IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental body, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and work towards effective respect of the human dignity and well-being of migrants.
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Within the framework of its constitutional purposes and functions, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been making efforts to institutionalize and mainstream gender into its work. In February 1995, a Working Group on Gender Issues was established with the task of institutionalizing and mainstreaming existing measures and efforts, and making further progress towards ensuring that gender issues are an integral part of IOM’s planning and actions.

The Working Group took stock of IOM’s achievements and shortcomings on gender-related issues. It then developed policy statements to serve as guiding principles for the Organization in the two areas of programmes and activities and internal staff matters.

In November 1995, an IOM Staff and Programme Policy was adopted by the IOM Council. The policy goals state that “IOM is committed to ensuring that particular needs of all migrant women are identified, taken into consideration and addressed by IOM projects and services” and that “equality of opportunity and treatment of men and women is a guiding principle of IOM”.

In 1996, Plans of Action on gender issues were approved. To facilitate their implementation, a Gender Issues Coordinator was appointed in 1997 with the mandate “to foster a positive awareness of gender policies throughout the Organization, ensure that programmes are in line with IOM gender policies, provide advice to senior managers on gender policy and support the elaboration of proposals for programmes to address the particular gender-related needs of migrants”.

It is within this context that a Gender Mainstreaming Strategy has been developed, approved and integrated into the overall activities of the Organization. Gender mainstreaming as a functional facet of IOM’s work seeks to ensure that women and men are provided with equal opportunities to develop and utilize their skills and to participate in decisions affecting their lives. Mainstreaming works “upstream” to sensitize policy-makers in gender issues, and “downstream” to ensure that migrant women’s needs and concerns are addressed in the Organization’s programmes, projects and services. Similarly, upstream and downstream mechanisms also address gender balance to secure equal opportunity and treatment of men and women within IOM.
A measure of the IOM staff’s commitment to the issue of gender and migration is the establishment within the Organization of 35 gender focal points who advocate, advise and monitor progress and results in gender mainstreaming, primarily in the field but also at Headquarters.

The measures described in this brochure provide the formal underpinning to IOM’s work on gender and migration. We are confident that the treatment of gender as an integral part of IOM’s action for migrants will make an essential contribution to the success of our efforts and those of the international community.

Narcisa Escaler
Deputy Director General
IOM’S POLICY ON GENDER ISSUES

For some years, IOM has been moving towards a comprehensive approach to address gender issues, both among the staff and in its programmes and activities. Thus in February 1995 it formed a Working Group on Gender Issues, drawing on staff from Headquarters and field missions, to examine a range of gender-related concerns. The Group’s aim was to bring existing efforts into the mainstream, so that gender issues became an integral part of IOM’s planning and action.

The Working Group was successful in developing policy statements to serve as guiding principles for the Organization in the two areas of programmes and activities and of staff. The statements were endorsed by Resolution No. 932 (LXXI) of the IOM Council in November 1995. They formalize and codify IOM’s longstanding commitment to migrant women, and at the same time affirm its commitment to making equal opportunity and treatment for all IOM staff a reality.

Programme Policy

The first of the policy statements relates to gender-appropriate policies and programmes for migrant women. It reads as follows:

“IOM is committed to ensuring that the particular needs of all migrant women are identified, taken into consideration and addressed by IOM projects and services.”

Rationale

The feminization of migration

Today, despite shortcomings in statistics and varying definitions of a “migrant”, it is known that at least 50 million women are international migrants, some 30 million of them in developing countries. In 1990, according to United Nations estimates, Asia was host to some 20 million female migrants, followed by North America and Europe with about 12 million each and Africa with over 7 million. Their participation in migration flows fluctuates over time and, because of differences in migration policies, varies from one receiving country to another. Women’s migration is also shaped by their role in the country of origin. As a result of these factors, the proportion of women in the many different flows of migration ranges from virtually none - e.g. Southern African miners working in South Africa - to virtually all - e.g. Asian nurses working in the Gulf States.

In current national estimates of permanent migration flows and numbers of foreign or foreign-born people in the traditional migration countries and Western Europe, women form some 50% of the total. For industrialized countries as a whole, women constitute over half of the migrants, and outnumber male migrants in a third of all receiving countries. The proportion of women among migrants living in the developing world varies widely from country to country. Taken as a whole, more than 45% of migrants in developing countries are women.
Migrant women, in common with women in general, have historically been marginalized as members of the societies in which they live, and despite the fact that they account for near half of the migrant population, their particular needs have often been overlooked in migration-related programmes. That their condition has been insufficiently studied is, in part, both cause and consequence of this marginalization.

**Particular problems facing migrant women**

The growing attention paid to migrant women at the international level is an expression of the increasing focus on women’s rights and special needs that has taken place over the last two decades in various fields. A number of studies during that time have led to specific recommendations and policies aimed at improving the survival and development of female children.

In the field of migration, displaced and refugee women received attention before migrant women in general, a consequence of urgent concerns for their protection. The problems of rape, sexual exploitation, and other forms of violence suffered by refugee women began to be denounced and documented 10-15 years ago in the context of pirate attacks on Vietnamese boat people. Violence against refugee women had existed before, but for a variety of reasons it was not openly addressed by the international community. Since then, both awareness and sensitivity have evolved with the times, and the problem has become accepted as a legitimate subject of public discussion and intervention, as recent crises have shown.

This acceptance has helped focus attention on migrant women’s needs beyond protection and, subsequently, on the experiences of migrant women who are not refugees. More has been learned, for example, about female migrant flows, the economic role of migrant women, and gender-specific problems of adaptation, both in the receiving country and upon return to the country of origin.

In Asia, the economic significance of female migration is such that some governments have incorporated quantitative female labour export targets in their development plans. Migrants from Bangladesh, the majority of whom are women, are reported as having remitted $1.5 billion to their home country in 1997. The economic contribution of female migrants is significant both to the survival of their families and to the economic stability of the sending countries.

Indeed, women are increasingly migrating as autonomous economic actors, and not as dependants of male migrants. Yet their job opportunities and success are limited by the kinds of work open to them. Often considered as cheap, docile and flexible employees, migrant women are strongly concentrated in a few female-dominated occupations: domestic work, “entertainment” (often prostitution), helping in restaurants and hotels, assembly lines in labour-intensive manufacturing, and so on. At the bottom of the occupational hierarchy, these jobs offer inferior working conditions and limited prospects or security. Many place women in informal work situations with little access to information networks and social support, leaving them vulnerable to discrimination and abuse.

When women resort to traffickers to arrange their migration, now a frequent phenomenon, they become even more vulnerable to abuse and violence. Because of rising restrictions in labour-importing countries, women are increasingly involved in irregular migration and hence are subject to police harassment, raids and detention. In 1996, a study on migrants in Asia estimated that there were 700,000 irregular female migrants in Asia alone.
While studies on some of these issues exist, the results of research have rarely been translated into policies that promote change. Yet many elements of women’s experiences as migrants are particular to their gender or are more prevalent among migrant women than men. These experiences touch on all facets of everyday life and have a marked impact on migrant women’s ability to secure their future. The following points summarize some of the main problems they confront:

**Economic factors**

- Many migrant women have limited access to employment and social welfare programmes because of their status as a “dependant” or other limitations on the conditions of their admission to the host country.

- Migrant women face double discrimination in the labour market, being both female and foreign. Discrimination in hiring can distort migrant women’s access to the labour market, making them poor wage-earners. Migrant women generally earn less than native-born and migrant men, and less than native-born women.

- The exploitation of migrant women may be compounded by their presence in marginal jobs and in the informal sector, as well as by low educational levels and poor command of the language of the host country.

- Abandonment by husband or family can be economically devastating for a woman, regardless of where she may live. In a new country, an abandoned woman usually does not have the community and family support she might be able to count on in her home country.

**Social factors**

- Migrant women frequently lose the ability to take part in community decision-making. Traditional ways of participating may not exist in host countries, leaving migrant women at the mercy of those who, legitimately or not, speak for them. Alternatively, they may be thrust into decision-making roles to which they are not accustomed and for which they may not be prepared.

- Finding ways to reconcile the demands of public (paid work) and private (family duties) spheres is particularly challenging for migrant women, who often have to cope with the least flexible working conditions.

- Migrants must often move back and forth between two cultures: the culture they came from and the culture of their new country of residence. For migrant women this is often compounded by having to take responsibility for resolving conflicts among family members with different levels of adaptation to the new culture.

- Traditional gender roles, suspended when one spouse lived abroad while the other remained at home, may be re-established to the detriment of women in reunited families.

- The triple - productive, reproductive and community - role of women in society is often a major source of conflict, both between migrants and nationals of the host country and within the migrant family itself.
**Legal status**

- Legal residence may be linked to a migrant woman’s relationship with a citizen or “primary” migrant. If that relationship changes, she may face expulsion.

**Health**

- In many countries, access to health care is linked to legal status. Such policies leave women vulnerable to poor health outcomes. Migrant women are especially vulnerable in terms of reproductive health, even after allowing for social and biological risk factors that apply to the female population in general.

- Migrant women working in unskilled and informal work are especially vulnerable to work-related injuries.

- Migrant women are particularly vulnerable to psychosocial stresses, such as divergent sets of cultural expectations, marginalization in the host society and in the labour market, and the double burden of family and work.

- Migrant women may suffer physical and sexual abuse during travel or in countries of destination. The consequences of rape, for example, may include rejection by the community, further damaging the woman concerned personally as well as her relationship with family members and her ability to raise her children.

**Why an IOM Policy on Migrant Women?**

The IOM policy on migrant women is based on the following three premises. Taken together, they point to the need both to articulate a policy and to make sure that it is complied with:

- Women constitute a substantial proportion of migrants;

- Migrant women are exposed to specific risks and discrimination which warrant special consideration;

- The needs of migrant women have not in the past been sufficiently taken into account in migration-related policies and programmes.

To carry out the policy, IOM has a responsibility to:

- Improve awareness and understanding, both within and outside the Organization, of the conditions and needs specific to migrant women;

- Ensure equal access to IOM projects and services so that migrant women can fully participate in and benefit from them;

- Design and implement projects and services specific to migrant women, where and when appropriate.
Staff Policy on Gender Issues

This first statement on programme policy is reinforced by a parallel IOM staffing policy which states that:

“Equality of treatment of men and women is a guiding principle of IOM. “

IOM will ensure that its own recruitment and staff development policies and procedures address gender issues appropriately. Historically, there has been an imbalance in the representation of women at different levels of the Organization. Concerted efforts are now being made to identify, promote and recruit qualified female candidates. In 1995, when it endorsed the staff policy, the IOM Council set the following targets:

- Equal opportunity and treatment of men and women staff to be reflected in all IOM staff policies and actions;

- The proportion of women in the professional categories overall to be increased to at least 35% within two years, emphasis being given to levels where women are under-represented;

- The proportion of female staff members at all levels where they are under-represented to be increased to at least 40% within five years;

- A gender-balanced staff to be achieved within the next 10 years.
THE IOM MAINSTREAMING STRATEGY

The Basis

IOM’s approach to the policies on gender issues adopted by the Council in November 1995 has been set out in an overall Gender Mainstreaming Strategy introduced in May 1998. The Strategy is based on three fundamental points derived from the policies:

- For IOM to be accountable for applying the policies, gender must be mainstreamed and incorporated as a strategy in the Organization’s processes.

- There is a need to “institutionalize” and integrate gender into the entire spectrum of activities - projects, programmes, and staff policies. For gender issues to be fully integrated into the Organization’s new vision, all staff need to understand and implement the Strategy in their work.

- This mainstreaming strategy is not exclusively related to women and their specific needs and concerns. It also includes initiatives for men when needed, provided they promote overall gender equality.

Recommendations

How is this to be done? First, gender focal points are being designated at all levels of the Organization, capitalizing on existing in-house expertise. The staff members selected will devote some 5-10% of their time to the promotion of gender mainstreaming, in accordance with guidelines covering broad aspects of policy, programme and staffing.

Secondly, the Working Group on Gender Issues will continue to contribute to the integration of a gender dimension in IOM’s work.

Thirdly, Plans of Action have been designed to translate IOM programme and staff policies into operational terms. They will be put into effect in line with a five-year timetable.
THE FIVE-YEAR ACTION PLAN

Policy Orientation

IOM’s Plan of Action to put the new Strategy into practice is guided by the following policy orientations:

To strengthen the Organization’s commitment to ensuring that the particular needs of all migrant women are identified, taken into consideration, and addressed by IOM projects and services.

From this overall policy flow a number of expected outcomes, each with its own objectives and an outline of the necessary activities to achieve them.

Networking and Outreach

The first of the desired outcomes or results of the policy is “increased networking, public outreach with government, international organizations, NGOs and other relevant actors such as migrant women’s associations, aimed at information sharing and mainstreaming migrant women’s issues”.

To achieve this result, IOM is engaging sending, transit and receiving governments and multilateral and bilateral organizations in a constant dialogue on migrant women. The many international meetings and networks on migration are important fora for exchanges. Information on IOM’s activities for migrant women is distributed to Member and Observer States and to donors so that its core messages are widely known. At the same time, summaries of donor and government policies are distributed to all levels of IOM.

To reach a wider public, a programme of publications and other information material on IOM’s gender policies and activities has been launched. The Organization liaises with governments and institutions to ensure that migrant women’s issues are brought to the forefront at international, regional, and national fora. The exchange of information with other organizations on meetings and activities has been strengthened.

Interaction with other organizations and agencies includes such activities as inviting their gender coordinators to make presentations, organizing discussions on migrant women, giving added visibility to gender matters in speeches and documents, and using electronic media to get the message to the field.
The Need for Data

To support these activities with an accurate and complete evidence base, the necessary gender data need to be collected and presented in easily accessible form.

This entails tracking and reporting on migrant statistics by gender as well as by such factors as age and ethnic group. IOM is studying the statistical systems in this field used by other organizations, e.g. the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the UN Statistics Division. All missions and regional and country programmes and projects are being required to prepare gender statistics. Particular attention is being paid to variables and indicators of change for use in evaluating the success of IOM projects.

Staff Awareness and Project Design

A further outcome of the Strategy will be to raise IOM staff awareness of the central place of gender issues. All staff training will include a gender component. Also, gender is being placed firmly in the mainstream at all stages of programme and project development - from planning, project design and implementation to monitoring and evaluation.

All major IOM projects are being reviewed to ensure that this is achieved. As gender-related aspects are identified and strengthened, migrant women will be encouraged to participate more and more. All project documents will contain a section explaining how the project addresses the needs and participation of women beneficiaries; regular reporting will be required.

Information for Migrant Women

The Plan of Action also highlights the provision of information to migrant women about IOM’s services and projects. The Organization will draw up lists of migrant and other women’s groups, and interact with them through a complex of networks, including universities and other institutions, at international, regional and national levels. A wide range of information projects will be supported, and guidelines will be prepared to help develop “easy-to-read” brochures and to use the Internet, the IOM web site, and the mass media.

Joint Projects

IOM will continue to seek opportunities for joint projects with other organizations centred on the needs of migrant women, and to ensure that gender sensitivity is an integral part of the projects it already shares with partner organizations.

Planning and Research

Lastly, and closely linked to the objectives of better gender statistics and the integration of gender issues in all programme activities, IOM will stress planning and research aimed at ensuring that projects and services correspond to migrant women’s needs. This will involve making sure that
gender aspects are considered in all IOM advisory bodies where projects are initiated and monitored. As a further step, the Organization is setting up research projects on women and migration to help assess actual needs.

**Policy on Staff Matters**

The second, complementary pillar of the Plan of Action, which is aimed at applying the new Strategy in the domain of staff development, again rests on a clear statement of policy:

“To further the equality of opportunity and treatment of men and women in IOM and to increase the number of women at the decision-making level.”

To achieve this policy objective, the Plan targets six broad outcomes and sets out a corresponding range of activities for their implementation.

**Consistency with gender equality**

The first of the desired outcomes provides for all staffing measures and recommendations to be reviewed for consistency with the achievement of gender equality. The proposed activities include:

- The development of special measures or updated guidelines applicable to the recruiting and interviewing process, to ensure consistency with the gender policy;

- The introduction of a review and redress mechanism for all staffing recommendations, to support the advancement of women in IOM and help to achieve gender balance;

- The creation of a roster of qualified internal and external women candidates for all categories of posts in IOM;

- The preparation of an annual report containing an inventory of posts and staff by gender, level and duty station.

**A supportive work environment**

To achieve a supportive work environment that enables women and men to participate equally and motivates all staff to seek career advancement in IOM, the Organization will develop a range of measures to attract qualified female candidates. It plans to prepare a “work and family” agenda with improved incentives in terms of child care, job sharing and part-time possibilities, flexible family leave and so on. It will also keep an inventory of staff skills in order to promote career development for women, and give recognition to women’s personal efforts to upgrade their skills and qualifications.

**Opportunities at higher levels**

To offer more job opportunities for women at higher levels, measures will centre on ways of foreseeing and creating job openings, for example by tracking potential retirements, selecting staff in advance to allow for a period of “mentoring”, formalizing job sharing and part-time work, and offering incentives to incumbents to take early retirement.
Sensitivity to gender issues

To increase the staff’s knowledge and understanding of gender issues, IOM foresees a programme of activities aimed at bringing about changes in attitudes and managerial culture through such means as training, the dissemination of information and counselling.

Gender balance in IOM materials

The Organization is undertaking a review of its job vacancy notices and related materials to make sure that they are consistent with its gender policy before they are distributed. It plans to explore the experience of other organizations in both public and private sectors to compare ways of reducing gender stereotyping and bias in job descriptions.

Policy implementation and redress

To ensure that gender balance becomes a central part of IOM’s organizational culture as rapidly as possible, all staff will receive instructions on implementation, which will then be monitored to keep track of progress. Should breaches of the policy occur, channels will be available for redress.
PUTTING POLICY INTO PRACTICE

Migration Trends

International migration has played an important role in society by helping to forge economic, social and cultural bonds between peoples and States. In recent years, fundamental changes have affected many countries and regions. While rapid economic advancement in some parts of the developing world is creating massive growth, other developing countries lag behind. Unemployment rates in many industrialized countries remain high, and are even higher in many developing countries.

Meanwhile, demographic trends continue to distinguish an ever younger developing world from an ageing industrialized world. New conflict situations are arising from the break-up of some States, and leading to the disintegration of others. Environmental degradation is obliging more and more people to move in search of a place where they can survive.

The IOM Response

As the inside front cover of this brochure points out, IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental body, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to:

- Assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration;
- Advance understanding of migration issues;
- Encourage social and economic development through migration; and
- Work towards effective respect of the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

The Organization contributes to these objectives through programmes divided into four main areas, described below. In each of them, the gender dimension will increasingly assume its central role as the new policy and strategy are applied throughout IOM’s activities, with a focus on the most vulnerable groups.

Humanitarian migration

The international community looks to IOM to provide assistance to migrant refugees or displaced persons in many situations: people fleeing conflict, refugees being resettled in their countries or repatriated; stranded individuals and unsuccessful asylum seekers returning home; internally or externally displaced persons; individuals seeking to be reunited with other members of their families; victims of trafficking; and migrants involved in regular migration.

IOM provides these people with secure, reliable, cost-effective services, including counselling, document processing, medical examination, transportation, language training, and assistance with cultural orientation and integration. For instance, activities with a gender component to meet the
needs of internally displaced persons include: the collection of information on gender-related needs for water, food, shelter and health care, and on gender roles; integration of a gender perspective in workshops and training for officials; and the mainstreaming of gender in operational guidelines.

IOM action also includes the provision of emergency assistance to persons affected by conflict and post-conflict situations. The Organization has participated in virtually every emergency involving large-scale movement of people since it was founded in 1951. These services can be even more crucial during the critical transition from emergency humanitarian relief, through a period of rehabilitation, to longer-term reconstruction and development efforts.

Migration for development

Through its programmes in this field IOM provides skilled human resources to States. For example, it works to help reverse the “brain drain” from developing countries; assists qualified professionals to migrate to countries in need of specific expertise or return to their country of origin where their skills are most needed; provides temporary expatriate expertise to States; and fosters intraregional cooperation through the exchange of qualified human resources within a given region.

Technical cooperation

IOM offers advisory services on migration to governments, intergovernmental agencies, NGOs and others. These programmes respond to the need to develop coherent responses to migration challenges in a changing international environment. Their aim is to assist in the development and implementation of migration policy, legislation and management. IOM also assists with capacity-building projects such as training courses for government migration officials. This training will increasingly include a gender analysis of migration, tackling such aspects as the roles of women and men, the division of labour between them, access to resources and benefits, participation in decision-making, the relationships of power that reinforce gender roles, and the specific needs of each gender.

Migration debate, research and information

IOM furthers the understanding of migration through regional and international seminars and conferences designed to produce practical solutions. It undertakes research not only on the migration process but also on migrants’ individual needs, gathering information on potential migrants’ attitudes and motivations, as well as on situations that could lead to irregular migration flows. By making proposals for the scope and design of studies, the Organization can help to ensure due attention to gender issues. In the comparative study of labour migration policies recently requested by the Inter-American Conference of Labour Ministers, for example, it has suggested the inclusion of: an account of labour migration that highlights the situation of women; emphasis on equal opportunities and treatment for migrant men and women; and a call for the development of policies that address the circumstances of women migrants. In this context, IOM holds that international labour standards in general should adequately address women migrants’ needs and concerns. Further attention should be given to the links between the feminization of poverty and migration patterns, taking into account poor families’ survival strategies and the roles of women and men.

Sound information is essential for individuals making life-changing decisions about migrating; for governments setting migration policies; for organizations designing migration programmes; and for
researchers and the media. IOM gathers information to meet these growing demands. As a preventive measure, it also designs and implements information campaigns which provide potential migrants with a more accurate picture of migration realities, including the pitfalls of irregular migration.

To reach the widest possible audience, many of the surveys and research studies are published as part of IOM’s growing publications programme, either by the Organization itself or jointly with external publishers. IOM also publishes a number of periodicals and newsletters, including the quarterly review *International Migration, IOM News, Migration and Health Newsletter*, and the quarterly bulletin *Trafficking in Migrants*. Other IOM products include posters, training material and a series of topical information sheets. A selection of publications dealing with gender-related issues appears in the Annex.

**Conclusion**

The scale of the gender-related issues IOM is called upon to address is vast and growing. IOM is determined to press ahead with the mainstreaming of gender issues in accordance with its newly reoriented policy and strategy, and particularly the design of appropriate programmes. It counts on the collaboration and support of interested governments, international organizations, NGOs and other institutions concerned to ensure that the world community, in the face of such pressing needs, can truly make a difference.
Selected IOM information sources on gender-related issues

Quarterly bulletin

Trafficking in Migrants: Compiles information from the media, governments, and international governmental and non-governmental organizations on trends in migrant trafficking and measures being taken to combat it. The aim is to improve the exchange of information in this field among governments and international organizations.

Available from: Trafficking in Migrants, International Organization for Migration, P.O. Box 71, CH-1211 Geneva 19, Switzerland. E-mail: trafficking@iom.int

Info sheets

- 7/97 The Plight of Migrant Women in Argentina (1997, English/Spanish)
- 31/97 Trafficking in Migrant Women and Children: IOM Responses to Date and Future Activities (1997, English)

Publications, Surveys and Studies

- Trafficking and Prostitution: The Growing Exploitation of Migrant Women from Central and Eastern Europe (1995, English)
- Trafficking in Women to Austria for Sexual Exploitation (1996, English)
- Trafficking in Women to Italy for Sexual Exploitation (1996, English)
- Trafficking in Women from the Dominican Republic for Sexual Exploitation (1996, English/Spanish)
- Trafficking in Women to Japan for Sexual Exploitation: A Survey on the Case of Filipino Women (1997, English)
- Trafficking of Cambodian Women and Children to Thailand, published jointly with the Center for Advanced Study (1997, English)
- Trafficking of Vietnamese Women and Children to Cambodia, published jointly with the Center for Advanced Study (1998, English)
- Information Campaign against Trafficking in Women from Ukraine - Research Report (1998, English)
- Analysis of Data and Statistical Resources available in the EU Member States on Trafficking in Women and Children for Purposes of Sexual Exploitation. Final Report of an EU/IOM project (1998, English)
Internet Home Page

IOM’s web site provides a wealth of information on the Organization’s policies, programmes, meetings and documentation. It can be visited at http://www.iom.int