



Policy Brief

Women's Rights in Labour Migration and Children's Rights

Women constitute a growing share of the 86 million international labour migrants worldwide, and increasing attention has been drawn to the importance of a gender perspective when analyzing issues related to migration. This brief provides an overview of key issues related to the international and domestic labour migration of women, with a particular emphasis on the impact that women's migration has on children.

Because women bear the major burden of child rearing in most societies, children are likely to be seriously impacted when their mothers migrate, particularly because they are often left behind. Women are more likely than men to migrate into informal sector and domestic worker positions, where they encounter difficulties in taking advantage of family reunification policies to bring their children or even to visit their home countries regularly. When unmarried women bear children in foreign countries, they frequently also face discrimination in passing their nationality onto their children or, if they are undocumented, can be reluctant to register their children for fear of deportation. On the other hand, domestic rural-urban migration has been shown to have positive impacts on child survival.

This policy brief explores these areas and provides recommendation for further exploration.

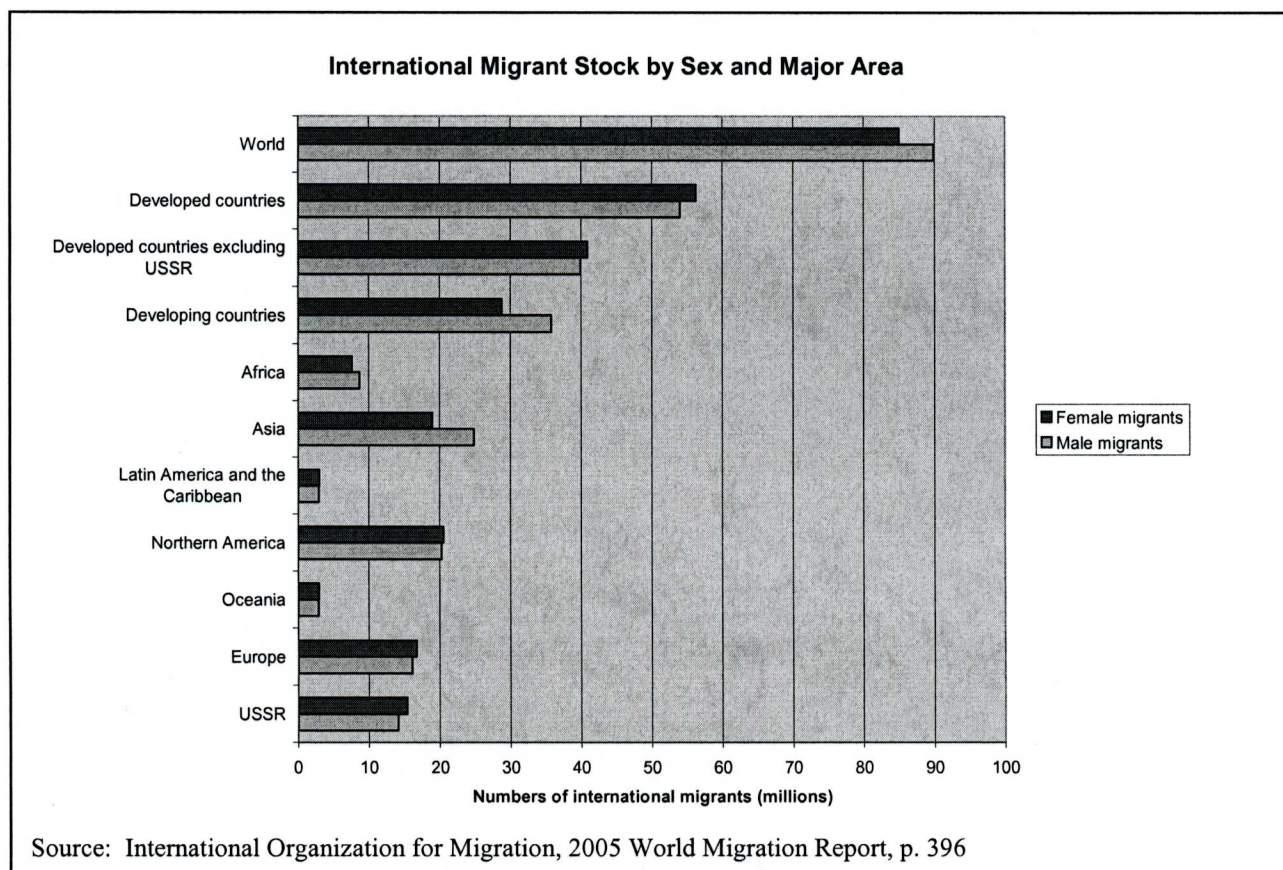
Dimensions of Women's Migration¹

Women and girls constitute approximately half of the world's 175 million international migrants. In most developed countries, females now account for the majority of migrants.¹ Chart 1 provides further information on the distribution of

¹ Due to space limitations, this brief will focus on the voluntary labour migration of women, in relation to its impact on children, and not discuss forced migration in the form of trafficking or involuntary migration as refugees or internally displaced persons. Issues related to the labour migration of girls also merit a separate discussion and are not a subject of focus here, due to the distinct legal and policy implications related to child labour.

international migration by sex and region. The number of female migrants has more than doubled from 1960 to 2000; in the year 2000, there were approximately 85 million female international migrants.² Due to the demands of the global economy as well as economic necessity, women are now increasingly migrating on their own as workers rather than as dependents of their husbands.³

Economic reforms and the development of multilateral trade and investment arrangements have pressured governments



to develop multilateral responses to migration while also fuelling the more traditional “push” and “pull” factors for migration flows. The dominant migration pull factors are rapid population growth, inadequate economic opportunities, and high unemployment, particularly in South Asia. “Pull” factors include expanding markets, labour shortfalls and aging populations in the more industrialized countries in Asia (Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and increasingly also China) and a continued need for workers in the Gulf States.

The majority of the world’s migrants are concentrated in 22 countries. The ten countries hosting the largest number of international migrants in the year 2000 were the United States, the Russian

Federation, Germany, the Ukraine, France, India, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Australia, and Pakistan.⁴ Migration accounts for an increasingly large share of the population of some sending countries: for example one in ten Sri Lankan citizens—a majority of them female—work abroad.⁵ Asia is prominent as both a significant sending and receiving location for female migrants, with most originating from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia.⁶ Consequently, much of the existing research and advocacy work on this topic has been focused on the East Asia and Pacific Region.

Migration of women, like that of men and children, includes both domestic and international migration as well as voluntary and forced. Voluntary

