

Migration and Gender

The costs and opportunities of migration are not gender neutral. Acknowledging the central role that gender plays throughout the migration process and experience is the starting point for further development and execution of gender-sensitive policies that will both protect and empower women.

Between protection and empowerment

Women have always migrated in a similar proportion to men, making up roughly 48.4% of the global international migrant stock¹ - a percentage that has remained rather stable over the past decades.

However, the term 'feminisation of migration' has been coined to describe the increasing independent migration of women since the beginning of the 21st century. More women are now migrating independently in search of jobs, rather than in the context of family reunification.²

Nonetheless, the costs and opportunities of migration are not gender neutral.³ Men and women face different opportunities, and face gender-specific vulnerabilities to human rights abuses, exploitation and discrimination.

For instance, even though women make up slightly less than half of all international migrant workers worldwide, they make up 73.4% of the international domestic workforce.⁴ Being less visible and less regulated than most of the male-dominated sectors, this industry exposes women to a higher risk of being exploited. Situations of conflict and displacement provide further illustration of the heightened incidence of violence and abuse to which women on the move are subjected.

Conversely, migration also offers the potential for women to be more empowered, by allowing



them to access employment, education and financial resources. Educated women, unable to overcome labour discrimination in their own country, may migrate in search of an opportunity to find employment that is more likely to better utilise their skills, especially when they do not comply with certain gendered expectations, such as single mothers, unmarried women or divorcees.

Moreover, women may experience gender-specific motivations to migrate such as harmful traditional practices, from forced marriages to female genital mutilation/cutting.

On a more positive note, women's empowerment through migration can also translate into an increased role for them in development processes. In terms of developmental impact, studies⁵ on remittance behaviour have suggested that women remit a higher proportion of their incomes and there may be a marginally bigger flow of social remittances from female migration.⁶

From the available research and current practices, it can be deduced that migration policy-making's remit is twofold: it must boost empowering factors whilst reducing the impact of vulnerability.

Preliminary analysis points to the fact that while vulnerability is addressed by means of dedicated policies and protocols, for example in the area of

¹ UNDESA 2017

² Ghosh, J. (2009) "Human Development Research Paper 2009/04 Migration and Gender Empowerment: Recent Trends and Emerging Issues", UNDP Available at: www.hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdrp_2009_04.pdf

³ ILO 2013

⁴ ibid

⁵ For instance, S. Forbes Martin, "Women and migration, Background paper for the Consultative meeting on migration, mobility and how this movement affects women", United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, 2-4 December 2003

⁶ Fleury, A. (2016) "Understanding Women and Migration: A Literature Review", KNOWMAD Working Paper. Available at: www.atina.org.rs/sites/default/files/KNOMAD%20Understanding%20Women%20and%20Migration.pdf

trafficking, empowerment and agency measures lag behind.

The need for gender-sensitive policies

Acknowledging the central role that gender plays throughout the migration process and experience is the starting point for further development and execution of gender-sensitive policies.

The international community has recognised the importance of applying gender-sensitive approaches to development, as demonstrated by the inclusion of gender-specific targets in the Sustainable Development Goals and UN WOMEN, a set of recommendations for addressing women's human rights in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

Moreover, international human rights standards and existing frameworks have already included specific provisions for female migrants and how to ensure their protection. The UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their families, and the CEDAW General Recommendation No. 26 on women migrant workers, provide essential foundations for migration governance⁷ and should be considered and applied when developing any migration-related policy.

Policies are best suited if they address needs on different levels and do not treat migrants as a homogenous group. Employment policies, for instance, should consider how labour markets are segmented by gender and include measures that address the challenges linked to workers in the domestic sphere.

In addition to that, agencies dealing with migrants should provide separate facilities, especially for women and girls who are alone, in order to reduce the risks of abuse. When talking about gender in migration it is important to recognise that the issue is about changing dynamics and pre-ascribed roles between men and women for the improvement of development.

Including a gender dimension in public policies is to acknowledge that development cannot be

truly sustainable and inclusive until it encompasses and fosters the full economic, social and political empowerment and the leadership of women and girls.⁸

MIEUX's approach

As a capacity building facility, MIEUX has supported the development of migration-related policies on more than 30 occasions since 2009.

Based on this experience, MIEUX has witnessed how the topic of gender is often overlooked or misunderstood in favour of gender-neutral approaches due to lack of research and awareness in this area.

Through MIEUX's capacity building initiatives, the project is able to address this angle and develop a stronger understanding of the importance of gender sensitive approaches to migration policy-making.

Recently, MIEUX has been involved in Actions where the issue of gender was incorporated into the development of policies, which indicates a gradual conceptual shift.

The *Second National Integration Plan 2018-2022* in Costa Rica, the diaspora engagement policy that is currently being developed in Madagascar, the *National Migration Strategy* in Sierra Leone, and the development of the *Migration and Development Policy* in Mauritius are a few examples that illustrate this trend.

COSTA RICA (2017)

Objective

Analysis of the Costa Rican migration context 2017 and development of the Second National Integration Plan 2018-2022.

Framing of gender

The CSO "Gender and Society Foundation" was tasked with developing the Analysis using a gender-based approach to analyse gender-related migration phenomena. The Analysis calls

⁷ *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families*, adopted 18 December 1990, entry into force 1 July 2003, Available at: www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cmwr/cmwr.htm

⁸ UN WOMEN (2016) "*Recommendations for addressing women's human rights in the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration - Outcome of expert meeting in Geneva*"



for gender-sensitive policies, especially addressing gender-based violence.

The *Second National Integration Plan 2018- 2022* includes a specific focus on gender which recognises “*the existence of opportunity gaps between men and women that have been socially constructed. This approach also implies ensuring a differentiated approach for men and women, taking into account the particularities of each gender and the social implications that these entail.*”

Specificities and needs for migrant women, especially those who are victims of violence, are analysed and integrated into different strategic actions.

MADAGASCAR (2017 - ongoing)

Objective

Development of a diaspora engagement policy

Framing of gender

A preliminary study with gender-disaggregated data on the composition of the diaspora and remittance sending patterns had been produced by the Malagasy government.

This data will provide a strong basis for MIEUX to suggest how the specific objectives and measures of the policy have to be formulated and how the resources available can best be utilised in order to take into account gender specificities.

MAURITIUS (2018)

Objective

Development of the *National Migration and Development Policy and Action Plan*

Framing of gender

The policy contains the objective to mainstream gender aspects into migration management and policies.

Part of the policy measures aim to collect gender disaggregated data and reaching a better understanding of the special needs, interests and

concerns of female and male migrants.

Where do we stand?

Although these developments are still in the nascent stages, MIEUX's accomplishments can be considered a valuable step towards the recognition of the necessity to take gender into account in migration policies. The following section offers some recommendations for migration practitioners, including MIEUX, involved in current or future policy development interventions.

SIERRA LEONE (2017)

Objective

Development of the *National Migration Strategy of the Republic of Sierra Leone*

Framing of gender

Gender is considered a key cross-cutting issue that needs to be mainstreamed into migration management and development planning. It is clearly recognised that, “as migration affects men and women differently, gender needs to be mainstreamed as part of an effective migration management policy”.

Encompassing gender-sensitive policy objectives are set, both to mainstream gender into migration management and to ensure that migration policy benefits both men and women.

Migration policies and gender: a possible way ahead

Based on the implementation of previous Actions and the development of a number of migration policies, MIEUX proposes the following suggestions to successfully mainstream gender in migration policies.

More research is needed to analyse how sectoral policies at national and international levels affect migrant women and migration.

Gender should constitute an integral part of the research on understanding root causes of migration and on how policies can influence decisions to migrate.

More research is also needed **to better understand the specific push and pull factors for women** and be able to address resulting flows to specific regions or employment categories in an improved way.

Include and address multiple and complex reasons for female migration and gendered root causes in all policies developed in countries of origin and destination, and in thematic workshops.

Raise awareness about **current global frameworks and how their gender dimensions** affect and need to be integrated into national policies.

Include policy measures that **increase the protection of female migrants**, such as: developing visa schemes for domestic workers and care workers (Germany, Italy and the UK); extending national labour regulations to domestic work; or measures that reduce the dependency on the employer. For example, new rules in Sweden allow the applicant to attend a job interview through a job applicant visa.

Promote the **strengthening of social protection policies** to create a context that is conducive to women's empowerment.

Provide recommendations on **how other sectoral policies can mainstream gender elements**, such as the improved monitoring and enforcement of labour standards to reduce discriminatory practices in the workplace. Policies that should include a gender aspect in order to support women's empowerment and positive contribution to development are especially in the areas of: healthcare, labour market, investment and finances, development and education.

Moving forward, the **inclusion of gender focal points where possible and ministries working on**

gender issues is recommended. These ministries can advise on how their action plans and strategic documents should be taken into account for coherence purposes. MIEUX has always adopted a multi-stakeholder approach in order to ensure the sustainability of policies and to enhance cooperation between different institutions.

Organisations and institutions attempting to integrate gender perspectives into their policies should also aim at having **internal gender strategies** to ensure that not only their work is gender mainstreamed but that the entire institution is sensitive to this approach, which will ensure a more effective implementation of the policies in the long run.

When mainstreaming gender in policies, it is important not to equate gender to women/girls but **to recognise that gender is about men and women, and the changing of dynamics between them**. Gender mainstreaming is about working together to find common benefits in empowering men and women. Gender should not be viewed only as a set of issues that must be applied separately to migration policies for men and women.

Capacity building is needed to create a wider understanding of the benefits of improving structures and dynamics. MIEUX is a useful tool that can, on the one hand, sensitise partner countries to the importance by including gender in its capacity building activities and creating a stronger understanding of the relevance of including a gender perspective in migration policies. Every future intervention should include provisions on gender to underline its importance.

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