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**Closing the gender gap: effective policies to deliver on Sustainable
Development Goals in the Economic Commission for Europe region**

Empowerment and Equality for Migrant Women and Girls: Progress and Opportunities in the Economic Commission for Europe Region

Note by the International Organization for Migration

Summary

A key component of the Beijing+30 regional review process is the assessment of empowerment and equality for migrant women and girls in the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region. This paper provides a crucial analysis, drawing upon global and regional evidence, to present progress, highlight gaps, and propose critical policy actions as part of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action+30 review. To emphasize alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the analysis clusters the twelve critical areas of concern into six dimensions.



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I. Introduction

1. Gender dynamics shape migration experiences throughout the entire migration cycle, from pre-departure decisions and reasons for migrating, to challenges faced during the journey, and conditions in destination countries, as well as the return to the country of origin, if undertaken.¹ When migration is a choice, it can reflect migrants' agency and leadership, and serve as a vehicle for their empowerment. However, migration can also expose many, particularly women and girls, to vulnerability and rights violations due to gender-based discrimination in law and practice in countries of origin, transit, and destination. While migration can be a cornerstone in achieving sustainable development, prosperity, and progress,² failing to address gender inequality and empower migrant women and girls in their diversity will undermine sustainable and inclusive progress.³

2. The experience of women and girl migrants intersects with multiple and overlapping identities, often resulting in increased discrimination, risk of violence and exclusion. The principle of non-discrimination, including gender-based discrimination, has been consolidated by decades of policy and legal developments, including the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), which is rooted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The GCM is based on ten cross-cutting principles, including gender-responsiveness, that must be applied throughout its implementation. This will ensure that implementation efforts recognize and address the different experiences faced by migrants based on sex and gender, and support their independence, agency, and leadership that moves away from addressing migrant women primarily through a lens of victimhood.⁴

3. In the previous five regional reviews of ECE progress towards the Beijing Declaration commitments, the intersection between migration and gender emerged as a recurrent issue across different sectors. Member States reported progress in labour migration, addressing gender-based violence (GBV) and trafficking in persons. Despite this, there is persistently less progress and focus on the agency of migrant, diaspora and displaced women, with entrenched victimhood stereotypes, addressing social cohesion, anti-migrant and gender backlash. Despite some good examples of feminist policies, there is limited system-wide action to transform gender inequalities in the context of migration.

II. Inclusive development, shared prosperity, and decent work

4. Labour migration significantly contributes to economic development, offering opportunities for decent work and poverty alleviation. Migrants from less developed countries can experience a 15-fold income increase, doubled school enrolment rates, and a 16-fold reduction in child mortality after moving to developed countries.⁵ Over time, migrants positively impact government budgets by increasing productivity, innovation, and demographic structure if integrated into the labour market. However, gender equality and intersectional disparities in labour participation, job segregation, pay, and economic opportunities hinder inclusive development.⁶ 101 million out of 169 million global labour migrant workers reside in ECE member countries, with 49 percent being female (49.5 million).⁷ This excludes women working in informal economies or unpaid domestic labour.⁸

¹ International Organization for Migration (IOM), *World Migration Report*, (2024).

² IOM, *Leveraging Human Mobility to Rescue the 2030 Agenda IOM Flagship Report for the SDG Summit* (2023).

³ IOM, *Sixty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68) 'Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective' Expert Group Meeting Observer Paper* (2023).

⁴ UNGA, *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*, A/RES/73/195, para 15 (g).

⁵ World Bank (2016). *Migration and Development: A Role for the World Bank Group* (2018).

⁶ Agenda 2030 recognizes that achieving inclusive and sustainable development as well as shared prosperity is underpinned by an imperative to achieve gender equality (SDG 5) and address other intersecting inequalities (SDG 10, and cross-cutting principle to "leave no one behind").

⁷ The estimate is based on subregional aggregations in the latest International Labour Organization (ILO) report "*Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers. Results and Methodology*". Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco and San Marino are not included in the report's subregions, while Channel Islands are included but not part of ECE list. *ILO (2021a), Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers. Results and Methodology*.

⁸ Migration Data portal, *Labour migration* (2024).

Addressing the intersections of inequality faced by migrant women is crucial for achieving global development outcomes and driving inclusive and sustainable development.

5. Labour migration shows significant gender disparity due to limited formal employment opportunities in “feminised” sectors and restrictive migration pathways.⁹ Entrenched gender roles and mobility restrictions¹⁰ result in limited decent work opportunities and access to regular migration routes, pushing women to riskier transit routes, increasing GBV, trafficking, debt bondage, and engagement in the shadow economy.¹¹ As a result, women generally have fewer options for regular migration than men and are often employed in informal industries characterized as “feminised.” Women often fill low-wage jobs in domestic and caregiving sectors, which lack protective labour legislation and standards. In 2019, globally 80 percent of women migrant workers were in the service sector, compared to 56 percent of migrant men.¹² In countries of the ECE region, women working in these sectors endure poor pay, discrimination, long hours, and limited social protection services.¹³ Recruitment agencies often exploit migrant workers, especially in domestic and caregiving sectors. Women migrant workers face greater challenges in repaying recruitment-related debts due to lower wages, informal employment, and gender discrimination. In the ECE region, efforts toward ethical recruitment include the United States adopting whistleblower protections,¹⁴ and the Netherlands introducing longer work permits.¹⁵

6. Labour migration agreements and policies often reinforce gender biases, favouring male-dominated skill levels. Admission schemes overlook gender-specific considerations, adversely impacting women.¹⁶ For instance, women in nursing or teaching find it harder to get work permits in European Union (EU) countries compared to men in higher-paid, male-dominated sectors.¹⁷ Challenges in credential recognition increase the likelihood of migrant women being employed in low-wage positions, exacerbating deskilling.¹⁸ For example, Ukrainian refugee and migrant women face significant employment obstacles due to inadequate pay, language barriers, and mismatched qualifications.¹⁹ While the gender gap in international education is narrowing, efforts must continue to achieve parity.²⁰ The educational attainment gap between migrants and nationals in the EU is narrower for women than men, yet, higher-skilled migrant women face ongoing gender barriers in accessing formal work opportunities.²¹ In the ECE region, progress has been made in harnessing labour migration for sustainable development, including improving regular migration pathways and addressing gendered barriers. For instance, a project in Czechia offers legal and social guidance to migrant domestic workers,²² while Spain's WAFIRA initiative develops business skills for women migrant workers in agriculture.²³ However, these efforts are limited in scope, missing broader gender-responsive approaches and skills recognition for migrant women.

7. Migration enhances labour participation rates for women, but the gender wage gap and unpaid domestic labour disparities persist. Women and girls perform more than three-quarters of unpaid care work globally, hindering labour-market progression and widening the gender wage gap.²⁴ Furthermore, poor labour market access and risks of trafficking

⁹ IOM, *World Migration Report* (2024a).

¹⁰ Such restrictions include, e.g., legal requirements of spousal consent for a woman's travel and employment abroad. Women face increased hurdles to obtain legal documents for travel, reducing opportunities for regular migration, access to key services, and protections of rights. IOM, *Addressing Women Migrant Worker Vulnerabilities in International Supply Chains* (2024).

¹¹ Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB), *Migration with Dignity: Implementing the Dhaka Principles* (2017).

¹² ILO, 2021a.

¹³ Martinez, Raquel, *Migration, Domestic Care Work and Public Policies on Long-Term Care in Spain*. REMHU: Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana, vol. 30, no. 65, (2022), pp. 73-90.

¹⁴ UNNM, *1st Meeting - Second Regional Review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration* (2024).

¹⁵ UNNM, *Voluntary National Review of the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Netherlands* (2022).

¹⁶ EIGE, *Migration* (2020).

¹⁷ IOM, 2024a.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ IMPACT, *Economic integration of Ukrainians in Poland by the end of 2023: insights and challenges* (2023).

²⁰ IOM, 2024a.

²¹ Eurostat, *Migrant integration statistics – education* (2024).

²² UNNM, *Migrant Domestic Workers Rights on the Threshold of Czech Households*.

²³ UNNM, *1st Meeting - Second Regional Review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration* (2024).

²⁴ The majority of the 49.5 million women migrant workers in the ECE are employed in Northern, Southern, and Western Europe (42 percent), followed by Northern America (35 percent). King-Dejardin, Amelita (2019). *The social construction of migrant care work. At the intersection of care, migration and gender* (2024).

disproportionately affect migrant sex workers,²⁵ especially women and people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC).²⁶

8. Migrant women often overcome traditional biases to transform economic roles through better employment opportunities.²⁷ In the EU, only one-third of migrant-owned businesses have female owners, indicating barriers to digital services, financial access, and economic empowerment.²⁸ Financial solutions empower migrant women, particularly those without financial accounts. For instance, Malta's pre-paid cards included migrants without basic payment accounts, enabling financial transactions.²⁹ Tajikistan's Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund project provided financial literacy, vocational training, and entrepreneurship opportunities, boosting economic resilience and leadership roles for women and girls.³⁰ However, these initiatives need greater scale and focus on reducing systemic gender barriers.

9. Migrant, diaspora, and returnee communities are vital for achieving sustainable development. Despite the potential to advance women's rights and contributions, diaspora communities often reflect the inequalities present in their countries of origin. Diaspora and returnee women's contributions and platforms for contributing to sustainable development are limited in visibility in the region.

10. The Beijing Platform for Action underscores the challenges that migrant women face in achieving equal pay for equal work and exercising their legal rights. Similarly, GCM Objectives 6, 18, and 19 stress the importance of promoting inclusive development, skills recognition, and decent work opportunities for migrants, including women.

11. To accelerate progress towards the Beijing Platform for Action, the SDGs, and the GCM objectives, the following actions are critical:

- Develop safe and regular migration pathways, and labour migration policies and programmes that are gender-responsive, including in highly “feminised” and informal sectors such as domestic and care work and which address the gendered barriers to women's labour force participation and skills recognition;
- Support development, convergence and alignment of national skills classification, standardization and recognition systems which are gender-responsive, ensuring that progress in this area breaks down harmful gender norms which continue to exclude women within traditional “feminised” sectors;
- Develop gender-responsive policies and approaches to ethical recruitment, investing in workplace safety and regular labour pathways for migrant women, ensuring access to justice and remedies;
- Support relevant public and private stakeholders, including governments, trade unions, migrant and women associations, NGOs, employers, and migrant women, to create and implement market-driven skills development policies that improve employability of migrant women;
- Decriminalise sex work for women and girls and provide comprehensive support and exit pathways, enhancing prevention initiatives, fostering financial and digital inclusion, and creating viable alternatives to sex work;
- Build gender-responsive programmes that promote the leadership of women diaspora members and migrant returnees, engaging persons of all genders in transforming harmful gender norms and intersectional disparities.

²⁵ Migrant sex workers are estimated to comprise more than 65 percent of the sex worker population in Western Europe, and a significant segment of the community in Central-Eastern Europe. Reference: ICRSE (2021). *From vulnerability to resilience: sex workers organising to end exploitation*.

²⁶ To maintain consistency in terminology, this paper will use both terms “diverse SOGIESC” as per standard terminology of IOM and when referring to specific member states' progress within the ECE region, the term “LGBTIQ+” (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer/Questioning) will be used, as it is more commonly adopted by many member states in this region.

²⁷ UN Women, *Joint Advocacy Brief on the impacts of COVID-19 on refugee and migrant women and girls and the importance of including their specific needs and rights in COVID-19 recovery plans. Advocacy Brief Refugee and Migrant Women and Girls (IBC LMPDR and Gender)* (2022).

²⁸ EEA, *Digital Byte on the digital gender divide* (2023).

²⁹ UNNMN, *'Pre-paid cards to unbanked migrants'* (2021).

³⁰ UNNM, *Empowerment of 'families left behind' for improved migration outcomes in Khatlon, Tajikistan* (2023).

III. Poverty eradication, social protection, and social services

12. Migration remains a powerful poverty reduction tool for migrants and their families as well as for the communities where they live, and where they come from.³¹ However, migrants are more likely to be at risk of poverty than non-migrants.³² For instance, in Europe and North America, 85 percent of migrants earn less than non-migrants on average.³³ While migration has the potential to accelerate gender equality, systemic barriers heighten risks of poverty among migrant women including the gendered division of labour, restrictive gender norms, and reduced decision-making power. For example, migrant women in high-income countries face a dual wage penalty due to their gender and migrant status.³⁴

13. The multifaceted risks of poverty among migrants expose them to new vulnerabilities, intensifying gendered experiences of poverty, discrimination, and socio-economic exclusion, including inadequate access to social protection and healthcare.³⁵ Migrant women born outside the EU often face high rates of economic inactivity and poorer employment outcomes compared to men, putting them at greater risk of poverty. They are frequently concentrated in lower-paid sectors, such as domestic and care work, where they face exploitation and human rights violations and low social benefits.³⁶ These vulnerabilities were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, with migrant women facing increased job loss and financial instability due to their high representation in the hardest-hit sectors.³⁷ Additionally, many of them move as dependents rather than for employment, facing higher unemployment and economic inactivity rates.³⁸ Migrant women exhibit higher unemployment or economic inactivity rates than any other demographic in the EU labour-market.³⁹ In migrants' countries of origin, gendered patterns of migration arise from various economic, socio-cultural, legal-institutional, and policy factors that favour men, leaving many women and girls behind trapped in poverty.⁴⁰

14. Migrant remittances have the potential to significantly contribute to poverty reduction in countries. While migrant women remit about the same amount as men, they send a higher proportion of their income regularly, even though they generally earn less.⁴¹ In 2021, remittance inflows to Europe and Central Asia reached historic highs of USD 74 billion, representing one of the highest remittance rates globally.⁴² Meanwhile, the average cost globally of sending USD 200 of remittances was 6.3 per cent in 2022, over double the SDG target of 3 per cent.⁴³ As a result, migrant women's contributions to poverty reduction and development is undermined.

15. Globally, many migrants have no access to social protection; approximately 22 per cent of labour migrants are not covered.⁴⁴ Migrant women are more likely than non-migrant women to work in jobs that are generally excluded from contributory social insurance schemes and lacking occupational safety, such as domestic and care sectors, and seasonal agricultural work.⁴⁵ Employment and residency regulations may also prevent them from enjoying these entitlements.⁴⁶ While migrant women play a vital role in providing essential social services, they often encounter barriers in accessing vital services like health, education, social and child protection, and decent work, especially when in irregular situations. They also have specific needs for healthcare, especially for sexual and reproductive health and

³¹ IOM, *Submission to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2024* (2024).

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ OECD, *International Migration Outlook 2020* (2020).

³⁵ Jolly, S. and H. Reeves, *Gender and Migration: Overview Report*. BRIDGE Development – Gender, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton (2005).

³⁶ UN Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016* (2015).

³⁷ IBC LMDPR and IBC Gender *Joint Advocacy Brief on the impacts of COVID-19 on refugee and migrant women and girls and the importance of including their specific needs and rights in COVID-19 recovery plans* (2022).

³⁸ IOM, *Leveraging Human Mobility to Rescue the 2030 Agenda IOM Flagship Report for the SDG Summit* (2023).

³⁹ EU Parliament, *Briefing: Migrant women and the EU labour market Overcoming double discrimination* (2023).

⁴⁰ Rajan, S.I. (Ed.), *South Asia Migration Report 2020: Exploitation, Entrepreneurship and Engagement* (1st ed.) (2020).

⁴¹ UN Women, *Women Migrant Workers and Remittances*; Hennebry, J., J. Holliday and M. Moniruzzaman (2017). *At what cost? Women migrant workers, remittances and development, Research Paper* (2017).

⁴² World Bank, *Remittances to Reach \$630 billion in 2022 with Record Flows into Ukraine* (2022).

⁴³ IOM, *Leveraging Human Mobility to Rescue the 2030 Agenda IOM Flagship Report for the SDG Summit* (2023).

⁴⁴ Hagen-Zanker, J., E. Mosler Vidal and G. Sturge, *Social Protection, Migration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2017).

⁴⁵ Hennebry, J., K. Williams and M. Walton-Roberts, *Women Working Worldwide: A Situational Analysis of Women Migrant Worker* (2017).

⁴⁶ UN Women, (N.D). *Leaving no-one behind: Access to social protection for all migrant women*.

protection in cases of violence. Women with irregular migration status are typically excluded from maternity protection and healthcare, forced to work late into pregnancy or return prematurely, risking their health and their children's health.⁴⁷ Language barriers, lack of information, and absence of required documentation can hinder access to social protection services for migrant women, especially in countries where undocumented status may lead to arrest and deportation.⁴⁸ Cultural taboos may prevent migrant women from accessing sexual and reproductive health and essential services for survivors of violence.⁴⁹ In Europe, migrant women have worse pregnancy and birth outcomes in comparison to non-migrants.⁵⁰

16. In terms of progress, some countries provide immediate healthcare check-ups and social security benefits for newcomers, prioritizing mental health and support for women and children, for example in Luxembourg. While progress has been made, certain groups of women and gender-diverse migrants still face challenges in accessing essential services due to criminalization and stigma, including transgender and intersex migrants.⁵¹ For example, ILGA-Europe reported that trans asylum seekers often struggle to access hormone replacement treatment and mental health support. Furthermore, migrants whose residence status depends on their spouse often find themselves trapped in violent and abusive situations, unable to seek support or leave. The Istanbul Convention has prompted several countries to create policies offering residency pathways for migrants who are survivors of violence. In the EU, such permits are available in France, Greece, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands.⁵² Despite these measures, gaps in access to services for GBV survivors persist within the ECE region (see also section III).

17. Migration should be a choice rather than a necessity, as recognized by the GCM. To achieve this, it is essential to address poverty as a driver that compels people to leave their country of origin. Implementing gender-responsive migration, social protection, and service access policies can address these challenges for migrant women. GCM enshrines the provision of essential services to migrants and migrant women in Objectives 15 and 16, including establishing portable social security systems that allow migrant women to retain benefits when they move. GCM Objectives 15 and 22 call for removing barriers to social services, ensuring equitable access to healthcare, education, and housing.

18. To accelerate progress towards the Beijing Platform for Action, the SDGs, and the GCM objectives, the following actions are critical:

- Design gender-responsive poverty reduction strategies and financing options, that address the risks of poverty and exclusion among migrant women in countries of destination and origin, address gender barriers to integration and reintegration, as well as gendered barriers to mobility options in poverty-affected communities;
- Extend inclusive and non-discriminatory national social protection systems; develop frameworks, policies and practices in consultation with migrant women in their diversity to remove obstacles to social protection and systematically address gendered barriers;
- Provide universal access for migrant women and gender-diverse persons to safe, quality and affordable health services – including mental health and psychosocial support - medicines and continuity of care, to achieve universal health coverage;
- Establish gender-responsive mechanisms for the portability of social security benefits, recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work through public services, infrastructure, and social protection policies, while also invest in interventions to transform harmful gender norms;
- Establish and strengthen gender-, age- and disability-responsive information points at local level, that are migrant inclusive, offer relevant information on essential services

⁴⁷ ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2017-2019: Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals* (2017).

⁴⁸ Ulrichs, M., *Informality, Women and Social Protection* (2016).

⁴⁹ Schmidt, N.C., V. Fagnoli, M. Epiney and O. Irion, *Barriers to Reproductive Health Care for Migrant Women in Geneva: A Qualitative Study*. *Reproductive Health* 15, article 43, (2018).

⁵⁰ WHO, *Report on the Health of Refugees and Migrants in the WHO European Region: No Public Health Without Refugee and Migrant Health* (2018).

⁵¹ European Commission, *Progress report on the implementation of the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025* (2023).

⁵² PICUM, *Insecure Justice? Residence Permits for Victims of Crime in Europe* (2020).

and protection in different languages spoken by migrants, that address intersectional barriers to information access.

IV. Freedom from violence, stigma, and stereotypes

19. Migrant women and girls in the ECE region face significant risks of violence, exploitation, and abuse throughout their migration journeys. Socio-economic marginalization and gender stereotypes limit opportunities for regular migration opportunities, increasing their risk of harm through irregular routes.⁵³ Many women migrate to escape gender-based violence (GBV), including forced marriage and domestic violence.⁵⁴ Irregular migration heightens risks of trafficking, with recent regional data showing 63 percent of registered victims are female.⁵⁵ Furthermore, previous experience of GBV heightens risk of trafficking.⁵⁶ During transit, many migrant women reporting experiences of sexual assault and exploitative relationships.⁵⁷ In destination countries, the risk of GBV remains high, especially among groups facing intersectional marginalization. Undocumented migrants and migrant women who rely on a spouse for their visa encounter significant barriers to accessing services and justice due to their migration status.

20. Labour migrant women, often employed in the domestic and care sectors with precarious work contracts, are less likely to access social protection mechanisms and more likely to be undocumented workers, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.⁵⁸ Migrant women and persons of diverse SOGIESC engaged in sex work are exposed to disproportionate risks of violence due to their criminalization, societal stigma, surveillance, precarious residence status, and marginalization. In detention centres, asylum seeking women, girls, and persons of diverse genders or undocumented migrants are at heightened risk of violence. This is particularly the case for transgender migrant, who are often placed in detention facilities that do not respect their gender identity.⁵⁹

21. Despite the considerable risks of GBV and trafficking in the region, the Istanbul Convention provides a strong policy framework within the ECE region for combating violence against women and domestic violence and includes specific articles to protect migrant and asylum-seeking women.⁶⁰ In terms of progress, countries parties to the Convention show some promising practices to address GBV among migrant communities. Examples include the most recent Directive (2024/298) of the EU which includes important provisions to address intersectional forms of discrimination including for third country nationals and provisions to address violence reporting deterrents, Portugal's initiatives against female genital mutilation,⁶¹ Sweden's online portal for migrants providing information on sexuality, family relation, marriage and violence,⁶² Norway's minority adviser scheme to combat forced marriage and "honour" related violence⁶³, and Canada's support to address GBV in the resettlement sector.⁶⁴

22. Despite these successes, anti-gender and anti-migrant pushbacks in the region have reduced access to rights for migrant women survivors, undermining non-discrimination measures and the effectiveness of protection mechanisms and access to services for survivors, particularly for undocumented migrant women. The Istanbul Convention has faced resistance, with several governments withdrawing or threatening to withdraw from it, while

⁵³ IOM, 2024a.

⁵⁴ IOM, (2024). *Migrants Travelling to Europe by land and by sea. Journeys, Vulnerabilities and Needs of migrants arriving in Greece, Italy, and Spain in 2023*. IOM, Europe. Pg. 18.

⁵⁵ Eurostat, *Trafficking in Human Beings Statistics* (2024).

⁵⁶ UNODC, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022* (2022).

⁵⁷ UNHCR, IOM and Mixed Migration Centre, *On this journey no one cares if you live or die. Abuse, Protection and Justice along Routes between East and West Africa and Africa's Mediterranean Coast. A route-based perspective on key risks. Volume 2* (2024).

⁵⁸ For example, Central Asia Civil Society, *Oral Statement by Central Asia Civil Society at the GCM Regional Review for ECE* (2024).

⁵⁹ IOM, *World Migration Report 2022* (2023).

⁶⁰ In Article 59. Council of Europe, *Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention): Protecting migrant women, refugee women and women asylum seekers from GBV* (2011).

⁶¹ Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), *GREVIO's (Baseline) Evaluation Report on legislative and other measures giving effect to the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (hereafter: Evaluation Report Istanbul Convention). Portugal* (2019).

⁶² GREVIO, *Evaluation Report Istanbul Convention. Sweden* (2019).

⁶³ GREVIO, *Evaluation Report Istanbul Convention. Norway* (2022).

⁶⁴ UNNM, *Written statement by Canada submitted to the GCM Regional Review 2024 for the ECE* (2024).

others have refused to ratify it. The revision of national laws, policies, and actions on violence against women and domestic violence in the region has not always been used as an opportunity for protecting the rights of the diversity of migrant women. There continues to be considerable risks and rights violations reported in detention centres, with some limited measures to address cisgender specific considerations, such as in Greece. However, adaptations to ensure inclusivity and protection for gender diverse migrants continue to be a gap.

23. In terms of policy frameworks against human trafficking, the Palermo Protocol and the Council of Europe’s Convention on Action against Trafficking are key instruments relevant to the ECE region. In terms of progress, there are numerous examples of national and subregional commitments for trafficking in persons, with the EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings (2021-2025) and the Anti-Trafficking Directive (2011/36/EU) focus on prevention, victim protection, and prosecution of traffickers, emphasizing gender-sensitive approaches and child protection. Despite these efforts, gaps remain in addressing trafficking in the ECE region, including inconsistent laws, limited survivor-centred and gender-responsive approaches, and lack of comprehensive victim support services.

24. Gendered stereotypes also feed into anti-immigration discourses and intersect with racism and religious hatred, portraying migrant women as vulnerable victims, negating their agency, and contributing to social stigmatization and demonize certain groups, such as women from racialised communities.⁶⁵ Initiatives to counter these gendered, racial and religious stereotypes and anti-migrant rhetoric appear limited in the ECE region. Furthermore, gender biases are inherent in the immigration process, including the use of digital technologies for identity and security checks, often misrecognizing individuals with darker skin complexions, women, and migrants of diverse gender identities.⁶⁶ Actions to address intersectional risks among migrant women and girls appear to be limited in the ECE region, especially among women with diverse SOGIESC, migrant sex workers, migrant women and girls with disabilities and undocumented migrants. One example of progress is the Netherlands “SAMEN” project which aims protect from sexual, gender-based and domestic violence with specific focus on migrants who belong to marginalized groups, such as women, young adults and people from the LGBTIQ+ community.

25. Previous Beijing regional reviews have emphasized that safety from GBV on migration routes and in detention centres must be ensured, and that migrant women who report abuse in their informal work environments should be protected from deportation and sanctions.

26. To accelerate progress towards the Beijing Platform for Action, the SDGs, and the GCM objectives, the following actions are critical:

- Strengthening survivor-centered legal frameworks to end violence against women and domestic violence and gender-responsive actions to combat trafficking in persons, including through ratifying and effectively implementing the Istanbul Convention as well as the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children and international labour standards, notably Protocol 29 to the Forced Labour Convention, within a realistic timeframe and prioritize actions to address the gaps identified in monitoring reports. Safe and consistent implementation of such legal frameworks is required to foster trust amongst women and girls to report and participate in efforts to achieve justice and avoid impunity;
- Enhance the availability of gender-responsive pathways for regular migration, including regularization of migrants who are in an irregular situation. Pathways should be based on international human and labour rights standards, address the specific needs of women and girls to lower the risk of exploitation and human trafficking and ensure that affected migrants are able to access justice and services without fear of arrest, detention and deportation – as well as removing the gendered barriers to migration and employment which reinforce gender inequalities;

⁶⁵ IOM, 2024a.

⁶⁶ EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), *Bias in algorithms – Artificial intelligence and discrimination* (2022).

- Develop national laws, policies, action plans and allocate sufficient financing to address all forms of GBV. This includes strengthen a focus on prevention of violence addressing structural barriers to gender equality and improving access to essential services for survivors of GBV survivors independent of migration status. Ensure that actions are tailored to address most marginalized and at-risk women and girls;
- Establish open and accessible services for the diversity of GBV and trafficking survivors at local level which are safe, confidential, and accessible; and ensure frontline staff, including border officials and law enforcement professionals, are trained and held accountable to assist survivors of GBV and trafficking independent of migration status, and in a survivor-centered and non-discriminatory manner;
- Provide a platform to migrant women and girls in their diversity to be agents of change, with targeted action to empower the most marginalized migrant women and girls, to address GBV, trafficking, exploitation and combat harmful gender stereotypes, anti-migrant, racist discourses and religious hatred. Learn from their experience and insights to design intersectional, human rights-based, survivor-centered, gender- and child- sensitive and trauma-informed protection, GBV and anti-trafficking interventions;
- Change the narrative of migrant women from victimhood to agency, working with the media, private sector, educational institutions and the diversity of migrant, displaced and diaspora women and their organizations. Support gender-responsive public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives aimed at fostering a culture of respect, tolerance, and understanding, which challenge discriminatory attitudes and practices to end misinformation, stigmatization and political manipulation of human mobility and showcase migrant women and girl's agency.

V. Participation, accountability, and gender-responsive institutions

27. Agenda 2030 and other global commitments recognize that gender equality and women's empowerment are critical to achieving sustainable and inclusive development, poverty eradication, peace and social inclusion. Despite some progress, such as the increase in women's representation in parliaments and local governments, gender gaps in political leadership persist, with significant disparities between countries and regions.⁶⁷ Despite these commitments, the role of migrant, diaspora, displaced and returnee women and girls is often limited or overlooked. They encounter double discrimination due to their gender and migration or displacement status, which creates barriers to political and civic engagement, education, employment, and financial opportunities. Although migrant and diaspora women and girls have a crucial role in promoting peace and security, their participation and leadership are frequently undervalued by male-dominated structures.⁶⁸ They face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and violence that limit their access to resources, services, protection, and justice.⁶⁹ Ensuring women's meaningful participation requires local ownership and tailored policies and programmes.⁷⁰

28. To support Member States and other stakeholders' efforts to integrate the GCM in policies and other strategic planning efforts, the UN Network on Migration was established in 2018 at the request of the Secretary-General. One of the Network's workstreams is dedicated to enhancing the application of anti-discrimination dimensions, including discrimination based on gender⁷¹. Initiatives to address these gaps in the ECE region include the adoption of several instruments to promote gender equality and women's rights in migration, such as the Istanbul Convention, the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, the

⁶⁷ World Economic Forum, *World Gender Gap report. Insight Report June 2023* (2023).

⁶⁸ IOM, *Women on the Move: Migration, Gender Equality and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*; UN Women (2016). *Gender and the European Refugee Crisis* (2019).

⁶⁹ Crawley, H. and Skleparis, D., *Refugees, migrants, and citizens: constructions of identity and exclusion in the European response to the 2015 refugee crisis* (2018).

⁷⁰ IOM, *Gendered Dimensions of Disengagement, Disassociation, Reintegration and Reconciliation in the Lake Chad Basin Region* (2022).

⁷¹ UNMN (n.d.), <https://migrationnetwork.un.org/enhancing-application-anti-discrimination-dimensions-including-discrimination-based-gender-work>.

EU Gender Action Plan III, and the ECE Policy for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.⁷² Several countries have also launched feminist foreign policies, such as Sweden, France, Spain⁷³ and Canada.⁷⁴ However, while many countries and political parties have showed their intention of developing a feminist foreign policy, there have been recent trends towards abandoning feminist approaches, restricting support to migrants and adopting stricter immigration laws in ECE region.

29. Migrant women and girls in the ECE region have strengthened political systems by participating in policy development and advocacy, including civil society initiative such as the European Network of Migrant Women and the French Union of Sex Workers,⁷⁵ and ECE countries have supported migrant women's rights and participation in their countries of origin, such as Germany's support for UN Women's programme "Making Migration Safe for Women" in Niger and Ethiopia.⁷⁶

30. Gender-responsive governance requires accurate and disaggregated data and evidence on migration and gender inequalities. Examples of evidence-based policy action in ECE include IOM's GenMig platform and Gender + Migration Hub,⁷⁷ Canada's Gender-based Analysis Plus,⁷⁸ Netherland's national gender statistics,⁷⁹ and Armenia's census.⁸⁰ Despite this progress, migration policies often neglect the diversity, agency, and participation of migrant women and girls, especially those facing intersectional discrimination based on age, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, and SOGIESC. Only 23 per cent of countries⁸¹ incorporate a gender perspective into their national migration strategy.⁸² There is a need for more evidence and analysis on the participation of migrant, diaspora, displaced and returnee women with diverse SOGIESC,⁸³ disabilities, racial backgrounds, and age groups in political and development forums, as their inclusion will enrich perspectives and strengthen collective efforts

31. Some progress has been made on gender-responsive humanitarian assistance and security sector reform, such as the German strategy on gender in humanitarian assistance, the chairmanship of the Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies⁸⁴, and the IOM project on strengthening national policing capacity in Moldova, which includes training on gender equality, women's empowerment, GBV, and disability inclusion. However, more is needed to challenge the harmful patriarchal norms in the security sector, and to ensure the inclusion and protection of persons of diverse SOGIESC in humanitarian interventions.

32. The GCM gender-responsiveness guiding principle explicitly calls for empowering migrant women as agents of change (GCM, para 15(g)), and Objective 18 calls for migrant women to take on leadership roles and participate in decision-making processes at all levels. Furthermore, previous Beijing Declaration reviews have emphasized the importance of investing in sex and gender disaggregated data for better monitoring, reporting and inclusive policy-making purposes.

33. To accelerate progress towards the Beijing Platform for Action, the SDGs, and the GCM objectives, the following actions are critical:

- Conduct and apply intersectional gender analysis at different levels with focus on the gender and intersectional dynamics to develop, resource and take gender-responsive and inclusive actions for migration governance and support the meaningful participation of women and girls in all their diversity, in leadership and decision-making processes;

⁷² United Nations, *ECE Policy for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. Accelerating the attainment of SDGs with a gender lens in the ECE region (2021-2025)* (2021).

⁷³ The Diplomatic Society, *3rd International Conference on Feminist Foreign Policies to be hosted by Mexico*. (2024).

⁷⁴ Global Affairs Canada, *Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy* (2017).

⁷⁵ UN Women, *UN Women continues supporting women's leadership in politics and business*; ICRSE (2021). *From vulnerability to resilience: sex workers organising to end exploitation* (2021).

⁷⁶ Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Government of Germany, *Migration and gender* (2024).

⁷⁷ IOM, *Gender and Migration Research Policy Action Lab* (2024).

⁷⁸ The Government of Canada, *Gender-based Analysis Plus* (2022).

⁷⁹ European institute for Gender Equality, *Gender mainstreaming in Netherlands* (2022).

⁸⁰ Statistical Committee Republic of Armenia, *Population Census 2022* (2022).

⁸¹ There are 77 countries and EU listed as ECE according to [ECE website](#).

⁸² IOM, *Migration Governance Insights: Informing People-centred Migration Policies – Executive Summary* (2024).

⁸³ EU, *Guidance note on the collection and use of data for LGBTIQ equality* (2023).

⁸⁴ UNNM, *Oral statement by the Government of Germany for Session 4 at the GCM Regional Reviews 2024 for the ECE* (2024).

- Strengthen capacities of institutions to safely collect disaggregated migration data at local, national, regional and global levels, based on do-no-harm principles to better understand the situation of migrants of all genders in all their diversity and identify their needs, capacities and risks, to take target action and strengthen evidence-based policymaking and gender-responsive migration governance;
- Invest in inclusive platforms to strengthen the meaningful participation of migrant women and girls in their diversity, including partnering with and allocating funding to Women-Led and Women's Rights Organisations that focus on migration. Address intersectional barriers to ensure that the most marginalized migrant women and girls, with particular attention to young women, adolescent girls, women with disabilities, and undocumented women, have a space to participate in political and development forums, to ensure their priorities and perspectives are adequately addressed;
- Develop and fund capacity-building programmes specifically targeting diverse groups of migrant women, including those with disabilities, with diverse SOGIESC, sex workers, and from various racial backgrounds and age groups. Leadership and advocacy training programmes should be tailored for migrant women and civil society organizations working on the rights and empowerment of migrant women, ensuring that they are equipped to participate in decision-making processes at all levels, in public debates and policy forums.

VI. Peaceful and inclusive societies

34. Migrants, diaspora and displaced persons of all genders in their diversity have the right to dignity, equality, and freedom, free from discrimination or violence. They have also proven to play a crucial role in fostering intercultural dialogue and social cohesion in the ECE region. Yet, they face multiple challenges, such as politicization, conflict, inequality, and anti-migrant rhetoric, xenophobia, racism, religious hatred (especially Islamophobia), and anti-gender backlash, affecting their integration and inclusion. For example, the EU reported high levels of discrimination and a large increase in racist and xenophobic incidents.⁸⁵ Therefore, the integration of migrant women and girls is critical to support their economic autonomy and strengthen social cohesion.

35. In terms of progress in the region, Romania and the Netherlands have recently improved their legal and policy frameworks to promote human rights education and migrant integration. Canada and Turkmenistan⁸⁶ have invested in tailored settlement services and structural reforms to support the integration and inclusion of migrants, especially women, youth, seniors, persons with disabilities, and with diverse SOGIESC. Canada provides funding for gender-based violence supports, LGBTIQ+ settlement supports, and women's only language classes. Peer mentoring and its Gender-based Analysis Plus (intersectional analysis) is continuously applied to assess the potential impacts of policies, programmes, and services on diverse groups of people, through the Settlement Program.⁸⁷ However, there is a need for more systematic and transformative approaches to address harmful gender norms among both migrant and host country populations, and to enhance social cohesion, inclusion, and integration processes within the ECE region.

36. Migrants living within non-traditional families also encounter legal and administrative obstacles in obtaining visas, residency permits, or family reunification due to restrictive definitions of family and marriage that exclude same-sex or unmarried couples. Furthermore, they may face discrimination and exclusion in accessing housing, education, and social services due to heteronormative and patriarchal norms and practices. The EU LGBTIQ+ strategy⁸⁸ advocates for upholding the rights of LGBTIQ+ migrants and applicants for international protection and recognizes the heightened vulnerability of transgender and intersex individuals. The European Commission's Safe Home guidance⁸⁹ calls for ensuring equal access to non-segregated accessible community-based services for all migrants,

⁸⁵ FRA, *Coronavirus pandemic in the EU-fundamental rights implications*. EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020).

⁸⁶ UNNM, *Written input from Turkmenistan to the GCM Regional Review 2024 ECE region* (2024).

⁸⁷ UNNM, *Written input from the EU to the GCM Regional Review 2024 ECE region* (2024).

⁸⁸ European Commission, *Progress report on the implementation of the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025* (2023).

⁸⁹ The European Commission, *Safe Home guidance* (2022).

especially those at a greater risk of discrimination, sexual and labour exploitation and abuse, and human trafficking.⁹⁰ However, there is a need for more targeted action and financing to address gaps among migrant, displaced and returnee populations.

37. Migrant and displaced women and girls in the ECE region experience conflict differently, some fleeing from war-torn countries, and endure perilous journeys. While gender inequality is rarely recognized as driver of and contributor to conflict, evidence shows that gender inequality increases civil conflict severity and instability.⁹¹ Despite women's historical role in conflict-affected contexts, as combatants, as part of organized civil society, as human rights defenders, as members of resistance movements and as active agents in both formal and informal peacebuilding and recovery processes,⁹² diaspora, displaced and migrant women and girls are often excluded from dialogue and peace efforts. Gender stereotypes portray women as victims and caretakers rather than agents of change.⁹³ Also, stereotypes assume men are more dangerous and active fighters, ignoring the complex and diverse reality.

38. In the ECE region, some countries support partner countries to build cooperation and capacities in areas such as skill development, addressing adverse drivers, and bridging the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, including through donations to the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund. Canada prioritises gender across the multilateral system, in human rights, peace and security, humanitarian response and development.⁹⁴ IOM implemented a programme in the Kyrgyz Republic to address structural barriers to women's participation and contributions to conflict mitigation and peacebuilding, using innovative approaches to identify good practices and solutions from within the community and to shift community perceptions of harmful gender norms. Activities aimed at changing gender norms were impactful and local authorities showed greater cooperation with women. This example highlights the need to empower women as decision makers and increase engagement with men and boys and women from vulnerable communities. However, programmes to address the nexus between migration, conflict and gender could be better reflected within these funding mechanisms.

39. In the five previous Beijing Platform for Action reviews for the ECE region, member States agreed on preventing discrimination across all sectors, including in security and defence. The Beijing+25 Regional Review meeting emphasized that to protect migrant women, strict measures against racial profiling and institutional racism should be implemented. This aligns with the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda and GCM Objectives 2 and 16, which emphasize the need for gender-responsive policies and calls for the empowerment of migrants for social inclusion.

40. To accelerate progress towards the Beijing Platform for Action, the SDGs, and the GCM objectives, the following actions are critical:

- Strengthen gender-responsive social cohesion and inclusion policies and programmes based on consultation with migrant, diaspora and displaced women and girls in their diversity, including designing actions based on intersectional gender analysis that address structural inequalities to transform harmful gender relations, and at the same time address the needs and gender inequalities among host communities;
- Ensure that social cohesion and inclusion policies and programmes address the intersectional needs and interests of the most marginalized migrants, diaspora and displaced persons of all gender, including persons with diverse SOGIESC, persons with disabilities, undocumented migrants, sex workers and those dependent on a partner for a visa;
- Design and fund programmes which strengthen migrant, diaspora and displaced women's roles in peacebuilding and conflict resolution and transform harmful gender

⁹⁰ The Strategy specifically mentions unaccompanied minors, children deprived of parental care, women, LGBTIQ, Roma, persons with disabilities, older persons, racial or ethnic minorities and non-Ukrainians, including undocumented and stateless people.

⁹¹ Forsberg, E., & Olsson, L., *Gender Inequality and Internal Conflict*. *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Politics* (2022).

⁹² OHCHR, *Women's human rights and gender-related concerns in situations of conflict and instability* (2024).

⁹³ UN Women, *Women are increasingly at-risk in conflict, underrepresented in peace processes, according to UN Secretary-General report* (2023).

⁹⁴ UNNM, *Written input from Canada to the GCM Regional Review 2024 ECE region* (2024).

norms, engaging men and boys to achieve gender equality and peacebuilding objectives.

VII. Environmental conservation, protection, and rehabilitation

41. Environmental degradation, disasters, and climate change pose an unprecedented threat to global populations and the environment, requiring urgent action. These pressures, exerted by climate change, are significant drivers of migration influencing the decisions to migrate or stay. The poorest and least mobile, often disproportionately women and girls, are however frequently left behind. The adverse impacts of migration also amplify risks and pre-existing gender-based inequalities. Women and girls are disproportionately impacted and receive inadequate and inequitable support to adapt to these changes, driven by factors such as lower socio-economic status, limited access to information, education and skill development, restricted agency as well as lower access to land ownership, labour markets, and decision-making processes.⁹⁵ Similarly, during recovery efforts they encounter more challenges such as increased care and domestic responsibilities, greater health risks related to pregnancy, and heightened risks of violence.⁹⁶ These factors prevent women from fully contributing to climate-related planning, policymaking, and implementation.⁹⁷

42. Migration can be an effective climate adaptation strategy, benefiting destination countries and communities through migrants' skills and knowledge.⁹⁸ Migrant women's experiences can drive positive social change, promote women's agency, and challenge gender stereotypes in work and caregiving roles.⁹⁹ During the 2024 ECE GCM Regional Review for the ECE region, countries in the region recognized the importance of the existing frameworks, such as the 2030 Agenda, the GCM and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and highlighted the contributions made for the advancement of SDGs. However, despite the gendered impacts and dynamics of climate change and migration, there are few countries specifically addressing the nexus between gender, migration and climate change to date. The ECE Environmental Performance Reviews indicate that a few countries in the region address gender, yet none of the Review reports address the intersectional aspects between migration and gender.¹⁰⁰

43. Some exceptions to this gap during the review period include Greece, which has established a Task Force to map the dimensions and impacts of the climate crisis to formulate policy proposals including addressing the gendered impacts, as well as Tajikistan, who adopted a National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction for 2019-2030, identifying new approaches to the role of women in disaster risk reduction. Furthermore, Germany highlighted the nexus between migration, gender and climate change to be among its priorities, supporting communities to secure their livelihoods and to adapt to climate change,¹⁰¹ data analysis and scenario planning, among other initiatives.¹⁰²

44. The nexus between gender, migration, and climate change remains insufficiently addressed; with women and gender-diverse persons frequently seen as victims of climate change rather than as agents of change, undermining their potential contributions to adaptation and mitigation efforts. Addressing this nexus requires a multisectoral approach that brings together global, regional, national and local efforts, in addition to including a gender-responsive approach to existing policy frameworks. Building on these climate change and disaster-risk reduction frameworks, the GCM calls for concrete actions to address adverse effects of climate change, environmental degradation and disaster risks in the context of migration.

⁹⁵ Erman, A., De Vries Robbé, S. A., Thies, S. F., Kabir, K., and Mirai Maruo, M., *Gender Dimensions of Disaster Risk and Resilience Existing Evidence*. The World Bank and the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (2021).

⁹⁶ UN Women, *UN Women brief on earthquake in Türkiye: Impacts and priorities for women and girls* (2023).

⁹⁷ Halle S and Kellogg M., *Gender, climate & security: sustaining inclusive peace on the frontlines of climate change*. United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, UNDP and United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (2020).

⁹⁸ UN Women, *Policy brief: Ensuring safe and regular migration for women and girls in the context of climate change* (2022).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ ECE, *Gender mainstreaming in environmental performance reviews* (2024).

¹⁰¹ UNNM, *Germany's general remarks in Session 1 ECE GCM Regional Review 2024* (2024).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

45. Dialogue on challenges related to migration, environment, climate change and gender is crucial, however, action in this area continues to be lagging behind significantly.
46. In order to accelerate progress to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, the Agenda 2030 and GCM commitments, the following actions are recommended:
- Create platforms for migrant women and girls' meaningful participation in shaping climate action and resilience-building initiatives, ensuring that their voices and experiences inform policy decisions, and promoting their leadership that fosters an inclusive approach;
 - Integrate gender-responsive human mobility actions into national adaptation and climate change response plans, developed in collaboration with Women-Led and Women's-Rights Organisations, based on consultation with women and girl migrants, diaspora, displaced and those otherwise affected by climate change and migration. Action plans must specifically ensure that intersectional disparities are addressed for specific groups, and not reinforce victimhood by only focusing on vulnerabilities;
 - Develop and facilitate safe and regular migration pathways that are gender-responsive, including by investing in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) and green skills development and removing the gendered barriers to up-skilling, re-skilling, and recognition of qualifications for migrant women and girls, to support a just and green transition;
 - Leverage women diaspora contributions in designing and funding climate adaptation strategies. Investing in skills development and the recognition of qualifications can support a just and green transition, enabling women to contribute actively to climate adaptation and sustainable economic growth. Additionally, leveraging diaspora contributions can boost sustainable global value chains and foster innovation and green entrepreneurship;
 - Strengthen women's leadership in climate action and ensure gender-responsive climate financing. This involves promoting the active participation of women, girls and gender-diverse persons in decision-making processes and leadership roles related to climate policies and initiatives, ensuring that their perspectives and needs are integrated into climate action and disaster risk reduction, ensuring that adequate financing is allocated to Women-Led and Women's-Rights Organisations working on migration issues.
-