



ABOUT

The *Data Bulletin: Informing the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration* series aims to summarize in an accurate and accessible fashion existing evidence on migration to support the discussion and any follow-up activities.

As part of the project “Support to IOM for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration,” funded by the European Union, *Data Bulletin* outlines the strengths and limitations of relevant migration data and highlights innovative data practices that are pertinent to the Global Compact for Migration. This publication reflects the collaborative nature of the Global Compact for Migration process by including relevant contributions from different parts of IOM, as well as other agencies and migration experts.

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Gender dimensions of migration

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration includes gender as one of its 10 “cross-cutting and interdependent guiding principles”, acknowledging the importance of “gender-responsive” approaches, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The Global Compact for Migration goes on to cite gender within 15 of its objectives, including promoting gender-responsive remittance transfers and access to basic services, as well as expressly acknowledging gender-specific risks and issues, such as sexual and gender-based violence, and women migrant domestic workers.

Based on the limited data available, we know that gender affects migratory decisions, migratory experiences such as work opportunities and exposure to risks, and effects of migration, for example remittance flows. Further data are essential for fully understanding the role of gender in shaping international migration and the specific needs of migrants of all genders, and in particular migrant women and girls. Without such data the design and implementation of effective policies to implement the Global Compact for Migration risks being undermined.¹

What do we know?

Global trends

In general, women migrate as much as men, with women migrants making up between 48 and 50 per cent of the international migrant stock between 1990 and 2017.² There is a geographical dimension to this pattern: Since 1990, more women than men migrated to higher-income countries, while a decreasing proportion of women migrated to lower-income regions. In addition, more women than men migrate to Oceania, Europe, and Northern America and Latin America and the Caribbean, while fewer women than men migrated to Africa and Asia (see the graph that follows).³

Estimates show that the rate of female migration was growing faster than male migration in many important receiving countries between 2010 and 2017.⁴ More women are migrating on their own or as heads of households, in pursuit of better economic opportunities.⁵ Higher education levels have been found to be positively associated with increased migration for women.⁶ In many instances, women are more likely to choose to migrate to countries that have less discriminatory social institutions than their country of origin, which also tend to have better economic opportunities.⁷

¹ This data bulletin draws from the Overseas Development Institute's (ODI) briefing paper series on migration and the 2030 Agenda: T. O'Neil, A. Fleury and M. Foresti, “Women on the move: Migration, gender equality and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (ODI, London, 2016) “Women on the move: Migration, gender equality and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. (ODI, London, 2016).

² United Nations Department of Economic and Social (UN DESA), *Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2017 Revision*. United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2017 (UN DESA, New York, 2017).

³ Ibid. There are similar regional differences for refugee women: women represented 50 per cent of the world's refugee population in 2017, yet this varied regionally with 51 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa, compared to 39 per cent of refugees in Europe. See United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2017* (UNHCR, Geneva, 2018).

⁴ Authors' calculation based on UN DESA (2017) data. Between 2010 and 2017, there was a higher female growth rate in 18 out of the 25 key destinations: Angola, Argentina, Australia, Ethiopia, France, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, South Sudan, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom and United States of America.

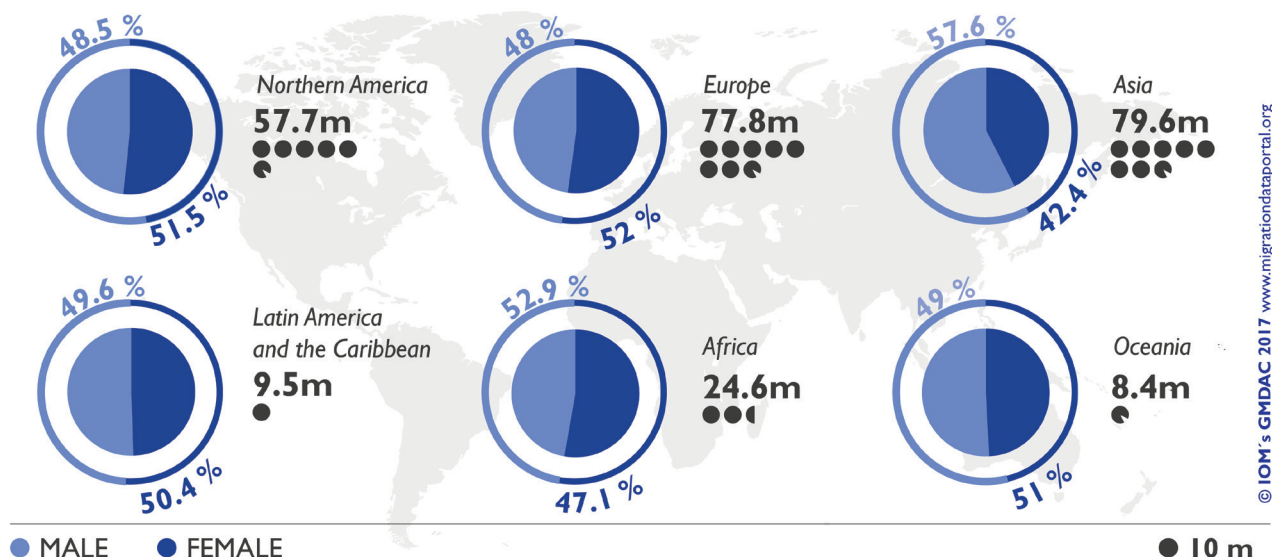
⁵ IOM, *World Migration 2008: Managing Labour Mobility in the Evolving Global Economy* (IOM, Geneva, 2008). Available from <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2008-managing-labour-mobility-evolving-global-economy>

⁶ S.M. Kanaiaupuni, “Reframing the migration question: An analysis of men, women and gender in Mexico”, *Social Forces*, 78(4):1311–1347 (2000).

⁷ G. Ferrant, E. Loiseau and K. Nowacka, “The role of discriminatory social institutions in female South–South migration”, Issue paper (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Centre, Paris, 2014).



Figure 1: Total International Migrant Stock by sex, 1990 – 2017



Source: UN DESA, 2017.

The majority of women migrants are workers. Indeed, labour force participation rates of migrants were higher for migrant women (67%) than their native-born equivalents (around 50%) in 2013, and in all world regions except sub-Saharan Africa.⁸ This contrasts to migrant men who were only slightly more likely (78%) to participate in the labour market than non-migrant men (77%) in 2013.⁹

Migration is a gendered phenomenon

Migration decisions

Gender norms in countries of origin affect migratory decision-making. Women usually have less control over the decision to migrate than men – a decision more likely to be taken by their family, perhaps based upon gendered beliefs, including that women are more likely to send home regular remittances.¹⁰ Societal expectations of gender roles might limit the extent to which women migrate, prescribing that women should remain at home to look after the children while men ought to be the ones migrating for work.¹¹ However, women and girls may also make the decision to migrate to escape traditional gender norms and practices, for example, forced marriage or female genital mutilation.¹²

In response to risks of exploitation faced by women migrant workers, several governments have legislated gender-based migration bans and restrictions on female emigration. However, as well as infringing women's human rights, banning women's mobility often increases risks for women as they instead turn to irregular migration channels.¹³ This is despite the fact that women generally tend to be more risk-averse than men, preferring to migrate through regular channels, and when social networks are in place.¹⁴

Migration experiences

Gender shapes migration experiences, including the work opportunities

⁸ International Labour Organization (ILO), ILO global estimates on migrant workers: *Results and methodology – Special focus on migrant domestic workers* (ILO, Geneva, 2015).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ B.S.A. Yeoh, E. Graham and P.J. Boyle, "Migrations and family relations in the Asia Pacific region", *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 11(1):1–11 (2002); Kanaiaupuni, 2000.

¹¹ J. Hagen-Zanker and R. Mallett, *Journeys to Europe: The role of policy in migrant decision-making* (ODI, London, 2016).

¹² M. Temin, M. Montgomery, S. Engebretsen and K. Barker, *Girls on the Move: Adolescent Girls and Migration in the Developing World. A Girls Count report on adolescent girls* (Population Council, Washington, D.C., 2013).

¹³ R. Napier-Moore, *Protected or put in harm's way? Bans and restrictions on women's labour migration in ASEAN countries* (ILO and UN Women, Bangkok, 2017).

¹⁴ A. Fleury, *Understanding Women and Migration: A Literature Review*, Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD) Working Paper 8 (KNOMAD, World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2016)).

available to the migrant. Labour markets remain highly segmented, with men concentrated in more "masculine" sectors, and women concentrated in more "feminine" sectors; in particular, low-skilled women tend to be concentrated in sectors such as domestic and care work, and more highly skilled women in health and social care work.¹⁵ Countries with a higher demand for domestic workers attract more female migrants. In Indonesia, for example, women made up 83 per cent of migrant workers in 2009, 90 per cent of whom were domestic workers.¹⁶ Of the estimated 11.5 million migrant domestic workers in 2013, 73 per cent were women.¹⁷ Domestic work is less attractive to national workers and less socially valued than other types of work, reflected in lower pay and fewer labour regulations – 40 per cent of countries do not offer protection for domestic workers in national labour laws.¹⁸ Enforcing what rights there may be available is difficult, as domestic workers often work isolated in private homes, where risk of exploitative working conditions, abuse and maltreatment by employers is high.¹⁹

While data on irregular migration are very limited, estimates suggest that women migrants often engage in informal and irregular employment; 65 per cent of women workers are engaged in vulnerable employment in the Association of South-East Asian (ASEAN) countries.²⁰ Also, although it is very difficult to quantify human trafficking, women are more vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation, with estimates suggesting that 80 per cent of trafficking victims globally are female.²¹

Many skilled women migrate, with women migrants in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries more likely to be highly educated than their male equivalents and native-born population in 2010.²²

Economic and non-economic gains of migrating can be empowering for women. Becoming a main breadwinner for the family can change

¹⁵ T. O'Neil, A. Fleury and M. Foresti, 2016.

¹⁶ UN Women, *Managing Labour migration in ASEAN: Concerns for women migrant workers*. (UN Women Asia Pacific Regional Office, Bangkok, 2013).

¹⁷ ILO, 2015.

¹⁸ UN Women, *Domestic work and migration in Asia*, Factsheet (2012). Available from www.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20seasia/docs/publications/2012/domestic%20work%20and%20migration%20in%20asia.pdf?la=en

¹⁹ A. Fleury, 2016.

²⁰ ILO and Asian Development Bank (ADB), *'ASEAN Community 2015: Managing integration for better jobs and shared prosperity'*. (ILO and ADB, Bangkok, 2014).

²¹ F. Farah, "An expert group meeting on female migrants: What is so special about it?" In: United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and IOM, *Female migrants: Bridging the Gaps Throughout the Life Cycle*, Selected papers of the UNFPA-IOM Expert Group Meeting. (UNFPA and IOM, New York and Geneva, 2006), pp. 23–26.

²² Working age migrants, 51.4 per cent women; 30.2 per cent, migrant women with tertiary education; men, 29.4 per cent, native-born population, 23.6 per cent (OECD, Database on Immigrants in OECD Countries 2010/11 (2013). <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=MIG>

family power dynamics and lead to women having greater authority in family and personal decisions.²³ Migrant women may acquire increased self-esteem, agency and social standing, as well as influence their home communities to adopt more equitable norms and gender roles, and transferring skills earned while working abroad.²⁴

However, as family members in home countries often rely on remittances of families abroad, this can increase vulnerability to exploitation of migrant women as they feel pressure to maintain employment under any condition.²⁵

Moreover, migrant women often accept low-skilled positions they are overqualified for due to professional credentials not being recognized or other barriers such as racial discrimination, language, lack of social networks or knowledge about their rights.²⁶ Meanwhile, female relatives of migrant women are often relied upon to take over the unpaid care work of their left-behind families, referred to as the “global care chain”.²⁷ This can have negative impacts on the abilities of female relatives of migrant women to take up economic or education opportunities.

Remittances

Remittances have important benefits not only for households, but also for national economies, often surpassing the amount of foreign aid and investment in developing countries.

Women as remittance senders. Gender-segregated labour markets and wage gaps mean women migrants often earn significantly less than men, yet some evidence suggests they remit similar amounts to men, representing a larger proportion and sacrifice of their earnings.²⁸ Women face gender-specific barriers in transferring remittances, as women tend to remit smaller amounts of money more frequently, and for longer periods of time than male migrants, they are likely to spend more in transfer fees. This is particularly the case for women working in the informal sector who tend to rely on informal transfer methods, which can be costly and without assurance the money will arrive.²⁹

Women as remittance recipients. A large majority of remittance recipients are women. Evidence shows that when women have control of the money, as caretakers of the household, they tend to more heavily invest in the well-being of family members, such as children’s education, as opposed to personal expenses or private assets.³⁰

Data challenges and priorities

Data gaps

There is a general lack of accurate and comparable sex-disaggregated data on international migrants (see Table 1).³¹ UN DESA global estimates of the international migrant stock are available disaggregated by sex and age and computed by compiling data from 214 countries. Yet countries and organizations use different data collection methods, with some omitting groups of migrants (e.g. irregular migrants) altogether, or defining migration

categories differently, for example conflating some categories.³² This is reflected in household surveys, which often report different estimates of migrant women than census registers.³³ Such inconsistencies and incoherencies in recording practices are problematic for the reliability of migration estimates, and make it difficult to accurately understand migration flows from a gender perspective or the impact of migration on migrant women.

ILO produces sex disaggregated global estimates of labour migration, yet such estimates are based on data collected from national censuses and surveys, only 35 per cent of which include a breakdown by migratory status, sex and sector of occupation.³⁴

Little is known about less visible migrant women, including domestic workers, irregular migrant women, victims of trafficking and refugees. In particular, numbers of migrant domestic workers are thought to be underestimated, given the difficulties of reaching this group for data collection.³⁵

The little data available on irregular migrant women are limited to some case studies.³⁶

Similarly, large gaps in knowledge of human trafficking and migrant smuggling, and inconsistencies in data collection, mean that numbers of trafficking victims are often underestimated, particularly as trafficking prevails in informal sectors.³⁷ While the US Department of State collects data on identified victims of human trafficking around the world, these are not disaggregated by sex. The UNODC disaggregates by sex, yet as their estimates include only *reported* victims of trafficking, thus are likely to omit many hidden victims.³⁸

Data on the numbers of refugee women are also limited, with disaggregated estimates only available for 60 per cent of the countries.³⁹

There is similarly a lack of data on remittances sent (and received) by women, as World Bank estimates are not disaggregated by sex.⁴⁰ Furthermore, World Bank estimates do not capture remittances sent through informal channels, and as women often remit through such channels, the knowledge gap in women’s remittances may be particularly significant.

Migration is known as a gendered phenomenon, yet these large data gaps mean that the gender-specific needs, behaviours and capacities of migrant women are unknown. For example, women’s remittances are vital to the development of many national economies and households, yet there is a lack of understanding of women’s remittance behaviours in receiving and sending patterns and the ways in which funds are used.⁴¹ Lack of data has real-world consequences for migrant women and policymakers who need data and evidence to unlock the potential benefits of women’s migration:

- **Limited ability to design and execute “gender-responsive” policies.** Lack of an accurate and comparable database on migration impacts the quality of evidence-based migration governance, limiting policymakers’ ability to design effective “gender-responsive” policies, which address the lived realities of migrants of all genders.
- **Lack of accountability.** Without disaggregated data on female migrants, governments, service providers and other institutions cannot be held accountable for implementing programmes that address the gender-sensitive needs of migrants.

²³ J. Hennebray, W. Grass and J. McLaughlin, *Women Migrant Workers’ Journey through the Margins: Labour, Migration and Trafficking* (UN Women, New York, 2016).

²⁴ T. O’Neil, A. Fleury and M. Foresti, 2016.

²⁵ J. Hennebray, W. Grass and J. McLaughlin, 2016.

²⁶ S. Wojcieszki, S. Pentz, C. Blacklock, K. Hoffmann, W. Peersman, O. Nkomazana and R. Kutalek, “African female physicians and nurses in the global care chain: Qualitative explorations from five destination countries”, *PLoS ONE*, 10(6) (2015).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ A. Petrozziello, *Gender on the Move: Working on the Migration-Development Nexus from a Gender Perspective* (UN Women, Santo Domingo, 2013); Western Union, “Western Union pays tribute to global women work-force as world economic change agents and calls for greater recognition and integration”, Press release, 8 March 2016, available from <http://ir.westernunion.com/news/archived-press-releases/press-release-details/2016/Western-Union-Pays-Tribute-to-Global-Women-Work-Force-as-World-Economic-Change-Agents-and-Calls-for-Greater-Recognition-and-Integration/default.aspx>

²⁹ J. Hennebray, J. Holliday and M. Moniruzzaman, *At What Cost? Women, Migrant Workers, Remittances and Development*, Research paper (UN Women New York, 2017).

³⁰ A. Petrozziello, 2013.

³¹ J. Hennebray, K. Williams and M. Walton-Roberts, *Women Working Worldwide: A Situational Analysis of Women Migrant Workers*, Research paper (UN-Women, New York, 2016).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ ILO, 2015.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ J. Hennebray, K. Williams and M. Walton-Roberts, 2016.

³⁷ J. Hennebray, W. Grass and J. McLaughlin, 2016.

³⁸ UNODC, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2016* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.16.IV.6) (UNODC, Vienna, (2016).

³⁹ UNHCR, 2018.

⁴⁰ J. Hennebray, J. Holliday and M. Moniruzzaman, 2017.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Table 1: Data sources for women migrants, adapted from Hennebry et al. (2016)

| Data Subject | Primary data sources | Data coverage | Description of coverage |
|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------|---|
| Total migration | UN DESA | TOTAL | Global coverage |
| Labour migration | OECD ILO | PARTIAL | OECD – Complete for 92 countries in 2000 ILO – Partially available for 140 countries |
| Migrant domestic workers | ILO | PARTIAL | 73 countries in 2013 |
| Refugees | UNHCR | TOTAL | Global coverage in 2017 |
| Irregular migration | UNDP IOM | LITTLE | Not sex-disaggregated in 2009 Case studies only |
| Trafficking and smuggling | UNODC | LITTLE | Not sex-disaggregated Only reported victims of trafficking in 134 countries in 2012–2015 |
| Remittances | World Bank | LITTLE | Not sex-disaggregated |

Data priorities going forward

The Global Compact for Migration sets out several actions with the potential to overcome data challenges that impede effective evidence-based, gender-responsive policies for migrant women. Based on these and other recommendations,⁴² priorities for improving gender-sensitive data should include the following:

- **Improve national data collection.** Censuses, labour force and other household surveys, and administrative sources should always disaggregate data by sex and other migration-related variables. To this end, States should invest in capacities of national agencies to collect sex-disaggregated data on international migrants, for example by working with the Global Partnership for Sustainable Data Development. Data should be analysed accordingly to inform policies and programming, so that no one, including women and girls, are left behind, and can benefit from migration.
- **Standardize international migration definitions and data collection methods to improve international comparability of data across and within countries.** A global strategy for improving migration data at local, national, regional and international levels with all relevant stakeholders could harmonize data collection, analysis and dissemination to that end, as well as offer training and technical assistance. Such platforms for international cooperation could include the government-led Global Forum for Migration and Development, and the 2018 International Forum on Migration Statistics, jointly organized by IOM, OECD and UN DESA.⁴³
- **Use creative and purposive sampling methodologies.** To improve understanding of migrant women that are typically invisible in data records, hard-to-reach migrant women groups (especially domestic workers and undocumented migrant women) should be targeted for data collection, using creative and purposive sampling methodologies.

⁴² T. O'Neil, A. Fleury and M. Foresti, 2016; J. Hennebry, J. Holliday and M. Moniruzzaman, 2017; *Global Migration Group, Handbook for Improving the Production and Use of Migration Data for Development* (KNOMAD, World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2017).

⁴³ OECD, *What were the key messages of the International Forum on Migration Statistics?*, Migration Data Brief no. 3 (May 2018) Available from www.oecd.org/migration/forum-migration-statistics/migration-data-brief-3-EN.pdf

IOM's GMDAC

In response to growing calls for better data on migration, and for better use and presentation of migration data, IOM has created the Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC).

Located in Berlin, Germany, the Centre aims to provide authoritative and timely analyses of data on global migration issues as a global hub for data and statistics on migration.

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