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**Launch Seminar of the Mediterranean edition of the Handbook  
on Establishing Effective Labour Migration Policies**

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**Introduction to Session 5: Gender sensitive labour migration policies**

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**Good morning ladies and gentlemen,**

The aim of this Session is to give attention to the increasingly important role women play in labour migration, to highlight some of the risks they face and to discuss policy options that take into account the gender aspects of labour migration.

When developing the Handbook, we decided to bring in the issues of specific significance to female migrant workers as cross-cutting issues and incorporate them where relevant in the Handbook.

Persons dealing with gender issues in the three organizations were consulted and they contributed both written inputs as well as comments which have been incorporated in the Handbook. Now in retrospect, a separate chapter or a more comprehensive section on the need for establishing more gender sensitive labour migration policies by both countries of origin and destination could have been included. But that will have to be in a new edition ...

However, to underscore the importance of policy-makers also paying attention to the need to develop more gender sensitive labour migration policies, we have devoted a separate session to this issue in this Seminar. As producers of the Handbook and organisers of this Seminar, we are very interested in hearing your views and policy responses to this important topic.

But, let me move to the Handbook itself.

In the **Introduction** there is a section on the Feminization of Labour Migration. It points out that almost half of the 191 million or so migrants in the world are women. The percentage of female migrants varies from about 43% in Northern Africa to about 52% in Europe (from year 2000 based on the UN International Migration Report 2002). From mostly migrating as spouses and family members, women are now, more and more, migrating to take up employment in destination countries. They have therefore become an increasingly important actor in destination countries as well as in their home countries as they are contributing to their economic transformations mainly through remittances.

The large majority of women migrate to take up gender-specific jobs, mainly in welfare and social professions such as teachers, nurses, social workers and domestic workers.

Their reason for migrating is very often family-oriented: a need to improve the economic conditions for their families, to feed and cloth their children, to give them a reasonable education and save for a house of their own; or then to join their husbands abroad and keep the family together.

Work opportunities abroad, especially in the high-skilled and skilled jobs has brought increased economic independence and improved self-esteem to many women, however many women still find themselves in jobs in the informal, unprotected, hidden and unregulated labour market due to the lack of legal migration opportunities. These jobs are often low paying and with little protection.

In **chapter 5 on Administration of Labour Migration** the Handbook discusses the different aspects that policy-makers need to consider when crafting a policy on labour migration. In countries with a sizable female migrant population, it suggests that policy-makers also ought to consider gender sensitivity - that is differences in socio-cultural roles, needs and opportunities, constraints and vulnerabilities of female migrant workers. To help prevent abuse and exploitation of female migrant workers, the Handbook recommends that migration policy should take into account the following issues:

- ✓ Which are the jobs/job sectors in which women are particularly exposed to discrimination and exploitation?
- ✓ Does the policy provide for identification and protection of female migrants in vulnerable jobs/job sectors?
- ✓ Does the policy consider the special needs of female migrants, like caring for family members and elderly at home?

In **chapter 6 on Foreign Labour admission policies** the Handbook discusses the situation of domestic foreign workers in particular.

Many female migrant workers take up domestic work more out of necessity than choice. The Handbook highlights the fact that in many countries domestic workers are excluded from labour legislation and that their working conditions remain unregulated. This places the domestic migrant workers in a very vulnerable and unprotected position as they become easy

targets for discrimination and exploitation, without having any or little legal means to fight back.

The Handbook therefore emphasizes that it is important for destination countries to introduce adequate policies that take into account the demand for foreign domestic workers and provide this category of workers with proper protection and means to acquire a regular status.

A regular status will provide female domestic workers with the opportunity to visit their children and other family members more frequently and makes it easier for them to return home as they still have the option to go back if they would need to. This will also make a difference on the high social costs that many young migrant workers and their home societies have to pay today as young children and other family members are left at home for long periods of time to fend for themselves.

The Handbook gives a number of fundamental steps for the protection of domestic workers that countries of destination may wish to consider to improve the conditions of this group of workers.

Furthermore, it cites some good practice examples from both destination and origin countries set up to reduce irregular migration and protect female migrants against various risks, for example, it mentions

- ✓ The Special Unified Working Contract for foreign domestic workers in Jordan – which is a legally enforceable contract (right to life insurance, medical care, repatriation, and treatment according to international human rights norms);
- ✓ The Live-in Caregiver Programme in Canada for employers and caregivers – which provides a legal migration channel for this category of employment;
- ✓ Information Resource Centres in countries of origin and destination (Tajikistan and Portugal) – information on employment risks including counter-trafficking information, their rights and obligation and where to seek help and advice;

It also acknowledges that trade unions in many western European countries today are providing their support to migrant female domestic workers.

To conclude, in **chapter 7 on Post-admission policies**, the Handbook addresses among other things the issue of discrimination. It points out that discrimination often has a double impact on women as most job opportunities for them are in the unregulated labour market where the protection systems are very weak against abuse and exploitation. To prevent discrimination and ensure social cohesion, it suggests several policy elements that policy-makers should consider. It also refers to several conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.