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Gender and migration

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Abstract

This paper examines in detail migration processes and feminization of migration in the Asia-Pacific region within the human development framework. It explores particular problems faced by female migrants such as policies hindering remittances, their social status vis-à-vis other migrants, lack of opportunities of collective bargaining and social protection. The paper finds that the effects of migration are context-specific and can be both positive and negative depending on factors such as norms and ideologies related to gender, identities, socio-economic and labour conditions, and institutional and legal policies. The author opines that support programmes in destination countries have yet to respond fully to the vulnerabilities and needs of female migrants even though it is widely recognized that migrants integrate best when they have access to social networks. The paper concludes with policy pointers and recommendations addressing migrant women's vulnerabilities and challenges faced by them, both in source and destination countries.

Key words: gender disparity, human development, migration, women workers

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations, including UNDP, or the UN Member States.

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Gender and migration

I. Introduction

In the Asia-Pacific region, the so-called feminization of migration started in the late 1970s when women began being employed as live-in domestic workers in the Middle East. By the mid-1990s women constituted up to 70 per cent of the migration flow to both the Middle East, and increasingly in East Asian industrializing countries such as Taiwan, Province of China, Singapore and Malaysia (UNRISD 2005). Overall, the estimated stock of Asian migrant populations is currently around 25 million, including both within and beyond the Asian region (Hugo 2005). In Japan, the Philippines and Thailand, in particular, women make up the majority of internal migrants (Jolly and Reeves 2005).

Given the growing feminization of migration in some sending and receiving countries, there is a need to understand the peculiar *gendered* migration processes of female migrants: the types of labour markets that absorb their services and their social position vis-à-vis other migrants, the terms of employment and working conditions, the obligations they continue to shoulder for families left behind, the kinds of risks they face when they opt to migrate through irregular channels, the gender-specific impact on their families, the different remittance dynamics, and the vulnerability and isolation that they may experience as they are socially and culturally located at the fringes of their host societies. While a good number of migrant women are able to tell how their hard work has enabled them to put their children in good schools, spurred new enterprises at home, and helped them attain respectable standing within their communities, there are stories of exploitative working conditions, de-skilling, discrimination, ‘dirty, dangerous and difficult’ types of work, sexual harassment and even forced labour. Heavy restrictions on migrants by receiving countries fuel irregular migration that often endangers and poses enormous risks to female migrants. Additionally, industries exploit irregular migrants’ vulnerability and profit from their cheap labour with weak labour rights and social protection – a situation where there might even be the complicity of governments. Irregular migration¹ places migrant

¹ “Migration that takes place outside the norms and procedures established by States to manage the orderly flow of migrants into, through, and out of their territories.” (IOM n.d).

women at risk of sexual harassment and exploitation as they are forced to live and work with unprotected rights.

It is in this light that international cooperation is a key to mitigate the adverse effects of female migration, to ensure safe mobility and to create conducive/enabling policy and working environments for migrant women. This report is therefore an attempt to understand the complex and contradictory conditions that migrant women encounter in the migration process from a gender perspective. It also seeks to examine existing international, regional and national policy instruments that address migration in the Asia-Pacific region in general and female migration in, in particular.

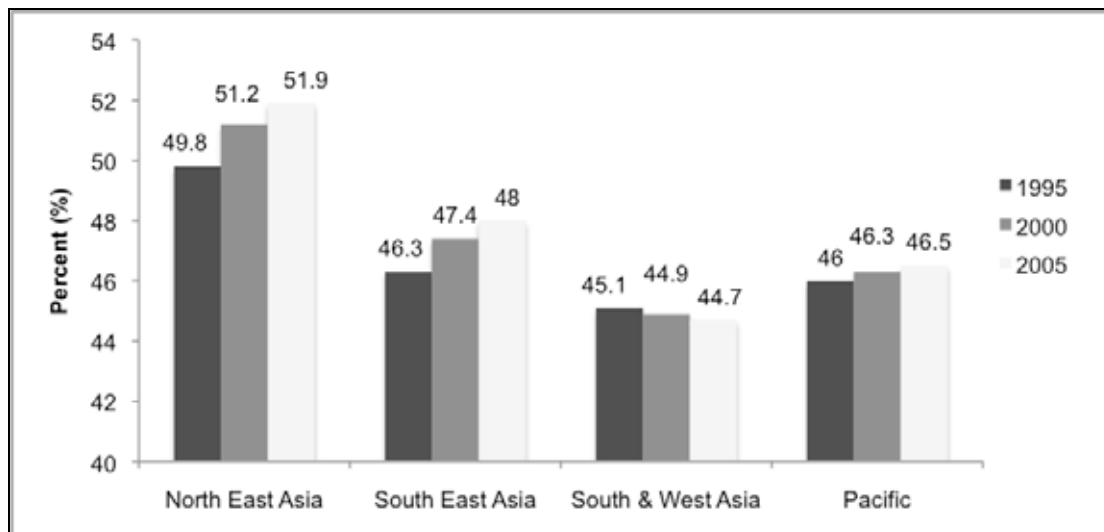
The report will review the feminized migration patterns in the Asia-Pacific region and examine the types of occupation, in which female migrants are most concentrated, remittance practices, and current discourses on the usefulness of remittances for development as well as the effects of migration on left behind families in origin places. Finally, the report will revisit international and regional instruments and platforms that address migration issues in both sending and receiving countries from the perspective of the rights and needs of female migrants.

Regional Gender-differentiated Migration Patterns in Asia-Pacific

Migration stock patterns in the Asia-Pacific region over time indicate that women's flows are positive, and in a number of sub-regions, almost equal men's migration stock. Except for South and West Asia, all UNESCAP sub-regions² registered an increasing percentage rate of female migrant stock from 1995 to 2005. Figure 1 below presents this trend.

²**North East Asia:** Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, China (SAR), Macao, China (SAR), Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Republic of Korea, Lao PDR, Mongolia and Viet Nam; **South East Asia:** Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste; **South & West Asia:** Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka; **Pacific:** Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu

Figure 1: Female migrants as percentage of all international migrants in UNESCAP sub-regions, 1995, 2000 and 2005



Source: UN Population Division (2006). Trends in Total Migrant Stock. The 2005 Revision.

Female migrant stock in the Asia-Pacific region is slightly below 50 per cent, thus men continue to dominate migration flows. The share of women in the migrant stock in the Asia-Pacific region has nevertheless increased by a maximum of 6.8 per cent within a ten-year period, from the lowest percentage in South and West Asia in 1995 (45.1 per cent) to the highest percentage in North East Asia in 2005 (51.9 per cent).

Recent demographic estimates also show that migration in Asia has been increasingly intra-regional (ILO 2007). Nearly one-fourth of the estimated 25 million Asian migrant populations worked in East and Southeast Asia in mid-2000. Hugo (2005) roughly classifies countries and territories in Asia according to the following international migration categories: 'Mainly emigration' (Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Vietnam); 'mainly immigration' (Brunei Darussalam, Hong Kong, China (SAR), Japan, Macao, China (SAR), Malaysia, Singapore, Republic of Korea); and 'both significant immigration and emigration' (Thailand). Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand are also considered transit countries. Female migration in emigration and immigration countries will be discussed at length below.

Table 1 shows that the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Indonesia send more female than male migrant workers to various destinations (see also Ghosh 2009; Yamanaka and Piper 2005; Asis 2005).

Table 1: Proportion of Women Among Emigrants in Selected Migrant-sending Countries

Country of Origin	Year	Percentage of Female Migrants Among Emigrants	Sources
Philippines	2005	65%	Department of Labour data (Opiniano, Jeremiah 2005.)
Sri Lanka	2002	75%	Weeramunda, (Joe) A. J(2004).
Indonesia	Between 2000 and 2003	79%	UN (2006)
Lao PDR	2005	55% (registered migrant workers in Thailand)	Huguet, Jerrold. W. and Punpuing, Sureporn (2005).
Nepal	2005	5%	Seddon, David (2005).
Bangladesh	1999	12%	Siddiqui, Tasneem (2001)

The increased number of women migrants in the region in the 1990s, “making female migrants outnumber male ones in Indonesia and the Philippines at the end of the decade”, has heated the issue of protection for women migrant workers as their vulnerable situation comes from the fact that they are both “migrants and women” (Chantanavich 2000). Acharya (2003) observes a similar trend in Cambodia where women made up 56 per cent of “very recent” migrants to Phnom Penh, as revealed by the census.³ This is evidently in response to the opening up of numerous garment and shoe factories in the capital. These establishments began to attract rural women to such jobs in the mid-1990s (Acharya 2003).

The trends seem to show that most countries in South and West Asia are source countries for labour migrants who have historically migrated to work in Gulf countries but are increasingly moving to Southeast Asia. India, in particular,

³ The demographics in Cambodia, however, indicate a slightly higher number of women, especially female-headed households, because of the high number of male deaths during the war-torn years.

continues to export skilled professional labour to North America and Europe. Cross-border movements among countries in this sub-region continue to intensify, especially to India as a destination country. Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh are major sources of migrant workers (IOM 2005). In Bangladesh, there has been a recent and dramatic rise in female migration, from 2,730 in 2004 to 18,880 in 2006 (Bangladesh Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training 2007). The steep climb in numbers is attributed largely to underestimation in past documentation of female migrants (Blanchet et al. 2008)⁴. Bangladeshi female migrants move to work for domestic service in the Middle East, most of them concentrated in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (Bangladesh Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training 2007).

According to a study by the Nepal Institute for Development Studies in 2002, approximately 170,000 Nepalese were in East and Southeast Asia, 10,000 in North America, 36,000 in Europe, and over 465,000 were working in Saudi Arabia and Qatar (Seddon 2005). Majority of Nepali female migrants were concentrated in Hong Kong, China (SAR) (44per cent) and Japan (9per cent), and with the rest in Southeast Asia, the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Bahrain. Most of them were domestic workers or in other areas of the services sector (Ibid).

Hugo (2005) estimates that 8.7 million temporary contractual workers living and working in the Middle East consisted of Indians (36per cent), Pakistanis (11per cent), Bangladeshis (21per cent), Sri Lankans (10per cent), while the rest were Filipinos (17per cent) and Indonesians (5per cent). Most workers in construction and infrastructure projects are migrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in the Gulf States, while female domestic workers come from Sri Lanka and Indonesia (Asis 2005). Almost 90per cent of Pakistani temporary migrants are engaged in contractual semi- to low-skilled employment in the Gulf countries (Islamic Development Bank 2006).

Although many migrants from South and West Asia continue to find work in the oil-rich countries in the Middle East, beginning in the 1990s, more workers moved to better-paying jobs in Southeast and East Asia (Yamanaka and Piper, 2005). The

⁴ This could also explain the low percentage of female migrants in Table 1.

attractive destinations are Hong Kong, China (SAR), Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan and Taiwan, Province of China. A large number of the migrants also work in the oil palm plantations of Malaysia, or as female domestic workers in Singapore, and in the construction industry in the Republic of Korea. Sri Lankan women work in Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong, China (SAR) as domestic workers (Islamic Development Bank 2006). Still a few work in fish farms – case of Lao PDR and Thailand. One migration study reveals that Vietnamese and Chinese migrants use Lao PDR as a transit point to other countries. Thailand is also a buffering station for many Vietnamese female migrant workers who temporarily work there to earn enough money to pay for migration fees to higher income countries such as Japan or South Korea (Yen 2008). Majority of Indonesian female migrants move to Hong Kong, China (SAR), Malaysia, Taiwan, Province of China and Singapore (Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration Including Human Trafficking 2008).

In a study on women and migration in the Pacific island states, Connell (1994) concluded that while many women migrate either with or to join their husbands, women are increasingly traveling as individuals for reasons of their own, such as for economic purposes, marriage or to flee from natural hazards. Several country-specific and local studies suggest some important dimensions of female migration, such as some of those cited below.

Women land in a variety of skilled jobs in their countries of destination. Connell's study (1994) identified female migrants from the Cook Islands and Tokelau who migrated to New Zealand and became domestic workers. He also studied women migrants from Papua New Guinea who became employed as nurses, teachers and clerks.

In Fiji, a study by Chandra (2000), noted that more women than men were migrating. Immigration data from Australia also supported this view: Indo-Fijian women represent about 52-57 percent of all Indo-Fijian migrants for the period of 1990-2001. The same study noted that in Fiji, young women (15-30 years of age) migrated more than men in the same age group. In a more recent study on Fiji, Walsh (2006) links the increase in the number of female migrants from 1995 to 2002 (especially for

those aged 15 -24) to young women migrating as students, or for employment, especially as nurses in other countries.

A study of skilled female migrants from Fiji to Kiribati and the Marshall Islands noted that they worked as hotel workers, teachers, dentists and dental therapist, and as civil servants (Rokuduru 2007). It is significant to note that some Pacific island female migrants work as civil servants in other countries in the region. However, the majority are nurses who migrated due to the attraction of huge wage differentials in the nursing occupation between Fiji and the two host countries, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands.

Substantial population movements from the remote rural areas to the urban centers characterizes internal migration in the island microstates in the Pacific. Rural-to-urban migration has been pushed substantially since the post-independence establishment of urban-centered national bureaucracies and public services infrastructures for education, health and other service sectors in the 1960s (Khadria 2007a). Public sector employment, in the particular context of Pacific island states, is highly concentrated and oriented towards the urban centers, and has subsequently dominated the formal economy everywhere.

With the growing limitation of the public formal sector to meet the burgeoning demand for employment of migrants in urban areas, the informal sector is beginning to emerge as an important source of employment in cities such as Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Kolkata and Dhaka (Yap 2003). Small-scale manufacturing and home-based businesses have spurred informal sector jobs such as domestic work, cooking, tailoring, carpentry and handicraft production, cigarette production, food preparation and vending. These generate considerable employment for the youth and women. In the informal market sector in particular, women predominate because of gender discrimination in the formal jobs sector, limitations in education and skill and their ability to combine informal income-generating activities with domestic responsibilities. These jobs, however, are seasonal and poorly rewarded. Today, the flip side of the rise of the non-formal economy associated with unplanned urbanization has been the rise of crime and an expanded sex industry with its own share of health and disease problems in the Pacific island nations (Connell 2002).

Hong Kong, China (SAR) and Japan are the topmost migrant workers' destinations in North East Asia (UN 2006). Migrants constitute close to half the population of Hong Kong, China (SAR), whereas in Japan, they constitute only 1.6 per cent of the population. The table below shows the percentage of female migrants in destination countries in the region.

Table 2: Female Migrants as Percentage of All International Migrants in Major Destination Asia-Pacific Countries, 1995, 2000 and 2005

	Percentage (%) in 1995	Percentage (%) in 2000	Percentage (%) in 2005
Australia	50	50.8	51.6
Hong Kong, China (SAR)	51.5	53.9	54.0
Japan	50.2	52.9	53.8
New Zealand	50.3	51.3	52.5
Singapore	50.3	50.3	50.3
Thailand	42.1	50.4	56.8
Republic of Korea	47	50.1	53.5
Total Percentage Average	48.8	51.4	53.2

Source: UN Population Division (2006). Trends in Total Migrant Stock. The 2005 Revision.

The growth rate of the total percentage average of female migrants from 1999 to 2005 is 4.4 per cent. This indicates that the number of migrant women is steadily rising in these destination countries. Japan is the destination country of the third largest number of overseas Filipino workers (285,977), after the United States and Saudi Arabia, representing one-third of all foreign workers in Japan (Philippine Overseas Employment Agency 2006). Athukorala (2006) additionally points out that the Migrant Labour Dependency Ratio⁵ in Japan, Republic of Korea, and China has increased in recent years, indicating greater dependency of these countries' economies on imported labour.

More than at any other time, current evidence shows that growing numbers of women in the Asia-Pacific region have been making the move. Beyond what the numbers actually show are the complex processes and problems women undergo in order to

⁵ The Migrant Labour Dependency Ratio is defined as the number of migrant workers per 1,000 workers in the labour force (IOM 2008b)

migrate and ensure that migration is a beneficial experience for them: decision-making, labour employment issues, sustained remittances and obligations to their left-behind families, the prospect and implications of migrating for marriage, support networks and institutions, and policies in both sending and receiving countries that govern the conduct of their lives as both women and migrants. These will chiefly be the concerns of the forthcoming sections.

III. Thematic Issues on Gender and Migration in the Asia-Pacific Region

A. Decision-making and the Migration Process

Migration has become an increasingly important component of economic and social development in the Asia-Pacific region. Migration is being driven by greater and widening economic disparities within and between countries, as well as globalizing forces that open new opportunities and risks. Sources of household incomes are increasingly multi-locational, as migrants engage in multiple livelihood and occupational portfolios through both internal and international migration (Resurreccion and Elmhirst, 2008; Resurreccion and Sajor, 2008).

Internal and international migrations are in fact linked in a number of ways. First is in step migration, which is when migrants choose to move first to one or two locations within their own country prior to emigration to another country. They move to these locations to fill in jobs that had been abandoned by others who have moved to other countries (IOM 2008b). Step migration has been observed, for example, in the Indian state of Kerala, where the vacuum left by skilled workers who left for Gulf countries has been filled in by migrants from neighboring states (Rajan and Zachariah 2005). Second, the distinction between internal and international migration blurs with cross-border mobility of people to neighbouring countries that assumes the character of internal migration, particularly in those cases where passports and/or visas are not required by law, say for example, between India and Nepal, or India and Bhutan, or Bhutan and Nepal (Khadria 2005).

There are, however, specific vulnerabilities associated with international migration and internal migration. Legal documents and processes accompany the pathway towards international migration. Migrants without proper legal documents may drive them to seek irregular ways of migrating and in turn, may subject them to abusive and

corrupt practices of unregistered recruiters who may charge onerous fees, may be ‘fly by night’ entities who do not honor commitments for paid for services, or may traffic women and children into slave-like and covert types of exploitative labour. Irregular migrants may become bonded labourers to employers who threaten to expose their illegal status. Otherwise, state policies may actually encourage bonded labour of some kind. For instance, a comparative study on Lao, Burmese and Isan migrants working in shrimp farms in Surat Thani Province, Thailand, revealed that Burmese migrants more than Isan or Lao migrants, are bonded to employers not because they were irregular migrants, but because Thai immigration law penalizes employers who do not register their migrant employees (Resurreccion and Sajor 2008).

Internal migration, on the other hand, may overlook particular vulnerabilities and sidestep residence rights of rural migrants living and working in cities. With the increasing influx of migrants into cities, urban poor slums are on the rise due to insufficient housing, and tend to locate themselves in marginal areas of big and medium-size cities where they engage in urban petty trade and in irregular informal sector services, with limited social protection (Resurreccion, Sajor and Fajber 2008). Already lacking in basic water supply and sanitation facilities, they are most vulnerable to disease and generally live under insecure economic, social and settlement conditions. Shouldering both livelihood and responsibilities of care, migrant women often experience poverty and insecurity in disproportionate terms (Han and Resurreccion 2008; Moser 1998).

International and internal migration constitute different types of migration with their respective benefits and vulnerabilities often contingent on conditions influencing the migration process, their linkages with left behind families, and the types of work they embark on in places of destination. Below are types of migration that women, men and children may engage in.

Box 1: Types of migration

- Orderly permanent migration, which is legal migration from one country or area to another without eventual return.
- Return migration, where migrants return to their country or area of origin, either voluntarily or involuntarily, after spending a period of at least one year in another country.
- Forced migration, in which the movement of the migrant is involuntary and usually the result of events such as natural disasters, armed conflicts or other displacement.
- Irregular migration, whereby migrants seek to gain a new country or area of residence through illegal means. This can reflect individual movement without intermediaries; or smuggling, which is the assisting in illegal migration to another country with the goal of receiving material benefit for the services provided; or trafficking, which is the forced migration of people through the use of coercion or fraud.
- Very short-term or seasonal migration, as a result of the search for livelihood and productive income opportunities, which is an increasingly prevalent feature of many developing societies. This includes seasonal migrants, frontier workers and even very long distance weekly commuters.

Source: Ghosh 2009, 10

The decision to migrate is a complex one. Household relations affect decision-making: who manages to migrate, for how long, to which destinations, nature of networks that enable migration, and a continued sense of obligation to left behind families and kin.

A study by Rokuduru (2007) significantly noted that while majority of Fiji female migrants decided to migrate jointly with their spouses, a substantial percentage of female migrants (31 percent) – mostly nurses – solely decided to travel for employment, partly due to existing spousal differences and domestic tensions. In Fiji, while family migration was crucial, widowed, divorced and single women also traveled for employment, family reunions, vacation and marriage. Pangerl (2002) suggested that while men were more likely to migrate due to economic insecurity and the desire to improve their family's lifestyle, female Indo-Fijian migrants, on the other hand, also listed personal and physical insecurity, apart from economic security, as

reasons for migration. In Kiribati, Connell (1994) noted the possibility of women migration to avoid familial and church pressures on enforced marriages.

On the other hand, in some contexts, women may have little influence over decision making in the household, and it is possible that parents or older siblings compel younger women to move to search for job opportunities in distant places. Young women, more than men, are generally perceived to be dutiful and thus to be relied upon to faithfully remit their earnings once they find jobs in cities or in overseas placements (Boyd and Grieco 2003). Other factors beyond the household also influence the decision to migrate, such as: community norms and cultural values that may constrain or even prevent women from migrating, displacements caused by economic turns and shifts in production technologies such as the current financial meltdown that threatens to repatriate migrant workers, increasing climate change effects, the quality and nature of labour markets in one's country, the laws and policies in place that mediate, enable and constrain the migration process in both sending and receiving countries (; IOM 2008a). Burmese female migrants, meanwhile, cited their persecution as ethnic minorities, severe economic hardship, family pressures to marry, and family conflicts as reasons that drove them to migrate to Thailand (Punpuing 2007).

Oishi (2002) argues that the migration of women is enabled through macro-state and micro-level conditions. At the macro scale, some countries do not restrict male migration but have severe restrictions for female migration. For instance, in Myanmar and Bangladesh, women are still legally required to secure explicit permission from father or husband in order to apply for a passport. At the household level or micro scale, social norms and context mediate the capacity of women to migrate. Oishi further argues women in societies are not given much freedom of mobility are typically not sending countries for migrant women. Strong religious restrictions govern the mobility of women in Bangladesh. On the other hand, state control in Myanmar generally constrains the movement of people and together with patriarchal norms, specifically limits and controls women's mobility.

Additionally, binary views in migration studies often classify migration experiences as either being 'coercive,' or 'voluntary.' Growing consensus in migration studies

however emphasizes that these views are unable to capture the complexities of the migration experience, as it is often ambiguous and does not fall under any one category (Jolly and Reeves 2005).

B. Gendered Migrant Labour Employment

Recent trends show that more women are making the move. Philippines, Sri Lanka and Indonesia deploy more female than male migrant workers (Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration Including Human Trafficking 2008). Hong Kong, China (SAR) has one of the highest percentages of female migrants. Many of these female migrants work as paid domestic helpers for private employers. The following sub-sections will discuss the diversified areas⁶ where female labour migrants are most concentrated in host countries and in places within their own countries. These discussions will show the pervasiveness of gendered definitions of work in varied places, ‘niche-making’ for migrant women in the global labour market, and the implications of gender on migrant women’s employment security.

(a) Domestic Work

Globally, most women migrants generate incomes by taking up unskilled jobs, often poorly paid and performed in the domestic or private domain of the home. These jobs tend to be devalued economically and looked down socially as they are associated with women’s reproductive responsibilities (Piper 2005). Domestic workers are thus usually not fully recognized as workers⁷.

The major patterns of movement of domestic workers in countries of South East Asia alone involve at least more than two million women mainly from the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka (Hugo 2005). A summary table that indicates the number of migrant domestic workers that are sent and are received by selected countries in Asia

⁶ Recent discussions on the feminization of migration draw attention to the diversified and stratified nature of women’s migration: they have several types of employment in different labour markets, and, these types of employment are hierarchically positioned according to the social status, skills, and assets of female migrants (Regional Thematic Working Group 2008).

⁷ Domestic workers work under the employment of private employers, are confined to private homes, largely perform domestic tasks, observe flexible working hours, and are usually unregulated in terms of state legislation and policies for worker benefits, tenure and terms of employment. They are also unable to organize themselves in the same manner as workers organize themselves in trade unions for the redress of low wages and unjust terms of employment. Their contributions to the host country’s GDP are also undocumented.

is presented below.

Table 3: Migrant Domestic Workers Sent and Received in Selected Asian Countries

	Period	Migrant Women Sent as Domestic Workers	Migrant Women Received as Domestic Workers	Sources
Indonesia	1999-2001	691,285		(IOM 2003)
Philippines	2001-2004	4.2 to 6.4 million		(Wee and Sim, 2004)
Sri Lanka	2007	102,176		(Dissanayake 2008*)
Cambodia	1998-2006	3,703 (to Malaysia)		(Lee 2007)
Myanmar	2006	55,496 (to Thailand)		(Punpuing 2007)
Hong Kong, China (SAR)	2000		202,900	(IOM, 2003)
Singapore	2005		63,000 (from Philippines) 60,000 (from Indonesia) 13,000 (from Sri Lanka) 136,000	(Human Rights Watch 2005**)
Malaysia	2002		155,000	(IOM 2003)
Brunei Darussalam	2005		102,176 (cleaners; 47per cent of all emigrants)	(Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration Including Human Trafficking 2008)

*Official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sri Lanka

** From interviews with Embassy officials

A domestic worker “is a wage earner working in a private household, under whatever method and period of payment, who may be employed by one or several employers” (Punpuing 2007). Domestic work is often considered to be unproductive work and economically invisible because of the following: (i) it is work that does not create

value because the immediate products are consumed; (ii) it takes place in the 'private' sphere of the household; (iii) it is not reflected in national accounts because it is seen as lying outside the monetary economy; and, (iv) it is perceived as 'women's work' rather than a shared responsibility among women and men and the State (Ibid). Additionally, female migrants fill in the traditional responsibilities of female nationals in households of receiving countries, freeing them up to engage in skilled and professional work, which increases household income and enhances the development capacity of receiving countries (Khadria 2007b). Piper (2005) adds that the significant increases in female labour participation have created a need for social services, especially where mothers of young children work full-time. Migrant domestic workers are high in labour supply and cost less than public care services. This suggests that there is ample supply of domestic workers to address the growing need for them. They also have very little and arbitrary labour rights and they often depend on the good will of their employers.

Domestic workers, in particular, are difficult to sample as they are spread throughout places as 'invisible workers'. A study on Cambodian female migrants in Malaysia noted that domestic workers tended to be more vulnerable than those employed in factories or who worked as restaurant waitresses. Their freedom of movement is severely curtailed by their employers on whom they are dependent for food, money, shelter and human company (Lee 2007). Most domestic workers are socially isolated and therefore rely on their employers and their families for company, although in many places such as Singapore and Hong Kong, China (SAR), they meet with other domestic workers during weekends.

Due to the financial meltdown of 2008 that caused an export crisis and massive unemployment in China, migrant women professionals in China's Guangzhou Province who earlier moved for employment opportunities in recent years are seeking jobs as domestic workers (Foreman and Cao 2009). For example, Home EZ Services in Guangzhou's southern business center that trains and places domestic workers, has been receiving university graduates as applicants. Since August 2008, 90 per cent of the 600 women who have applied for domestic work placements have higher education degrees.

(b) *Professional Services in Care and IT Industries*

The migration of highly skilled professionals has been increasing since the early 1990s. This appears to be the result of the global labour demand and supply of skilled migrants and evolving government policies that enable such movements. About 10 per cent of all highly skilled persons from developing countries live in either Europe or North America (IOM 2008b).

Definitions on highly skilled labour vary. Most definitions consider educational attainment (usually completion of tertiary education), competency and occupation. In the EU, highly skilled migrants grew from 15 per cent of all migrants in 1991 to 25 per cent by 2001 (Ibid). Since Asian-born migrants register as the largest internationally mobile population, it is not surprising that the largest number of highly skilled migrants also come from this contingent. In most European Union countries, Canada and the United States, Asians are the biggest group of tertiary educated foreign-born adults (Docquier and Abdeslam 2006).

Globally, highly skilled women have tended to enter jobs broadly defined as the 'welfare and social professions' (education, health and social work), which are traditionally female jobs (Piper 2002). UNESCAP (2002) reports that there will be more female migration in the healthcare sector, such as in nursing and physical therapy. The recourse to recruiting migrant nurses in response to the crisis in the nursing profession has created a global job market, especially in United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada and the United States. The Philippines supplies the majority of nurses working in these countries. Industrializing countries in Southeast Asia do not yet show signs of importing nurses from neighboring countries. However in Japan, because of decreasing pensions, admitting migrant workers may be a viable option (UNESCAP 2002). In the recent Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement, Japan will accept up to 400 Filipino nurses and 600 caregivers per year for two years once the agreement enters into force (Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration Including Human Trafficking 2008). Thus, migration oriented towards the health care and health services sector are dominated largely by female migrants embedding themselves in the 'global care chain,' which in turn also frees other women to participate in the local labour markets (Van Eyk 2005). Public Sector International (PSI), a global federation of public sector trade unions has

conducted studies on the health sector. Their studies revealed that the health sector continues to be undervalued, where female health workers struggle with heavy workloads, low wages, violence in the workplace and the additional responsibility of caring for their families. They resort to migrating for overseas jobs as nurses and health care givers. The PSI researches (Van Eyck 2003, 2005) show that despite their status as “professionals,” many nurses and other health care workers do not earn a living wage. Poor conditions of work may also be prevalent in both the North and the South. The studies on women as international health workers documented by PSI show that women often shoulder heavy workloads due to understaffing and the lack of adequate medical supplies. They are also vulnerable to communicable diseases that make health care work extremely precarious. They also frequently encounter racial and gender discrimination in host countries.

In China, emigration rates of all highly skilled individuals with a university education for the OECD and non-OECD countries were pegged at 3.2 per cent. This suggests that the outward movement of highly skilled persons (estimated at 1.7 million) has implications on ‘brain drain,’ which Chinese policy makers will eventually have to confront (Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration Including Human Trafficking 2008). Meanwhile, economic development in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic is increasingly constrained by the out-migration of 37 per cent of all highly skilled workers, thus rendering the country the fifth highest level of ‘brain drain’ worldwide (Schiff and Ozden 2005). Nurses from Melanesia are increasingly migrating to the Marshall Islands, Palau, New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates (World Bank 2006a).

In education, Thailand is currently hosting an increasing number of Filipino English teachers. There are currently more than 3000 groups of Filipino teachers in Thailand whose population is increasing due to the growing number of international schools, as well as English teaching programmes in Thai schools. Although no official record registers them as a distinct professional category, these teachers are estimated to be about 3000, and are probably mostly women (Cadias 2008). These groups organize a long shared concerns for pedagogy, welfare, experiences of job discrimination, and expatriate living in Thailand. As this phenomenon in Thailand progresses, South Korean families have migrated in search for less expensive

education and entrepreneurial pursuits in the Philippines, Mongolia and Vietnam (Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration Including Human Trafficking 2008). Moreover, in Singapore, an estimated 90,000 of foreign workers have been classified as highly skilled (Yeoh 2007).

From 1970s to the 1980s, there was a large outflow of Indian migrants to the Middle East (Chisti 2007). Beginning in the 1990s, highly skilled migrants working in the information technology (IT) sector constituted the new outward migration flow. Most of them migrated to the US as the most popular destination for engineering graduates and IT professionals. Forty-nine percent of 331,206 H1B visas granted went to Indian IT professionals of which 92 percent were IT-related jobs (Hira 2004). Many of these migrants moved to the US largely due to the dearth of IT jobs in India. With the IT industry experiencing rapid and significant growth in India, the situation has reversed, where an estimated 40,000 expatriate professionals have instead returned to Bangalore, India's major IT hub (Vinutha 2005).

(c) *Entertainment, Sex Work and Temporary Wives*

Many areas of the Thai-Myanmar border have become a destination for migrant workers. One Burmese border town, Tachileik-Mae Sai, is famous for commuting workers crossing into Thailand, which includes women working in entertainment, massage and sex work (Chantavanich 2000). Burmese women living near the border towns of China also explore employment opportunities in these places. A recent study on a Burmese village and migrant remittances revealed the diversity of livelihoods that women (mothers and daughters) have taken as they migrated to Chinese border towns (Din 2006).

According to Din's study (2006), a broker sold a temporary wife to a Chinese man for whom she performed domestic and sex work. She can be sold to another man after living with her earlier temporary husband for some time. A temporary wife stays in the Chinese town with her temporary husband and receives a wage from him which she usually remits to her family in Myanmar. Many of the temporary wives are remarried in Myanmar to men who are heavily drug-addicted and are, thus, unable to work for a living. The women have become the *de facto* breadwinners. The market for temporary wives are said to be widespread in border towns in these two countries, and has been viewed as one of the effects of China's increasing male population because

of its One Child Policy and cultural norms for son preference. Cases of trafficking women as temporary wives is said to be a pervasive practice as well in these places.

The sex industry in Cambodia is an important employment sector for Vietnamese female migrants (Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration Including Human Trafficking 2008; Acharya 2003). Many women are employed in the sex industry, including massage parlors and dance halls. They are among the most vulnerable migrant workers and are subject to exploitation and extortion, which is worsened because of their profession and irregular status. After successive wars, by 2000, close to 120,000 labour migrants from Viet Nam were working in more than 40 countries (Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration Including Human Trafficking 2008). Women numbered less than men as a whole, however, women who worked overseas were often employed as domestic workers and entertainers.

Many Filipina workers also work in entertainment establishments in Japan, where they are recognized as skilled workers under the current Japanese Immigration Control Act and they are allowed to remain in the country up to six months (UN 2003). In Sabah, Malaysia, a recent study of fourteen female Filipino migrants shows that like most other female migrants, the musician, the masseuse and the manager constitute part of the feminization of labour in which women have come to dominate overseas migration flows working in areas linked with reproductive activities such as domestic service, entertainment and sex work (Hilsdon 2007). The study argues that both marriage and economic reasons can combine to drive women to migrate.

An estimated 100,000 to 150,000 Nepali women are employed in the sex industry across India (Seddon 2005). In 2004, more than 1,000 Russian women engaged in sex work in the Republic of Korea, many of whom entered the country with tourist visas (UN 2005). Given the largely unregulated and underground nature of the sex industry, actual numbers are difficult to ascertain and are likely higher than available estimates. But in the 1990s, sex work accounted for 2 per cent of the GDP of four Southeast Asian countries (UNFPA 2006).

(d) Agriculture, Fisheries and Plantation Work

Couple migrants from rural areas in Northern Thailand, Myanmar and Lao PDR who work in the shrimp farms of the city of Surat Thani, southern Thailand, reside and work in these farms. For monitoring water quality, feeding and guarding the shrimp ponds from theft, they earn a wage that is smaller than two individual wages, and have access to lodging and a food allowance. However, migrant wives are expected to perform domestic work apart from feeding the shrimps and employers require children older than five years to be sent back to their villages of origin (Resurreccion and Sajor 2008). This is the case where the boundary dividing production and domestic work blur because of the informality of the employment arrangement and that a migrant wife is governed by social norms of domesticity. It draws attention to the flexible nature of work largely associated with female labour. About 60 per cent of registered Lao workers in Thailand work in construction and agriculture, and a small portion in the fishing industries (Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration Including Human Trafficking 2008).

Records from the statistics department of Brunei Darussalam show that more migrant men than women are employed in agriculture, forestry and fisheries, however there was almost gender parity in mining and quarrying (Department of Statistics, Brunei Darussalam 2005).

In the border towns of Yangian, China, migrants from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea come as male individuals, leaving wives and children behind in the North Hamgyong Province, the northernmost and one of the poorest regions in the country. The migrants tend to be highly vulnerable to exploitation and many of them work in agriculture and forestry (Smith 2005).

In the late 1990s, Indonesians, many with families, migrated to the Malaysian palm oil plantations, among them in the Selangor State of Malaysia to work as plantation workers. Since migrant labour was cheaper, indigenous Malaysian female and male contract workers were eventually displaced especially since palm oil became one of the country's chief exports (Teng 2008).

Rural areas in Asia are experiencing rapid and far-reaching changes. Studies have shown that occupations and livelihoods in the countryside are diversifying (Bryceson, et al. 2000; De Haan and Rogaly 2002; Elmhirst 2008; Lynch 2005; Rigg 1998,

2003). Occupational multiplicity is becoming more common and further pronounced. The balance of household income is shifting from farm to non-farm. Livelihoods and poverty are becoming de-linked from land and from agriculture. Livelihoods are becoming de-localized and multi-local, while simultaneously, the average age of farmers is rising and more young people are seeking work beyond their rural villages .

Female migrants also respond to similar employment opportunities as those discussed in the previous section on transnational migration. Differences may possibly reside in the nature and degree of insecurity, vulnerabilities and the exploitation that they face and experience at the hands of employers, police and immigration authorities, their volume of remitted earnings, and in their relations with those they left behind. For instance, in a recent study mentioned earlier by Resurreccion and Sajor 2008, it was discovered that in Thailand's southern technology-intensive export shrimp farms, Burmese migrants were generally more bonded to their employers than Northern Thai migrants due to more stringent immigration policies currently in place in Thailand. Moreover, Northern Thai migrant women had greater attitude for engaging in multiple livelihoods (apart from shrimp farming) compared with their Burmese counterparts. The following sub-sections discuss the ramifications of female rural-urban migration in some parts of Asia.

A World Bank (2006b) report recommended bilateral arrangements and explorations with destination and labour-scarce countries for employment opportunities for Pacific islanders. Specifically, this has led the New Zealand government to launch a new labour scheme in 2007 that allows up to 5,000 low and semi-skilled migrants to take up seasonal jobs in horticulture and viticulture industries unfilled by New Zealanders.

(e) Garment and Textile Factories

The sharp growth of the tourism and manufacturing industries in Thailand has prompted more than 1.3 million women from rural areas to move to urban, municipal areas (GDRI 2006). Among the total labourers working in these industries, 57.1 per cent are women while men account for less than 42.9 per cent (Royal Thai Government 2005). Present-day disparities between urban and rural areas drive rural Thai women to migrate to urban areas, because of the considerable demand for unskilled and low-paid labour particularly as associated with female labour (Han and Resurreccion 2008). A study on skill development in Thailand revealed that the top

three manufacturing establishments that contributed a huge share of the Kingdom's GDP were food processing, garment and textile industries where women workers are concentrated (Suriyisarn and Resurreccion 2003). Most of these women workers are probably migrants from other Thai provinces who have come to seek wage employment in Bangkok. The figures below demonstrate that female labour has contributed significantly to Thailand's GDP and to maintaining the low cost of industrial production.⁸

In a study on the adoption of new agricultural technologies in Cambodia (Resurreccion and Sajor 2008), it was found that beginning in their 30s, more men than women work away from their villages to perform non-farm occupations in construction sites. It is also equally noteworthy that there are more women than men up to age 29 who work outside their villages. The study discovered that these young women were employed by garment factories owned by Chinese businessmen in nearby provincial towns. In contrast from the age of 30 onwards, there is a deep plunge in the percentage of women who work as labour migrants. This seems to indicate that in view of preference for young female labour by the urban labour market, older women have then become the farm mainstays in their villages.

The gender and age differentials in non-farm employment indicate that new meanings regarding the position of women as farmers and factory workers are being re-worked along age and life cycle parameters.

Studies in Thailand and Cambodia demonstrate the propensity of rural women to respond to urban employment opportunities and that their migration may yield both positive and negative consequences (De Haan and Rogaly 2000). While female migrants may work in key revenue-generating industries that enable them access to better incomes, social experiences of living in the city may place them at greater risk. A few cases demonstrate this. Ties with kin and those left behind may provide the informal support networks for childcare that female migrants may need in order to sustain living and working in the city. Adversely, these same ties may serve to disfavour Indonesian female migrant returnees to the rural areas over male returnees

⁸ In manufacturing, women generally earn a monthly wage of 6,700 THB (US\$ 185), whereas men earn a monthly wage of 8,500 THB (US\$ 235) for the same category of jobs (Royal Thai Government 2000).

during the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s (Silvey and Elmhirst 2003). Another recent study on female migration and domestic violence in Bangkok cited social isolation and poverty as factors that constrained women from escaping violent relationships with partners. These women had severed ties with family members in the provinces due to their inability to remit earnings for children they had left in the care of elderly parents and relatives while they worked in Bangkok. This brought them a sense of social isolation, especially in the face of domestic violence (Han and Resurreccion 2008). In Cambodia, older women are increasingly becoming farm mainstays, as younger women and men move to work outside their villages. This suggests that farming may assume an increasingly reproductive function by providing care, labour safety nets and food security in the countryside for migrant and mobile people. Agriculture thus provides a platform for semi-skilled female migrants to enter urban labour markets such as in the growing garment industry. It is now possible for younger rural women to work in the cities as older women become chiefly responsible for agriculture in Cambodia: the aging and feminization of agriculture has then given way to feminization of migrant labour in factory work in the towns and cities (Resurreccion and Sajor 2008).

(f) Other Types of Informal Employment

Informal employment today comprises 63 per cent of total employment in ASEAN in 2006 (ILO 2007). This rise accompanies an alarming decrease of workers in formal employment. Labour conditions of migrant women in the informal economy — whether in domestic work or in underground jobs ungoverned by a legal contract — are particularly adverse since they do not have any legal protection either as a migrant or as a worker (Gills 2002). Young rural women work in cities or in peri-urban areas under often-unprotected working conditions such as in entertainment spots as beer promotion girls (often referred to as ‘beer girls’), escort girls or sex workers. In other places, they work as waste pickers and recyclers and small transport operators (Resurreccion and Van Khanh 2007; Ofreneo 2008)

Lee (2007) points out that rural women dominate rural-urban migration in Cambodia, many of whom work as hairdressers, petrol and cigarette sellers, manicurists, shop assistants, and fruit vendors. There are an estimated 4,000 beer promotion girls in Cambodia, most falling between 20-29 years old. They work in beer gardens, karaoke bars, nightclubs and soup shops. Beer promotion is associated with sex work, and

beer promoters as ‘indirect sex workers’ are often subject to verbal abuse and sexual harassment. Since they work on a commission-basis earning a basic salary of US\$ 50 per month, most usually end up selling beer at all costs even if it means having to engage in sex work.

Rural women from the Red River Delta working in the city of Hanoi as waste pickers live in crowded hostels, where they sleep on floor mats and where it is unbearably hot and dusty during the summer and very cold in the winter. They live in the city for eight months yearly and return to Nam Dinh Province during the peak labour periods of rice planting and harvesting. The migrant women work within an exclusive and a complex network of co-villagers in the waste recycling industry. Their husbands are left behind to farm their small landholdings. The younger women are the waste pickers and scavengers, while the older, more well-off women and men are buyers of recyclable waste which, in turn, are sold to bigger recycling plants (Resurreccion and Van Khanh 2007). Waste picking is considered an exclusively feminine job in Viet Nam.

The diverse employment opportunities that migrant women from Asia-Pacific take up are ascribed around feminine attributes and social reproductive functions assigned to women. They are usually care-related, irregular and tenure-insecure, low-skilled and possibly associated with the sexual objectification of women. As such, they earn lower wages, have fewer tenure and employment benefits, may be largely unregistered and isolated from official support services, and therefore may be vulnerable to forms of exploitation and abuse. For professionals who migrate, migrant women may encounter forms of discrimination with regards to nationality and race, and are often slotted into feminine jobs such as nursing and teaching.

C. Migrating to Marry

According to Siddiqui (2008), there are four types of female migration: (i) migration of women as dependent spouses of male migrants both within and beyond Asia; (ii) independent migration of women for labour; (iii) independent migration of women as students and professionals and, (iv) international marriage migration. This section focuses on migration for marriage.

Women are not only migrating for work, but are marrying for economic and social

reasons, such as a better life elsewhere and an enhanced social status. Within Asia, it is noteworthy that in 2003, one-third of all Taiwanese marriages were all with a foreign spouse, the bulk of which were local men who married foreign brides (Hugo 2005). A recent study of these international marriages in Taiwan, Province of China revealed that Vietnamese brides predominantly originate from poor areas in rural South Viet Nam, while the grooms originate from rural Taiwan, Province of China). They were married through a system of arranged marriages that operated in the two geographical areas within these two countries.

Other destination countries in North East Asia, such as Japan and the Republic of Korea, have witnessed a rise in the marriage of local men with mostly Asian wives coming from the Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam. Female migration is also a response to the shortage of wives in these countries, as well as the male desire for 'traditional wives' and to be able to have wives who could live with them in rural areas where local native women no longer wish to stay. Estimates in 2005 have already pegged around 88,000 foreigners have entered the country to marry Korean citizens (Asis 2006a; Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration Including Human Trafficking 2008).

A recent study on domestic violence among Korean men and their Asian wives documented the process of marriage arrangements (Song 2008) . Most Filipina and Thai women meet their husbands through religious seminars regarding happy families held by the Unification Church, which have branches in major cities in the Philippines. The missionaries of this church recruit Filipinas to attend the happy marriage seminars. The participants of these seminars become motivated to marry Korean men, expecting an ideal family. They submit their pictures to be paired with Korean men who had applied for marriage through this church and thereafter choose their partners by looking at the women's pictures. The women who are chosen by men can see their potential husbands' pictures. When the Korean men arrive in the Philippines, the potential couples meet personally. After one day, they go through marriage completion procedures in order to take the women to the Republic of Korea. Men return to their country shortly after and women stay in the church waiting for the day they can travel to the Republic of Korea to unite with their husbands . Upon arriving in Korea, they perform a mass wedding arranged by the church. Soon after

the wedding ceremony, the couples are compulsorily separated for over forty days. The brides learn Korean language or Korean culture in the church while the bridegrooms are educated about the doctrine of the church during this period. After the completion of the training period, the couples can live together. In rural-urban migration, rural women may find themselves socially isolated and discriminated in their urban workplaces, thus psychologically dependent on male partners and spouses, and therefore possibly vulnerable to sexual abuse, gender-based violence and degrees of helplessness (Han and Resurreccion 2008).

In many parts of Asia, there is a rising pattern of ‘bride deficit.’⁹ Women entering the work force have increased, delaying the trend for early marriage and childbirth and thus a greater demand for traditional housewives to mind both ‘hearth and home.’ Strong son preference due to exorbitant dowry requirements that has resulted in female infanticide and prenatal sex determination has led to the silent decimation of girls. In China and India alone, an estimated 40.1 and 39.1 million women and girls are “missing” respectively (UNFPA 2006).

Men are increasingly seeking brides beyond their countries to fill the gap. In India, villagers approach brokers to procure Bangladeshi and Nepali women and girls (Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration Including Human Trafficking 2008). A study (Duong, et al in 2005) of 213 Vietnamese migrant women who had once lived in China found that close to 30 per cent had been sold as brides. Many reported that they had entered into the arrangement because of poverty (91 per cent reported income insufficient for “survival”, and 69 per cent cited unemployment) and to provide for elderly parents (80 per cent). Though many planned to send remittances back home, most found themselves as stay at home wives, or working on the household plot. Researchers also uncovered evidence of physical abuse and reproductive rights violations.

D. Migrant Support Programmes in Destination Countries

Female migrants mostly comprise the unskilled and semi-skilled migrant labour force. As such they are the least protected and potentially face in determinable risks: they

⁹ A shortage of young, single women of marriageable age

may be vulnerable to exploitation, unjust and volatile wage and working conditions, trafficking and bonded labour, and forms of sexual harassment and abuse. International arranged marriages may be potentially fraught with problems that result in domestic violence, psychological isolation and other disorders.

Support programmes in destination countries have yet to respond fully to the dilemmas, vulnerabilities and needs of female migrants. It is widely recognized that migrants often adapt and integrate best when social networks exist to assist and support them. NGOs and church-based organizations have played an important and crucial role in assisting migrants especially when they face legal or social dislocations within destination countries. NGOs may also advocate for gender-sensitive and provide rights-conscious assistance to migrants. One example is the Philippine Migrants Rights, which held an international conference convening all Filipino migrants groups both in the Philippines and in destination countries (Asis 2006a). Hometown and country-specific migrant associations also foster solidarity and supportive services to migrants. However these migrant and diaspora associations should not be assumed to be innocent of excluding other migrants such as domestic workers and other semi-skilled migrant workers.

These associations also act to mobilize resources for those left behind in origin countries especially in the wake of crisis, shocks and stress. For instance, a study of Bangladeshi diaspora communities in the UK and US revealed the existence of associations formed around villages or cities of origin in Bangladesh. The associations collectively raise funds to build or support of schools or mosques, to repair infrastructure, to provide scholarships for students and to organize relief and reconstruction activities in the aftermath of natural disasters and heavy floods (Newland and Patrick 2004).

In the Republic of Korea, the government is set to create training programmes for migrant workers to adapt to the local business environment, especially in the IT sector (UNESCAP 2003). In Lebanon, Sri Lankan female migrants expressed their lack of confidence in the Sri Lankan Embassy, citing that they were overcharged with fees and often encounter passivity towards migrant workers' plight in the Middle East. On the other hand, groups such as the Afro-Asian Migrant Center, Caritas in Beirut or the

Budaya Club in Bahrain assist female domestic workers and serve as social hubs for their social and cultural interactions. Additionally, the Migrant Workers Protection Society provides shelter for distressed Sri Lankan women (UNDP Regional Centre in Colombo 2008). Female migrants from Bangladesh interviewed in Dubai, Beirut and Bahrain also expressed that they did not know about support services provided by the Bangladeshi Embassy and very few of them approached the embassy for support. Pakistani migrants were also not in contact with their embassy in host countries as the embassy does not handle cases of human rights violations and HIV and AIDS since the government has no explicit policy to address the conditions of migrant workers (Ibid).

Rural migrants are just as vulnerable as cross-border and transnational migrants. The DFID-funded Migrant Labour Support Programme implemented by the Gramin Vikas Trust seeks to reduce their vulnerability in a job market usually dominated by intermediaries and employers who are better informed and socially connected. The NGO provides services to migrants from Gujarat and Rajasthan and the tribal districts of Madhya Pradesh such as job information, rights awareness seminars, assistance with negotiating for wages and assistance in accessing government programmes (IOM 2008b). This programme employs a typically social protection model for migrants that reduce poverty and vulnerability by limiting their exposure to risks and by enhancing their capacity to protect themselves against exploitation, abuse and sudden income losses.

Non-government initiatives seem to be fairly advanced insofar as assistance, support and response to migrant workers and their needs are concerned compared with governments. The initiatives and programmes cited above have however yet to fully address female migrants' gender needs as part of their welfare, security and assistance agendas and programmes.

E. The Effects of Migration and Ties with Families and Spouses Left Behind

The departure of family members in pursuit of work abroad or in the city has diverse effects on the security of their families left behind as well as to changing gender dynamics. Where men migrate, women are left with greater responsibility of agricultural or productive labour, simultaneously having more control over crops,

other livelihoods and any earnings to be utilized. In effect, women may gain economic independence, possibly greater confidence and freedom through their own or their spouses' migration (Rao, 2006).

Migrant women are also nonetheless mothers from a distance, sustaining global chains of care. This has been referred to as 'transnational motherhood' (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997), indicating that migrant mothers adopt strategies to ensure care for their left behind children and parents are sustained (Resurreccion 2009). Reproductive obligations are often negotiated between migrant women and their left behind relatives. Migrant women continue to sustain such obligations and often experience conflicting feelings of guilt, resentment and pride at having to provide the means for care and social security from afar.

With migrant women away, childcare and domestic work may be relegated to elderly parents or relatives. Issues such as the deteriorating health of the elderly and their increasing incapacity for domestic work arise and become contentious within families and clans as cases below demonstrate.

In China, rural migrants in cities are not eligible to receive social security and social welfare benefits. Children of migrants, for instance, cannot join care centers and public schools, unless parents pay huge fees. Dependent elders cannot have access to public health services. This is China's *hukou* system, which requires Chinese citizens to be registered, and which ties them to one residential unit in a specific geographical location. As a result, they are compelled to leave their children and the elderly in the countryside. Luo's (undated) study argues that this system aggravates the crisis of rural family support. Left-behind grandparents are requested to raise the young children of absentee migrant parents. In turn, young migrant couples, remit a portion of their earnings to compensate for childcare. Additionally, strong disagreements also ensue among siblings over the support and care responsibilities for the elderly parents and how this should be divided among them. This is especially difficult for migrant siblings who are away and may only remit some extra money but are also shouldering the higher costs of being away and living in cities.

On the other hand, migrants in India have been able to fund care centers for the elderly and for those with specific disabilities especially in the absence of state provision. Whereas in Thailand, the elderly continue to care for their grandchildren often without financial support (Kofman and Raghuram 2007). In Cambodia, farming and childcare are left with elderly women, and they are often the beneficiaries of rural development and agricultural technology programmes initiated by NGOs. This is taking place at a time when the national government does not prioritize agriculture as an engine of economic growth. Agriculture has receded in importance and its value is premised on its reproductive function for food provision, thus falling on the shoulders of older women (Resurreccion and Sajor 2008).

Studies on the plight of left behind husbands and children have revealed contradictory findings. Husbands resist taking up domestic work and rely on extended family relationships to fill in some of the vacuum left behind by their migrant wives. Children of migrant mothers also show different responses to their mothers' absence. For instance, a study by Parrenas (2005) found that when Filipino mothers migrate, fathers seldom take up caring responsibilities, which they leave to other women in the family or with household helpers. Asis (2006b), on other hand, discovered that in the absence of mothers, children identified their fathers as their primary caregivers. A study in the Red River Delta in Viet Nam revealed that left behind husbands are able to take up care responsibilities but leave other domestic types of work to mothers in law or older daughters (Resurreccion and Van Khanh 2007).

A sample of 1,443 children of migrant parents across a number of Philippine provinces showed that the children attended more expensive private schools rather than children of non-migrants. They were found to be well-adjusted and perform well in their studies compared with children of non-migrant parents (Scalabrini Migration Center 2004). Similar results have emerged from studies on children of migrant parents in Bangladesh (Kuhn 2006), in Thailand (Jampaklay 2006), and in Indonesia (Hugo 2002).

The Philippines study also found that left behind children generally find care and solace within the extended family system. However, the adolescents studied demonstrated a few trouble spots especially those with absentee mothers. In another

related study on male out-migration in Japan, children of absentee fathers had lower reading abilities, which was not the case in the Republic of Korea, Hong Kong, China (SAR) and China (Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration Including Human Trafficking 2008).

In Sri Lanka, caregivers reported that some of the children left behind by their migrant mothers exhibited certain negative behaviours which included loss of appetite, weight loss for those under five years old and temper tantrums across ages, especially among adolescents (Save the Children 2006).

Cases of rape and abuse of left behind children in China have also been reported. Adolescents felt abandoned, had problems soliciting for help and felt anguished about being left behind. They were also marginally less healthy than other children (UNESCAP 2006).

Hugo (2000) notes that migration may lead to women's empowerment especially in instances where they often have minimal decision-making and control over resources. This, he says, 'is influenced by the context in which the migration occurs, the type of movement, and the characteristics of the women involved . . . and takes place within the legal framework for an extended period' (Hugo 2000, 288).

The study on rural female migrants from Nam Dinh province to Hanoi showed how women were able to purchase consumption goods that attributed enhanced status to their households and stratified villages on new indices of migrant-acquired wealth. Additionally, husbands left behind performed domestic work while wives were working as junk collectors. Both wives and husbands looked towards some future time when wives would finally return from their prolonged seasonal work in the city, accumulate incomes, and resume their care-giving responsibilities at home. There is often guilt on the part of the migrant women at having to leave their households for eight to ten months in a year, while their husbands continue to hope that their wives will return and take over household domestic work one day when enough wealth is accumulated (Resurreccion and Van Khanh 2007). The study has shown that while men take up work usually assigned to women at home, this situation is regarded as temporary, thus gender divisions of labour continue to be governed by deeply seated

norms and definitions of gendered work. The results of the study chime in with Piper's (2005) view that left-behind men do not always easily adjust to the new situation compared with left-behind women.

Box 2: Migrant Women's Control over Their Intimate Life

Control on the intimate life of women is their ability to be free from sexual, verbal and physical abuse, and even violence by their husbands. Many migrant women said that the nature of their relations remained the same compared with before they migrated. In some cases, the couple balance power in their relationship, in others, the women negotiate sex with their husband from an inferior position.

"We sometimes quarrel, sometimes my husband gives concessions, sometimes me. Despite my earning money, our family is the same." Nguyen Thi T., 37 years old.

"For over a week my husband forces me (to have sex). If he forces me strongly then I accept". Nguyen Thi T., 37 years old.

"We never force each other to do that thing (sex)... However, in our religion, it is not permitted that a wife resists her husband. When the husband asks, a wife does not dare oppose. If she does, she is guilty. If the wife cannot satisfy her husband and lets him go out and have sexual relations with other girls then it is the fault of the wife." Nguyen Thi H., 29 years old, Catholic.

The following case is different. Her opinion about the right to be free from physical violence by her husband is influenced by traditional norms.

"When my husband beats me, he only slaps my face. I do not dare to box him. How can we hit males? Husband hitting a wife is a normal thing, but when a wife hits the husband, this is unacceptable." Nguyen Thi T., 28 years old.

Despite the considerable control that many of these [migrant] women have gained over their material lives, deeply embedded patriarchal values often remain unchallenged (Kaur 2006).

Source: Cao Ho Thu Thuy 2009. *Social Autonomy of Rural-Urban Migrant Women*. Masters' Thesis, Geneva: IMAS in Development Studies, Graduate Institute of Development Studies: 39-40.

Research on female migration has often grappled with the question of whether women attain a sense of autonomy as a result of their migration experiences. The research results are conflicting. A study by Cao Ho Thu Thuy (2009) has explored this question at length among rural migrant women in Hanoi. Her study shows that as a result of their migration experiences, migrant women experienced improved self-esteem and self-confidence most especially in decision-making regarding crucial

household financial matters that husbands usually were more in control of. Freedom, money and mobility have indeed rendered them more confident to engage with husbands and people on equal footing on general issues. However, the migrant respondents in this study expressed no change in the control of their intimate lives, as shown in excerpts from Thu Thuy's (2009) research in Box 2.

Filipino domestic workers in Singapore, for their part, position themselves pragmatically not as icons of national pride as the Philippine media celebrates them, but as responsible members of families who have to leave out of 'necessity.' Their identities are tied to being dutiful daughters and mothers engaged in maternal sacrifice. Through their sacrifice, they also achieve upward mobility in their respective homeland communities (Yeoh and Huang 2000). Their sense of identity and achievement is firmly bound to notions of motherhood and sacrifice in their origin society.

Piper (2005) also notes that migration may have an empowering effect on men. Citing evidence from Bangladesh, returning sons may have more latitude in selecting their marriage partners since they accumulate resources to offer gifts to prospective wives instead of traditionally relying on their fathers' wishes.

The effects of migration on gender dynamics and on left behind families are context-specific and are mediated by the conditions governing the migration process and work opportunities in destinations, the norms and ideologies that define people's values, identities and behaviour towards family obligations and sexual relations in origin societies, and institutional and legal policies in place that facilitate or constrain linkages between migrants and their left behind kin.

F. Return Migration

Return migration is a major concern for migrants whose intention was to work and accumulate savings in order to return home one day. For instance, domestic workers in Singapore look forward to that day – when they are able to shed their sense of dislocation from being away and reunite with loved ones in the homeland for good. For them, this signifies the restoration of their full personhood (Yeoh and Huang 2000). On the other hand, many contract workers are forced to return home having

been terminated by their employers. This is an issue that has gained currency due to the present global recession leading to the termination of contract workers located in the Gulf countries (Trofimov 2009).

It is also common for migrant women to return home due to sickness of a family member, drug addiction of children, or infidelity of a spouse (Villalba 2002; Resurreccion and Van Khanh 2007). Rural women migrants in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, who have contracted HIV and AIDS no longer wish to return to their provinces due to the stigma attached to their disease. Excerpts from recent research below in Box 3:

Box 3: The Reintegration of Women Migrants with HIV and AIDS in Cambodia

The women migrants do not have any intention to return to their provinces due to the lack of land, house, lack of opportunity to earn an income, but what is the most interesting is the level of shame or the regard from others in the village.

“Here (Phnom Penh) people are more educated and have access to information and do not fear of people like us” (FGD woman # 2)

“In the city, people don’t judge you” (FGD with woman #1 who left the province with her boyfriend and will not go back due to experience of discrimination)

“The knowledge is not the same. Here in Phnom Penh, more people have knowledge and do not discriminate against ill people. I feel ashamed to go back. In the remote area, they won’t allow their children to play with mine. They don’t even drink in the same glass. That is why I don’t want to go back” (Interview with reintegrated woman # 6)

Source: Vireak, Hoeung. 2008. *Going Back Home? Case Studies on the Reintegration Process of Vulnerable Women and Children Including Those with HIV-AIDS to Phnom Penh, Kandal and Prey Veng, Cambodia*. Master’s Thesis. International Masters in Advanced Studies in Development Studies (IMAS), Geneva: Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies: 44-45.

Moreover, migrant women returnees may undergo problematic adjustments as they re-integrate with their home communities. A study by the Asian Migrant Centre (2005, 77-78) revealed that cross-border Lao and Khmer migrant women who experienced independence while working in Thailand find it difficult to readjust to former gender expectations and norms upon return. Women sex workers and those suffering from Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) are likely to be stigmatized by their communities. They also face a number of problems upon return, such as: 1) the

lack of a referral system from the border to a clinic in their home town; 2) poor health infrastructure in the origin community; 3) a discontinued treatment process due to lack of health service available in the origin community; 3) lack of financial capacity to pay for treatment; 4) lack of family support; and 5) being homeless or landless. Migrant women returnees in Bangladesh similarly face degrees of social ostracism brought about by a commonly shared view that migration is 'impure.' Women who were employed as migrant domestic workers are believed to have had sexual relations with their employers, and thus face the onerous burden of trying to disprove this upon return (Oishi 2005).

Migrant reintegration programmes by the governments of Sri Lanka and the Philippines involve remittance management, social and economic reintegration and counseling for victims of exploitation (Villalba 2002; Dias and Jayasundere 2002). However, return migrants are usually not aware of them, and on the contrary, express disappointment that the conditions that pushed them to migrate in the first place basically remain, and are traumatized and resentful over the intimidation towards them by immigration authorities upon arrival. This intimidation appears to be also true of deported migrants. The Asian Migrant Centre (2005, 47) was able to document one episode: Migrants who are recaptured and deported from Thailand reportedly experience inhumane treatment and often exploitation by the authorities. One interviewed migrant said that together with other deported migrants, he was forced by the Thai police to walk a long distance back to Cambodia. They were then taken to the police station in Cambodia, and had their remaining money stolen by officials or were made to cut the grass at the station yard for a day. Once deported migrants are returned to Cambodia, the Cambodian police pick them up and take them to a nearby "rehabilitation" center, where they must pay a fine of THB200 each. The police reportedly have claimed that migrants, especially women, bring "shame" to Cambodia, thus they need to be punished to prevent other migrating attempts.

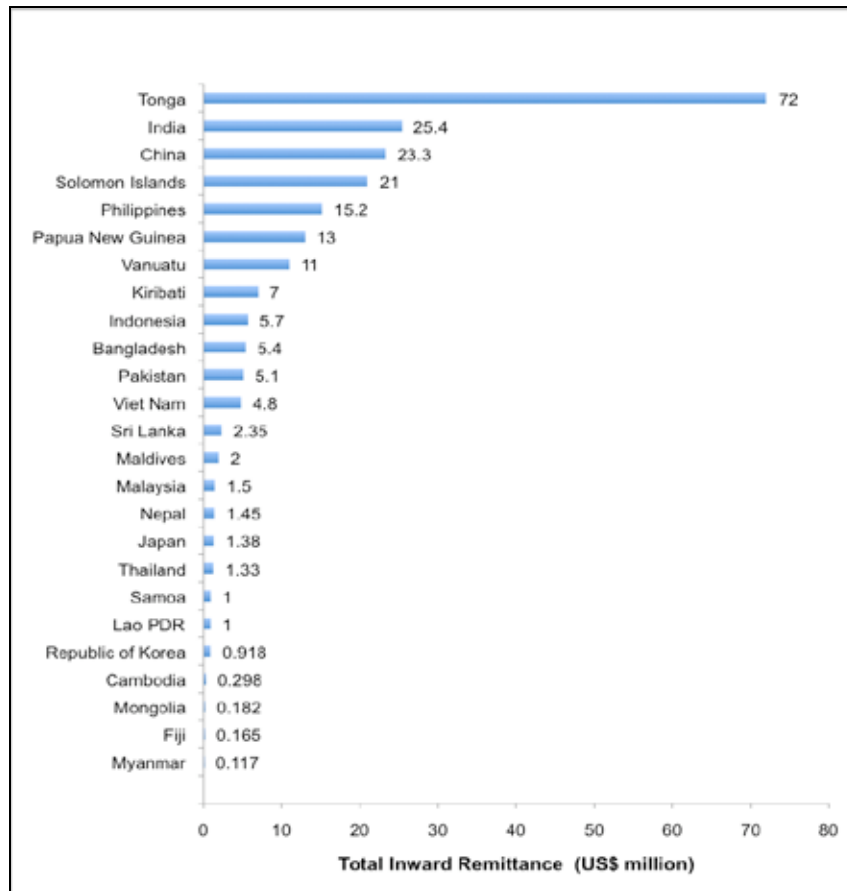
When migrants return, they bring with them new skills, ideas and optimism nurtured through years of navigating their lives in distant places. These are called 'social remittances.' For skilled migrants, a number of governments, such as India and Malaysia, offer incentives for their repatriation in order to practice their knowledge and skills – in the fields of ICT, manufacturing, the arts, science and technology, and

medicine – in the home country (Hugo 2005). Migrants therefore have the potential to be agents of political and economic transformation. For instance, migrant women have been known to acquire attitudes, opinions and knowledge that can lead to enhanced family health in the home country. A study on migrant women attributes improved child health and lower mortality rates to the health education that female migrants receive while living abroad (UNFPA 2006). However, social remittances are not transmitted in straightforward fashion and may be governed by traditional patriarchal and kinship-driven norms that remain resilient in home communities. For instance, a study on female and male return migrants in Guizhou Province, China, showed that male migrant returnees eventually became village leaders and even led the construction of new infrastructure by mobilizing collective action. On the other hand, female migrant returnees who asserted their interests and views on infrastructure building were repudiated and censured. Other women returnees who were involved in collective action influenced clan groups ‘from the rear,’ since being overtly assertive would cause them to be censured by village (male) elders (Ge Jinhua, Resurreccion, Elmhirst, 2011). These episodes demonstrate what Ghosh refers to as the ‘disjunctures between women’s own aspirations as highly skilled and educated returnees and local gendered perceptions and modes of discrimination that inhibit their full economic, social and political participation in their own communities and societies’ (Ghosh 2009, 42). Indeed, return migration is fraught with problems and hopes, the outcomes of which are mediated by local institutional, political and cultural mechanisms that forebode satisfaction or disappointment for many who have nurtured dreams of returning home one day.

G. Remittances

Between 2000 and 2007, South and West Asia received the largest share of inward remittances compared with South East Asia (Ratha et al. 2008). In the Pacific states, Tonga appears to be the largest recipient of remittance flows as shown in Figure 2, followed by India, China, the Solomon Islands and the Philippines as the top 5 recipients in the region.

Figure 2: Total Inward Remittance in Selected Countries in Asia-Pacific, 2006



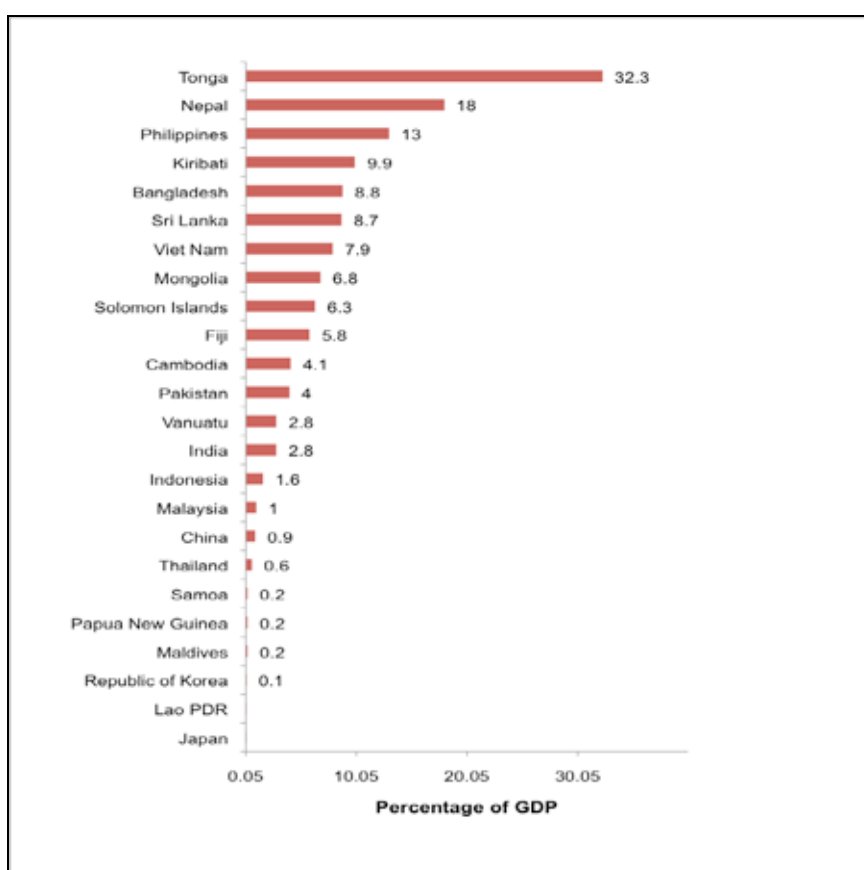
Source: Migration and Remittances Fact Book, World Bank, 2008

Tonga, one of two largest countries in the Pacific region with a population of around 100,000, has had over 40 years of migration history, and thus remittances are of considerable significance. Many ethnic Tongans live overseas and their top destinations are the United States, New Zealand, Australia, American Samoa, Chile, Fiji, Kiribati, France, United Kingdom and Samoa (World Bank 2006b, 2008). Tonga is often described as having a mature migration-remittances economy, where agriculture remains to be the chief domestic economy, which has survived the collapse of a small-scale manufacturing economy (World Bank 2006b). Figure 3 shows the heavy dependence of the Tongan economy on remittances.

Internal migrants in China meanwhile comprise the huge percentage of migrant population. Since the liberalization of the Chinese economy in the late 1970s, migrants from interior rural villages work in the manufacturing and services sectors in the country's coastal areas as temporary migrants (Walton-Roberts 2004). Moreover,

it was estimated that the “floating population” of China was 79 million in 2000 (Hugo 2008), most of who had rural origins but were living in urban areas. The huge amount of remittances recorded in Figure 2 comes from these movements and is generating wealth for rural places of origin. Domestic remittances in 2006 averaged about US\$ 43 million, out of which about 75 percent were coursed through formal financial institutions in 2004. This burgeoning internal migration has seen the number of rural-urban migrants in Chinese cities increase from 21 million in 1990 to 121 million in 2000 (Zhou and Cai 2008).

Figure 3: Percentage of Remittance to GDP in Selected Countries, Asia-Pacific, 2006



Source: Migration and Remittances Fact Book, World Bank, 2008

Figure 3 also presents the countries that greatly rely on migrant remittances¹⁰ to boost

¹⁰ Migrant remittances are believed to be bigger and more resilient to volatile economic conditions compared with the fluctuations in development assistance or foreign direct investments (FDI). In the current global financial meltdown, for instance, remittances are being touted as one of the less volatile sources of foreign exchange earnings for developing countries and even tend to be counter-cyclical relative to the recipient countries’ economic cycles (Ratha, et al. 2008). The reasons for this resilience are offered: (i) remittances are sent by the cumulated flows of migrants over the years not only those who have recently left; (ii) remittances are a small part of migrants’ earnings and they tend to continue to send remittances when hit by income shocks; (iii) several high income OECD remittance source countries are poised to undertake large fiscal stimulus packages in response to the financial crisis

their economies. Among the top five are Tonga, Nepal, Philippines, Kiribati and Bangladesh. The Philippines is known to export a significant number of female migrant labourers who contribute significantly to the keeping the country's economy buoyant.

Assumptions about remittances and their development potential however evince a particular type of migrant (remitter) and may prove rather shaky especially when juxtaposed with the profile of many female migrants who (i) engage in contractual and temporary migration rather than long-term or permanent migration; (ii) remit a sizeable portion of their earnings to their families back home and thus do not have huge savings; and (iii) are vulnerable to possible massive layoffs in destination countries that could dispense with domestic and other gender-related informal care services (Sorensen 2005). Additionally, while the macro statistical projections present a view that remittances can potentially contribute to short-term poverty alleviation or long-term development, a major concern is that the poorest people from the poorest countries are generally unable to migrate and that they profit least from remittances (Francis 2002; UNFPA 2006). With the exception of Tonga, the largest remittance-receiving countries are middle-income countries like India, China, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. Remittances are highly differentiated and selective in terms of who the remitter is and the capacity to remit, and will have differentiated and non-uniform impacts on migrant-sending communities, households and overall development. As de Haas (2005) emphasizes, the direct benefits of remittances do not tend to flow to the poorest members of communities or to the poorest countries, thus challenging remittances as the 'new development mantra.' In the case of Asia, countries classified as Middle-Income countries are the largest sending countries in the region (i.e., Philippines, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Indonesia)¹¹, and are also the major recipients of migrant remittances compared with Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Piper (2005) makes a similar point as she observes that destination countries often create stratified patterns of migration, where differential routes of entry may favour more highly educated and highly skilled migrants rather

(Ibid).

¹¹ All are Middle Income countries. Nepal also has a huge emigrant population, but is considered one of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

that those from poorer, disadvantaged groups in sending countries. A study on the Philippines demonstrates that a great proportion of urban households depend on remittances as their principal source of income. Households from the wealthier regions of the country reported that they receive remittances, while households in the poorest regions did not. Within these remittance-receiving regions, higher income groups were receiving remittances more than lower income groups. Migrant remittances have therefore been creating new social differences and widening the gap between the rich and the poor (Go 2002).

Remittances also do not automatically lead to improved development but are contingent on the specific and existing social, gender-specific economic, political conditions in both sending and receiving countries that determine and shape the degree and nature of the outcomes of remittances.

Remittance sending and receiving behaviour are also gendered. Focusing solely on the economic benefits of remittances loses sight of the remitter herself or himself. Citing a Philippine government study, for instance, Kofman and Raghuram (2007) point out that Filipino female migrants sent approximately 1,164,971 US\$ to their families in 2001. While women privilege investment on their children's education, men are inclined to invest in consumption goods, assets or property (Go 2002). Bangladeshi women working in the Middle East countries sent 72 per cent of their earnings home. More than half of their remittances were used to spend for daily needs, health care and children's education (Kofman and Raghuram 2007). This is the same for Burmese young female migrants in Thailand who send money for education and to boost hometown livelihoods, and who express obligation towards parents and siblings (UNESCAP 2006). Walton-Roberts (2004) in her study on India indicates that female migrant remittances were used largely for the personal provision of care whereas male migrant remittances were used more for infrastructural development of care institutions. Remittances therefore provide social security services that are often unaffordable or not offered by public health institutions in countries of origin (INSTRAW 2008).

Piper (2005) argues that gender affects the volume of remittances, with women generally remitting their earnings more than men. Additionally, temporary, skilled

and semi-skilled migrants tend to remit more than permanent, highly skilled migrants whose numbers are also smaller. Studies conducted by INSTRAW (2008) further show that there is greater effort to remit on the part of women since their wages are relatively smaller in destination countries. As a result, they are not able to improve their quality of life in destination countries, or invest in their own career advancement through education, but instead may be locked in the domestic and care-giving sector.

The INSTRAW (2008) cases also demonstrated that in general, the increased importance of women as providers through remittances has enhanced their status in households and communities. However, it was pointed out that social perceptions were ambivalent: ranging from valuing the contributions of migrant women to well-being to blaming them for child and family abandonment. One other study noted that the ambivalence of newly acquired status lay in the remitter herself. Older women who remitted their earnings home tended to feel empowered since they felt that they assumed the traditional male breadwinner role. Remittances from younger women, on the other hand, were found to intensify generational and gender power relations within clans (Aguias 2006). Younger female migrants are often expected to remit regularly and directly to their parents and they often lack the freedoms that male migrant relatives and siblings enjoy. Younger migrant women with a subordinate position in patriarchal families are generally less likely to control the allocation and spending of their remittance earnings than older women migrating from more equal gender positions in origin households (Sorensen 2007).

Remittances from internal and international migration may also differ. When migrating internally, those who migrate both generate and disburse their incomes, as perhaps in the case of increasing numbers of Chinese internal migrants cited earlier. In international migration, where remitted incomes are usually higher, the migrant needs a local 'partner' to manage the remitted funds. This is where control of remitted incomes becomes a site of competing interests and power dynamics in the receiving household. A gender analysis of migration and remittance control patterns must emanate from an understanding of the household as a site of sometimes contradictory, hierarchical and conflicting social relations organized along generational, gender and kinship lines. Research into remittance control and power dynamics is still at its infancy, although there have been forays into this in earlier research on male

outmigration that show left behind women attaining greater clout and decision making power from controlling their husbands' remitted earnings. Much has yet to be known about the dynamics of control over migrant women's remitted earnings.

The growing global and development discourse on migrant remittances – and their management and investment – tends to lose sight of migrants as social individuals and may instrumentalize them as 'pawns of development' without concern for or action on their well-being or human rights in their host societies (Olsen 2008) and eventually upon return to their home societies. The emerging research on migrant remittances demonstrates that remittances register as important sources of revenue and boost receiving countries' GDP; that they have however differential effects on left behind families and communities and may exacerbate wealth gaps among them; that female and male migrants have different priorities and purposes driving them to remit their earnings; and that remittances affect those who both send and receive them in terms of gendered status and power within their families, clans and communities.

While remittances are an important source of improved livelihoods, health care and education of children of left behind families, a narrow focus on their productive effects may blur concerns over the welfare and rights of migrant women and men in destination places, replace the state's welfare and social security obligations, as well as sidestep changing and unequal relations among members of receiving households both as a result of migration and remittances.

IV. Migration Policies and their Gender Implications

Summing up the Issues Facing Migrant Women

The preceding sections underscored the increasingly feminized nature of migration through evidence of the growing numbers of women migrating for work in countries other than their own, or moving to cities from the countryside to respond to labour market needs for specific types of female labour. Moreover, the preceding sections draw attention to the gendered nature of migration where female migrants are often subjected to gender-specific forms of exploitation, isolation and discrimination once they reach their places of destination. This is however not to preclude the fact that female migrants have benefited from their migration, although much of the literature suggests that migration is a contradictory experience fraught with both risks and

opportunity.

Female migrants face many challenges from the moment that they decide to make the move. For instance, female migrants may fall prey to unscrupulous, sometimes illegal, recruiters who charge exorbitant recruitment fees and do not observe regulatory mechanisms for the secure movement and occupational placement of migrants. Once in their destination places, female migrants may face late, insufficient or total lack of payment of agreed wages, non-fulfillment of airfare reimbursements and harassment to actual abuse of women workers by employers especially since they are isolated and vulnerable in these new places. Other problems also include the lack of social protection, denial of collective bargaining and organization, denial of human rights, discrimination, sexual harassment, xenophobia and general social exclusion. Extreme cases of female migrant vulnerability lead to trafficking, enslavement and bonded labour. The most seriously vulnerable among migrants are usually female: domestic workers and entertainers, trafficked persons and irregular migrant workers (Wickramasekera 2002). Additionally, as return migrants, women face challenges as they re-integrate in their home communities where resilient gender norms continue to apply. Migrant remitters are also not fully in control of their remitted earnings once received, especially if they are stationed overseas or in another country. To mitigate and address possible adverse effects experienced especially by low skilled female migrants, policies in both sending and receiving countries require gender-responsive measures.

Existing Migration Policies

Some countries in Asia observe obstructive policies with regard to international female migration. For instance, in Nepal, a ban on overseas female migrants was lifted in January 2003. The ban lifting however only applies to organized sectors (e.g., manufacturing) and does not include domestic work and other forms of semi-skilled or unskilled work (Siddiqui 2008). Since 2000, Sri Lanka began sending women to export labour markets after the demand for male workers plummeted. After a second construction boom in the Gulf and Southeast Asian countries, Sri Lanka is currently pursuing a policy promoting male labour migration, which has reduced the registered number of female migrants (Ibid). Siddiqui (2008) further remarks that such obstructive policies to ward international female migration manifest a state mindset

that is rooted in the traditional patriarchal notion of family honour that is directed toward control of women's mobility.

Sending countries, nevertheless, are increasingly becoming aware of the welfare and social protection needs of migrant workers and are only beginning to recognize the specific gender needs and conditions of female migrant workers and migrant brides. Receiving countries, on the other hand, focus on managing immigration flows and set in place selective entry mechanisms that favour particular types of migrants through state apparatuses and bureaucratic instruments, but simultaneously are tightening border controls to edge out irregular entrants and employing stratified standards and provision of services to semi-skilled and unskilled female migrant workers.

International migrant-sending countries like Sri Lanka, Philippines, Indonesia, Fiji, Tonga, India, Nepal and Bangladesh are concerned with the protection of their nationals abroad jointly with the development benefits of migrant remittances. Viet Nam has an active emigration policy to send skilled and unskilled workers to the Republic of Korea and Japan as targeted destinations under on-the-job training programmes. A unique feature of Viet Nam's emigration policy is that it relies on state-owned organizations to organize emigration (Dang 1998).

The Philippines, Sri Lanka and Indonesia have established overseas labour offices and consular services abroad to respond to the needs of migrants, as well as passed their respective migration protection laws¹² (Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration Including Human Trafficking 2008). Moreover, these governments have developed mechanisms to promote the protection of migrants through pre-employment seminars, establishing repatriation funds and appointment of staff in overseas consular offices to address their needs. Both the governments of Sri Lanka and the Philippines have organized two-day pre-departure orientation programmes for domestic workers leaving for Hong Kong, China (SAR) and the Middle East. These seminars orient them on the rights of domestic workers based on the standard employment contract system, obligations, living conditions and do's and

¹² Philippines: Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995; Sri Lanka: Foreign Employment Act of 1985; Indonesia: Protection and Placement of Migrant Workers, 2004.

don'ts in relation to the employer (IOM 2008b). Despite these efforts, however, female migrants remain largely unprotected and simply have no recourse but to rely on the kindness of their employers and if able, on on-site networks of other migrants (Asis 2006a). The Philippines, for its part, has been active in addressing the problem of human trafficking through its participation in various regional forums such as the Asian Regional Initiative Against the Trafficking of Women and Children as well as the Global Programme Against Trafficking in Human Beings (Wongboonsin 2003).

Three sending countries have established Migrant Welfare Funds (MWFs): the Overseas Pakistani Foundation, the Philippine Overseas Workers Welfare Administration and the Sri Lanka Overseas Workers Welfare Fund. A recent IOM study (2005) revealed that Pakistan allocated 13 per cent of its welfare services budget to job sites, supporting consultations, legal services, the return of migrants and repatriation of remains should they pass away overseas. Sri Lanka allocated 35 per cent for the same purposes. The Philippine MWF operates 28 migrant worker centers in countries where large populations of Filipino migrant workers are located. The fund pays for the legal services to defend migrants in foreign courts, pays for the repatriation of migrants whose jobs were terminated due to physical abuse, violations of contracts, as well as for the repatriation of remains (IOM 2008b). More information has yet to be provided on whether the MWFs have responded equitably to female and male migrants' cases and needs, and whether all migrants know how to access these MWF-supported services. Altogether the MWFs provide a safety net for migrants in distress or in vulnerable situations, but it is unclear whether fund-supported services were gender-responsive.

In 1981, the Bangladesh government prohibited the emigration of unskilled female workers unless a male guardian accompanied them. Only professional women could work overseas as 'principal workers' (or primary breadwinners). In 2003, the government allowed Bangladeshi women to work as domestic workers in Saudi Arabia provided that they were above 25 years of age, married and accompanied by their husbands. Other policies mandate the government to disallow emigration of persons of a particular occupation. In 2002, the Emigration Rules stipulated the need to provide briefing to outgoing overseas employees before issuance of a clearance and requires recruitment agencies to ensure that migrant workers have medical

certifications and attend pre-departure briefings (UNDP Regional Centre in Colombo, 2008). The Bangladesh missions in destination countries are obligated to receive complaints of migrant workers; intervene and negotiate with employers; provide legal assistance and arrange for the repatriation of stranded migrant workers as well as repatriation of remains of deceased workers. The government of Bangladesh also manages a migrant welfare fund (Khadria 2008).

China provides pre-departure orientation and requires that each migrant secure a training certificate, including knowledge of the law before they are allowed to work abroad. The Ministry of Labour is mandated to assist overseas workers with documents and medical examinations, manage contributions of migrants to social insurance schemes and provide legal assistance to migrants in foreign courts (Ibid).

The Government of India recently established the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs that has set up programmes to trace the roots of Indian diasporas overseas. The Ministry is also exploring the establishment of a university that will educate the children of return migrants in India, facilitating a process of re-assimilation for migrant family returnees. Diplomatic missions will also hear complaints of abandoned and abused Indian wives abroad, as well as offer services that ensure the protection of female migrants against sexual exploitation in the workplace (Ibid).

Major receiving countries in the Asia-Pacific include Singapore, Hong Kong, China (SAR), Malaysia, Republic of Korea, and Thailand. Receiving countries are generally concerned with managing in-migration, issues of cohesion, social order and integration, and the perils of irregular migration. They also have a stronger preference for skilled migrants. Broadly speaking, in the Southeast and Northeast Asian regions, typologies of receiving countries emerge. Malaysia and Singapore have instituted fairly strict immigration policies, rigid labour contract systems and a very low tolerance for civil action that advocates for migrant rights. On the other hand, countries like the Republic of Korea and Japan are tolerant of civic action and migrant associations, but simultaneously enforce tight border controls. Hong Kong, China (SAR), meanwhile, has put in place a strict labour contracting system and immigration policy but exhibits notably high tolerance for collective migrant action (Yamanaka and Piper 2005).

Additionally, the immigration policies of the receiving countries are generally liberal and conducive to receiving professional and high-skilled migrants who can assume managerial and professional positions. They are generally encouraged to settle down permanently with special treatments for their entry, employment and stay of dependents. Furthermore, skilled technicians and workers are allowed to bring in their dependents and possibly inter-marry. Finally, semi-skilled and unskilled contract migrant workers are to be fielded only in approved sectors and are repatriated once they have terminated their contracts. Female unskilled and semi-skilled workers are to be deported if they become pregnant (Wongboonsin 2003).

Singapore has unilaterally introduced a process of accreditation of recruitment agencies as well as an Employment Act that sets out working conditions, occupational safety and health arrangements for all employees except domestic workers. Low-skilled and unskilled workers including domestic workers face restrictive policies such as prohibiting their reunions with dependents, restricting marriage to a Singapore national, being required to make pre-contract payments of three months' salary and risking deportation once they get pregnant (Kaur 2007).

In the event that migrants' contracts have been violated, host country authorities have the responsibility to ensure the availability of legal recourse. For instance, the Department of Labour in Hong Kong, China (SAR) provides this legal service. Additionally, Chinese labour law guarantees a minimum wage, maternity leave, regular days off, public holidays and a paid vacation period (UNESCAP 2006).

With the introduction of tight border controls in August 2002, Malaysia began to impose penalties that include beating and imprisonment of both illegal migrant workers and their employers. The government also blacklists employers who mistreat domestic workers following complaints of abuses. Besides, Malaysia has become heavily reliant on migrants for the following three industries: plantations, construction and domestic work (Leigh 2007).

In 2003, a proposed new approach introduced by the Thai government envisaged to adopt a more "open door" policy to manage rather than to reject migrant workers. This approach requires the registration of employers who employ migrant workers

and for employers to issue public announcements of job vacancies initially to the Thai labour force. This is totally new for Thailand as the policies in the past were geared towards registering workers in order to monitor their presence in the Kingdom – rather than register employers. Employers were required to pay government fees to register their migrant employees. Official records indicate that the biggest number of migrant workers with work permits is the Burmese. The nature of the recent Thai migration registration policy is therefore a concessionary one, ceding to the need to redress the scarcity of low- and semi-skilled labour for growing industries like technology-intensive shrimp farming on one hand, and for a way to control the flow of migrant workers through legal means that metes out stiff penalties on violators of existing requirements on the other (Muntarbhorn 2005; Chantavanich 2007).

Internal migration, on the other hand, sidesteps many of the issues duly recognized by institutions working on international migration, migrant rights and welfare. Often, internal migration is embedded in discussions on urbanization, although experts argue that rural to rural migration and urban to urban migration may be equally important as rural to urban migration (Bravo 2008).

Consensus is wide that rural migrants tend to benefit economically from their move to urban areas. Policy makers recognize this fact but fear that migration may exacerbate housing conditions, infrastructure and services and place further pressure on the urban economy, thus bloating the urban informal sector and increasing poverty.

Scholars have unpacked migration practices and urbanization from their stereotypes. Rural to urban migration may not always be permanent, but more often is cyclical, seasonal or even daily (Yap 2003). Urbanization does not always only mean the growth of ‘mega cities.’ Towns and suburban areas are created and people may live in settlements with urban characteristics, but not necessarily in urban centers. Additionally, there is no direct association between rate of migration with increase in urban poverty, and in fact, a number of migrants succeed, thus indicating that the ‘urbanization of poverty’ is not inevitable. The problem is therefore not over-urbanization, but rather incomplete urbanization and inadequate urban management.. In China, for example, migration research has indicated that with rural-urban migration, income disparities between the poor inland and more well-off coastal

provinces narrowed especially since the government began to promote both education and migration (Chan 2008).

Rural women who move to cities are usually temporary migrants absorbed in the growing number of export-oriented manufacturing establishments. Others join the urban informal sector as waste pickers, vendors and service providers. They contribute to urban economic development as well as their families' welfare. Security is a major concern for them: in housing, communication and transport, which thus have implications on the quality and extent of infrastructure and services in cities. For instance, revolving funds in the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh enable rural women to obtain micro-loans to purchase mobile phones from Grameen Telecom. These phones help lessen the risks involved in the transfer of remittances by daughters working in the city (Ibid). This is one example of a non-state initiative that enables positive outcomes from internal migration. More of this sort needs to be put in place by governments.

Remittance Policies

Transmitting remittances can be costly and bureaucratic, such as in Bangladesh and India where migrants have to obtain central bank authorization to process remittances beyond prescribed ceilings. In many countries, inward remittances have to be reported to the authorities. Remittance costs also vary: 6per cent of every US\$200 from Kuala Lumpur to Jakarta, while vice versa, it is pegged at 13per cent (Khadria 2008).

Asian governments have introduced policy measures that attempt to manage the flow and use of remittances largely in the form of incentives. For instance in India, repatriable currency accounts with an active interest policy rate and foreign currency bonds have been offered to non-resident Indians to promote cash inflows. Pakistan, for its part, offers incentives to Overseas Pakistanis (OPs) ranging from separate immigration and customs airport counters to free renewal of passports and duty-free allowances. Remittances are not subjected to taxation and this encourages OPs to remit money freely. Other benefits to non-resident Pakistanis remitting US\$ 10,000 through bank channels such as ballot of choice plots in public housing schemes at attractive prices to be paid in foreign currencies, discounts in auctions, and special allocation of shares in privatization schemes. In Bangladesh, the government has yet

to adjust its legal framework to allow the increasing number of Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) to harness remittances or access them in destination countries. However, the Bangladeshi government has encouraged Bangladeshi banks to open correspondent relationships with financial institutions in destination countries, which has liberalized existing financial instruments and tax-free incentives to attract migrant remittances (IOM 2003). Whether and how these incentives affect the remittance behaviour of female migrants is a subject for further investigation.

Constraints such as poor infrastructure, corruption, macro-economic instability, market failures, and lack of trust in state institutions may deter remittance transfers and prevent migrants from investing in their places of origin. Comprising the most vulnerable group of migrants, women may also have weak access to the safest means of sending remittances, or may feel that they cannot control where their remittances ultimately go and how they are spent. There remains to be a paucity of information and research on female migrant remittances or gender-disaggregated data on remittance research in general.

V. Conclusions

The Asia-Pacific region is highly diverse and consists of both major migrant-sending and receiving countries. Among the region's sending countries – Philippines, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka – female migrants constitute slightly more than male migrants and are concentrated in semi-skilled and unskilled occupations such as domestic work, care-giving, entertainment and sex work. Female migration from other sending countries in the region remains lower than male migration, but has significantly increased over time.

Migrant women's occupations carry both opportunity and risk. They are able to remit substantial portions of their earnings to families left behind. Their children are able to attend better schools and care is provided by female kin, sometimes by left-behind yet somewhat ambivalent care-taking fathers, or by domestic helpers, thus creating and sustaining a global chain of care. Power relations at the household and community level restrict or enable the equitable distribution and benefits of migrant women's remittances. While migrant women generally feel a sense of duty and fulfillment from their financial contributions, this constrains their career advancements and provides

them with little to live from in their host societies. There also remains to be a paucity of gender analytical research on migrant remittances despite the growing interest in the role of remittances for enhancing development.

Due to restrictions on female mobility in a number of countries, women may migrate through informal channels, rendering them vulnerable to illegal recruiters, trafficking syndicates and abusive and exploitative employers. Female migrants are not only labour migrants but many of them migrate to marry. While there are incidences of harmonious migrant marriages, inter-cultural differences and weak access to social support networks may isolate migrant brides and render them vulnerable to sexual and physical abuse by husbands.

Internal migrants such as rural women moving to cities or to nearby border towns may experience problems with settlement, security and social services. Many local governments sidestep their needs and choose to relegate them to marginal areas to dissuade them from long-term settlement.

Existing migration policies patently aim to manage, regulate and control migration flows. For sending countries, migration means remittances and economic buoyancy especially during economic downturns. For receiving countries, barriers are built for full integration of migrants and their human rights, sustain a bias for professionals and restrict low skilled migrant labourers. For female migration in particular, the occupations of care that female migrants take up are considered extensions of women's reproductive identity and obligations, thus to a great extent, undervalued and marginalized.

It then appears that the overriding policy environment on migration in most of Asia is not to allow or to limit permanent settlement whether in international or local places of destination, and to greatly restrict and regulate non-permanent migration of unskilled workers (Castles and Miller 2003). Several problematic assumptions underlie existing migration policies discussed in previous sections. They seem to assume that:

- § *Women's right to migrate is contingent, not fundamental.* In sending countries, obstructionist policies to female migration are rooted in patriarchal ideologies.

Thus, restrictions are placed on women's international migration, which may potentially subject them to the risks of irregular migration, trafficking and labour exploitation.

- § *Negative costs – such as social ills, job competition, environmental effects and racial and ethnic mixes – far outweigh the positive contributions of migrants to host societies. There are high societal costs of migration in destination places:* Thus, the policy response is regulation and tighter control of internal and international migrants, including women. In some contexts, programmes addressing the welfare needs of internal migrants are even non-existent or too scanty.
- § *The migration of people (and women) is usually permanent and transnational.* In turn, there are fewer support mechanisms for internal, circular and seasonal movements. Each type of migration has its own implications on welfare and security of both migrant and left behind families, as well as remittance flow, benefits and management.
- § *Concern for migration is only relevant for the period during which female migrants are about to depart from origin countries and when they are away.* There is little concern therefore for dependents and left behind families. Support services tend to be piecemeal and to focus largely on pre-departure and welfare needs of migrants while living and working in destination places.
- § *Remittances are key to development.* Therefore states are urged to efficiently harness remittances for investments and poverty alleviation by offering incentives to remitters.
- § *Remittances are being transmitted to families in home communities in straightforward manner and in turn, will be managed equitably by left-behind families.* Therefore most policies ensure efficiency in transmitting remittances but do not create control or management mechanisms for the remitter.
- § *Return migration is 'homecoming': fostering a sense of settlement and shedding one's dislocation as a migrant, and therefore unproblematic, secure and harmonious.* Re-integration programmes are few and overlook women's gender-related and other adjustment problems upon re-joining their home communities.

Recommendations

The general policy environment toward female migrants has generally not been favourable, as evidence has shown. In a fundamental sense, there is need to shift from a paradigm of regulation and control – to a paradigm of creating an enabling environment for women who opt to migrate. The key principle needs to be holistic: that is, to enable safety, welfare and security, and opportunities for stronger self-determination in favour of female migrants and those they leave behind in home communities. In response to this overarching principle, the following are recommendations for policy makers:

- § Lift restrictions and ease the legal impediments to women's migration, recognizing that migration is one among multiple strategies women and men may employ to realize economic, personal and social aspirations. Formalizing the migration of women through gender-responsive policies and support programmes will reduce the risks of irregular migration.
- § Reduce gender-specific vulnerabilities of migrant women. This means strengthening mechanisms for the safe movement of women to places of destination alongside more gender-sensitive efforts toward informing migrant women not only of immigration and employment regulations in host countries, but about their rights as human beings, as migrants, and as women during pre-departure seminars. They must be provided ample information on legal assistance providers, procedures and systems of redress, and centers that offer counseling services for migrant women.
- § Host countries should honor minimum labour standards, apply protective legislation and measures for all types of work that migrant women might take up.
- § Migrant-receiving countries should explore the viability of supporting and endorsing a circular migration programme that responds to their labour demand requirements and optimally matches migrant needs for economic welfare and human security.
- § Receiving countries should reduce the social isolation of female migrants as they work as domestic helpers and caregivers and allowed to foster connections with fellow migrants and friends, as well as to support networks.
- § For internal migrants, local governments should strengthen urban management

programmes to respond to their specific needs for a adequate settlement, both temporary and long-term, and for access to urban infrastructure and social services such as health and education. Their rights as citizens with rightful access to these services should be equally recognized, which requires easing the restrictive and exclusionary residence-based policies.

- § Private-public partnerships in transport, banking and communication sectors could be forged to shape more responsive and affordable programmes and packages for migrants, including women. These should be designed to facilitate and sustain more frequent connections between migrant women and their left behind families to strengthen personal ties as well as to enable easier, safer and more transparent management of remittances up till these are received by the designated manager of remittances in households.
- § Scholars on migration and development specialists should conduct a thorough gender analysis on the phenomenon remittances from migrant senders.
- § Ensure that information on incentives for remitting earnings through formal channels reach all migrants, especially female migrants. Provide training courses for remittance receivers, especially women, on productive investments as well as management of receivables.
- § Gender-sensitive programmes on re-integration should be purposively created to respond to the complex adjustments female migrants have to make upon re-joining their home communities.

This policy environment is however being increasingly challenged by advocacy groups, civil actions and multilateral bodies.

There have been some bright spots in the international policy horizon with respect to female migrants' welfare and social protection. Much however has yet to be done to make governments aware that female migrants' well-being can contribute both to the goals of development both in sending and receiving countries, and to their own empowerment – which should not be considered mutually exclusive, but optimally beneficial. Officializing female migration and recognizing full human rights of female migrants will guarantee their safety, the welfare of families left behind and will provide long-term benefits to the economies of both receiving and sending countries, as well as to cities and towns that absorb them.

The 1990 UN International Convention for the Protection of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families is noteworthy for its rights-based approach to migration. However, to date, only sending countries like Sri Lanka and the Philippines in the Asian regions have ratified the Convention¹³. Host countries limit the recognition and application of human rights to their citizens only, and distinguish between documented and undocumented (irregular) migrants, thus the reluctance to ratify the convention. The Convention acknowledges both male and female migrants, however it does not address gender-specific issues. Truong (1996) notes that the Convention does not recognize women migrants in their role as reproductive workers in the care-taking economy.

The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) provides liberalization of trade in services and offers a multilateral platform for negotiations designed to enable the movement of service providers. A major shortcoming of this platform is that it does not provide universal criteria for the admission of specific types of service providers and their access to labour markets. The Agreement does not define which types of service providers or the sectoral coverage of country commitments (IOM 2008b).

The Global Forum in Migration and Development (GFMD) appears to be a workable platform where representatives from both sending and origin countries can come to the table for straightforward and no-holds barred, yet non-binding and non-normative, discussions. The recently concluded GFMD meeting in Manila last October 2008 drew attention to the enormous benefits that migration can bring. There were open discussions on the rights of migrants and the need to create enabling environments that would optimize migrants' contributions to development. Migration management schemes by receiving countries were also presented and recommendations for follow up actions will document more good practices on migrant protection and explore the potential of more flexible and liberal policies for regular and circulatory migration (Global Forum on Migration and Development 2008). There was no separate roundtable discussion or side event that discussed the specific nature and conditions of female migrant workers.

¹³ As of September 2008, only 39 out of 191 countries have ratified the Convention (IOM, 2008b)

There is some recognition that apart from non-binding forums such as the GFMD, regional and bilateral cooperation could serve as more workable pathways towards more protection of migrant workers. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) are two regional formations that have discussed migration issues.

Regional cooperation between Southeast Asian Nations pursues ambivalent perspectives on sub-regional migration. On one hand, the need to provide welfare and protection of labour migrants is recognized by receiving countries. Yet on the other, this provision is subsumed within the existing national laws and policies of receiving countries on immigration and rejects recognition of the rights of irregular migrants. A case in point is the ASEAN, a sub-regional body that has signed a Declaration on the Protection of Migrant Workers in January 2007 during the 12th ASEAN Summit. In the Declaration, ‘receiving states have the obligation to promote fair and appropriate employment protection, payment of wages, and adequate access to decent working and living conditions for migrant workers’ (Paragraph 8). They should also ‘provide migrant workers, who may be victims of discrimination, abuse, exploitation, violence, with adequate access to the legal and judicial system of the receiving state (Paragraph 9). At the same time, the Declaration is explicit about its adverse position vis-à-vis irregular migrants: “ Nothing in the present Declaration shall be interpreted as implying regularization of the situation of migrant workers who are undocumented” (Paragraph 4). Moreover, the Declaration denies access to justice and remedies by irregular migrants, as well as omits any mention of the right of migrant workers to free association or to organize (IOM 2008b).

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is committed to facilitating labour mobility only for certain categories of professional and skilled persons through information exchange on the regulatory regimes of host countries, providing services to fast track travel documents like business visitor visas and temporary residence procedures. There has been no substantial discussion or debate on semi-skilled or irregular migrants, both women and men (IOM 2008b).

Six governments in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) – Cambodia, China, Viet

Nam, Thailand, Lao PDR and Myanmar – have signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the Cooperation against Trafficking in Persons in the Greater Mekong Subregion in October 2004 forming the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking (COMMIT). The UN Inter-agency Project Against Trafficking in the GMS (UNIAP) serves as COMMIT's secretariat and has adopted a plan of action. The MOU also commits the six governments to develop national plans of action against human trafficking, as well as calls for the investigation, arrest, prosecution and punishment of the perpetrators of trafficking. This appears to be one noteworthy multilateral initiative that squarely addresses the potential risk of trafficking experiences specifically by vulnerable groups of female migrants (Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration Including Human Trafficking 2008).

In view of the weak ratification and impact of current international migrant rights' conventions, it may be useful to:

- § Forge bilateral agreements between governments of sending and receiving countries to recognize female migrant rights, as well as providing legal frameworks to uphold these rights
- § Consider employment of other human rights instruments that could protect migrants' rights (e.g., the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the ILO Conventions no. 97 and 143)

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