, vulnerabilities and differences in relation to other structural differences, such as race/ethnicity, class and age. Hence, to be truly sensitive, gender sensitive policies should also reflect these inter-connections.”

Source : OSCE (2009). Guide on Gender-Sensitive Labour Migration Policies, p. 6, Retrieved November 21, 2013 from <http://www.osce.org/eea/37228>

approximately half of all contemporary international migrants are women.³

Therefore, in recent years the term “feminisation of migration” has become popular. However, this terminology could be misleading. It suggests an absolute increase in the proportion of female migrants, when in fact already in 1960 almost 47 % of all international migrants were women. According to more recent numbers it is about 49%⁴. Hence, this does not constitute a very significant rise since 1960. The real change of the last decades has been the way women move, namely independently and not merely as a family relative. Due to this change, experts need to look at different aspects of migration, such as the role of

women as remittance senders; the working conditions of jobs done by migrant women, such as domestic work and care giving jobs; the changing role of women in the family and in the community; the phenomenon of mobility orphans; and the vulnerability and exposure of migrant women to different kinds of risks, including trafficking.⁵

The reasons why women migrate do not necessarily differ from men’s reasons and often relate to economic and social factors, such as the search for (better paid) employment. But there are also various reasons that are specific to female migration, such as the wish to leave patriarchal societies, escaping from bad and abusive marriages/relationships, fleeing

³ Human Development Report 2009, UNDP, p. 25.

⁴ Feminisation of migration, 2007, INSTRAW

⁵<http://www.caritas.org/includes/pdf/backgroundmigration.pdf>





from domestic violence, and desiring more equal opportunities. Despite the fact that more women migrate independently, still many leave their country of origin to follow their spouse⁶.

Levels of poverty and gender inequality, especially in terms of access to information to inform decision-making, influence female migration and affect the scale of migration flows. Experts define this as a *migration hump*⁷: migration of women is most likely to occur when economic development in their country of origin is at a medium level and when improvements in the status of women can be noticed. Extreme poverty hampers international migration since people have fewer resources to leave their country of origin. Moreover, transportation and communication infrastructure are less likely to be developed in poor areas. Simultaneously, in more developed countries higher educational levels can stimulate aspirations for suitable employment, increase knowledge about the world and capacity for action. The same happens when the level of inequality between men and women is high. When women are married as children or as young adolescents, receive little and poor-quality education, bear many children at young age, lack access to credit and banking and have few rights, they lack both the decision-making capacity and the resources to migrate. Thus, migration can contribute to a desire for gender equality and

empowerment. Yet, women are more vulnerable for risks such as violence, trafficking and prostitution if they come from poorer backgrounds⁸.

3. The Current Legal Framework

A number of international legal instruments have recognised that women are increasingly migrating independently and that they are more vulnerable to diverse forms of discrimination and exploitation due to stereotyped gender roles. The following are the most important international human rights instruments which address the rights of migrant women:

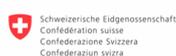
- **The International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions on Migrant Workers (C. 97, C. 143), the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and the ILO non-binding Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration**⁹ are important sources of protection for migrant women in relation to labour. These legal instruments cover issues of remuneration, membership of trade unions, collective bargaining, social security, legal proceedings and equal opportunity and treatment. The aforementioned conventions were adopted when women mostly migrated for family reunification, whereas today women are increasingly migrating independently. *The Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration* promotes the protection of female

⁶<http://www.caritas.org/includes/pdf/backgroundmigration.pdf>

⁷http://www.unfpa.org/upload/lib_pub_file/658_filename_migration.pdf

⁸ Female migrants: bridging gaps throughout life cycle, p.31

⁹<http://www.ilo.org/migrant/lang-en/index.htm>





migrant workers by, amongst other things, calling for gender-sensitive policies, sex-disaggregated data, the provision of opportunities for decent work for all women of working age, bilateral and multilateral agreements addressing gender specific trends, and measures to address trafficking, to assist and protect victims.

- **The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination¹⁰** address all forms of discrimination based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin against all individuals, including women. These instruments are therefore more general by nature. The CEDAW contains parts that are particularly relevant to female migrants: the elimination of stereotyped roles for men and women (Art. 5); the suppression of all forms of trafficking in women and the exploitation of the prostitution of women (Art. 6).
- **The 1995 Beijing Platform of Action, Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women¹¹** acknowledges the vulnerability of migrant women. The report mentions that women are often not aware of their rights nor do they have the proper resources to access information and recourse mechanisms. It further stresses the importance of implementing special measures to

eliminate violence against women, particularly those in vulnerable situations, and to enforce current legislation as well as develop and adopt new legislation for female migrant workers in both sending and receiving countries. It also calls for appropriate measures to address the root factors of trafficking, and the allocation of resources to provide comprehensive programmes designed to heal and rehabilitate victims of trafficking into society.

4. Engendering migration policies

Gender Mainstreaming is a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. Mainstreaming is not an end in itself but a strategy, an approach, a means to achieve the goal of gender equality. Mainstreaming involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities - policy development, research, advocacy/ dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects.

Source: United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2013.), Gender Mainstreaming, Retrieved November 21, 2013 from <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/gendermainstreaming.htm>

¹⁰ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

¹¹ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>

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Several measures can be taken to improve 'gender mainstreaming' within migration policies. The following three critical prerequisites should be addressed when mainstreaming a gender perspective into policies and programmes:

- top-level support
- stakeholders' involvement
- enabling mechanisms¹²

Commitment from the top level is most crucial. Support should be given through official statements which legitimise initiatives to mainstream gender. These official statements can be strengthened by

referring to national and international commitments, such as the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW (see description of these legal instruments in the previous section).

The second prerequisite is stakeholders that function as 'starters' of the change. These can include: (a) ministries that create an environment for change and have the authority to develop policies; (b) focal points and heads of governmental departments who analyse problems, develop plans and carry out the change; and (c) staff in public authorities, in field missions, in embassies, etc. that apply the policies in their daily

Migration policies are not indifferent to gender; rather, they can be gender-biased, gender-blind, gender-neutral or gender-sensitive:

- **Gender-biased policies** are those that discriminate, e.g. excluding women from recruitment programmes, wage discrimination, or policies that allow for the systematic exploitation of women.
- **Gender-blind policies** result when policymakers fail to recognize gender as a key determinant. One example is that the household is often taken as one economic unit in migration studies, when in fact it is made up of men and women with very different tasks and decision-making power.
- **Gender-neutral policies**, de facto, do not have a differential impact on men and women; however, their outcomes may sometimes be detrimental to female migrant workers.
- **Gender-sensitive policies**, in contrast to the above three policy types, consider factors rooted in the gender division of labour and power relations between men and women; they use sex-disaggregated data and take into account who benefits from policies and who does not. They can contain specific measures targeting women in order to bring about increased equity of opportunity, rights and obligations among men and women.

Source: Global Perspectives on Migration and Development GFMD Puerto Vallarta and Beyond, 2012. Irena Omelaniuk

¹² <http://www.osce.org/eea/37228>





work. It is important that all actors are informed, motivated and understand the rationale behind the changes of policies.

The third important prerequisite is enabling mechanisms, such as allocated resources. Staff costs and resources needed for mainstreaming gender should be estimated in all programme and activity budgets.¹³

Additionally, the constant monitoring and adjustment of policies and procedures, as well as securing the commitment of all stakeholders are crucial in the gender mainstreaming process. Since migration is a process in constant change, sector specific developments, changing gender composition and other factors should also be taken into consideration when evaluating the progress made.

In addition, another study describes 3 recommendations on how to engender a human rights approach to migration. The key elements of such an approach are:

- Migration policies that enable women as well as men to take up opportunities for safe and regular migration. This would include measures to ensure sufficient regular channels for women's entry, and prevent them from being pushed into more risky irregular channels. This could be supported by bilateral agreements between sending and receiving areas, protecting female migrants' rights.
- International rights frameworks that offer protection for female migrants. These frameworks include not only the ones referring to migrants, trafficking,

refugees and displaced people, but also women-specific frameworks such as the *CEDAW*, *UN Resolution 1325* and the *Beijing Platform for Action*.

- Support for the acknowledgement and realisation of the rights of migrants throughout the migration process, including providing pre-departure information on legal rights, facilitating remittances, ensuring access to basic services such as housing, education and health. Support to migrant organisations and solidarity between different migrant groups to address issues of exclusion and isolation.¹⁴

5. African migrant women: change agents for development

Historically, strong African women, within and outside the African Diaspora, have shown commitment for change. In 1915, for example, Adelaide Casely-Hayford from Sierra Leone gave a public lecture on women's rights due to which many women joined the struggle to demand participation in the government. Still today examples of this kind of engagement can be found among women from the African Diaspora. For instance, the *Nigerian National Council of Women's Societies* (NCWS) launched a diaspora branch in the United Kingdom. NCWS is an organisation that was founded in 1958 to ensure Nigerian women's participation in public life.¹⁵

¹³ <http://www.gender-budgets.org/>

¹⁴ <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/go/bridge-publications/cutting-edge-packs/gender-and-migration/>

¹⁵ <http://www.ncws-ukdiaspora.com/about-2/>





Various African migrant women who have moved independently or with their family engage actively in development activities in their home countries. They feel the need to positively contribute to social change and development in the African continent. The examples are manifold. Among these are Fatoumata Diawara, an advocate of peace and women's rights, Semhar Araia, White House champion of change and founder of the



Figure 1 Semhar Araia

Diaspora African Women's Network (DAWN) and Erinma Bell, who was awarded The Queen's Golden Jubilee Award for her organization *Carisma*. Network organisations such as the *Diaspora African Women's Network*¹⁶ generally aim to promote the role of the diaspora in Africa's development, but also specifically try to advance women's leadership and empowerment. They organise networking events and bring together African Diaspora women with women's organisations in Africa¹⁷.

6. Spotlight: Diaspora women and peace-building

While African men and women in the diaspora are contributing to peace and reconciliation processes in their countries or

origin, women tend to be more active in this terrain. This could be the case because women and children are more likely to have first-hand experience with the direct effects of conflict on, for example, their family lives. The psychological and emotional connection that diaspora women share with victims of conflict stimulates them to take action towards conflict resolution and reconciliation. In recent years, these efforts have undergone a drastic transformation. What began as an emotional reaction to conflict in countries of origin has now evolved into a systematic and structured approach to conflict resolution, addressing also the economic and political factors behind conflict in the countries of origin.¹⁸

Originally, diaspora women used to engage in peace-building and development mostly by engaging in philanthropic work towards their country of origin. For many diasporas, philanthropy was a safe way to reconnect with their countries of origin without arousing distrust among local political leaders. Since the 1990s, many diasporas have engaged in small-scale philanthropic transactions in countries of origin and/or heritage. The philanthropic activities of diaspora women have included paying school fees, setting up cultural awareness and exchange programs or organising cultural days.¹⁹

¹⁸ Rigby, Andrew. 2006. "Civil Society, Reconciliation and Conflict Transformation in Post-war Africa". In Oliver Furley and Roy May, eds. *Ending Africa's wars: progressing to peace*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., pp. 47-61.

¹⁹ Lyons, Terrence. 2004. "Engaging Diasporas to Promote Conflict Resolution: Transforming Hawks into Doves." Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University.

¹⁶ www.dawners.org

¹⁷ <http://www.ncws-ukdiaspora.com/about-2/>



Although some organisations still maintain these activities, most diaspora women's initiatives have changed significantly over the years. A 2006 study commissioned by *Mama Cash*²⁰ showed for instance that migrant women in the Netherlands generally engaged in four areas of work in their homelands: micro-finance programmes, construction of women's centres, leading emancipatory campaigns or training courses and setting up literacy and vocational training programmes. *The Hague Declaration on Women and Peacebuilding*²¹ (June 2003) was one of the first to seek formal attention for the contribution of diaspora women to peacebuilding in their homelands from the Netherlands-based diaspora.

Part of the reason that diaspora women are so active and successful with these activities of promoting peace in their homelands is that they use a variety of mechanisms. Direct forms of peacebuilding activities include promoting dialogue between the elders of different clans, offering training on peacemaking tools and techniques and promoting an understanding of human rights laws in the country of origin. The indirect ways in which projects set up by diaspora women contribute to peacebuilding include increasing equal access to health and education facilities, especially in marginalised regions. In this way, the projects address the underlying

social factors of conflict. The positive developments within Europe towards the inclusion of diaspora women's organisations set a standard for effectively channelling the contributions made by diaspora women to peacebuilding processes²².

7. Concluding remarks

As described in this e-policy brief, "feminization of migration" is not to be understood as the absolute increase of women deciding to migrate. The way women migrate has changed, namely more independently than before. Also, women have specific reasons to live and work somewhere else, such as the wish to leave patriarchal societies, escaping from bad and abusive marriages, fleeing from domestic violence, and desiring equal opportunities.

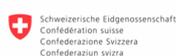
Migration can contribute to a desire for gender equality and empowerment. However, women are more vulnerable for risks such as violence, trafficking and prostitution if they come from poorer circumstances. Therefore, it is necessary to 'engender' migration policies and to look at this issue with a gender 'lens'. As with all gender mainstreaming programmes it is important to adhere to 3 prerequisites to be successful, namely: top-level support, the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, and having enabling mechanisms in place.

But having a gender sensitive approach towards women and migration is not only important in order to be aware of the support

²⁰ Rindoks, Aimee and Vonk, Esther (eds.). 2006. "She gives back. Migrant women's philanthropic practices from the diaspora". A study commissioned by Mama Cash.

²¹ "The Hague Declaration on Women and Peace-building: The Role of Women in Peace-Building and Reconciliation." Institute of Social Studies, the Hague, 12 June 2003.

²² Rindoks, Aimee and Vonk, Esther (eds.). 2006. "She gives back. Migrant women's philanthropic practices from the diaspora". A study commissioned by Mama Cash.





and protection women need. On the contrary, it just as important to see their potential as change makers. Many successful individual women and women's organisations can be seen in the field. Their contributions can be very valuable for development activities in their countries of origin.

