

# Gender and Migration News

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## Nicaragua/Costa Rica – Exploratory Study Looks at Migration Impact on Women

**A** new study by IOM and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) presented in Nicaragua and Costa Rica sheds light on the impact that migration has on women and encourages sound policies to uphold their human rights.

The IOM /UNFPA exploratory study examines the migratory patterns of Nicaraguan women who migrate to Costa Rica, focusing on the problems they face as women migrants, and provides recommendations to make their experience more positive.

Nicaraguan women interviewed for this study overwhelmingly say they decided to migrate to escape poverty and lack of jobs at home and to find better paid jobs in Costa Rica. Other reasons for migrating included fleeing domestic violence and an idealistic perception of life in Costa Rica.

“Many women, like me, thought that there were plenty of jobs in Costa Rica, and that we were going to be treated well. But when we arrived, we realized this was not the case at all,” confirms one interviewee.

Another migrant woman in Costa Rica recalls her domestic nightmare: “He had his house and family, but he would not leave me in peace. One day he put a gun to my head and told me that I would never leave him. That is why I had to leave Nicaragua.”

How does migration impact a woman's daily life? For the most part the experience has had negative impacts, because the majority of the women interviewed are irregular migrants and therefore more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The women confirmed they were exploited by their employers and felt more vulnerable as women. They also cited a difficult time accessing health and reproductive health services, as well as housing or shelter programmes.

The women interviewed also felt they had paid a high emotional price because they were forced to leave their children and extended families behind. Being a woman meant an increased sense of guilt, as they are expected to be there for their children; many confirmed this causes depression and anxiety.

The authors recommend the creation of a bi-national committee to create policies, including access to health and other social services irrespective of a person's migratory status; the creation of jobs and investment opportunities in the country of origin; sustainable and dignified return to Nicaragua; the set up of a shelter in Costa Rica for migrant women in need; implementation of an information campaign, aimed at the Costa Rican public, on the positive aspects of migration; and strengthening hometown associations, amongst others.

The UN Inter-Agency Gender Group (GIG)-Costa Rica which contributed financially to the publication is currently working on some follow-up initiatives.

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## AROUND THE WORLD: GENDER AND MIGRATION NEWS

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## UK: Female Migrant Workers Most at Risk of Not Being Paid Minimum Wage

11 August 2008

New Trades Union Congress (TUC) research published on Monday 11 August 2008, reveals that female migrant workers may be more likely than any other group to be paid less than the national minimum wage (NMW).

Reports of the abuse of migrant workers have become increasingly common and the research - commissioned by the TUC's Commission on Vulnerable Employment and carried out by the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford - aimed to investigate the available information to uncover the reality of working life for migrant workers.

COMPAS reviewed the pay, working hours, type of work and accommodation of recent migrant workers who have been living and working in the UK for less than 10 years, in the West Midlands and in the East of England/East Midlands (both areas where there has been high levels of recent migration). National information about migrant workers, such as the Government's Labour Force Survey (LFS), was also included in the report.

cluded in the report.

The report found that migrant workers were much more likely to experience problems at work, and highlighted a number of worrying trends:

- Recent migrants work longer hours per week than most other workers - for example 55 per cent of recent migrants work 31-48 hours per week, and 15.4 per cent work more than 48 hours per week, compared to 48.3 per cent and 13 per cent of workers generally.
- Migrant workers are more likely to be working as temps or in insecure work (for example not having a written contract) than any other workers.
- Recent migrant workers are more than twice as likely as other workers to be earning less than the appropriate NMW for their age.
- Women who are recent migrants to the UK are 1.5 times more likely than male migrant workers to be paid less than the NMW. Women who migrate to work in the UK therefore face a disproportionate risk of being illegally underpaid - with around 35,000 denied the NMW.

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said: "The rogue employers who underpay the NMW deserve zero tolerance. The NMW is making a real difference to the lives of many low paid migrant workers, and we must continue to crack down on those mean bosses not paying their staff the legal wage to which they are entitled.

The TUC's Commission on Vulnerable Employment heard many complaints from migrant workers, including excessively long hours, no contract and a complete lack of health and safety training.

Belonging to a trade union is the best form of defence a worker can have against exploitative bosses. UK unions are stepping up their efforts to organise migrant workers to stop employers from using a poor grasp of English or ignorance of UK employment law as an excuse to treat people badly."

*Published by the Trades Union Congress (GB) and reproduced with permission*

<http://www.vulnerableworkers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/analysis-of-migrant-worker-data-final.pdf>

## Cambodia Clamps Down on Foreign Marriages

By Chris Lom, Regional Information Officer, Asia-Pacific

A decision by the Cambodian authorities in April 2008 to suspend all new marriages between Cambodian women and foreigners of all nationalities has highlighted fears in some of Asia's poorest countries that brokered foreign marriages may be resulting in cases of abuse.

The Cambodian move came after an IOM Phnom Penh report disclosed that in 2007 some 1,760 Cambodian women left the country to enter brokered marriages with Korean men - up from just 72 in 2004.

Explaining the decision, Cambodian Secretary of State of the Ministry of Women's Affairs You Ay said that the suspension of all foreign marriages was prompted by public concerns about exploitation and human trafficking, citing the case of seven Cambodian women who recently returned home because they could not endure married life in Korea.

But, she says, there is no evidence of "systematic exploitation."

The rapid increase in the number of Cambodian women marrying Kore-



*A former Cambodian bride discusses her experiences in Korea with an IOM researcher (Photo: © IOM, 2008, MKH0264)*

ans through brokers mirrors a similar increase in Vietnam, where the authorities are responding by beginning to crack down on illegal private marriage brokers amid persistent media reports of exploitation and abuse.

The IOM report attributes the increase in brokered marriages between Cambodian women and Korean men to a variety of possible

factors, including fewer formal links with Taiwan, previously the largest destination country for brokered marriages; the Vietnamese crack-down on illegal marriage brokers; and growing Korean links with Cambodia, including inward investment and a Korean expat community of over 3,000 in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.

A registered Korean marriage broker in Phnom Penh - the Chanthin Group - cited in the report, says that Cambodian women clients are mostly between 22 and 25 and come from middle income families in Kampong Cham and Kampong Thom provinces. The Korean men using the broker are older and primarily blue collar factory workers or farmers with a high school education. Most are Christian and their average income is between \$2,000 - \$3,000 per month.

Chanthin says that women applicants have to come to the agency to complete an application form and provide proof of identity and photos. These are translated and the



details posted onto the agency's website. Korean men can then access the site, select a woman and schedule a meeting with her in Cambodia through the agency.

If they and their respective families subsequently agree to a marriage, it goes ahead, subject to clearance from the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Korean Embassy in Phnom Penh, which subjects the prospective husband to a detailed interview and checks the documentation.

After the wedding, the husband returns to Korea almost immediately. While the bride waits for the documentation to clear and her visa, a period of some three months, Chanthin provides her with one month of intensive Korean language training. When she finally arrives in Korea, the agency claims that it monitors the couple to check whether they are having any problems, including telephoning the bride. It says that about 2 per cent of couples encounter some sort of difficulties.

But according to the IOM Phnom Penh report, only a tiny percentage of arranged marriages are through government-registered brokers like Chanthin. "The vast majority," it says, are through unregistered, informal and often exploitative brokers offering hasty "marriage

tours" for between \$5,000 and \$20,000 to bachelors unable to find a wife in Korea.

Local brokers persuade young women that marriage to a Korean husband is an opportunity to make money and get a better life for themselves and their families. If the girl and the parents agree, a prospective bride could be taken to Phnom Penh, where she could wait with up to 100 other young women to be selected by a Korean "marriage tourist," typically on a four to six-day visit to Cambodia. Meetings take place in restaurants or small hotels in or near Phnom Penh.

If a girl is selected, a hasty wedding is arranged. Photos are taken and the bride's immediate family is given the price of their travel to Phnom Penh and a wedding gift of \$300 to \$1,000. After the marriage, the groom returns to Korea and the bride returns home with her parents for the roughly three months it takes to process her visa.

According to the report, most of the women are poor, have little or no education and are, in some cases, illiterate. Most brokers provide no basic pre-departure orientation or language training and many Cambodian brides have inflated expectations of married life in rural Korea.

This frequently results in tensions between couples and in-laws, which is compounded by the fact that many Korean marriage tourists are older than their brides and relatively low income earners. It also seems that many lie to brokers and prospective brides about their financial circumstances, in the hope of finding a "better" partner, says the report.

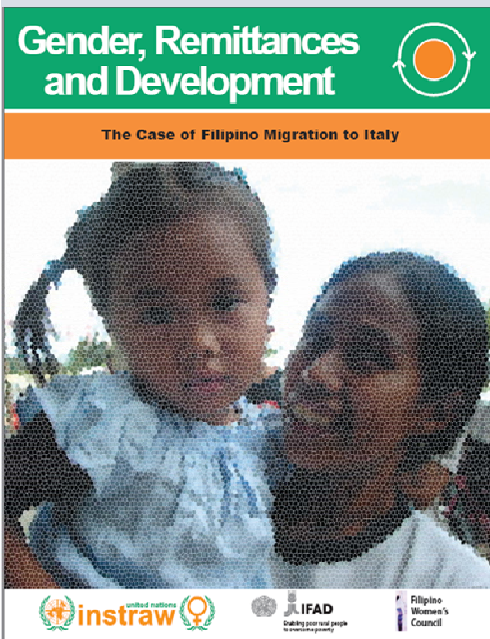
It adds that the solution to these problems lies in raising awareness of the potential pitfalls and challenges of foreign marriage in rural Cambodia, particularly in schools, and stimulating public debate of the issues.

It also calls for a pre-departure orientation programme, including language training, for all migrant brides destined for Korea to be developed in close cooperation with Korean NGOs and the Embassy and Consulate-General of Korea in Cambodia. IOM has already launched a similar pilot pre-departure orientation programme of this type in Viet Nam.

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## Migration and Remittances Have Positive Impacts on Gender Equality in the Philippines



and selected rural communities in the Philippines' provinces of Pampanga, Batangas, Ilocos Sur, Oriental Mindoro and Tarlac. Researchers collected qualitative data during 2 round-table sessions and 132 in-depth personal interviews with 61 migrants in Rome and 71 members of migrant households in the Philippines.

The high feminization of migration from the Philippines was one of the reasons that the country was selected for a case study of the impacts of women's migration. Moreover, Italy is the 6th most popular destination country amongst Filipino migrants (preceded by Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, and the United Arab Emirates) and hosts the largest number of Filipino migrants within Europe (followed by Spain, Greece, and Austria).

According to the Commission of Filipinos Overseas, there are currently 128,080 Filipinos residing in Italy (2006). "The Filipino community in Italy is more feminized than any other migrant group and is highly concentrated in the domestic service sector, characterized by its intense demand for foreign female labour. In cities like Rome and Milan, female Filipino migrants account for up to 70% of all Filipino migrants", stated Carolina Tabora, Social Affairs Officer at UN-INSTRAW.

Of the 12.8 billion dollars Filipino migrants sent back to the Philippines in 2005, 44 million dollars were sent from Italy, making Italy the fourth largest source of remittances. According to the UN-INSTRAW/IFAD/FWC study, Filipino women in Italy send remittances back home more regularly than their male counter-

parts. In Rome, 85.3% of women and 64.7% of men interviewed stated that they sent regular remittances to the Philippines each month. In general, regular remittances involve sending fixed amounts of money, averaging between €300 and €400 per month, which represents roughly half of the minimum salary of €600 per month earned by Filipino migrants.

The study revealed that for most recipient households, these monthly transfers act as a kind of salary, representing between 25% and 50% of total household income. This money is used to cover basic consumption (food, clothes, electricity, etc.), education and health. When remittances are sent regularly they can also serve to pay a caretaker, a domestic worker or a person who will be in charge of dependent persons in the migrant women's household.

"While women privilege investment in their children, particularly in education, men are inclined to invest in consumer goods, assets or property. However, if women succeed in covering basic consumer needs, education and health, they tend to invest in a house or in land for agriculture. As former tenants become land owners, these farmers are more willing to invest in technology for improving both the quantity and the quality of their harvests and for diversifying the types of products they cultivate," pointed out Maria Hartl, Technical Adviser in Gender and Social Equity at IFAD.

When the migrant is married with children, remittances will usually be sent to the spouse. If both adults of the married couple go abroad, remittances are generally sent to the eldest

The Study "Gender, Remittances and Local Rural Development: The case of Filipino migration to Italy", assesses the impact of remittances sent by Filipino migrants in Italy for promoting gender-sensitive local rural community development in the Philippines and supports capacity-building activities with migrant associations to improve the living conditions of Filipino migrants in Italy.

The case study, published by UN-INSTRAW, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Filipino Women's Council (FWC), was carried out in Rome (Italy)

child to administer, or to the children's temporary guardian. This is also the case with migrant single mother. When the migrant has a choice, women are actually often chosen over men to receive and manage regular household remittances.

According to the migrants and household members interviewed, the reasons behind this trend are related to women's traditional role as caregivers and domestic administrators in the Philippines and their consequent in-depth knowledge of the household's basic needs. Women are perceived as "thrifter" and more responsible when handling money intended to benefit the household as a whole.

The study further demonstrated that migration and remittances have had a number of positive impacts on gender equality in the Philippines. First of all, migration seems to have economically empowered many women, as it has increased and diversified the employment opportunities available to them.

"Some women in this study were able to tran-

sition from unpaid subsistence agricultural work to the administration of small businesses, which has led to changes in their power and status in their households and communities of origin. Likewise, the investment of remittances in children's studies has increased their levels of educational attainment, particularly among the daughters of migrants, opening up new opportunities for future generations of women," stressed Carolina Taborga.

The direct participation of the Filipino Women's Council members in the collection and validation of the data was fundamental to supporting the capacity building activities of Filipino migrant associations. FCW participants were able to build on prior knowledge in this area, understand how could benefit the organizations' future strategy, and raise awareness about the potential of remittance-based development amongst Filipino migrants and their families.

"With the insight we have gained from having participated in this process, it is now imperative that Filipino migrant associations are sup-

ported both financially and technically in the proposals they have developed to promote positive change and overcome current challenges to local/community development", stated Charito Basa of FWC.

The UN-INSTRAW/IFAD/FWC study points to an urgent need for increased awareness among Filipino migrants -men and women- about available alternatives for sending remittances and their potential for promoting rural development in communities of origin.

In addition, the study calls for organizing public hearings, discussions, seminars and training activities etc. on remittance-based development in the Philippines and working with financial institutions to develop services specially targeted to women migrants/remitters and recipients.

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## Mobility with Dignity, Equity and Justice for Women Migrants in the Arab States



Asian women migrants working overseas generate substantive economic benefits to both their countries of origin and host countries. However, they often migrate under unsafe conditions, live under very difficult circumstances, and are targets of sexual exploitation and violence. Coupled with limited or no access to health services and social protection, these factors make them highly vulnerable to HIV.

A recently released research study "HIV Vulnerabilities Faced by Women Migrants: From Asia to the Arab States," undertaken by IOM in partnership with UNAIDS, UNDP, UNIFEM, CARAM Asia and Caritas Lebanon reveals that:

- Domestic workers, like other migrants, are tested without consent and counselling and are summarily deported if found to be HIV positive.
- Female domestic workers are often only recognized as official employees when it comes to pre-employment HIV testing, but they are not protected by the basic labour rights of migrants as their jobs are not recognized by labour laws.
- Illegal and excessive fees are charged by recruiting agents and sub-agents to most migrant workers pushing them into greater economic debt.

- Disproportionate workload and unpaid or minimal pay are the most common complaints. Those who flee abusive working conditions are immediately rendered "illegal" by host countries, exposing them to greater risk of abuses including sexual exploitation and increasing their vulnerability to HIV.

- In the absence of local mechanisms in host countries to address abuses of migrant workers, embassies and consulates can play a critical role, but often, where they exist, they are understaffed or ill-prepared to address the range of needs of migrants.

- When countries of origin collaborate, have political relations with host countries, and agreements on conditions of work, the situation for migrant women improve.

- There is very little or no assistance for returning HIV positive migrants to reintegrate into many countries of origin and to ensure their access to HIV services, counselling and alternative livelihoods.

- Women who migrate through irregular channels and/or who have limited education and preparation are among the most vulnerable to abuse, extortion, exploitation and blackmail.

- Barring women from moving pushes migration underground, placing women at even greater risk of exploitation and vulnerability to HIV.

The research study based on more than 500 interviews over 9 months using focus group discussions and key informant interviews with migrant workers, senior officials of the ministries of health, labour and foreign bureaus of employment, embassy officials, service providers and recruitment agencies in both origin and host countries covers Bangladesh, Pakistan, Philippines and Sri Lanka (countries of origin) as well

as Bahrain, Lebanon and UAE (countries of destination).

The publication also offers several recommendations including:

- Undertaking initiatives in origin countries to encourage safe and informed migration and advocacy in origin and host countries for better social acceptance of migrant women workers and domestic work.

- Taking steps to mitigate the stigma and discrimination endured by HIV positive migrant women and protect their right to work.

- Promoting dialogue and coordination between ministries of health, labour, foreign affairs, and social welfare in countries of origin and destination, and facilitate multi-country negotiations between origin and host countries to protect the rights, health and wellbeing of migrant women.

- Encouraging governments to recognize domestic work as professional work in origin and host countries.

- Introducing gender and rights based policies, legislation and programmes that protect women migrant workers throughout the migration cycle.

- Stopping policies that ban female migration.

- Regularizing hiring agency fees in origin and host countries. Bringing sub-agents and recruitment practices under the purview of the law.

- Changing the "kafala sponsorship programme" in the Arab states which renders a domestic workers' status immediately 'illegal/irregular' if she is living outside her employer's home.

# Colombia: Women Working Abroad Keep Provincial Economy Alive

By Helda Martínez

**PEREIRA, Colombia, Jul 30 (IPS) - The so-called Coffee Belt region accounts for 60 percent of Colombians who leave the country, and the majority of those leaving are female. Once they are abroad, these women become the breadwinners of their families, with the resulting impact on household income extending to the provincial economy.**

The Coffee Belt, where Colombia's coffee production is centred, is made up of the departments (provinces) of Quindío, Risaralda and Caldas, the southern section of the department of Antioquia, and the northern regions of Valle and Tolima, all located in the central Colombian highlands.

A recent study undertaken in the region, focusing on one particular area -- the Midwestern Metropolitan Area (AMCO), made up of the municipalities of Pereira, Dosquebradas and La Virginia, in the department of Risaralda -- found that of all the remittances sent back to the area from Spain, the main destination for Colombian migrants, 54 percent were sent by women.

The study, "Gender and Remittances: Colombian Emigration from AMCO to Spain", also reported that 14.5 percent of households in this area have at least one member living outside the country. In 2006, a total of 3.89 billion dollars entered the area as remittances from workers abroad, reflecting an increase of 17.4 percent over the previous year.

In the country as a whole, money transfers from abroad now total almost 4.5 billion dollars annually, equivalent to three percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and almost 62 percent of foreign direct investment, according to figures from the Colombian central bank, Banco de la República.

But in the Coffee Belt, due to the high rates of emigration, remittances now account for 17 percent of local GDP, says William Mejía, director of the Human Mobility Group of the Alma Mater Public University Network, made up of 10 universities.

## REASONS BEHIND THE EXODUS

Mejía directed the field work for the Gender and Remittances study, which was undertaken by the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW) and the International Organization for Migration (OIM), with the support of the Colombian Foreign Ministry and National Statistics Office (DANE).

"Emigration from the region is not a new phenomenon," Mejía told IPS, adding, "It began half a century ago, during the so-called era of La Violencia (The Violence)," the term popularly used to refer to the bloody decade-long civil conflict unleashed by the assassination of opposition leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948.

In the 1960s, emigration was largely fuelled by the armed conflict between leftist rebels, government troops and right-wing paramilitary forces, while in the 1980s, another exodus was sparked by the rising violence and forced displacement caused by drug trafficking in the region.

Meanwhile, "the latest wave of emigration began with the economic crisis that followed the collapse of the International Coffee Agreement in 1989, which affected the economy of the Coffee Belt in particular and the national economy in general," the study notes.

The liberalisation of the coffee market led to a steep fall in prices, causing financial ruin for coffee growers around the world.

The situation worsened in the 1990s thanks to "the process of structural adjustment based on neoliberal-style measures promoted by international financial institutions," resulting in increased unemployment, decreased buying power, cuts in social services and rising violence and insecurity, a situation that prompted growing numbers of people to leave the country.

While the United States was traditionally the preferred destination for Colombian migrants, tougher U.S. immigration laws led to its replacement by

Spain, which also offered the benefits of a common language and more favourable government policies at the time.

It is estimated that close to a million people left Colombia during the five-year period between 2000 and 2005 alone.

## THE POWER OF WOMEN

The number of women leaving the country continued to grow, until by the year 2000, they accounted for roughly 70 percent of Colombians with legal residency status in Spain. Although their share in emigration has decreased in recent years, women continue to have a significant presence in the expatriate community.

The study states that female emigration from the Coffee Belt to Spain has given rise to a process of "progressive empowerment" for women, as both the main source of income for their households, in the case of the female migrants themselves, and as the recipients of remittances, in the case of those still living in the region.

"My daughter Isabel sends me 750,000 pesos (440 dollars) a month, which is enough to cover my medical insurance, taxes and minimum living costs," Gloria Calderón told IPS in Pereira, the capital of Risaralda.

Calderón lives in an area of Pereira known as Cuba, made up of 150 poor neighbourhoods and shantytowns where 90 percent of the residents were displaced from rural areas by violence and the coffee sector crisis.

"Isabel left nine years ago, because after making a huge effort to study agronomy, she looked everywhere for work for six months, even in other departments, but she couldn't find anything. A year and a half after she left, they called her from the National Coffee Growers Federation for a job interview, but what good was it then?" remarked Calderón, clearly disappointed.

Her daughter went to Madrid, where she had contacts who helped her out when she first arrived, the most difficult period, because "emigrating is not easy and luckily people are starting to recognise that," said Mejía.

While people once had an unrealistic view of what emigration entails, "today it is accepted that it is difficult, although it is true that there are also many positive factors involved," he added.

Though women and men who emigrate send home similar amounts of money, for women it means a greater effort, since they earn lower wages. Women's remittances also tend to be more regular and frequent, the study found.

Isabel's first job in Spain was as a caretaker for the elderly, a common occupation for immigrant women. Then she got herself a motorcycle licence and found a job making deliveries for a restaurant. Now she is a taxi driver, and her next goal is to become a helicopter pilot, reported Calderón.

She has also purchased two taxis in Pereira, as well as buying a house there a short while ago with her partner. "They want to pay it off quickly, so that they have a foundation that will let them come back in five years with a solid base of capital. They don't want to end up like some of her girlfriends, who left, saved a bit of money, came back, and then ran out, and had to go back again just recently," she explained.

## LIVING EXPENSES

According to the Gender and Remittances study, money transfers from abroad have contributed to the purchase of homes by the recipient families, but are more commonly invested in repairing and renovating existing housing, including homes that are rented out. Remittances are also used to purchase consumer goods, although the lion's share goes to covering basic living expenses.

While the largest percentages of Colombians living abroad are in the United States (35.4 percent) and Spain (23.3 percent), there are also significant



Colombian expatriate communities in Venezuela, Ecuador, Canada and a number of other countries, according to the 2005 census conducted by DANE.

Colombians can easily reach Ecuador by highway. It is less than a 20-hour drive from the Coffee Belt.

Nancy Gallego, a native of Quindío, moved six years ago to the Ecuadorean town of Santo Domingo de los Colorados, which is popularly known as "Santo Domingo de los Colombianos" (Santo Domingo of the Colombians).

During a visit to Armenia, the capital of Quindío, she told IPS that "there are a lot of people who go there to work, to send back remittances and money to support their families. In my case, for

example, I was able to study nursing, which I could never have done here. And even though I like to come to visit, I don't feel safe here anymore, in my own city."

One of the region's municipalities with the highest rates of emigration is Montenegro, in southern Quindío, home of the theme park known as the Colombian National Coffee Park. Day labourer coffee pickers gather in the town's central square on Saturdays looking for work, while children chase after tourists, asking for spare change.

"The situation is very tough for farm labourers. There has been no work in the countryside for a long time, and that's why people, and especially women, are leaving, mostly to go to Spain,"

Claudia Aristizábal, head of postal services in Montenegro, told IPS.

"Around Christmas and Mothers Day, we receive a lot of shipments of clothes and toys," noted Aristizábal, who estimates the average remittance for a family of five to be around 600 dollars.

Women who come home -- mothers, daughters, wives -- are welcomed with applause at Matecaña International Airport in Pereira. "Even with the enthusiasm typical of wanderers, nostalgia is a feeling that never goes away," remarked Mejía.

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## HIV/AIDS, Women and Migration in Southern Africa

**31 July 2008**

**A**frica has a long history of migration. Persistent economic instability, fragile ecosystems, cyclical drought patterns, and civil wars and other types of conflict have propelled people from their countries of birth. Currently, more than 16 million Africans are classified as migrants, and their numbers are increasing. In particular, South Africa has the largest number of foreign-born persons (excluding irregular migrants).

Southern Africa has the highest rates of HIV-infection in the world. UNDP estimates of HIV prevalence indicate rates of almost 40% in Botswana and Swaziland, around 25% in Zimbabwe and over 20% in South Africa. Malawi (14%) and Mozambique (12%) show lower rates of infection.

Some experts assert that the rapid spread of the infection in Southern Africa over the last decade can be attributed, among other causes such as poverty and economic marginalization, to population mobility, and that there is a higher rate of infection among migrant communities.

Migrants are regularly separated from their partners and many engage in short-term sexual relations with others as the migrant lifestyle creates opportunities for wider social networking.

In a recent survey conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the levels of knowledge around HIV and AIDS were uneven in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), with traders from Malawi and Mozambique showing worryingly low levels of awareness. The survey showed that migrants had lower levels of knowledge about HIV/AIDS than non-migrants.

The study also revealed an extremely low level of condom use in sexual relationships. Over 60% of the women in the domestic workers survey had never used a condom in their lives.

This compares to 40% of construction workers and female cross-border traders. Finally, mobile populations are more difficult to reach for post-infection treatment and commonly return to live with family members to obtain care or may migrate to obtain medical attention. This can involve cross-border movement to a country perceived to have better health care facilities.

### Migration patterns are changing

Women are increasing in numbers among Southern Africa's migrant population. Women encompass 37.4% of regular migrants from SADC to South Africa, and their numbers are increasing.

In addition to the fact that women are biologically at greater risk of infection than men, gender discrimination hinders women's ability to access information and testing related to HIV/AIDS or negotiate the use of protective methods, further increasing their vulnerability. This is compounded by gender-based violence, abuse, coercion, trafficking, sexual exploitation, prostitution and forced marriage.

Women migrants are more likely to be disadvantaged by the migration experience than their male counterparts, increasing their risk of HIV/AIDS even further. They suffer violence, overt hostility, social exclusion and exploitation. Women most often work in the informal trading sector or domestic work, which subjects them to poor working conditions and low pay, sometimes forcing them to resort to sex work to supplement their income. Female farm workers, who often outnumber men as seasonal labourers on some border farms, have been known to exchange sex for food, jobs and accommodation.

Extremely little research has been done regarding women, migration and HIV/AIDS, but all evidence points to an increased risk of infection as more and more women choose migration as a livelihood option. The most alarming element is that just as migration has increased the

spread of HIV, HIV/AIDS itself has increased population migration – perpetuating a dangerous cycle.

People living with HIV migrate to obtain care from health facilities or relatives, AIDS orphans migrate to live with relatives or seek income-earning opportunities. Death or debilitation of household or community members can lead to a decline in agricultural productivity and food security, creating pressure for out- or rural to urban migration. Skill gaps and shortages from high death rates create the need to replace workers with migrants. Finally, those diagnosed with HIV or those displaying physical symptoms of AIDS migrate to escape stigmatization by their community.

The link between HIV/AIDS and migration is receiving increasing attention from academics and policy-makers, but still remains acutely under researched. The research that does exist is also focused overwhelmingly on males.

The case study "Gender, Remittances and Development: Preliminary Findings from Selected SADC Countries", published by UN-INSTRAW and the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) highlights the fact that research into HIV/AIDS and migration is inadequate and that research into the gender dimensions of female migration are almost non-existent.

As more women join migratory flows, their risk of exposure to HIV/AIDS increases, and the situation can only worsen. This issue urgently needs the attention of researchers, policy experts and law makers.

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## HIGHLIGHTS ON IOM GENDER ACTIVITIES

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## Bangladesh – Kafé Mukti Concept Creates Jobs, Self Reliance for Vulnerable Women

**I**OM Dhaka, as part of its public-private partnership (PPP) initiatives, has opened four *Kafé Mukti* (Freedom Kafé) snack kiosks employing vulnerable women of Bangladesh.

The *Kafé Mukti* initiative, which is supported by Norway and Denmark and brings together IOM, multinational Nestlé and local NGO partners, is designed to provide business training, create jobs and generate income for vulnerable women and victims of human trafficking.

The first *Kafé Mukti* in Bangladesh was opened on the campus of Dhaka's private North South University (NSU) in July 2008. Since then, three more kiosks were opened at key government locations of the Bangladesh Secretariat, the Department of Social Service and the Department of Women Affairs.

The kiosks, each of which employs two women referred to the pro-

gramme by local NGOs, sells tea and coffee from vending machines provided free of charge by Nestlé, as well as snacks and utility items like pens, notebooks and soap.

"These kiosks are a showcase of public private partnership in promoting corporate social responsibility towards the rehabilitation of vulnerable people. They provide vulnerable women with an escape route from exploitation. We hope to set up more outlets and turn *Kafé Mukti* into a brand name promoting women's empowerment," said IOM Regional Representative for South Asia, Ms. Rabab Fatima.

Government officials presented at the opening of the Kiosk at the Bangladesh Secretariat applauded the initiative and gave their commitment to provide any support to ensure the success of the initiative in Bangladesh.

This initiative has gained immense attention and interest from both the government as well as private sector agencies, who are keen to expand on the Mukti initiative to include additional trades and avenues towards the empowerment of vulnerable women in Bangladesh.

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*Opening of the Kiosk at the Bangladesh Secretariat with the Executive Director of Bangladesh National Women's Lawyers Association, the Danish Ambassador, IOM Regional Representative and a Former Additional Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs.*

## Nicaragua - IOM Helps Trafficking Victims Make a Fresh Start



### **IOM Press Briefing Note of 22 July 2008**

**I**n the past year IOM Nicaragua has provided return and reintegration assistance to 30 young Nicaraguan women trafficked to Guatemala and Mexico for sexual exploitation.

"These young women are very courageous and many of them managed to flee extremely dangerous situations. One jumped from a balcony to escape her captors. IOM's assistance has to provide the means for them to heal and to reintegrate socially and economically," says Berta Fernandez, Head of the IOM Office in Nicaragua.

So far, ten of the women have successfully completed hairdresser and beautician training and are now employed. Another nine are still completing their training.

Once the women returned home to Chinandega, west of Managua, mobile IOM teams provided them with medical and psychosocial assistance, as well as vocational training.

IOM also provided support and training to local government officials and community organizations to ensure the success and sustainability of the women's reintegration.

A two-day workshop, supported by the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM), designed to strengthen cooperation and increase capacity amongst government officials, NGOs and other agencies helping victims of trafficking in the region, will open today in Managua.

The workshop, the first of its kind in Central America, will bring together 50 participants from Central and North America, and from the Dominican Republic. IOM Regional Counter Trafficking Officer Agueda Marin says that the training is vital

for service providers, "We want the participants to share best practices so that victim assistance can be constantly improved and to encourage cooperation among all actors and countries in the region," she notes.

IOM's counter trafficking assistance programme in Nicaragua and the workshop are both funded by US State Department's Bureau for Population, Migration and Refugees (PRM.)

In May 2008, RCM member states (Belize, Canada, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and the US), meeting in Honduras, drafted a regional plan of action addressing migrants' rights, human trafficking,



irregular migration, and the right of return for migrants wishing to return to their countries of origin.

The RCM, also known as the Puebla Process,

was created in 1996 in Puebla, Mexico. It is an inter-governmental regional migration forum, in which participating countries discuss migration trends and realities and seek common ground.

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## Foreign Marriages: Love and Money in Asia—Vietnamese Brides in Korea

By Chris Lom, Regional Information Officer, Asia-Pacific

**Concern is growing in Asia over thousands of young women who put their futures in the hands of sometimes unscrupulous marriage brokers in the hope of finding husbands in wealthier countries. Vietnam's solution has been to clamp down on unlicensed marriage brokers and to encourage better pre-departure orientation offered by, among others, IOM. Cambodia, following the publication of an IOM report, has temporarily suspended all marriages to foreigners. In Korea, the destination of many of the "mail order" brides, the authorities are stepping in to ensure that the young women know something of the country's language and culture before they arrive and fully understand their rights under the law.**



For 12,000 Vietnamese brides migrating to Korea each year, the economic security of a Korean husband introduced by a marriage broker may seem the solution to many of the problems facing their sometimes impoverished and demanding families.

But with numbers of Vietnamese women marrying Korean men rocketing since 2001 and a growing volume of media coverage detailing failed marriages and domestic violence triggered by a lack of information, unrealistic expectations and cultural differences, public concern in both countries is growing.

Brokers fees of up to \$20,000, payments of a few hundred dollars to the women's families and a growing sense that brokered marriages, although often successful, sometimes involve the sale of young women into a life of oppression in rural Korea, are also contributing to calls for action.

In October 2007 IOM's Ho Chi Minh sub-office, working with a Korean NGO KOCUN – the Korean Committee for UN Human Rights Policy – and the Viet Nam Women's Union, responded to the need with the launch of a programme to better prepare potentially vulnerable Vietnamese women for marriages to

Korean men.

"The pre-departure orientation programme is based in Ho Chi Minh City because more than three quarters of the women come from villages in the Mekong Delta. It provides prospective brides with information about what their marriage is likely to entail, the likely expectations of the groom's family, the language and cultural challenges that they will face, their rights in Korea and what to do if they run into problems. And it operates a free helpline providing advice to them and their families, as well as an informational website," says IOM project manager Andrew Billo.

Korea is now the top destination for brokered marriages from southern Viet Nam – replacing Taiwan – for a variety of economic, social and cultural reasons, according to Korean academic Prof. Kim Hyun-jae of Yongsan University.

He points to greater rural urban income imbalances in the Mekong Delta, more women than men in the countryside because more men have migrated to the towns, a greater cultural openness to foreign marriage than elsewhere in Viet Nam and a widespread enthusiasm for the glitzy lifestyle and beautiful people promoted by popular Korean soap operas.

Brokered marriages of Vietnamese women from the same area to Taiwanese men, which reached 13,000 in 2000, fell to 3,000 by 2005, when the similar problems of domestic violence and suspected human trafficking surfaced, leading the Taiwanese government to make it much harder for foreign brides to acquire Taiwanese citizenship, says Kim.

Van, 25, Nguyet and Trinh, both 21, who are about to leave Ho Chi Minh City to join their husbands in Korea, all agree that their choice of Korean men was based on Vietnamese affinity with Korean culture. "Why a Korean? I suppose it's fate," smiles Van, a hairdresser from the Mekong Delta town of Can Tho.

Between October 2007 and February 2008 some 1,150 women, including Van, Nguyet and Trinh, attended the pilot phase of the IOM Ho Chi Minh pre-departure orientation project.

IOM trainer Ung Thi Hong Thu says that some of the women referred to her course by the Korean consulate had no idea of what they were getting into. "Most had very little education. One of them, who was leaving for Korea the same evening, told me that she was so scared she simply went and prayed," says Thu. But Van, Nguyet and Trinh, who are studying Korean language, cooking and the social skills needed to cope with their Korean in-laws at

the Viet Nam Women's Union Marriage Support Centre (WUMSC) while waiting to join their factory worker husbands, are optimistic and say that they will work hard to make their marriages a success.

"I don't plan to get a job immediately, I need to learn the language, get to know my new family and consult with my husband. I'd also like to have kids," says Nguyet, who works in a factory making artificial flowers.

The IOM pilot project also focused on providing orientation training to counsellors from the WUMSC and Justice Departments. "The WUMSC is now the only agency in Viet Nam officially authorized to counsel women and arrange foreign marriages. Couples also have to attend an interview with the Justice Department to obtain a Vietnamese marriage certificate or recognition of a Korean marriage certificate," says IOM Ho Chi Minh project officer Nguyen Hoang Oanh.

"Our role is to provide support and counselling to these young women to help them make the right decision. We don't try to stop them, but we do try to give them the real picture," says WUMSC Director Nguyen Thi Bach Tuyet.

Viet Nam's interest in promoting a sustainable system that will prevent abuses through raising awareness in southern Viet Nam, while promoting bona fide brokered marriages to Korean men, is shared by the Seoul government and Korean NGOs.

Korean Consul in Ho Chi Minh City Bok-Hyun Nam says that his country has the infrastructure in place to support the integration of Vietnamese and other foreign brides after they arrive, but is looking into what more can be done by way of pre-departure preparation.

"This is a big human rights issue in Korea and there is a lot of media interest. This has increased with Cambodia's ban on foreign marriages, following the publication of IOM's report (on brokered marriages between Cambodian women and Korean men)," he says.

In 2006 the Korean Ministry of Gender, Equality and Family asked a Korean NGO, the Women Migrants Human Rights Center, to launch a 24-hour 365-day emergency helpline in six languages, including Vietnamese, for migrant women who are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and other forms of abuse.

The 1577-1366 helpline number is printed on awareness raising materials prepared by KOCUN and distributed to prospective brides attending IOM Ho Chi Minh City's pre-



departure briefing.

Cornell University PhD candidate Hyunoke Lee, who is currently researching cross border marriages between Vietnamese women and Korean men, sees the biggest challenge as overcoming the isolation felt by young Vietnamese brides when they find themselves alone

and unable to communicate with their new families in Korea.

"Women who know very little about Korea can be completely isolated. We need to both equip them with the basic information before they leave, and to ensure that they can access support services in Korea, if the need arises,"

she says.

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## Italy – IOM Supports Humanitarian Concert in Lampedusa While Reporting on Dramatic Increase of Migrant Women Reaching the Island

### IOM Press Briefing Note of 26 September 2008

For the second consecutive year IOM is lending its support to O'Scià, a music and cultural event that takes place every September on the island of Lampedusa and promoted by the renowned Italian artist Claudio Baglioni.

"IOM is glad that Baglioni's efforts in organizing the event were once again successful. O'Scià is a very special initiative, which has a proven ability to effectively draw public attention to the dramas that continue to take place in the Mediterranean," says IOM's Regional Representative for the Mediterranean countries, Peter Schatzer.

"This year appears to be even more important, because of the dramatic increase of irregular migrants who have reached the island in 2008; close to 20,000," explains Schatzer.

According to IOM staff, the number of women that have reached Lampedusa so far this year has increased from 600 in 2007 to almost 2,500. Nearly 1,130 hail from Nigeria. Interviews conducted point to a possibility that many may be victims of trafficking.

"We hope that in this particularly dramatic and challenging situation, the O'Scià concerts will once again raise attention to migration challenges and send a message of solidarity to Italy and other Mediterranean countries," says Schatzer.

Approximately 10,000 people are expected to gather at the event's three main concerts, where Baglioni and two other well-known Italian artists, Fiorello and Paolo Belli, will take turns on the stage.

Today, the Regional Representative will participate in a roundtable discussion focused on migration issues along with speakers from the Italian Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Labour, UNHCR, the Comunità di Sant'Egidio, Amnesty International, Save the Children, the World Islamic Call Society, the Municipality of Lampedusa and Claudio Balioni, founder of the O'Scià Foundation.

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## Afghanistan – IOM Radio Project Educates Women in Badghis



### IOM Press Briefing Note of 24 October 2008

IOM this week inaugurated an upgraded Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) radio station and a media centre in Qal-i-Naw in the western province of Badghis.

With funding from the Spanish government, IOM's Literacy Campaign and Radio Broadcasting Programme installed an AM transmitter and a fully equipped studio, allowing the new sta-

tion to broadcast to every Badghis district. The FM signal of the old station could only reach three districts.

"This is one of the most important projects implemented in the province in a long time. RTA is now able to broadcast in districts on the border between Herat (to the south) and Turkmenistan (to the north)," said Said Aga Erfaq, Badghis' Director for Culture and Information.

Badghis is one of Afghanistan's most remote provinces. Illiteracy, maternal and infant mortality rates are among the highest in the world.

As part of the programme, IOM trained female journalists and supported programming designed to increase basic health awareness among women, particularly in rural areas. The media centre, located within the radio station, will make media production facilities available to women for the first time.

Najia Majaheed, who will lead the group of female journalists noted: "The fact that we will

have a room dedicated to female journalists will give us freedom and space to do our work. I hope the station will give us an opportunity to promote the rights of women and continue to report on health issues. Radio is the best medium to reach out to people in remote districts."

IOM also completed a literacy and basic health campaign through classroom-based courses and road shows. The campaign reached some 1,600 women in 40 villages. During these events, women in rural areas were also informed about the RTA upgrading and given a total of 700 radio sets.

IOM is currently seeking additional funding to build on the success of the project, with a view to continuing to contribute towards women's empowerment, particularly in communities hosting a large number of migrants.

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## Chile - Campaign: Migrants Women, Women with Rights

By Viviana Mellado, Gender Focal Point—Chile

In August 2008, IOM Chile in cooperation with the Foundation Institute for Women, launched a radio campaign "Women Migrants; Women with rights" through the voices of famous actors and actresses. It is important to note that Chile, since 1990

has received an increasing number of migrants, from Andean countries, particularly Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Bolivia. In general, they come in search for better job opportunities and a significant percentage of them are women. For example women make up 63% of the Peruvian migrants in Chile.

Immigrant women not only face difficulties in integrating into Chilean life, but often ignore how to access health, education, employment and housing services. Confusion often occurs and increases their social vulnerability, giving place for abuse and reproduction of poverty. This is particularly serious for women irregular migrant.

Most migrant women work in private homes, doing household chores, without a proper contract or under conditions that violate their human and labor rights.

Deliver relevant information on national legislations, on how to access services and social programmes, to which the migrant population is entitled is essential, in order to facilitate their integration and their participation in the Chilean society.

The objective of this initiative is to promote

respect for women migrant's rights, in order to facilitate their social integration and employment in the Chilean system while at the same time sensitizing the host community. The campaign, consisting in nine radio spots, has been broadcasted over a month through nationwide and community radio stations.

A large-format poster was distributed on the streets of Santiago, especially in neighborhood with significant migrant population. Public and private services that assist migrant women, including NGOs in northern Chile, as well as

the internet were also used to disseminate the information.



## A Migrant's Regal Effort to Help Her People



*The support of Nana Adane Okofrobour-Krontihene, Paramount King of the Suma Traditional Area, is critical to Belinda's plans. He and other chiefs have offered the use of fallow land in Suma for mass scale farming (Photo: © IOM, 2007)*

By Jemini Pandya, IOM Geneva

**As young Ghanaian men leave their villages in search of work anywhere else, the queen mother of a traditional area in Ghana, doubling as a nurse in Italy, has stepped forward with an ambitious plan to rescue her people from poverty and put an end to the out migration from her region.**

**T**rying to reach the Suma Traditional Area which lies in the north west corner of Ghana's Brong Ahafo region is not easy. At some point an hour and a half before one reaches the capital, Suma Ahenkro, the tarmac ends and a very bumpy dirt road begins.

To the left hand of what serves as a road and just a stone's throw away is the border with the Côte d'Ivoire. There is a remoteness here and with it a certain isolation reinforced by the lack of proper roads that inhibit business development.

Consisting of 30 small towns and villages, 80 per cent of the population of Suma Traditional Area is made up of subsistence farmers with the burden of work and responsibility for feeding the family lying with the woman. With the exception of schools, there is little else in terms of facilities and certainly not much opportunity for finding work in the area, making labour plentiful and very cheap. It is because of

this, the resulting poverty and perhaps the proximity of the border with Côte d'Ivoire filling heads with dreams of a new, riches-filled life in Europe that are significant factors to emigration from the area. No one here knows exactly how many people have left.

But looking around in Suma Ahenkro, there is a visible lack of young men amidst the people going about their daily business. Lots of old men and women, children and mothers, young and old. But few young men. They tend to leave to find work in Ghana's urban areas or abroad – if they are lucky enough to make it. Several village boys and men have died making the long and perilous journey to Europe.

It is partly to prevent this heartache and that of those who do manage to make it to Europe and who soon realize that the streets there are not paved with gold but much pain and suffering, and partly to lessen the suffering of the women in the area, that Belinda Comfort Damoah felt pushed to act.

Alias Nana Akwamma Trepefo Odiakotene, Belinda is no ordinary person. She is the Queen Mother of the Suma Traditional Area (STA) although she is now a resident of Lecco, near the northern Italian city of Milan, and another recipient of IOM support under its Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA) programme for Ghana. It encourages African migrant diaspora to contribute to the development of their country of origin through skills transfer and investment in enterprise with co-funding from partners including IOM.

Belinda's successful proposal put forward in the second phase of the MIDA Ghana programme funded by the Italian government is an ambitious plan to revolutionize agriculture in Suma and with it, provide decent new job opportunities for people and improve the lives of the women there.

With thousands of acres of land lying fallow in the area, Belinda has created an agricultural cooperative society supported by the Suma Rural Bank as well as IOM with plans to utilize 500 hectares in the cultivation of much prized cash crops such as cashew and teak as well as vegetables and fruit such as mangoes, cassava and okra. Traders from India are already beat-

ing the path to Suma for the well-loved nut and the cooperative could soon be selling their produce directly to the Indians.

She bemoans the current waste of subsistence farming and has plenty of ideas for diversification. Take the cashews, for example, which grow well and easily in the area with the district in which Suma lies being the biggest producer of cashew nuts in Ghana.

"There are many things we can do with the cashew but we only take the seed and sell it. While the fruit, we can have juice or can conserve it or make marmalade," she explains.

By also organizing local farmers into cooperatives and with plans to access adequate storage facilities, the current lack of which forces farmers into selling any little surplus produce at ridiculously low prices during glut periods, she's hoping that agriculture here can become large scale and a real business. It's an ambition backed by all the traditional chiefs.

Speaking at the official launch of the Suma Agricultural Cooperative Society accompanied by much pomp and ceremony, Nana Adane Okofrobour-Krontihene, Paramount King of the Suma Traditional Area, reiterated support through the provision of land held in trust by the chiefs and queen mothers for large-scale farming.

"With arable land and energetic workforce, there is no over-emphasizing the agricultural potential of the Suma Traditional Area," he says.

The women in Suma Ahenkro are ecstatic about the project. Belinda has already organized them into a baking cooperative which provides bread for the whole village. "The burden of life is on the women here. They do everything. They provide everything. The economic contribution of the men is negligible. The women are really happy and excited about this development. They feel very strongly about organizing a cooperative," says Martin Adane, Advisor to the Suma Agricultural Cooperative Society.

Belinda is passionate about making a difference to the lives of the people here. She'd left her home in 1984 for Libya where she worked as a



nurse for five years before trying to reach the UK. But fortune favoured her and she ended up as a regularized migrant in Italy. Since the birth of her last child in 1992, she's been working as an auxiliary nurse and is now taking exams to be a general nurse.

There is a purpose. Not content to revolutionize the livelihood potential of Suma and help stop her people leaving their villages in search of work, she's been instrumental to the building of a primary health care centre in Suma Ahenkro. At some point soon, she's planning to come to Suma for several months at a time, allowing her to contribute her nursing skills at the health centre.

And then there is this other passion. A good

education for all children. She's already supporting 80 children in the village to attend school. But the building at the moment is a collection of kiosks and with the number of children now going to the school increasing, she is trying urgently to raise funds for a proper building for them.

"I have learnt a lot. I can help them, the women especially. I want to bring all the knowledge that I have acquired in Europe to help my people because I know they need me. They need my knowledge," says Belinda.

No-one would dispute her. Otherwise, who knows, heads might roll...

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Article originally published in *Migration -December 2007*. Since then Belinda's project has evolved.



## A Life Raft for Village Women in Aceh

By MGKD\* team, South Aceh

Of the 100 households in Alue Peunawa village, Babahrot sub-district of Aceh Barat Daya, Aceh, Indonesia there are approximately 20 female headed households. Just like the other families, these women's lands had been abandoned due to the conflict in Aceh. Additionally, they had no means of transportation to go to the other side of the river where their agricultural land was located. Consequently these widows, as the heads of the families had no choice but to find low paid work to support their families or work the land surrounding their house to produce food for their families to survive.

Fortunately, last year, Peunawa village was selected for a grant by the Makmu Gampong Kareuna Damee (MGKD) Project supported by the generous funding of CIDA. The project has a specific grant allocated for women only. The

women of Peunawa decided to use the grant to build a raft to take them across the river to their agricultural land. Thanks to the raft, they re-cleared the land which is now again productive and supporting their families. They called the IOM-CIDA assistance, "a blessing from Above."

On this land, Alue Peunawa women now grow rice, peanuts, banana, corn and many other products. They sell some of their harvest and consume the rest. Apart from the crops produced in the garden, these women earn money by selling 'Pakis' leaves that grow wild in the river bank. When they get home from work at around 5 pm, they stop by the river to pick the leaves. In the evening while resting with their family, they tie the leaves into neat bundles so that they can sell them to the 'vegetable agent' that comes to their village to collect vegetables and take them to the Blangpidie (the District capital) market to sell.

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\*Acronym of the project's Acehese name: Makmue Gampong Kareuna Damee, or "Prosperity for the village due to Peace."

## Dhaka: A Glimpse in a Training Centre

By Samiha Huda, Gender Focal Point— Dhaka

Receiving letters or phone calls everyday is no longer a surprise to Lovely, the trainer of a government training centre in Dhaka, dedicated to provide training for Bangladeshi women migrant workers. Although the official statistics reveal that a very small percentage of women are migrating through official channels, a huge number is actually migrating through informal channels every year. Women migration is increasing in Bangladesh and most are migrating as housekeepers/ caregivers/housemaids. Mostly these women are from rural areas in search of job and overseas employment is one of the popular option for their survival.

The young bright girl of a remote area of northern Bangladesh one day left her locality and came to Dhaka for higher studies. After completing these, Lovely Yesmin (35) started as a trainer in a national NGO and eventually joined the Sheikh Fazilatunnessa Technical Training Centre (TTC), the only training centre dedicated to women migrant workers, opened

in 2003. The centre, which is administered by the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), offers various skill development training for women and specialized training courses for potential migrant workers. Social work has always been her passion, and being a trainer in the TTC has eased the goal for her. "I try to develop skilled human resources although we have a lot of constraints resources-wise. I always feel good when a woman migrates safely and is secure at her workplace", says Lovely. She has good hope for the centre. The centre could offer more and more modern courses following the global job market for women workers, if upgraded.

The centre is currently running 8 batches where about 500 women are following 15 day trainings in housekeeping. I saw a group of women exploring new household equipments, as a wonder. Many of them are directly coming from rural areas where they never saw those equipments. Coming out of the house for overseas job is also a huge step for many of them.

So far the centre has trained more than 12,000

women. "It is always pleasant to receive a phone call from them informing me of their safe arrival in the destination country and thanking us for helping them in making the difference. I feel as if I am helping my own sister", says Lovely, walking down the training room as the trainees are waiting for her for the next session.

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Lovely in her classroom



# Self-help Groups Empower Migrant Women Affected by Violence in Vietnam

By Ramona VIJEYARASA, Hanoi



project in the late February. The project provided them training on such themes as human rights and violence against women; migration and mobility; communication skills; and skills concerning self help group establishment and facilitation.

While capacity building for these facilitators and local NGOs was an essential starting point for this project, the self help groups which the facilitators established have proven to play

**D**omestic violence in Vietnam remains a pressing issue. The enactment of the 2006 Gender Equality Law, and the law on domestic violence, signal the Vietnamese Government's growing recognition of the importance of gender equality. Yet, women in Vietnam who have been raped, sexually assaulted, or abused in the home have virtually no access to support services or opportunities for recourse, and they are further victimised by stigma.

Internal migrants, who are believed to be particularly vulnerable to violence, represent at least 30 percent of Vietnam's urban populations, many of whom are women. Research conducted by IOM in 2007 on the experiences of migrant women working in factories revealed that many of the women interviewed had experienced violence, particularly in intimate relationships.

Funded by the European Union, IOM is working in the capital of Vietnam in partnership with three local NGOs to improve the support provided to these migrant women who experience violence. This 18-month project entitled, "Violence Against Women – A rights-based approach to empowering migrant women affected by violence in Hanoi" has seen considerable success since its implementation in January 2008.

The project contains six main groups of activities:

- Capacity building for peer facilitators and local NGOs working on human rights;
- Mapping of service providers and developing an initial service referral system;
- Self help groups;
- Outreach and communication;
- Policy advocacy and implementation; and
- Social and health service provision.

Nine migrant women affected by violence were recruited as potential peer facilitators of the

a crucial role in all of the project's activities. Self help groups are established to create a safe environment for every migrant woman affected by violence (*"the right holders"*), giving them a space to share their experiences, to exchange information and to support each other. They also provide a strong support network for women who lack access to service providers in the host community. Self help groups are a place where rights-holders are empowered.

The self-help groups have also been a catalyst for the creation of roundtable discussions between the duty bearers in the community and these women. During these roundtable discussions, which have improved communication and interaction between all stakeholders, the facilitators provided feedback on the needs of migrant women affected by violence for health and legal services, psychosocial support, vocational training and job creation. Other issues that have been raised include improving the referral system in general, as well as the expectation for friendly, non-judgmental services. Ultimately, this process has enhanced these migrant women's awareness of, and ability to claim, their rights.

With the knowledge and skills they have obtained from the project together with their own experiences, the facilitators have managed to reach 89 rights-holders in the community. So far, nine self help groups have been established and forty-nine self help groups meetings have been held. Discussions at these meetings have ranged from women's rights, gender equality, trafficking, domestic violence, relevant laws, as well as individual experiences. Confidentiality has been a key element to the self-help groups many successes.

The facilitators also continue to hold regular meetings three to four times a month with each other. These meetings provide a time for the facilitators to share their positive experiences and challenges in reaching their peers and establishing and facilitating these self help groups. They also provide a forum for group

counselling for the personal challenges faced by the facilitators themselves as well as more information and discussion on such new topics as life values and positive thinking. The effectiveness of this project, in building the capacity of these facilitators to successfully establish and facilitate these nine self help groups, is reflected by two poems composed by some of the groups' members:

## For the group "Rose"

Three meetings a month  
Members are happy to learn  
Eager to raise ideas  
Raise hands when we understand  
Our spirits are better now  
When one member is sad  
We are ready to share

Even though we are away from home  
We are still happy  
Loving and caring  
We become friends  
And start to forget our worries  
We have the will to keep going this way  
Expecting to go back home some day

The social workers are very enthusiastic  
Taking care of us women  
Explaining our benefits from the Law  
Thanks to Gender Equality!

Phuc Xa, October 21<sup>st</sup> 2008  
Member  
F.T05.2TH

And

## The law on Gender equality

The law on gender equality is released  
Women are very happy  
Together we gain more knowledge  
On 'Rights of women'  
Our house is full of laughter  
This brings happiness to our family  
Husbands and wives swear to be faithful to each other.  
Being active in communication activities on  
Gender Equality  
We paint our lives in bright colors

August 23<sup>rd</sup> 2008  
Member  
F.T05.1SO



## INSIDE IOM: WHAT'S NEW?

•Women Represent More Than 40% of IOM Staff in Hardship Posts

•Gender Training Workshop at MRF Nairobi

•Gender Training in Bangkok

•Interview with an IOM Female Staff Member in Iraq

•A Treasure Hunt Leading to Better Gender Programming

## Women Represent More Than 40% of IOM Staff in Hardship Posts

Data from April 2008 indicate that 41% of IOM international workforce in duty stations categorized as D and E are female. They represent 70 staff members out of a total of 170 staff. 39% are posted in D duty stations while 44% are working in E duty stations.

These colleagues are posted in Sudan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Zimbabwe, Haiti, Georgia, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Tanzania.

They come from 34 different countries and are aged between 24 and 59 years old, the majority being in their mid-thirties.

They hold UG to P-4 grades, the majority being midlevel Officials. 6 hold chief of mission and similar positions, the others work in Programme/project management, Pro-

tection, Operations, Resource management, Communication/Information, Return and reintegration, Pre/Post DHS, Migration health, Overseas Processing, Monitoring, Liaison, Migration Law and Security.

These relatively high percentages are encouraging as they are only slightly lower than general gender balance in the organization (43.3% in June 2007), in line with IOM's commitment to gender balance at all levels and in all categories. They also contradict the common perception that women are unwilling or unable to be posted in hardship and emergency stations. Despite the difficulties of family responsibilities and cultural expectations, women are enthusiastic about working in emergencies, both for their careers and for personal fulfilment.



© US Navy 2005 — An IOM operation staff helping an injured Indonesian man medically evacuated from a village on the Sumatra island

## Gender Training Workshop at MRF Nairobi

By Consolata KIMATA-WAITHAKA,  
Gender Focal Point, Nairobi



The workshop was held on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2008 at MRF Nairobi office. Participants included members of the Gender Working Group and at least one other representative from the various departments within MRF Nairobi.

The main facilitators were from the Somalia Gender Theme Group. Namely, Ms. Ayoo Odicho (FAO-Somalia), Ms. Alexina Rusere (UNOCHA-Somalia) and Charity Buga (UNIFEM-Somalia).

The objective of the training was to :

- Create a common and updated understanding among MRF Nairobi staff on the basic gender concepts and gender analysis frameworks.
- Enhance MRF Nairobi staff appreciation of global, regional, selected country specific and IOM instruments on gender equality.
- Equip MRF Nairobi staff with practical skills on gender mainstreaming in IOM projects and activities.
- Define the next steps in strengthening gender mainstreaming in MRF Nairobi.

The MRF Nairobi Regional Representative, Mr. Ashraf El Noor, opened the workshop. He emphasized on MRF Nairobi's standing commitment to offer equal opportunities to men and women and of the mission's great strides to ensure there is no gender disparity.

IOM also seeks to ensure that the particular need of all migrant women are identified, taken into consideration and dealt with appropriately within IOM projects and services.

All participants greatly enjoyed the presentations and contribution. Certificates of appreciation and participation were awarded to all participants at the end of the training session.

## Gender training in Bangkok

By Varamon RAMANGKURA,  
Bangkok

The workshop was held at IOM Bangkok Office from 11:30 to 13:30 on Thursday 14 August 2008.

Resource persons were Michiko Ito and Nigoon Jitthai. The session was conducted primarily in English but K. Nigoon also provided Thai translation when requested.

There were about 25 participants which consisted of both international and local staff - both men and women. The CoM and RRMO were also present. The workshop received a lot of interest and staff actively participated in the discussion. The mission has plans to conduct a similar training at IOM UKTB office and to train field staff when they come to Bangkok so that they can go back and conduct similar

workshops for their colleagues in field offices.





## Interview with an IOM Female Staff Member in Baghdad

By Muna FADHIL, Gender Focal Point, IOM Iraq

### Tell us about yourself.

I liaise on migration-management issues between IOM and the Government of Iraq (GoI) - including ten main ministries, the Prime Minister's Office and the Iraqi Parliament- as well as the US embassy in Baghdad and the Multi-National Forces (MNF). I am also the Baghdad Team Coordinator where I record staff activities and report to the Project Managers in Amman-Jordan.

I am a wife and mother of three children, aged 15, 12, and two. Multitasking between being a mother and IOM staff is difficult because I am always worried about my children with explosions and snipers around their schools. Because of that, in 2006 my husband, who also works in Baghdad, and I had decided to send our children to Syria and to travel back and forth taking turns to be with them. Our children are now back in Baghdad, but if we feel the necessity to send them abroad again, we will.

### What is it like, being a woman in Baghdad?

Being a woman in Baghdad during times of tension had its downside. Women had limited mobility in many cases. For example there are male-dominated places where I would need a male escort to avoid harassment. Women also needed to work harder on maintaining their respectable social status. The Iraqi society became more conservative between 2004 and 2008 than it was prior to 2003 but the situation is improving. For instance, before I had to follow a dress code against my taste, wearing garments that were wide, covering me from neck to ankle and in colors that didn't attract attention. If I looked attractive I would be disrespected. However by early 2008 the situation in Baghdad improved. Today there is no need to cover my hair, I can dress according to my taste and I can wear clothes that are colorful. This was impossible not too long ago.

But being a woman did work to my benefit when the security in Iraq was deteriorating. Government officials appreciated my effort to

visit them because they were aware that the risk factor was more important for a woman. They felt obliged to find time to see me because I am a woman. Government officials were also impressed when they met me because there were very few women in their work environment. The situation is now changing as an increasing number of women are dealing with the Iraqi government. This is because more families are agreeing to send their daughters to work with security improving.

### Tell us about your daily routine?

During the most difficult times, I used to leave my house after 8:30 in the morning because most explosions occurred during the rush hour between 7 and 8AM. But if I had an appointment to catch around 9AM then I had to leave my house at 7AM or earlier to make it on time due to the long queues at checkpoints. It is still impossible to be punctual in Baghdad because of traffic jams at checkpoints now that more people feel safe to drive. I also see more women driving their cars to work. I use to make sure I was home by three PM. Baghdad was dangerous and looked like a ghost town before five PM. Now I feel safe to work until six or seven PM.

Abductions and car bombs have now become rare. I am not saying the risk has completely subsided. Now there are suicide bombers and plastic explosives. I lost four close friends who used to work at the Ministry of Interior and died because of a paste bomb placed under their car seats. But all-in-all the number of attacks is significantly less.

In the past I tried to schedule as many meetings as I could fit into one day so I would only have to leave my house two or three times a week. I worked half of the week from home. This is because it was very risky to be driving around Baghdad over a year ago. I usually had a male colleague escort me around. Now I leave my house to work every day. I work at two locations. Half the week I work at an IOM office inside one of the Iraqi ministries and the other half I work at the IOM office inside the United Nations compound. There are days when I

have to be at both offices. In order not to waste time I make all my phone calls on my way to meetings while I'm stuck in traffic. These would normally be inquiries from heads of units at the IOM Iraq office located in Amman. Seventy percent of my work is done with a cell phone and a note pad.

Power cuts are a major problem for me. I sit at home doing nothing until the power is back, thanks to a generator owned by a neighbor. We share the cost of fuel and maintenance and pay the owner by voltage. Otherwise the national electricity works for three hours maximum per day, but that is rare as we can go on for days with no national electricity. Or it might go one once for a couple of hours every 2-3 days.

It would take me more than one hour to download all my emails as the network connection is slow. I can't use the computer and the printer at the same time because of the unsteady voltage, so I write down my to-do list and all information I might need to look back on. By midnight I finish reading all my emails. That's when I start writing my reports to my direct supervisor in Amman. I go to bed after 1 AM, wake up at 7 AM and go through another day.

### Do you see yourself leaving Iraq?

I have been working with the IOM Iraq mission since its early days in 2003 and I have established my career here, so no I have no intention to leave. I prefer sending my family abroad – which I did in the past – and stay in Baghdad.

### Do you feel the situation of women is improving?

Yes for example the upcoming elections have many female candidates in several governorates. There are more women in the workplace than a year ago. Iraq has become safer for women as there are less abductions and killings.

## A Treasure Hunt for Better Gender Programming

By Blandine Mollard, Gender Unit, HQS

From September 22<sup>nd</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> 2008, EPC held its fifth training on Displacement, Camp Coordination and Protection, adopting an innovative approach to the mainstreaming of cross cutting issues in emergency programmes. Indeed, the trainees went through a Treasure Hunt, having to visit five cross cutting issues' booth in search of information to discover answers to pre-determined questions.

For gender, the three questions were "Why does gender matter in emergency situations?", "What is gender programming?" and

"What do you need to know to coordinate and manage a gender-responsive camp?".

The 35 participants, mainly country programme and operations officers, had GIC resources persons, Blandine Mollard and Anna Basten, to help them in their quest.

Ensued very interesting group discussions that revealed that many participants had a good understanding of the concept of gender. However, in their programmes, gender considerations were mainly applied by giving special support to women, rather than by consistently appraising men's and women's needs. Most of them insisted on women's increased vulnerability during crisis and displacement

and on the need for extra protection, in particular from gender-based violence.





Soon enough, the discussions focused on the relevance of conducting a gender analysis and on the danger of making assumptions on men's and women's capacities and needs, tendency that could lead to men or boys' needs being overlooked. For instance, one participant described the example of natural disasters, where a great number of displaced persons were men with children, having lost their wives in the catastrophe. Those men were suddenly faced with the responsibility of caring for their children, a role that is traditionally ascribed to women.

From the discussion, and with the use of resources developed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) on gender programming in emergency settings, the groups came up with a brief action plan to integrate gender concerns into their programmes:

-Undertake a quick gender analysis of the situation: What are the roles assigned to men/women, what are their responsibilities, their vulnerabilities? How have they been affected by the crisis? How are they coping?  
-Consult the population on their needs and priorities depending on how socially accepted it is for women to speak in public or to attend community gatherings, there might be a need to consult men and women separately.  
-Design programmes addressing the needs of the most vulnerable populations.

GIC provided participants with a series of leaflets on how to operationalize gender into IOM's work.

## Recommended reading

	<p><b>HIDDEN VIOLENCE IS A SILENT RAPE - RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT "PREVENTION OF SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST REFUGEES IN EUROPE: A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH".</b></p> <p>Publication by the International Centre for Reproductive Health (ICRH)</p> <p><a href="http://www.icrh.org/files/Hidden%20Violence%20is%20a%20Silent%20Rape%20Final%20Report.pdf">http://www.icrh.org/files/Hidden%20Violence%20is%20a%20Silent%20Rape%20Final%20Report.pdf</a></p>
	<p><b>GENDER AND SECURITY SECTOR REFORM TOOLKIT</b></p> <p>Publication by the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) and the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW)</p> <p>Tool 6 on Border Management and Gender covers Human Trafficking and Smuggling.</p> <p><a href="http://www.dcaf.ch/gender-security-sector-reform/gssr-toolkit.cfm?navsub1=37&amp;navsub2=3&amp;navl=3">http://www.dcaf.ch/gender-security-sector-reform/gssr-toolkit.cfm?navsub1=37&amp;navsub2=3&amp;navl=3</a></p>
	<p><b>PROGRESS OF THE WORLD'S WOMEN 2008/2009: "WHO ANSWERS TO WOMEN? GENDER AND ACCOUNTABILITY"</b></p> <p>Publication by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)</p> <p>Several mentions of migrant women in Chapter 4: Markets</p> <p><a href="http://www.unifem.org/progress/2008/">http://www.unifem.org/progress/2008/</a></p>
	<p><b>INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS</b></p> <p>Publication by the Global Migration Group (GMG)</p> <p>Two sections on female migrants</p> <p><a href="http://www.globalmigrationgroup.org/pdf/Int_Migration_Human_Rights.pdf">http://www.globalmigrationgroup.org/pdf/Int_Migration_Human_Rights.pdf</a></p>
	<p><b>STATE OF WORLD POPULATION 2008 REACHING COMMON GROUND: CULTURE, GENDER AND HUMAN RIGHTS</b></p> <p>Publication by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)</p> <p>Several references to migrant and section on Migration, Immigrants and Cultural Diversity</p> <p><a href="http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2008/presskit/docs/en-swop08-report.pdf">http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2008/presskit/docs/en-swop08-report.pdf</a></p>
	<p><b>GENDER, MIGRATION AND REMITTANCES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA</b> and <b>VOICES FROM THE MARGINS: MIGRANT WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA</b></p> <p>Publications by the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP)</p> <p><a href="http://www.queensu.ca/samp/sampresources/samppublications/policyseries/Acrobat49.pdf">http://www.queensu.ca/samp/sampresources/samppublications/policyseries/Acrobat49.pdf</a>  <a href="http://www.queensu.ca/samp/sampresources/samppublications/policyseries/Acrobat46.pdf">http://www.queensu.ca/samp/sampresources/samppublications/policyseries/Acrobat46.pdf</a></p>

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