



## Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

### Gendered lives and labour migration policies

**Key note address by  
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Seminar on: Gender-sensitive labour migration policies

It's a great honour for me to speak here today on the topic of gender and labour migration. I'm pleased to see among us representatives from our participating States and partners ; experts and colleagues from other international organizations.

I salute the dedication and hospitality of the Slovenian Government for making this gathering possible, I warmly salute the Greek Chairmanship for creating a distinct momentum having both migration and gender equality on the agenda of the OSCE priorities, I salute also the awareness and professionalism of my two colleagues Goran Svilanovic and Eva Biaudet and their teams for the fruitful and inspiring co-operation on this project and for joining efforts to help translate OSCE commitments into practice by producing, together with my Section, guidelines for gender-sensitive labour migration policies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Migration is no longer a male phenomenon. Today, women account for at least one half and in some instances over one half of the migrants worldwide. Needless to say that, as such, the humanity is currently witnessing one of the most amazing, significant and interesting migration flows that ever existed. While it is increasingly admitted that migration issues are firmly located where class, race and gender intersect, recent studies are bringing evidence that ; more important than age, class, country of origin or country of destination ; more important than race and culture, gender is often the decisive factor in shaping migrants' experiences and contributions.

Gender refers to the socially constructed differences in the roles and social relationships between women and men. These differences between the sexes are shaped over time by societies based on their beliefs, ideologies, values...etc. Gender roles and relationships

change over time and across cultures. They affect directly –and in all countries and cultures- the quality of life of both women and men.

In the middle of the debate about the extent of the “feminization of migration”, important aspects have, with few exceptions, been largely ignored, such as the causes, nature, and quality of women’s migration into and within the OSCE area ; and most importantly whether the current migration policies are still adequate for both women and men.

Frequently, I hear that the fairness requests that migration regulations should be spelled out in a neutral, a gender neutral manner. Migration is often seen as dealing with the movement of persons, and a migrant worker is seen as a person engaged in a remunerated activity in a country of which he or she is not a citizen.

In reality, what is called “gender neutral” continues to be tailored according to the male norm and has not changed as a result of the shift in the proportion and the nature of female migration.

Women and men migrate differently, for different reasons, they use different channels.

As migrant workers, the same set of policies relating to admission, residence, work permit, access to the labour markets, entitlements and social benefits granted to each one of them - impacts on them differently.

Furthermore, the extra-professional gender roles migrants bring with them and that shape their behaviour and status, affect in a different way the migration experiences of men and women and the results of their migratory processes.

In other words, the position of women migrants workers in their host-country and their ability of adaptation in the host-society can be heavily impacted by the fact whether the standard regulations have been adapted to their “condition of women” or not.

Any gender neutral policy in this context is –to different degrees- rather a gender blind policy. A “gender-neutral” policy is, by definition, discriminatory against women, because it means just that: overlooking and ignoring their specific needs, concerns, aspirations and contributions and as such it might undermine, albeit unintentionally, their rights and potential benefits.

Hence the extreme **significance of gender analysis and gender mainstreaming in formulating and adjusting migration policies.**

In approaching the process of developing appropriate policies, a gender based analysis should look at the reality of migrant women at work, and should assess the differential – real or potential- impacts of any proposed or existing policies on women and on men. Separately and in relation to each others.

For example, it is crucial whether a woman has the possibility to migrate as an independent even if she is unskilled or whether she will be dependent for her legal

residency and work status on the status of her male family member or whether she will not make it through the standard selection criteria and opt for irregular, undocumented migration with all known consequences.

The gender perceptions and the status of women in the country of origin, result in different productive, reproductive and domestic roles assigned to men and to women. Very often, this proves to be determinant when it comes to any acquired formal qualifications that women migrant workers would bring with them and that might, even, impact on their ability to migrate in the first place.

A gender analysis in Canada concluded that gender stratification and limited education opportunities among candidates for migration in countries of origin can prevent women (more than men) from meeting Canada's criteria for the desirable worker's profile. As a consequence, in-depth analysis of the gender conditions in the countries of origin was recommended and selection criteria were developed in a way that would value female experiences and facilitate women's access to selection as independent legal immigrant workers with a set of skills.

Sufficient gender based analysis of the economic and social policies of major countries of origins and in particular their impact on the status of women, should be undertaken prior to the design of any recruitment mechanisms and labour migration programmes by the destination countries. In particular, anticipated impacts on women and on men of questions pertaining to the quality of recruiting agencies, the nature and profile of employment opportunities and who can access them, under which conditions, should be thoroughly assessed.

Unskilled – in some cases illiterate persons- make the majority of female migrants. However, women with higher education increasingly migrate autonomously as the main income providers for the family, as a consequence of gender-based violence, lack of human rights or economic opportunities. Despite this fact, the labour markets in receiving countries remain sex-segregated in a clearly disadvantageous way for women migrant workers and employees.

Analysis of the gender division of labour shows that the sectors that are open to the employment of migrant women are typically sex-segregated: horizontally as well as vertically. Horizontally: showing a high concentration of women in certain sectors of the economy: domestic work, entertainment, nursing, care-giving, restaurant and hotel services.. Vertically: attesting women's over-representation in the rather lower levels of the professional hierarchy in almost all sectors.

Efforts towards reforming migration policies must take into account this gendered evidence as such: migrant women, more than men, have limited prospects for socio-economic empowerment and tend to concentrate in the labour segments that are unregulated and often do not fall under national labour laws. They lack access to social services, including reproductive health services and are subject to harsh working and living conditions, low wages, and sometimes illegal termination of employment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is the shared responsibility of Governments in both countries of origin and of destination to conduct sound analysis and gender impact assessments of migration policies that will lead to reformed laws and policies for women migrants workers' rights.

Understanding the gendered implications of human migration is essential for the formulation of social and migration policies that not only accurately reflect the reality of but also serve women's lives, their safety, dignity, well being and empowerment.

Accurate research and gender based analysis when properly communicated to policy makers, have the potential to help correct discriminations and inequalities.

There are a number of good practices of gender-responsive migration policies.

Bilateral or multi-lateral agreements between sending and receiving countries can introduce procedures and minimum conditions of employment that ensure the protection of rights of female migrant workers, including those of domestic and other "undocumented" workers.

Regulation and improved supervision mechanisms for recruitment agencies can help protect women's rights, reduce the risk of trafficking and allow for redress and protection in cases of violations by employers or any agents.

The provision of adequate and regular checks on employers can give early warning and prevent cases of abuse.

It has been proved efficient in a number of countries, when recruiting agencies and employers associations signed to a code of conduct that safeguards workers' rights, respects regulations, adopts social protection measures and ensures capacity building programmes.

Measures to promote gender equality throughout the migration processes and to raise awareness for the general public, migration officers and policy makers are essential to inform and educate to the rights of migrant women, to undermine the menace of sexism towards them and make their contributions to the development of their communities and to the host-society visible and sustainable.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Beyond victimhood and beyond protectionism, mainstreaming gender considerations in policies does not mean: to favour women over male migrants. It is important to strengthen and ensure rights of both male and female migrants workers. However, women's labour experiences in the migration call for a special and additional attention, not only because of their disadvantages in the gender labour division in the markets, but also because, added to this, they usually experience another type of labour division that

regulates their private and domestic spheres and that, more often than not, undermine their human rights.

Virginia Woolf once said: “ As a woman, I have no country. As a woman, I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world”. Virginia Woolf articulated this vision at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at a time between two deadly World Wars, when disputes over boundaries were devastating and when exclusions and discriminations sent millions on the migration roads. Today, Woolf’s aspirations maintain a remarkable and poignant actuality for women in an increasingly fast, globalized and insecure world.

I would like to conclude on this note ; gender-sensitive, inclusive and equitable migration policies are required more than ever. And I am pleased to be here, today, among so many dedicated and knowledgeable individuals who are working on them.

Thank you.