

**Statement by UN Women at GMG Preparatory event for the 19 September High-Level Plenary Meeting on the Large Movement of Refugees and Migrants  
“Protecting the human rights of all people in vulnerable situations within large movements”, organized by OHCHR and UNODC,  
Thursday 30 June, 10:00 -12:00 a.m.**

We would like to thank the permanent missions of Italy and Mexico and UNODC and OHCHR for co-organizing this meeting on protecting the rights of all people in vulnerable situations within large movements. As aptly stated by Italian Ambassador Cardi at a CSW side event organized by the GMG earlier this year, to “unleash the positive potential of migration” we must support initiatives for “women’s empowerment, in order to offer them the opportunities they need to fulfil their potential.” At UN Women, we have observed first hand Mexico’s commitment to the protection of the human rights of migrants. Mexico is one of 3 pilot countries where UN Women is developing a global project, funded by EU, on "Promoting and Protecting Women Migrant Workers’ labour and human rights". As part of the project, 900 representatives from government and civil society were trained on migration and gender.

At UN Women, we are encouraged by your support for the incorporation of gender equality issues and women and girls’ specific protection risks in these discussions.

It is important to reiterate that migrants and refugees are human beings entitled to the full protection and realization of their human rights. Human rights are universal, inalienable, indivisible and interdependent – and therefore apply to all female and male migrants and refugees irrespective of their legal status.

As eloquently stated by the Secretary-General Special Representative, Peter Sutherland, "we need to reassert our humanity by committing to concrete and ambitious outcomes... Behind each number ... is an individual, a girl dying on a

beach, sexual slavery imposed on unfortunate people, an adolescent boy who has dodged being drafted into a terrible war, or a mother trying to provide for her family."

We would also like to emphasize that, as reflected in the Secretary-General's report "In Safety and Dignity: Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants", women and girl migrants and refugees face specific protection challenges and risks, including sexual and gender-based violence, family separation, psychosocial stress and trauma, health complications (especially for pregnant women), physical harm and injury, and risks of exploitation.

It is key to underline that the lack of safe and regular migration channels often propels migrants into the hands of smugglers, where they lose their freedom of movement and decision-making power, leaving them in complete control of smugglers. In those contexts, migrant and refugee women and girls are often raped and forced into sexual servitude to repay "debts".

We would like to underscore that specific, gender-responsive policies are required to respond to the distinct needs, priorities and protection risks of refugee and migrant women and girls. To this end, we would like to make four specific policy recommendations:

1. Ensure the availability of gender-sensitive services in transit and destination; such as confidential GBV prevention and protection services, psychosocial support, trauma counseling, health care including sexual and reproductive health services, temporary shelter, sanitation and hygiene with separate facilities for women and girls.
2. Strengthen coordinated action on mainstreaming of gender-responsive policy making, programming and advocacy, by:
  - Institutionalizing the involvement of National Gender Mechanisms to participate in and advise inter-Ministerial national coordination structures and response planning.
  - Assisting local governments to promote positive attitudes towards refugees (based on non-discrimination/ gender equality), among

- host communities through communication campaigns and other local community engagement initiatives.
- Supporting the establishment of a regional network of local NGOs including women's organizations working on the response from countries of origin, transit and destination to share information and experiences, improve coordination and carry out joint advocacy on the rights of refugee and migrant women and girls,
3. Increase national capacity to effectively respond to the specific needs, and vulnerabilities facing refugee and migrant women and girls, including through:
    - capacity building of national service providers on issues of gender, GBV, women's and human rights;
    - increasing the number of field based staff, including gender and GBV experts, protection officers and female health workers, and female police officers;
    - building the capacity of national gender machineries local women's NGOs in humanitarian action
  4. Collect sex- and age-disaggregated data as part of the response to inform evidence-based programming and policy making.

Gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls, and the protection of their human rights need to be at the center of the deliberations and outcomes of the high-level plenary meeting on 19 September, and the subsequent efforts to address large movements of refugees and migrants.

Further, the normative gains in capturing the gender dimensions of human mobility (including the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, and CEDAW General Recommendation 26) should inform and be reflected throughout the High-level meeting. The outcome document of the High-level meeting must be gender-responsive and integrate gender equality consideration throughout.

In addition, the set of Principles and Practical Guidance on the human rights protection of migrants in vulnerable situations and in mixed and/or large movements that is currently being developed by the GMG Working Group on Human Rights and Gender Equality also needs to be gender-responsive to ensure

that the distinct protection needs of women and girls are addressed. UN Women as co-chair of this GMG working group is working to ensure that gender is mainstreamed across the principles and practical guidance.

We would like to point out that despite the risks and acute challenges they face, women migrants and refugees contribute in meaningful and integral ways to their countries of origin and destination. They bring energy, innovation and cultural diversity to their new communities. They fill key gaps in employment, thus keeping the economies of their destination countries vibrant and productive. They send remittances back to their home countries, a critical source of income for their families and a boost for productive activities and sustainable development. In fact, women contribute to half the global remittance economy (which stands at an estimated USD 530 billion), according to the latest World Bank figures.

It is therefore important to focus on the contributions of migrants and refugees and promote positive attitudes towards them among host communities through communication campaigns and community engagement initiatives based on principles of non-discrimination, solidarity and gender equality.

We would like to close by reiterating that the protection and realization of human rights needs must be at the center of the international cooperation on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants, and that addressing the particular vulnerabilities and needs of women and girls must be paramount in these efforts. It is crucial that the two global compacts and the outcome process address the contributions, vulnerabilities and needs of women refugees and migrants and their families, ensuring that their human rights are upheld. It must ensure that dedicated financial and human resources are available to support all the efforts in this regard.