

## Internal Migration and Gender

### Key Message

The current discourse on migration has failed to adequately address gender-specific migration experiences, even though women constitute an overwhelming majority of migrants. A gender perspective on migration is imperative, since women have significantly different migration motivations, patterns, options and obstacles from men.

### Challenges

- Since respondents in the Census and National Sample Surveys are required to give only one reason for migration, this has camouflaged some aspects of labour-based and related decisions which influence women's migration. Working women who move for marriage are not recorded as labour migrants, even though they work prior to and after migrating. Culturally determined inappropriateness about emphasizing women's economic role also contributes towards undercounting of women's migration for employment, among other reasons (Shanthi 2006).
- Women migrants remain invisible and discriminated against in the workforce: they are paid less than male migrants, their economic contribution is often subsumed in family labour units, and they enjoy no maternity entitlements or special care such as breastfeeding breaks at worksites.
- Health risks pose a serious concern for women migrants: maternal-health and child-health

indicators remain poor, lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities give rise to communicable diseases, and malnutrition and anaemia in children and adolescent girls remain widespread.

- Migrant women and adolescent girls are more vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse and may get pushed into sex work, either by coercion or to supplement their earnings. On the other hand, the left-behind women face the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, brought back by migrating husbands.
- In the absence of crèches, women leave young children to the care of siblings, usually adolescent girls, who additionally have to bear household responsibilities.
- The benefits of migration for women remain under-investigated. Migration can lead to greater freedom, cash incomes, and change in attitudes among migrating women, which may impact traditional gender roles and responsibilities. For the left-behind women, increased interaction in society, their participation as workers and decision makers of households can lead to some degree of empowerment (UNESCO-UNICEF 2012b).

### Facts and Figures

- Out of 309 million internal migrants, 70.7 per cent are women (218 million) (Census of India 2001).
- The most prominent reason given for women's migration is marriage – cited by 91.3 per cent of

women in rural areas and 60.8 per cent of women in urban areas (NSSO 2007–2008). There is need for further investigation of this in the backdrop of social customs such as village exogamy, decline in rural female work participation rates, among others (UNESCO-UNICEF 2012b).

- Female migrants mostly belong to the rural stream (75.6 per cent) and exhibit greater concentration in intra-district and inter-district migration (66.9 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively) as compared with inter-state migration (10.1 per cent) (UNESCO-UNICEF 2012b).
- Seasonal migration among women is higher than long-term outmigration, and female migration in the central, western and southern region is higher than the northern and eastern region (UNESCO-UNICEF 2012b).
- Female migrants are less well represented in regular jobs and more likely to be self-employed than non-migrant women. Domestic work has emerged as an important occupation for migrant women and girls (UNESCO-UNICEF 2012b).

## Policy Recommendations

### Fill knowledge and research gaps to incorporate gender-sensitive realities

- Revise concepts and categories used in the design of the Census and National Sample Surveys to enable data collection on multiple reasons for women’s migration.
- Collect sex-disaggregated and age-disaggregated data on migration and the contribution of women migrant workers towards remittances and national GDP.

### Strengthen legislation to protect rights of migrant women

- Prioritize implementation of existing laws including the Minimum Wages Act (1948), Payment of Wages Act (1936), Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act (1970), Equal Remuneration Act (1976), Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act (1976), Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act (1979), Child

Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986), Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act (1996), and Unorganized Workers Social Security Act (2008).

### Extend migrant support initiatives in favour of women migrants

- Establish pre-departure information and training programmes to raise awareness of rights and entitlements, skill upgradation possibilities and placement (for example, Bodhcrew Services Pvt. Ltd.), and information on general and reproductive health, including HIV/AIDS prevention.
- Run labour helplines/ legal clinics in major source and destination areas for providing legal assistance (for example, Aajeevika Bureau).
- Equip worksites with on-site or near-site ICDS anganwadis, mobile crèches and daycare centres for children (for example, Mobile Creches, Delhi), hostel and accommodation facility for unaccompanied women migrants and civic amenities for basic sanitation and hygiene.
- Create watchdog committees for tracking and monitoring women’s migration for preventing instances of harassment, exploitation and trafficking (for example, Sanlaap, Kolkata).

### CEDAW General Recommendation No. 26 on Women Migrant Workers

India is a signatory of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In practice, however CEDAW General Recommendation No. 26 on Women Migrant Workers (2008) remains largely unimplemented. CEDAW General Recommendation No. 26 especially outlines recommendations that respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of women migrant workers, against sex- and gender-based discrimination. Though the recommendation pertains to international migration of women workers, there is an urgent need to create awareness and implementation of CEDAW General Recommendation 26, and adapt roles and responsibilities for relevant stakeholders to similarly promote and facilitate internal migration of women workers.