



Fact-Sheet on the Impact of the Economic Crisis on Female Migration

A. Introduction

Gender plays an important role in all aspects of the migration experience. Women's opportunities to migrate legally have typically been more limited than men's. Women and girls also face different challenges and risks. Female migrants often face multiple discrimination on account of their nationality, immigration status as well as gender. The current economic crisis makes female migrants even more vulnerable to exploitation, discrimination and abuse.

B. Key findings

The extent of the impact of the economic crisis on female migrants varies by region and type of migration. So far, little concrete evidence is available on the magnitude of the impact. Women are well represented in both employment sectors hit by the crisis such as manufacturing, real estate, and the hotel industry, and at the same time in sectors that have not been negatively affected by the crisis or even expanded including health, social work, social and personal services, and education.

At the aggregate level, female labour migrants may have been less affected by the crisis than men. All the same, their presence in small percentages but non-negligible in absolute numbers, such as in the construction sector, should not be overlooked. Job losses, possible reductions in wages and poorer working conditions can be expected as employers seek to increase savings.

Many women are employed in the informal sector of the economy and are at increased risk of discrimination and exploitation. The plight of domestic workers not benefiting from the protection of labour laws in most countries deserves particular attention in times of crisis.

As competition for jobs increases, female migrants may be forced to accept inadequate terms and conditions of employment. This

applies as much to formally employed regular migrants as to irregular migrant workers in the informal economy.

Gender also plays a major role in the sending, receiving and management of remittances and thus in the development of communities in sending countries. While women typically send a larger percentage of their earnings home to their families, it remains to be seen how resilient these remittances will remain during the economic crisis. Women have been known to borrow money (and incur high lending fees) in order to send remittances to their families, or spend less money on themselves sacrificing their own comfort and well-being in order to support their families. During the economic crisis such behavior can be expected to continue or even increase if migrants are able and willing to work longer hours and take on extra jobs where available, postpone consumption and use savings in order to keep sending remittances.

C. Challenges

As the economic crisis continues, female migrants are likely to find it increasingly harder to obtain regular employment abroad. If they do find jobs, it is likely that the jobs will pay less and will have decreased benefits. This may impact the amount of remittances they will be able to send home which, in turn, will impact the quality of life on families who count on remittances to provide for food, health-care and education. Children and pregnant women may not receive the health care they need and girls may be forced out of school to help support the family.

In countries with already high child mortality rates, the decline in household income could further increase infant and child deaths and negatively impact maternal health.

Women who are unable to find employment through regular channels may resort to traffickers and smugglers, exposing themselves



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to exploitation and human rights abuses in sweatshops, the sex industry and domestic servitude where they may find themselves at increased risk of physical and mental health problems, including HIV/AIDS, yet lack adequate access to appropriate health-care information and services.

D. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Policy responses to cope with the effects of the current economic crisis should be comprehensive and should respect the rights of migrants, particularly female migrants who are typically more vulnerable. Female migrants should be viewed not only as workers or objects but also as human beings with rights. Policies should take into account not just the economic factors, but should also focus on the human and social dimensions. Migrants should be protected from discrimination and xenophobia and should not be made scapegoats of the economic downturn.

Regular migration channels should remain open and information on opportunities and risks should be made available to females contemplating migration to prevent irregular migration and trafficking. Female migrants should not become the innocent victims of the crisis. Migration must be factored into economic recovery plans and stimulus packages. Migration management policies should maximize the benefits of migration and take migrants into account.

The need to integrate the gender dimension in managing migration and to address the

particular needs of female migrants is essential to promote safer migration. It is especially crucial in times of economic crisis when immigration controls are tightened. The gender dimension should address family reunification issues to avoid the human costs of migration to female migrants and families left behind, especially children and the elderly. Women and

girls who return home should be assisted with reintegration into their communities and should be protected from stigmatization.

Timely and reliable data and culture, gender and age-sensitive research are essential for evidence-based policy making. This includes documentation of good practices, especially on the root causes of migration, the impact of the economic crisis on female migrants, and the effect of the crisis on migration and development.

Cooperation and collaboration between sending and receiving States is essential to ensure flexible and coherent policies that promote the orderly flow of migration and protect the rights of migrants.

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Prepared by: United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

For further information, please contact:
pdbinfo@unfpa.org