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**NINTH COORDINATION MEETING ON  
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

Population Division

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

United Nations Secretariat

New York, 17-18 February 2011

**EMPOWERING WOMEN MIGRANT WORKERS TO CLAIM THEIR RIGHTS AND  
CELEBRATE THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO DEVELOPMENT<sup>1</sup>**

## A. THE CONTEXT

Gender equality and women's empowerment, including that of women migrants, is critical to the mission and mandate of UN Women. In her first statement to the Executive Board of UN Women, Undersecretary-General and Executive Director Michelle Bachelet stated that:<sup>i</sup>

*“[w]omen’s strength, women’s industry, women’s wisdom are humankind’s greatest untapped resource...Tapping this potential involves bringing women into decision making and creating space for their leadership; it involves freeing women from gender-based violence and providing the avenues and opportunities for them to be recognized as economic actors and included in economic policymaking; it involves showing policymakers that where women fully contribute to their economies and societies, the gains for everyone are greatly increased”* (emphasis added).

UN Women brings a gender-sensitive and women's empowerment approach to international migration and human development via its work on: *Empowering Women Migrant Workers to Claim their Rights and Celebrate their Contribution*. The entity's work on women migrant workers is grounded in the significance of international migration to development; its emerging feminization globally –50.1% of the overseas migration population are women;<sup>ii</sup> and the lack of a gender-sensitive women's empowerment orientation in official discourse and practice. Women are increasingly migrating on their own for work, sometimes as the sole income earners for their families. They are overrepresented in jobs traditionally considered “women's work”. Large numbers of them are especially concentrated in the lowest unprotected ends of the informal manufacturing and service sectors, in domestic work and hospitality where they suffer gross abuse.

However, women migrant workers are not just victims– they are important development actors and creative survivors. They make crucial contributions to development via economic and social remittances to countries of origin and contribute their labour, skills, consumption expenditures, ideas and cultures to countries of destination. The contributions of women remain underutilized because the historically low value attached to “women's work” (especially unpaid domestic and care work) results in exclusion from legal and social protections.

## B. HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WORK OF UN WOMEN ON *EMPOWERING WOMEN MIGRANT WORKERS TO CLAIM THEIR RIGHTS AND CELEBRATE THEIR CONTRIBUTION*

The work of UN Women on migration builds on the success of the Regional Programme on Empowering Women Migrant Workers in Asia & the Arab States (elaborated later).<sup>iii</sup>

The entity's work focuses on: gender-responsive migration governance in line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) General Recommendation No. 26 on Women Migrant Workers and other sources of international law.<sup>iv</sup> This includes:

Knowledge generation and management.

Providing technical and financial assistance to the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of gender-responsive policies, plans, programmes and budgets on migration.

Facilitating gender-sensitive environments for service delivery.

Linking with practitioners on women's economic rights, gender and disasters and climate change to identify convergence areas for policy advocacy and reform.

Capacity-strengthening for women migrant workers and their associations to participate in a sustained manner at all stages of policy processes, and claim their entitlements.

Engage with mainstream accountability mechanisms and processes to respond to women migrant workers' concerns.

## C. WHAT UN WOMEN HAS DONE ON GENDER AND MIGRATION

### 1. *At the Global Level*

#### a. *The Global Forum on Migration and Development*

UN Women has been participating in the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) since 2007, by providing structured interventions at Round Tables and supporting civil society participation in all GFMD forums. In 2008 UN Women organised a 600-participant pre-GFMD international conference on gender and migration in Manila in the Philippines to influence the gender-related outcomes of GFMD II 2008.

Prior to the GFMD IV 2010, held in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, UN Women co-organized with Government of Mexico a Pre-GFMD IV High Level Consultation, “Promoting and Protecting the Rights of Women Migrant Workers” in Mexico City from 7-8 September 2010. The Consultation was attended by: Ministries of Labour, Interior and Women of participating governments; international organizations; and civil society organizations (CSOs), from over 20 countries across all regions. A set of engendered policy recommendations from this consultation contributed to shaping the outcomes of Roundtable 2.2 on Gender, Family and Migration (RT 2.2).

At the GFMD IV 2010, UN Women contributed substantively on the gender and women’s empowerment dimensions of labour migration. UN Women was an officially designated partner to RT 2.2 with other agencies, and co-wrote the Annex, “Uncovering the Interfaces between Gender, Family, Migration and Development: The Global Care Economy and Chains” with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This Annex accompanied the official paper by the Government of Mexico, “Human Mobility and Human Development: Migration, Gender and Family”. UN Women also co-presented, with the Government of Portugal, a paper on women migrant workers’ labour rights and actively supported civil society participation.

Key outcomes of RT 2.2 include:

The Chair of GFMD V 2011, the Government of Switzerland, identifying “Global Care Workers at the Interface of Migration and Development” as a sub-theme under the cluster on Labour Mobility for dialogue and concrete action.<sup>v</sup>

A proposal by governments to establish an Ad Hoc Working Group on Gender to implement key gender-related outcomes of the GFMD.

Mainstreaming of gender and migration-related concerns into the African Union Decade on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment.

#### GFMD V 2011:

UN Women will support the Government of Switzerland, the GFMD 2011 Chair in Session, and interested governments, to run consultations on gender-related themes in Asia, Africa, the Americas and Europe.

#### b. *The Global Migration Group*

UN Women is committed to leading and coordinating the development, with others, on:

A training module on mainstreaming gender concerns into international migration and development strategies (including plans, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and Common Country Assessment (CCA) and UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) processes; and

Gender-sensitive guidelines and a checklist to mainstream gender concerns into migration and international development strategies (including plans PRSPs, CCA and UNDAF processes).



the economic, social and political dimensions of development. Finally, it highlights good practices that maximize migrants' contributions to development for all stakeholders.

*Legal Protection for Migrant Domestic Workers* (2009). This publication documents and analyzes existing mechanisms for domestic workers, from international treaties to national labour laws and legally enforceable contracts. It highlights critical elements of gender-sensitive "model" laws and contracts for domestic workers. It highlights how international human rights and labour instruments can be invoked at two levels. First, the principle of non-discrimination, which underlies all human rights instruments, should protect migrant domestic workers who face multiple discriminations on account of their gender, nationality, ethnicity and occupation. Second, the instruments guarantee certain minimum conditions with respect to their employment and treatment, such as fair wages; rest and leisure, healthy and safe working conditions and social security.

*Gender Dimensions of Remittances: A Study of Indonesian Domestic Workers in East and Southeast Asia* (2009). This study examines the gender-differentiated patterns in the earning, saving and remitting practices of Indonesian migrant domestic workers, as well as in receiving and using remittances in Indonesia. It also examines the role of remittances in internal household dynamics, and solutions for maximizing the development potential of remittances for the women migrants, their families and communities of origin.

*Claim and Celebrate Women Migrants' Human Rights through CEDAW* (2005). This publication takes women's migration for work as an illustration to demonstrate how CEDAW's methodological framework can be used effectively to address the immediate and long-term concerns of women migrants, at all stages of the migration process. It further shows how the existing potential of CEDAW to address migration can be significantly strengthened through the adoption of a General Recommendation on migration.

*World Survey of the Role of Women in Development: International Migration and Women* (2004). This report sets out recommendations that, if adopted, will improve the situation of migrant, refugee and trafficked women. The recommendations include: ratification and implementation of all international legal instruments that promote and protect the rights of migrating women and girls; review of national emigration and immigration laws and policies in order to identify discriminatory provisions that undermine the rights of migrant women; and the development of policies that enhance migrant, refugee and trafficked women's employment opportunities and access to health care, education and other services.

#### D. UN WOMEN ACTIVITIES ON WOMEN'S MIGRATION IN THE IMMEDIATE PIPELINE

##### 1. At the Global Level

##### a. The Fourth UN Conference on Least Developed Countries in Istanbul, Turkey (LDC IV)

The *Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010* states that "[m]easures should be taken to ensure respect for and protection of the human rights of migrants, migrant workers and their families..." to promote social integration.<sup>xi</sup> UN Women will organize a special event at LDC IV on implementing legal and social protections for domestic and other care workers. UN Women and the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) are co-organizing a special event on trade and development in the LDCs that will include a focus on the UN Women Africa-based program on Women in Informal Cross Border Trade. The IOM and UN Women will also co-organise a special event, "High Level Ministerial Roundtable on Integrating Migration and Remittances in LDC National and Regional Development Planning".

*b. Parallel Events at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 2011*

The entity is engaged in two parallel events at the fifty-fifth session of the CSW on migrant domestic workers. Building on the 2011 CSW theme of “Access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women’s equal access to full employment and decent work”, UN Women is co-organizing two side events. They are: “Dignity for Domestic Workers: the ILO Convention and Beyond” (on 24 February 2011) with the NGO Committee on Migration, Migrant Rights International, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and others; and “Good Practices on Legal and Social Protections for Domestic Workers: The Role of Education and Training” (on 3 March 2011) co-sponsored by the Government of the Philippines, the Government of Switzerland (TBC) and Human Rights Watch.

*c. UN Women and European Commission-UN Joint Migration and Development Initiative*

UN Women, together with the EC-UN Joint Migration and Development Initiative (EC-UN JMIDI) and others, will be launching an e-discussion on good practices on building domestic workers’ capacity to claim legal and social protections. The e-discussion will be launched on 8 March 2011 (International Women’s Day) and will run for three weeks, finishing on 30 March 2011 (Domestic Workers’ Day in the Americas). It will be action-oriented and focussed on sharing, replicating and up-scaling good practices. A tracking system will monitor implementation of the shared practices.

*d. Policy Product with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)*

The ITUC and UN Women are creating a policy product based on existing and proposed human rights standards for domestic workers (the CEDAW General Recommendation No. 26, the 308w 0(o)-24 Contio6

## NOTES

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- <sup>i</sup> UN Women. First Statement to the Executive Board of UN Women by Undersecretary-General and UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet (24 January 2011). Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/2011/01/statement-to-the>

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