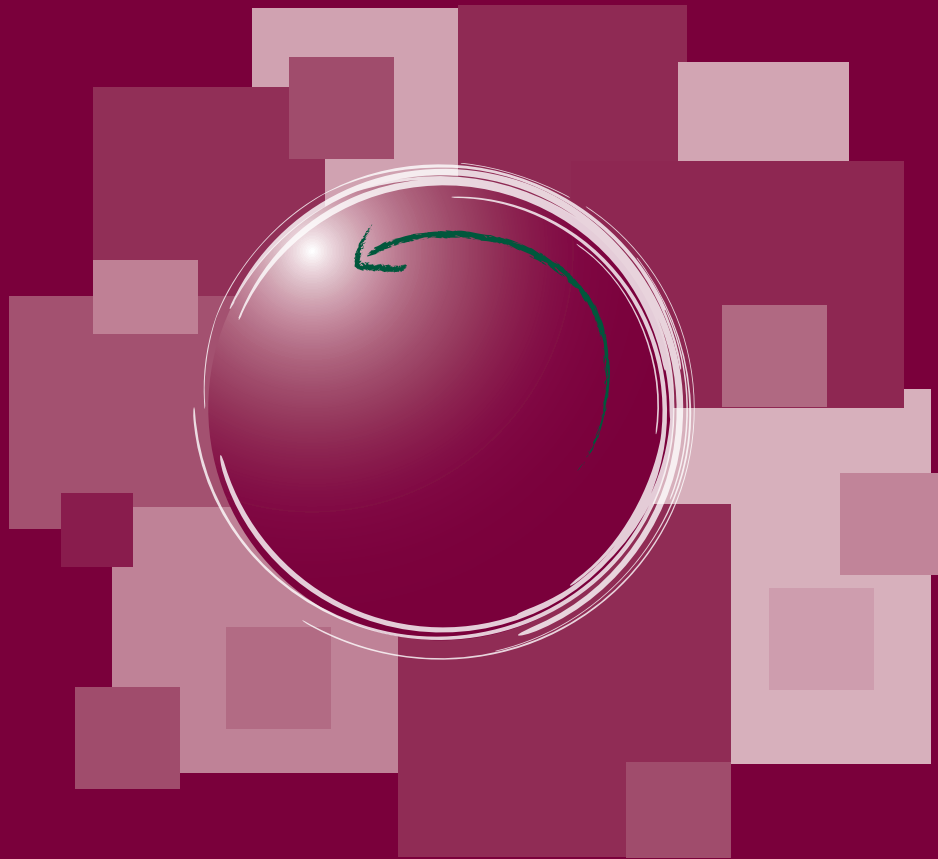


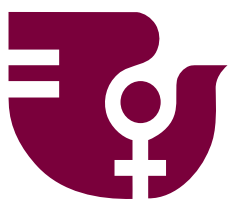
2004 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development

Women and International Migration



United Nations

Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Division for the Advancement of Women



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DESA

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Executive Summary

In its resolutions 54/210 of 22 December 1999 and 58/206 of 23 December 2003 the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to update the *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development* for consideration by the General Assembly during its fifty-ninth session. The present *World Survey* addresses key issues related to women and international migration.

The migration of women has always been an important component of international migration. As of 2000, 49 per cent of all international migrants were women or girls, and the proportion of females among international migrants had reached 51 per cent in more developed regions.

A gender perspective is essential to understanding both the causes and consequences of international migration. Gender inequality can be a powerful factor in precipitating migration when women have economic, political and social expectations that opportunities at home do not meet. Migration can be an empowering experience for women. In the process of international migration, women may move away from situations where they live under traditional, patriarchal authority to situations where they are empowered to exercise greater autonomy over their own lives. Women who remain behind when their husbands or children migrate often have to take on new roles and assume responsibility for decisions affecting the social and economic well-being of their households.

A dearth of data on women and migration makes it difficult to assess the full implications of international migration for women. Statistics on international migration, both legal and unauthorized, are far from reaching universal coverage and are often published without classification by sex or age. A better understanding of women and international migration requires improvements in data collection, dissemination and analysis.

Migrant women play a part in the economic development of both their country of destination and their country of origin through financial contributions from remittances, the improvement of their own skills or their contribution to the improvement of the education and skills of the next generation. Individual remittance transfers continue to be an important source of income for many families in developing countries. Migrant women may also influence the societies of origin by disseminating new values about the rights and opportunities for women.

Women often migrate officially as dependent family members of other migrants or as a future spouse of someone in another country. Female migrants are increasingly part of worker flows, moving on their own to become the principal wage earners for their families. Most women move voluntarily, but women and girls are also part of the flows of forced migrants who have fled conflict, persecution, environmental degradation, natural disasters and other situations that affect their habitat, livelihood and security.

Various international instruments specifically or generally enumerate the rights of migrants. International human rights conventions, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, provide important protection for migrant women and girls. During the past decade, a number of international, regional and national instruments dealing specifically with migration have been adopted, which include provisions applicable to migrant women. They include the International Convention on the Protection of the

Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Many national laws on emigration and immigration of voluntary migrants include discriminatory provisions that affect the protection of migrant women. Examples of discriminatory laws include provisions that deny permission or make it harder for female migrants to bring their husbands and children to join them, require pregnancy tests for female migrants, bar emigration of women without their guardian's permission and impose age limits on immigration or emigration of women and girls. Other legal provisions that may appear neutral can have a disproportionately negative impact on women since women tend to migrate more frequently in certain categories, such as domestic workers or agricultural workers, where local labour codes may not be in place or may not be enforced.

Refugee women and girls face particular problems regarding their legal and physical protection. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has issued guidelines on gender-related persecution that recognize that gender perspectives can influence the reasons behind and type of persecution or harm suffered by women. Many factors contribute to the vulnerability of refugee and displaced women and girls to sexual violence and exploitation. The traditional communal support systems for protection of widows, single women and unaccompanied minors may no longer exist in camp situations. Power relations in situations where women and children are dependent on aid may increase vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Equal access to food and other essential items is a key issue for refugee and displaced women and children, as is their participation in decisions regarding their future and that of their families.

The trafficking of people for prostitution and forced labour is one of the fastest-growing areas of international criminal activity and one that is of increasing concern to the international community. Women smuggled by traffickers may be led to believe that they will work in legitimate occupations but find themselves trapped into forced prostitution, marriage, domestic work, sweatshops and types of exploitation that constitute a contemporary form of slavery. Preventive activities must include education about the dangers of trafficking, in combination with the provision of economic opportunities at home and legal channels of migration for women who might otherwise resort to utilizing smugglers and traffickers.

International migration affects gender roles and opportunities for women in destination countries. In general, labour participation by female immigrants is lower than among the native population. Unemployment rates among women immigrants in the labour force are generally higher. Women immigrants tend to have lower earnings relative to male immigrants and "native-born" men. When the entire family migrates, mobility can lead to gender and intergenerational tensions. This is particularly the case when children adapt more quickly than their parents to a new language and social system. Migration can serve to reinforce traditional gender roles.

Some countries have laws that particularly disadvantage women migrants as well as "native-born" women who marry foreign men. Women may face difficulties in choosing their own nationality. The ability of male spouses to obtain the nationality of their new country may be restricted, even when women spouses of "native-born" men are permitted to naturalize. Such provisions violate international human rights law.

Migration can profoundly affect the health and well-being of both migrating women and women staying behind when their spouses migrate. The impact on women's health is complex, involving an interaction of broader determinants of health (including access to health care services) as well as the types of illnesses to which they are exposed. Women migrants who work in hazardous jobs face occupational health problems. Women victims of trafficking are at high risk of injuries and sexually transmitted diseases. Mental health problems, such as depression, may result from the trauma of their situation. Refugee women may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder with little or no recourse to adequate care, treatment or support owing to the lack of a social support network. The ability of female migrants to access appropriate and affordable health care to address these physical and mental health problems is largely determined by their economic status, their eligibility for health services and insurance coverage, and the availability of linguistically and culturally appropriate care.

The *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women and International Migration* sets out recommendations that, if adopted, will improve the situation of migrant, refugee and trafficked women. The recommendations include ratification and implementation of all international legal instruments that promote and protect the rights of migrating women and girls; review of national emigration and immigration laws and policies in order to identify discriminatory provisions that undermine the rights of migrant women; development of policies that enhance migrant, refugee and trafficked women's employment opportunities, access to safe housing, education, language training in the host country, health care and other services; education and communication programmes to inform migrant women of their rights and responsibilities; and research and data collection, disaggregated by sex and age, that improve understanding of the causes of female migration and its impact on women, their countries of origin and their countries of destination in order to provide a solid basis for the formulation of appropriate policies and programmes.

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