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# 6 GENDER AND MIGRATION: TRENDS, GAPS AND URGENT ACTION<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction



Reading the testimonies of two migrants, can you guess their gender?

“I was working in [the Kingdom of] Saudi Arab[ia] for five years. ... I came back to Bangladesh in 2019. Upon return, I started to work in a small local factory. ... I also go to the government employment office, as I am interested to go abroad again. Working in a foreign country enables us to have savings for the future.”

*Testimony 1: migrant from South Asia.*

Excerpt from GAATW, 2021.

“We were a group of boys and girls traveling together. We spent 40 days in the desert. ... By the time we got to Libya, many of us had been kidnapped. ... I was stuck for seven months in Libya. It was very bad. We saw our friend being violated. It was a bad, bad experience. ... The rebels kidnapped us because they want to make money off Africans.”

*Testimony 2: migrant from West Africa.*

Excerpt from WRC, 2019.

Any guess about the gender of the two migrants in the above testimonies is linked to gender biases shaped by centuries of gender norms and stereotypes that have been – more or less unconsciously – internalized by most people. It has been estimated that only 10.3 per cent of the global population has no social gender norms bias.<sup>2</sup> While gender biases are more apparent in societies embracing patriarchal and conservative social norms, they remain prevalent worldwide. Stereotypically, men are generally considered breadwinners, remittance senders and decision makers within families. Women are associated with caregiving, unpaid work and vulnerability. Looking at the two testimonies above, these gender norms and biases are likely to lead to testimony 1 being attributed to a

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<sup>2</sup> UNDP, 2022.

man and testimony 2 to a woman, particularly given the “breadwinner” role of testimony 1. However, testimony 1 is from a woman, and testimony 2 is from a young man.

Gender norms and biases affect many aspects of day-to-day life. However, they take on a specific importance for migrants, influencing their migration experience to the extent that migration has been described as a gendered phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> Alongside a range of other overlapping factors such as age, race, ethnicity, nationality, disability, health and socioeconomic status, gender impacts the different opportunities migrants may have and the various obstacles and risks they may face in pursuing them.<sup>4</sup> By setting out different roles and expectations for migrants of specific genders, the social norms of countries of origin, transit and destination may influence, for instance, who can stay and migrate in a household, the motivations and options for migration, the preferred destination countries, the type and means of migration, the goal and objective of migration, the sector of employment or the disciplines studied, the status afforded by legislations of countries, including in terms of rights and benefits, and the list goes on. These gender dimensions of migration in turn impact societies in countries of origin, transit and destination. Similarly, in displacement contexts, gender considerations underpin individuals’ trajectories, experiences and protection, and even their very decision to flee when related to gender-based discrimination and violence that may, in some countries, lead to international protection, including refugee status.

Gender-related challenges, obstacles and risks for migrants often mask broader systemic and structural gender inequalities that must be better understood and addressed in order to ensure that individuals of all genders have the same opportunities to migrate and to experience migration in a safe, orderly and regular manner. Among these, gender inequalities in terms of decision-making power and the gender segmentation of the global economy are of particular importance in explaining gender migration patterns. While gender equality has improved worldwide, progress is reported by the United Nations Development Programme to be slowing and even reversing in some countries since the COVID-19 pandemic, thus negatively impacting human development.<sup>5</sup> Discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics continues, with an increased polarization over the past decade between countries with high and low levels of acceptance.<sup>6</sup> Key definitions are provided in Appendix A.

The legal principle of non-discrimination, including on grounds of gender,<sup>7</sup> underpins decades of policy and legal developments on gender equality. These include, at the global level, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action; the 2006 Yogyakarta Principles and their 2016 additional Principles Plus 10 relating to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics; and the 2015 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in particular Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 5.<sup>8</sup> In the specific context of migration, global migration initiatives have recognized the need to adopt a gender-sensitive approach to migration, especially with respect to women and girls.<sup>9</sup> The most recent examples are the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which commit to gender equality and gender responsiveness.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Piper, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Boyd and Grieco, 2003; Lutz and Amelina, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> UNDP, 2020 and 2022. See also UN Women and UN DESA, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Flores, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> UNGA, 1948; United Nations, 1966a and 1966b.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, 1979 and 1995; ICJ, 2007 and 2017; UNGA, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Bauloz, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> UNGA, 2018a and 2018b; see also UNGA, 2016.

Against this background, this chapter aims to describe and analyse how gender intersects with international migration and considers what can be done to improve gender equality in migration. Given the breadth of the topic, the chapter does not purport to be comprehensive but to provide an overview of some important gender dimensions in migration to increase the understanding of the multifaceted interactions between gender and migration. A particular focus is placed on labour migration, because it is one of the main types of migration (nearly 70% of the international migrant population of working age are estimated to be migrant workers),<sup>11</sup> with highly gendered trends due to the gender segregation of the global economy. The chapter also covers other “types” of migration that are highly gendered, such as family migration, including marriage migration.<sup>12</sup> It also considers the gendered drivers of displacement and gendered impacts on refugees, as well as, more broadly, the interactions between gender and irregularity of status. In recognition of the context-specific nature of the topic, the chapter provides illustrations of diverse geographies worldwide.

The first section outlines historical context, including the “feminization of migration”. The second section then explores the diverse and multiple ways that gender impacts migrants’ experiences throughout the migration cycle, from departure from the country of origin to entry and stay in transit and destination countries and, if applicable, return to the country of origin. The third section then discusses the urgent need to adopt a gender-responsive approach to migration governance, and identifies four cross-cutting challenges that need to be addressed, highlighting examples of promising practices and interventions. Finally, the chapter concludes with reflections on the complexity of understanding the multifaceted interconnections between migration and gender, and the importance of gender-responsive migration governance for gender equality more broadly.

## Current context: From the feminization of migration to the growing global gender gap in migration

Migration, as with any other aspect of an individual’s life, remains structured by gender norms that ascribe certain roles and expectations to people based on physiological sex at birth. Because of these ascribed roles, migration tended to be depicted as male dominated, with women and girls considered as “tied movers”, migrating as spouses and daughters or subsequently through family reunification. Migration researchers engaged more deeply with migration and sex-based roles as feminist theories about the social construction of gender were advanced in the 1980s and 1990s. These theoretical advances marked a turn in understanding how gender and migration interact at individual, household and societal levels, and how gender identities, roles and relations influence migrant agency, decision-making, patterns of migration, as well as experiences throughout the migration cycle.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> ILO, 2021a.

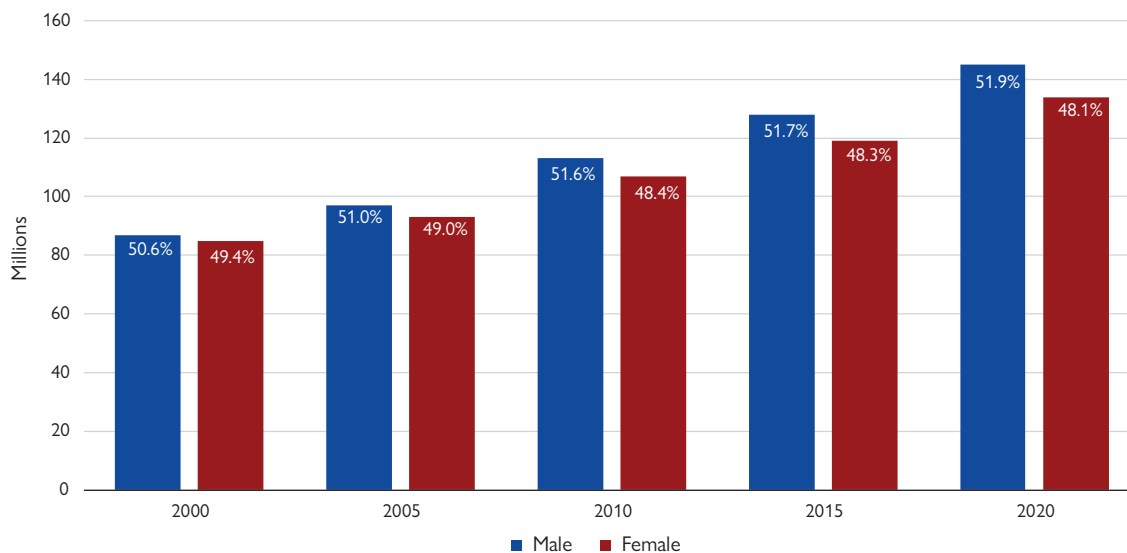
<sup>12</sup> Due to space constraints, the chapter does not cover international student mobility, although this type of mobility is also underpinned by gender considerations. On gender and international student mobility, see for instance Raghuram and Sondhi, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Boyd, 2021.

Research on women's international migration from the 1980s noted the increasing presence of women migrating independently, especially as migrant workers, leading to the introduction of the concept of the feminization of migration.<sup>14</sup> This notion was consequently elevated as a mantra in migration and gender research, one seldom questioned since the 1990s.<sup>15</sup> However, a deeper examination of migration trends and patterns requires nuancing this view. Although global data sets do not provide information on migrants of diverse genders, as the collection of gender-disaggregated data remains uncommon, global sex-disaggregated data remain useful to better understand demographic trends from a gender binary perspective.

History attests that there was a steady increase in the number of international female migrants from 1990.<sup>16</sup> However, evidence points to a growing gender gap globally over the past two decades.<sup>17</sup> As highlighted in the previous world migration report (Figure 1 below), the share of female migrants has been decreasing since 2000, from 49.4 per cent to 48.1 per cent. The gap between female and male international migrants increased from 1.2 percentage points in 2000 to 3.8 percentage points in 2020.

Figure 1. International migrants, by sex, 2000–2020



Source: IOM, 2021b, based on UN DESA, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Donato and Gabaccia, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Boyd, 2021.

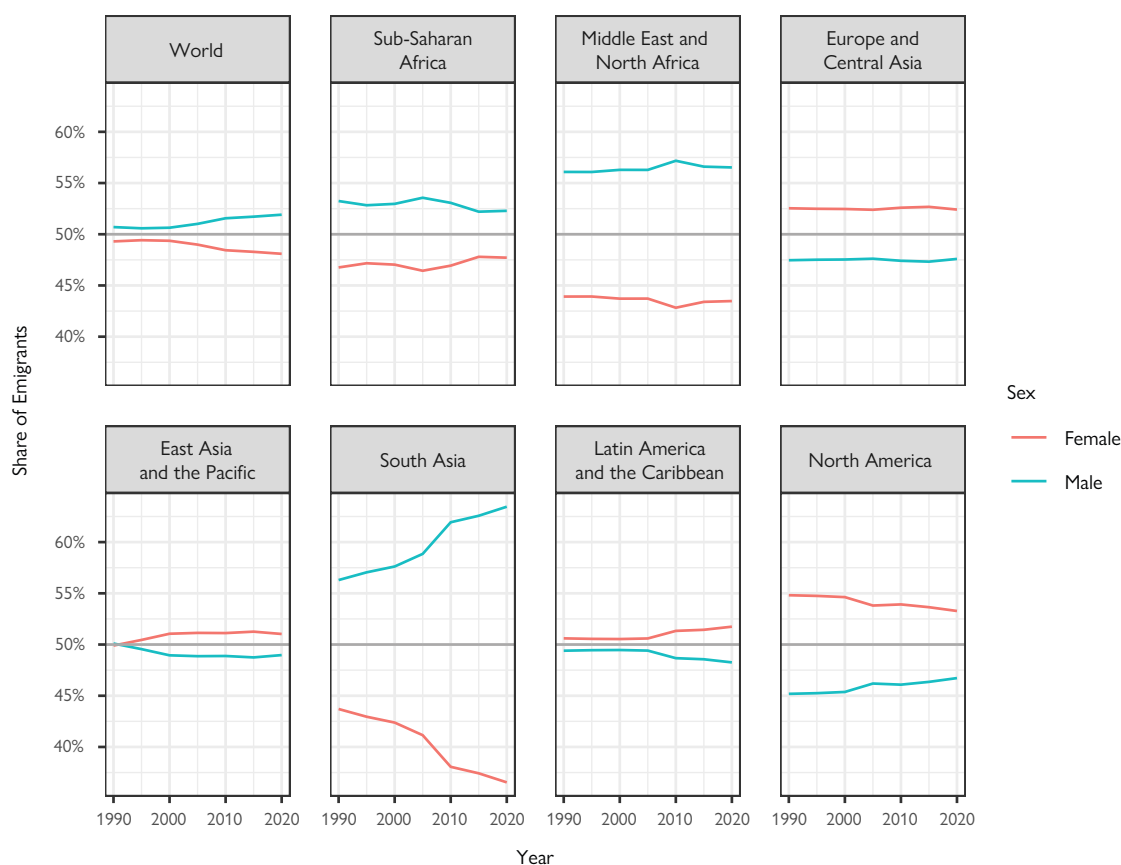
<sup>16</sup> Donato and Gabaccia, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> IOM, 2021b:27–28.

Hence, though the number of female migrants has increased over the years, migration is not more feminized. On the contrary, it has become more masculinized when considering the share of female and male international migrants at the global level.

These global trends and patterns, however, mask wide variation by regions of origin and destination. As shown in Figures 2 and 3, although migration has been more female led in certain regions of the world, there has been no marked feminization of migration for the past three decades, except, to a certain extent, for emigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean and immigrants to North America. By contrast, some regions have experienced a substantial masculinization of migration, especially in terms of emigration from South Asia, as well as immigration to Middle East and North Africa.

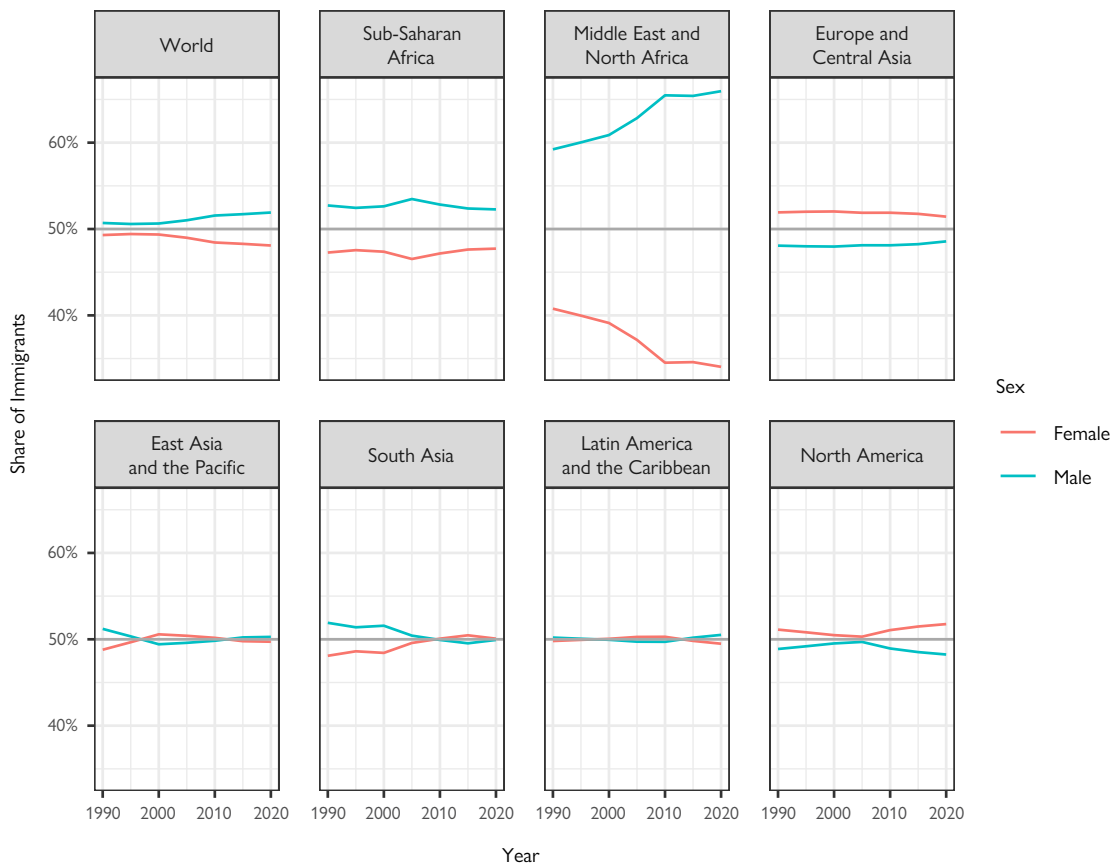
Figure 2. Share of female and male international migrants, by regions of origin, 1990–2020



Source: Abel, 2022, based on UN DESA, 2021.

Note: Regional categorization as done by the author.

Figure 3. Share of male and female international migrants, by regions of destination, 1990–2020



Source: Abel, 2022, based on UN DESA, 2021.

Note: Regional categorization as done by the author.

Labour migration corridors constitute the main driver behind both the global gender gap and the wide variations in gender patterns of migration across regions worldwide. First, labour migration constitutes the main form of migration and displays an even greater gender gap than does the overall international migrant population. According to the latest available data, migrant workers represented the majority of migrants worldwide in 2019, accounting for 62 per cent of the international migrant population.<sup>18</sup> Out of the 169 million migrant workers at that time globally, 99 million were males (58.5%) and 70 million females (41.5%), resulting in a global gender gap of 29 million individuals.<sup>19</sup>

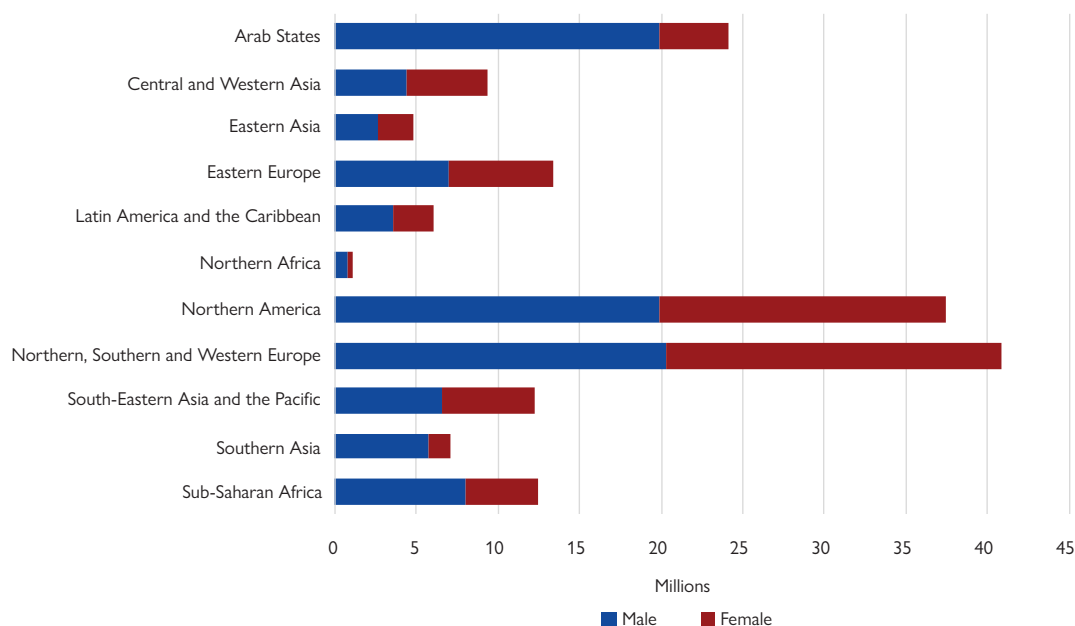
<sup>18</sup> ILO, 2021a; IOM, 2021b.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



Second, labour migration corridors drive the geographic distribution of migrant workers and, thus, of international migrants across the world's regions. As shown in Figure 4 below, and similar to the share of male and female international migrants by regions of destination (Figure 3), there is a stark imbalance in the demographics of migrant workers in the Arab States, North Africa and, to a lesser extent, in sub-Saharan Africa, where male migrant workers are disproportionately represented.

Figure 4. Geographic distribution of migrant workers by sex, 2019

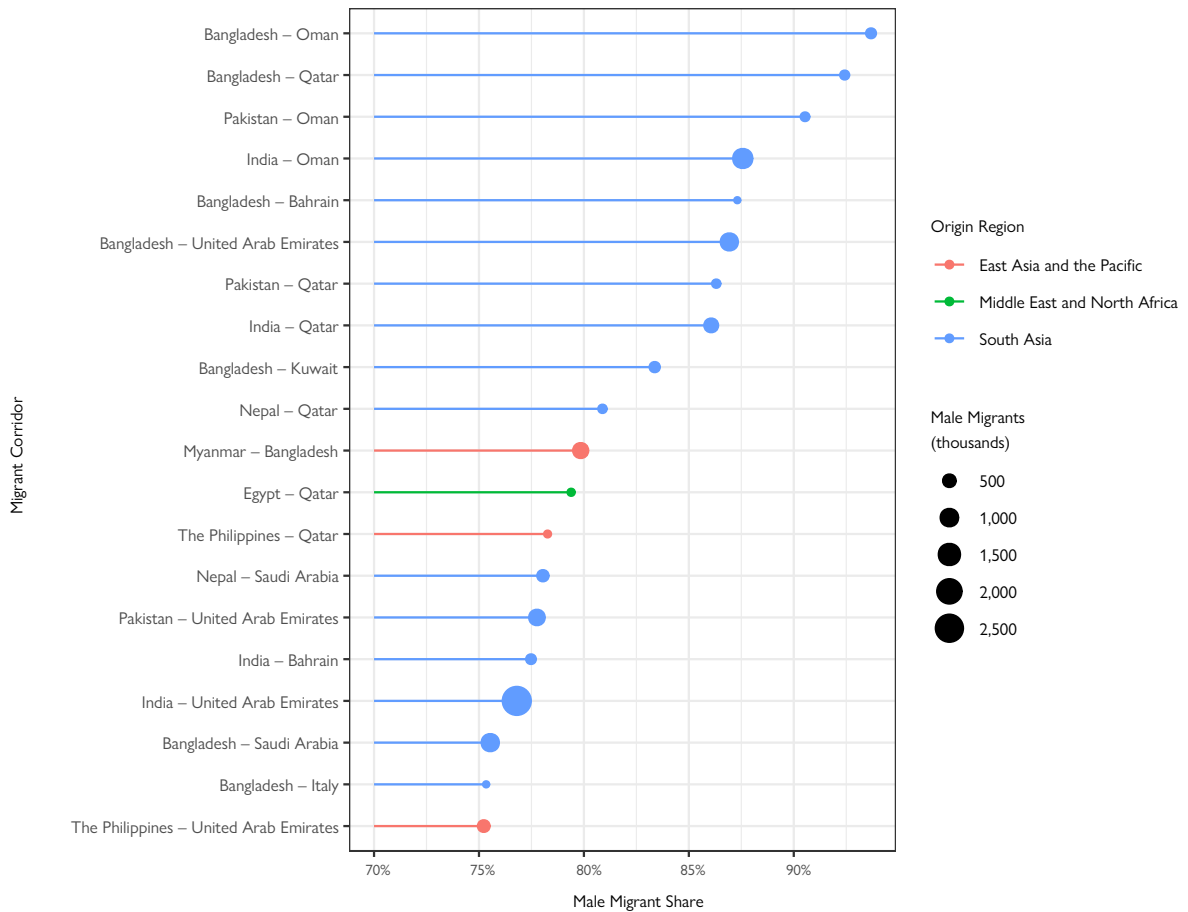


Source: IOM, 2021b, based on ILO, 2021a.

Note: The figure above reflects ILO geographic regions and subregions and does not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM. Please see Annex A of ILO, 2021a for more information on regional breakdowns.

The disproportionate representation of male migrant workers in the Arab States is underpinned by the fact that, as illustrated in Figure 5, in 2020, 18 out of the top 20 male dominant migrant corridors were to the Middle East (and primarily from South Asia). In contrast, the top 20 female-dominant migrant corridors in 2020 and outlined in Figure 6 were more diverse, although predominantly from South and South-East Asia.

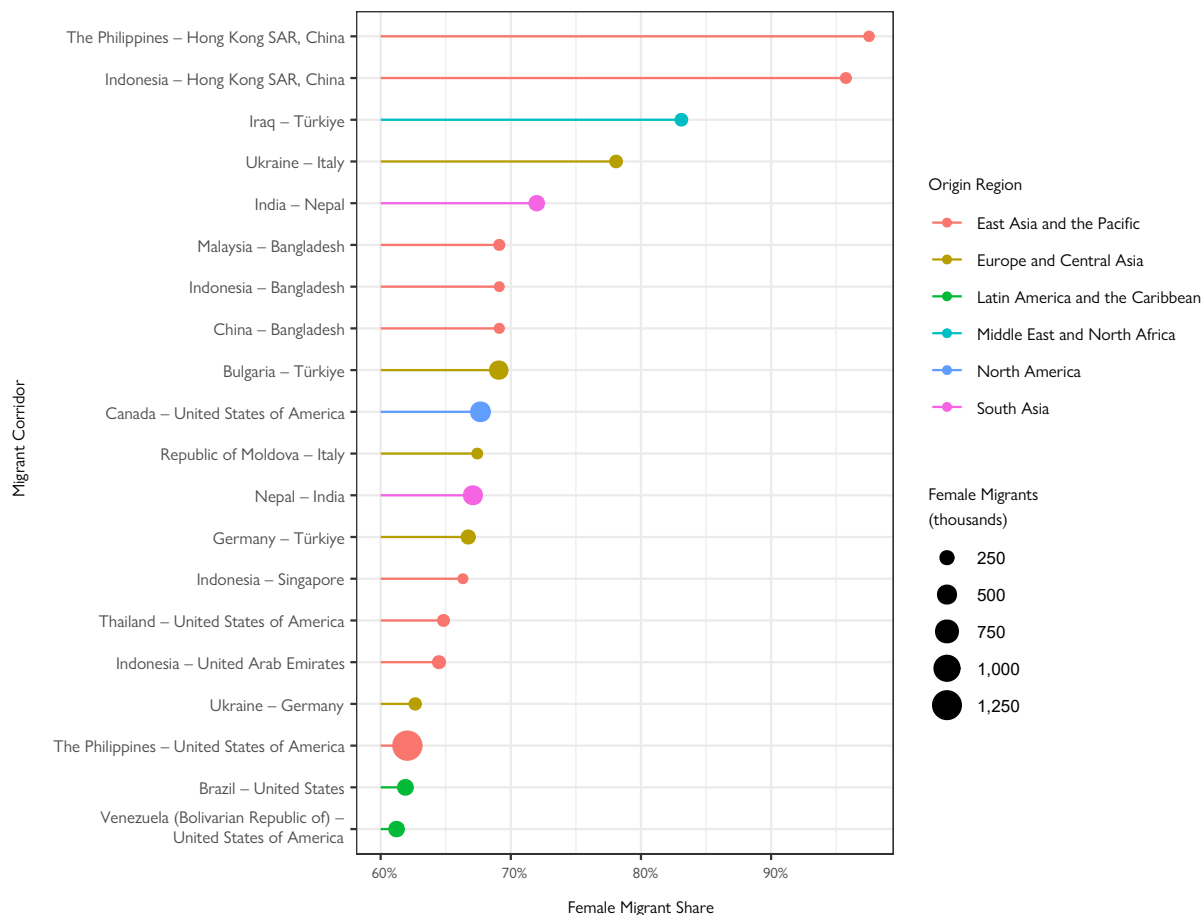
Figure 5. Top 20 male dominant migrant corridors, 2020



Source: Abel, 2022 based on UN DESA, 2021.

Notes: Ordered by share of male migrants, where the size of the male migrant population of the migration corridor exceeds 100,000 persons.  
Regional categorization as done by the author.

Figure 6. Top 20 female dominant migrant corridors, 2020



Source: Abel, 2022 based on UN DESA, 2021.

Notes: Ordered by share of female migrants, where the size of the female migrant population of the migration corridor exceeds 100,000 persons.

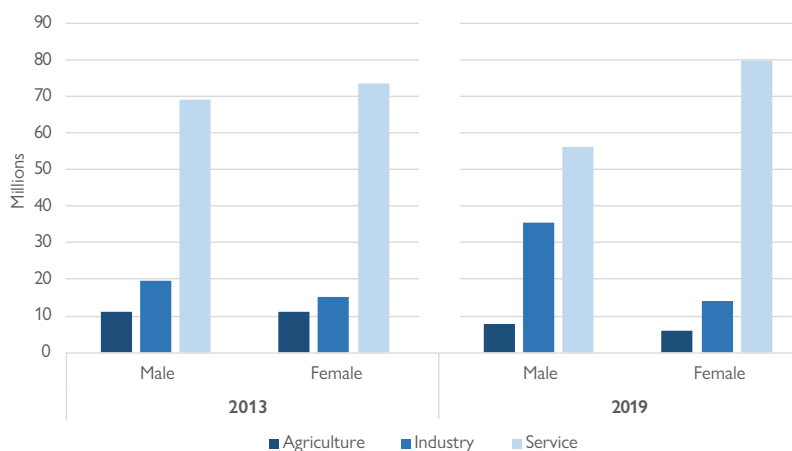
Regional categorization as done by the author.

Regional migration patterns and country-to-country migration corridors reflect regional economic demand in occupational sectors that may be gender segregated. The Gulf countries are major destinations for male migrant workers: nearly 83 per cent of all migrant workers in the Arab States region in 2019 were male,<sup>20</sup> primarily working in the industry sector as construction workers, due to an ever-rising demand since the oil shock of 1973. For female migrant workers, their main destinations and the top migration corridors reflect the high prevalence of female migrants in the service sector, especially in domestic work and as health-care workers. Figure 7 shows this gendered segregation and its intensification between 2013 and 2019, with male migrants increasingly working in the industry sector (from 19.8% to 35.6%) and female migrants in the service sector (from slightly less than 74% to nearly 80%).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The term Arab States is used by the ILO in its regional disaggregation.

<sup>21</sup> ILO, 2021a.

Figure 7. Global distribution of international migrant workers, by broad category of economic activity and sex, 2013 and 2019



Source: ILO, 2015 and 2021a.

These patterns demonstrate that the mantra of the feminization of migration must be nuanced. Not only is the migration gap increasing between female and male international migrants, but the gender patterns of occupational labour segregation remain prevalent worldwide and will likely be exacerbated, according to global historical trends in gendered labour segregation by sector of activity.<sup>22</sup>

Data provide a useful overview of migration trends and patterns; however, they are unable to account for the gendered vulnerabilities and inequalities experienced by migrants and their families that are perpetuated by the gender segregation of the global economy and the ensuing gendered labour migration corridors. The implications of gender roles and dynamics are more far reaching, going beyond numbers, beyond binary understandings of gender, and beyond any specific form of migration.

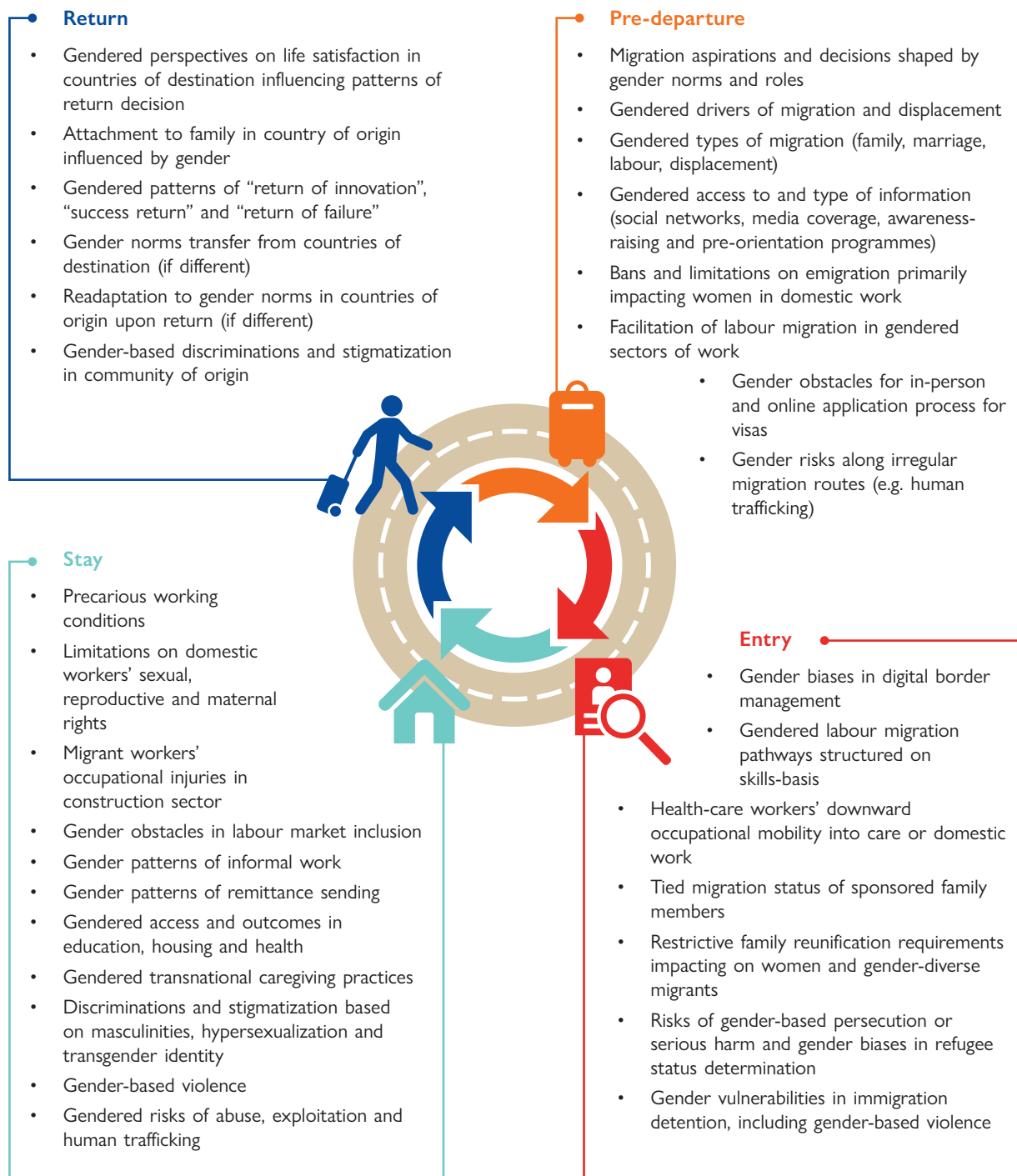
## Beyond numbers: Gender dimensions throughout the migration cycle

This section explores how gender influences migration experiences, including displacement, throughout the migration cycle, from pre-departure to entry and stay in destination countries and, if applicable, return to the country of origin; a typology used in previous editions of the World Migration Report.<sup>23</sup> Although migration and displacement do not necessarily follow a linear approach, conceptualizing the gender dimensions along the different stages of the migration cycle offers a useful framework of analysis. Recognizing the importance of other factors, including age, these gender dimensions summarized in Figure 8 below are approached through the prism of gender inequalities, highlighting how gender may trigger diverse opportunities, vulnerabilities and risks for migrants. This section should be understood as offering examples of the countless ways gender and migration interact, since it would be impossible to comprehensively cover all of these opportunities, vulnerabilities and risks.

<sup>22</sup> ILO, 2022.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, McAuliffe et al., 2021; and Beduschi and McAuliffe, 2021.

Figure 8. Gender dimensions throughout the migration cycle



### *Pre-departure*

As explored in this subsection, gender impacts the pre-departure phase of migration in multiple ways, from the aspirations and decision to migrate at the individual and household levels and the drivers of migration and displacement to the ability to access to information and the types of information channels used. Migration policies and legislation of countries of origin can be highly gendered, including emigration bans and limitations; bilateral agreements and facilitations for labour migration can likewise be highly gendered, and can be pivotal in fuelling irregular migration in gendered ways, including gendered risks of human trafficking.

Individuals' initial aspirations and ensuing decisions to stay or migrate are already influenced by gender norms prevailing in their countries of origin. The traditional figures of the man breadwinner and woman caregiver tend to persist worldwide to a greater or lesser degree, intersecting with individuals' life cycles in terms of age, marital status, and the fact of having children. For example, in West Africa, the migration of (young) men is considered an intergenerational responsibility and an expression of manhood, providing an opportunity for upward social and economic mobility upon return, including for marriage.<sup>24</sup> In Afghanistan and Pakistan, some ethnic groups consider migration as a rite of passage into adulthood, including through irregular and unsafe migration routes.<sup>25</sup> The takeover by the Taliban in Afghanistan in August 2021 and the restrictions they have since adopted, especially towards women and girls, have, however, somewhat nuanced the predominantly male-led migration patterns, with an increase in the number of women and girls displaced in often unsafe conditions.<sup>26</sup> In some families, women (especially young women) may be pressured into immobility to look after family members or resort to family or marriage migration as a socially acceptable form of migration.<sup>27</sup> Independent migration may be considered shameful for their families, at times associated with liberal lifestyle, behaviours and overt sexuality.<sup>28</sup>

However, although not considered matriarchal, some societies have a long-standing culture of feminized migration, such as in Cabo Verde or West Java, Indonesia.<sup>29</sup> Even in societies with a traditional approach to gender roles, women's migration has become a household strategy to address economic needs in the context of the growing demand for migrant labour, for example in the care sector. Beyond the well-known case of the Philippines since the 1980s,<sup>30</sup> Peruvian women have been migrating independently to Argentina to work in the service sector, being more likely to secure a job than their husband.<sup>31</sup> Seasonal or circular migration is also a strategy used by some migrant women to balance the need for income and their care duties as mothers and wives, as reported by migrant women from Hungary, for instance.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Concerning Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Senegal: Beqo, 2019; Bylander, 2015; Hoang, 2011; Prothmann, 2017; Mondain and Diagne, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Monsutti, 2007; McAuliffe, 2017; Hahn-Schaur, 2021; Ahmad, 2008.

<sup>26</sup> UNHCR, 2023; McAuliffe and Iqbal, 2022.

<sup>27</sup> UN Women, 2015; Bouchoucha, 2012; Cooke, 2008; Cerrutti and Massey, 2001.

<sup>28</sup> Walton-Roberts, 2012; Boyd, 2006; Dannecker, 2005.

<sup>29</sup> Åkesson et al., 2012; Iqbal and Gusman, 2015.

<sup>30</sup> UN Women, 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Rosas, 2013; Pedone et al., 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Eröss et al, 2020.

## Gender dimensions of migration, environment and climate change

Gender is a determining factor of the needs and priorities of climate migrants and will be key for the design of inclusive policies that not only tackle inequality and discrimination but also vulnerability to climate change. Women are disproportionately affected by climate change because they tend to be on average poorer, less educated, have a lower health status and limited direct access to or ownership of natural resources. Both the process (actual movements) and the outcomes (rural–rural or rural–urban migration, out-migration) of climate-induced migration are also likely to be highly gendered (Chindarkar, 2012). Although the link between gender and climate-induced migration is still under investigation, gender remains fundamental in the decision-making process of migration since the assigned roles to men and women in family, community and society are also a defining feature of vulnerability to climate change.

In fact, given their unequal access to resources and information, women and men have different vulnerabilities to climate change. The gendered process plays out differently in diverse societies depending on local cultural norms that entail gender roles, age, class and ethnicity. The masculinization of migration is a response to the social inequality exacerbated by climate change as strongly related to livelihood, risk exposure and weak adaptive capacity of individuals and groups. The loss of livelihood is indeed the triggering event that sets a migratory plan into motion: men tend to migrate when farming becomes uncertain and once the household income is kept on the decrease (Miletto et al., 2017).

Source: Braham, 2018.

For some, migration also offers an avenue to escape traditional gender norms and societal pressures. For instance, marriage migration allows women to avoid prevailing social norms dictating their age of marriage or whether they can remarry after divorce.<sup>33</sup> For migrants with diverse sexual orientation, gender identities and expression, and sex characteristics in South-East Asia, discrimination in families and societies can be a driver of migration alongside economic advancement.<sup>34</sup> At an extreme, gender-based discrimination can take the form of abuses, violence and persecution, and can force individuals to flee their country of origin, sometimes resulting in obtaining international protection elsewhere (see next subsection).

Migration decisions are also highly contingent on one's access to information, and on the type of information that can be accessed, which can be highly gendered. Four main sources of information can be identified: social networks, media coverage, awareness-raising interventions and pre-orientation programmes. While these are highly context specific, some overall gendered patterns and implications can be identified. Most notably, while social networks, including diasporas, play an important role for migrants of all genders, networks relied upon by migrant women vary: some women tend to favour family networks as a trusted source of information, while others turn to women's networks for gendered information or get the support of returned migrant women.<sup>35</sup> On their part, media coverage and awareness-raising interventions often focus on the danger and risks of migration, which may discourage women and girls from migrating but may have a more limited effect on men and boys.<sup>36</sup> Finally, except in some countries

<sup>33</sup> Chen, 2021.

<sup>34</sup> ILO and UN Women, 2022.

<sup>35</sup> Sha, 2021; ECDGMHA et al., 2017; Dannecker, 2005.

<sup>36</sup> Hennebry et al., 2016; Hahn-Schaur, 2021; ECDGMHA et al., 2017.

in South and South-East Asia, pre-orientation programmes tend to be designed based on a one-size-fits-all model that may thus be less effective in addressing gender vulnerabilities in migration.<sup>37</sup>

Migration policies and legislation of countries of origin may hinder individuals' migration along gender lines. Bans on emigration and limitations through pre-emigration clearance to certain countries (primarily the Gulf countries) have been adopted by countries of origin, especially in South and South-East Asia, including Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Myanmar.<sup>38</sup> While presented as protective measures for their nationals, these bans and limitations have primarily targeted women, restricting their labour migration in specific work sectors (primarily in domestic work). Such restrictions can be based on their age or that of their children, and can also involve the express approval of a male guardian.

At the same time, bilateral labour agreements (BLAs) and memorandums of understanding (MoUs) have increasingly been adopted among countries of origin and destination to facilitate labour migration and regulate regular labour migration, especially in low-skilled occupations such as agriculture, construction and domestic work. Often presented as “triple win” solutions for countries of origin, countries of destination and migrants themselves, these agreements, however, tend to reinforce the gender segregation of labour globally by facilitating labour migration to countries in need of workers in highly gendered occupations, in addition to creating gendered vulnerabilities due to their lack of a gender approach to protection (see subsection on stay, below).<sup>39</sup> Although the extent to which these agreements impact migration flows and migrant stocks is unclear, it is noteworthy that the majority of the top 20 migration corridors for male and for female migrants (Figures 5 and 6) involve countries with BLAs or MoUs.<sup>40</sup>

To facilitate labour migration, some countries also proactively support their nationals to prepare for migration in specific occupation sectors. Often presented as a model for labour migration, the Philippines has set up a whole apparatus for supporting the recruitment of Filipinos abroad and their protection in destination countries. This started back in the 1970s with the launch of an overseas employment programme, especially to countries in the Middle East experiencing labour shortages in the construction sector in the midst of the oil boom.<sup>41</sup> Issues of labour protection experienced by overseas Filipino workers prompted the country to complement its policy of facilitation of labour migration with one focusing on the protection of its nationals, starting from mid-1970s onwards and culminating in 2022 with the establishment of the Department of Migrant Workers.<sup>42</sup> The Department provides a range of e-services prior to migration and maintains a list of licensed recruitment agencies to aid in protecting workers from fraudulent recruitment agencies and exploitation.<sup>43</sup>

Yet, in most countries, visa application processes remain cumbersome and not easily accessible, if not dangerous. For instance, Syrian women applying for family reunification with their male spouses who had been granted refugee status in Germany may risk their lives while collecting the necessary documents and reaching German embassies in neighbouring countries due to the closure of diplomatic representation in the Syrian Arab Republic.<sup>44</sup> While the increasing move to online application processes may address some of these situations, they also raise issues for

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<sup>37</sup> Asis and Mendoza, 2012; ElDidi et al., 2021; Watanabe, 2019.

<sup>38</sup> Total bans on migration to the Gulf countries were also imposed by Kenya in 2012 and on domestic workers by Ethiopia in 2013 (both overturned). Shivakoti et al., 2021; Weeraratne, 2023; Joseph et al., 2022; Henderson, 2022; Kavurmaci, 2022; Lynn-Ee Ho and Ting, 2022; Walton-Roberts et al., 2022.

<sup>39</sup> Lim, 2016; Hennebry et al., 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Chilton and Posner, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Asis, 2017.

<sup>42</sup> Mones, 2022.

<sup>43</sup> Republic of the Philippines, n.d.; UNODC, 2015.

<sup>44</sup> Damir-Geilsdorf and Sabra, 2018.



individuals from countries with less connectivity and where women tend to be disproportionately without access to information and communications technologies (ICT) compared to men.<sup>45</sup>

Gendered obstacles to migration coupled with restrictive regular migration pathways may fuel irregular migration, which enhances the risk of abuse, exploitation and human trafficking. The risks along irregular migration routes are manifold, from violent smugglers to human traffickers exploiting migrants' vulnerabilities.<sup>46</sup> Accounting for 60 per cent of all identified victims of trafficking worldwide in 2020, the specific gender-related vulnerabilities of women and girls are well known, especially to trafficking for sexual exploitation but also for forced labour, with women and those with diverse gender identities and expressions more likely to be subjected to physical and extreme violence from traffickers compared to men.<sup>47</sup> The lower proportion of men and boys identified among victims of trafficking should, however, not mask some of their specific vulnerabilities, especially to forced labour, sexual exploitation, forced criminal activities and mixed forms of exploitation. Although the identification of men victims increased in 2020, men may not self-identify as victims or may be ashamed to identify themselves as such, especially in cases of sexual exploitation.<sup>48</sup> Similar identification issues may arise with transgender and non-binary individuals being primarily trafficked for sexual exploitation.<sup>49</sup>

## Entry

Gender considerations inform migrants' experience of and ability to enter a transit or destination country, both in terms of physical border crossing and normative and policy frameworks governing entry.

Borders are physical manifestations of national sovereignty and can become sites of discrimination and violence.<sup>50</sup> Gender biases can also be found in digital technologies implemented for identity and security checks at border points, such as for facial recognition, which has a higher propensity for misrecognizing individuals with darker skin complexions and women.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, AI-based emotion recognition used to assess migrants' credibility has also proven to be racially and gender biased, misinterpreting some microgestures made by migrants who have previously experienced trauma and, in cases of migrants of diverse gender identities, who may have been used to conceal or feel uncomfortable revealing their gender identity.<sup>52</sup>

Migration policies and legislation also determine migrants' opportunities for regular entry along gender lines. Gender norms and stereotypes emerge across the three main regular pathways: labour migration, family migration and international protection.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> ITU, 2022; McAuliffe, 2023.

<sup>46</sup> Bauloz et al., 2021.

<sup>47</sup> UNODC, 2022; CEDAW, 2020.

<sup>48</sup> UNODC, 2022; WRC and UNICEF, 2021.

<sup>49</sup> CTDC, n.d.

<sup>50</sup> Freedman et al., 2023.

<sup>51</sup> Beduschi and McAuliffe, 2021.

<sup>52</sup> Hall and Clapton, 2021.

<sup>53</sup> A fourth pathway, international student mobility, has not been included in this chapter.

Labour migration policies are not gender neutral: they perpetuate gender inequalities experienced in countries of origin, integrate societal gender biases and impact the opportunities and outcomes for migrant workers along the lines of gender identity.<sup>54</sup> Permanent and temporary labour migration permits tend to be granted according to skill levels that often remain highly gendered. For example, women working in traditionally feminized occupations, such as in the fields of health (for example, nurses) or education (for example, teachers), are less likely to obtain a working permit than men in male-dominated skilled occupations, especially when migration policies define skill levels based on the applicant's salary, which is often lower for women than men.<sup>55</sup> Highly skilled labour migration often associated with permanent or longer-term residence permits tends to focus on global talent acquisition in employment fields where men are often overrepresented, such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).<sup>56</sup> Skilled occupations predominantly held by women, such as those health and education, are often in regulated professions where migrants' international qualifications may not be recognized. This can result in women entering more easily accessible lower-skilled migration channels, including through BLAs and temporary labour migration schemes (particularly evident in care work), which then contributes to their downward occupational mobility and vulnerability in sectors with lower levels of protection, such as care, where States typically underinvest in welfare provisions.<sup>57</sup> When migrating for domestic work, women have also faced restrictions on their sexual and reproductive rights, for instance when asked by recruitment agencies in some countries to take a pregnancy test before and after arrival.<sup>58</sup>

Family migration has traditionally been highly feminized due to enduring gender norms in countries of origin, with women often following their husband migrant. Family migration policies reinforce these gender inequalities by tying family members to the first migrant sponsor.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, for family reunification, restrictive entry requirements may be difficult to meet due to gender inequalities in the country of origin, often disproportionately impacting women as sponsored family members.<sup>60</sup> This is the case, for instance, with regard to pre-entry language tests, as the necessary language skills are closely related to gendered levels of education and to the financial means to access language courses. Migrants with diverse gender identities face challenges in family reunification in a number of countries where a traditional binary understanding of sex in relation to spouses and partners remains in place.<sup>61</sup> Even in countries recognizing same-sex partnerships, the need to present a marriage certification or proof of civil union may bar migrants' family reunification, especially for those coming from countries where same-sex marriage is not legalized, and relationships may even be criminalized.<sup>62</sup>

Seeking international protection can be a highly gendered experience. First, gender-related risks in the country of origin may justify individuals being granted international protection in the country of destination, such as refugee status.<sup>63</sup> These gender-based risks have tended to be recognized for women and girls, as well as individuals of diverse gender identities in case of sexual violence (such as rape, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy and abortion and forced or underage marriage), physical violence (such as honour killing, genital mutilations and corporal punishments

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<sup>54</sup> Briddick, 2021; Kofman, 2013.

<sup>55</sup> For the European Union and the United Kingdom, for instance, see: European Union, 2021; de Lange and Vankova, 2022; Kofman, 2013.

<sup>56</sup> In the United States, for example, slightly more than 72 per cent of beneficiaries of the temporary H-1B visa for specialized occupations, especially in STEM, in fiscal year 2021 were men (US Department of Homeland Security, 2022).

<sup>57</sup> Boucher, 2021; Dodson, 2021; Walton-Roberts, 2020; Spitzer, 2022; Piper, 2022; Hennebray et al., 2022.

<sup>58</sup> Mehzer et al., 2021.

<sup>59</sup> Pajnik and Bajt, 2012.

<sup>60</sup> Bauloz et al., 2019.

<sup>61</sup> Freier and Fernández Rodríguez, 2021; Tryfonidou and Wintemute, 2021; Nusbaum, 2015.

<sup>62</sup> Malekmian, 2022, concerning family reunification of refugees in Ireland.

<sup>63</sup> United Nations, 1951 and 1967. See UNHCR, 2002 and 2012; CEDAW, 2014.

imposed because of discriminatory laws and social mores), or other serious violations of their human rights (such as arbitrary detention) or an accumulation of various discriminations.<sup>64</sup> Second, gendered considerations underpin refugee status determination, which centres on evidence and credibility assessment. In cases of gender-related persecution, past experiences of gender-based harm and discrimination, as well as the sensitive, intimate and sometimes concealed nature of gender identities and expressions, may affect the coherence and consistency of applicants' statements.<sup>65</sup> In other cases, gender stereotypes of vulnerability for women and girls have been found to negatively impact men asylum-seekers, who tend to be more easily viewed as "bogus" refugees.<sup>66</sup> These stereotypes can also affect vulnerability assessments for refugee resettlement, access of vulnerable individuals to referral mechanisms to appropriate services (such as for potential victims of trafficking), and service provision in humanitarian settings.<sup>67</sup>

### "I felt like I was born again": First non-binary person granted United Kingdom refugee status

Refugee status has been granted over a person's non-binary status for the first time in a UK court, following a landmark ruling. The judgment, in the upper tribunal, was decided in the case of Arthur Britney Joestar from El Salvador after concluding that they would face persecution for their identity if they returned to their home country. ... The UK ruling states that Joestar would be likely to face specific threats, including physical and sexual violence, if they returned to El Salvador.

Joestar, 29, now settled in Liverpool, came to the UK in October 2017 to escape daily abuse in their home country. "When I walked along the streets, people threw rubbish at me from their windows – once, someone threw a plastic bag full of urine at me," they said. "In El Salvador, non-binary people are in so much danger – I've seen corpses. Anything could have happened to me. I could have been tortured, raped, shot, killed."

In one incident, in the capital San Salvador, Joestar was stopped by police. "One of the policemen started asking about my hair, telling me I wasn't normal, that they wanted to teach me how to be a man. Then they punched me on the chest and pushed me to the floor. I'm not sure what was worse – the attack or when I was just left there and no one came to help me. I had a lot of bruises, my arms were bleeding and I was crying. But no one cared. It was really terrifying," they said.

Joestar had previously been refused asylum in the UK. The first claim, in November 2018, was dismissed by the first-tier tribunal which said the police brutality "amounted to no more than discrimination" and occurred only once. The second, in February 2020, on the basis of non-binary identity was initially refused but upheld on appeal.

"The way the judge handled the case: she just understood me – all the tiny details ... she saw the whole picture," they said. "At the end, she turned to look at me and started speaking to me in Spanish, to tell me she granted me the right to stay in this country and the right to be who I want to be. I just started to cry. I felt like I was born again."

<sup>64</sup> See for instance IOM, 2021b; UNHCR, 2002 and 2012.

<sup>65</sup> EUAA, 2018. See also Manganini, 2020.

<sup>66</sup> Griffiths, 2015.

<sup>67</sup> Turner, 2020.

...

Joestar hopes the case will help others. “All the injustice I suffered, maybe it’s worth it, to show people there is something positive to take from all the suffering. I just hope that soon people can see us and we can finally say we’re not invisible.”

Abridged excerpt from Kelly, 2020.

Finally, gender plays an important role in the experiences and vulnerabilities of irregular migrants, including rejected asylum-seekers and those placed in immigration detention pending removal. Beyond the traumatic psychological experience of immigration detention regardless of gender, women and migrants of diverse genders are at risk of sexual and gender-based violence.<sup>68</sup> This is especially the case for transgender migrants, who have been reported to be 15 times more likely to be sexually assaulted compared to other detained individuals.<sup>69</sup> Transgender women migrants are particularly at risk as they are often placed in detention facilities with men.

## Stay

Migrants’ experiences of staying in destination countries are diverse and depend on various factors, including their initial drivers of migration, migration status and ensuing inclusion processes, which can all be highly gendered. While this subsection explores some of the key inclusion outcomes for migrants in terms of labour market, remittances, education and training, housing, health and social cohesion, these outcomes remain closely tied to the benefits and entitlements granted to migrants depending on the duration of their right to stay in the destination country. Gender inequalities thus tend to be perpetuated, if not exacerbated, during migrants’ stay, given the greater obstacles that women face to access long-term and permanent permits and residency – often preconditions for citizenship – due to gender biases embedded in policies and legislation governing entry.

Employment outcomes, a key factor for migrant inclusion, are intrinsically linked to the skills-based approach to work permits taken by migration policies. Lower-skilled labour is not only highly gendered occupationally but often characterized by precarious – often temporary – migration status and working conditions that create and reinforce gender vulnerabilities. Typical examples are men migrant workers in the agricultural sector and women migrant workers in the care and domestic work sectors. Although widely acclaimed as “essential workers” during the COVID-19 pandemic, such workers experience highly vulnerable conditions, living in close proximity to their employer (on-farm housing for agricultural workers and employers’ homes for domestic workers), depending on employers for access to goods and services, and entitled to a lower level of labour protection than workers in other occupations.<sup>70</sup> The migration of women domestic workers from South Asia and South-East Asia to the Gulf countries is often governed by BLAs that do not secure migrants’ rights to labour protection in the destination country nor consider the specific vulnerabilities of women.<sup>71</sup> This contributes to the highly precarious situation of migrants covered by the Kafala system, which ties them to their employer, excludes them from the protection of labour laws and can lead to major abuses and rights violations.<sup>72</sup> In Lebanon, for instance, migrants’

<sup>68</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, 2019.

<sup>69</sup> IDC, 2016; IOM, 2021b.

<sup>70</sup> Spitzer, 2022.

<sup>71</sup> Rajan and Joseph, 2020.

<sup>72</sup> Almasri, 2022.

sexual, reproductive and maternal rights are unprotected, particularly in cases when workers become pregnant and employers terminate their contracts, leading to possible deportation or irregular status.<sup>73</sup>

From a migrant perspective, employment in destination countries can be a highly gendered experience. The lower rate of labour force participation for women migrants compared to men migrants (estimated globally at 59.8% and 77.5%, respectively, in 2019)<sup>74</sup> is partially attributed to the division of labour in migrant households, where women migrants tend to experience “involuntary inactivity” when married or due to care responsibilities for children.<sup>75</sup> This is also closely interlinked to gender norms and the dependency situation created by family migration policies, when women migrants are tied to their migrant worker husbands with, in some countries such as South Africa, no right to work.<sup>76</sup> Research also highlights the role of gender equality in countries of origin in terms of employment and wage levels for migrant mothers in destination countries, with migrant women from North Africa faring worse in France compared to those from sub-Saharan Africa and Europe.<sup>77</sup>

Gender-related obstacles to finding employment may push migrants to resort to informal work, as shown by the preponderance of women informal workers, including women migrants: estimates of the number of women in informal employment (as a percentage of total women in employment) are as high as 89.7 per cent for Africa and 64.1 per cent for Asia and the Pacific.<sup>78</sup> Occupations range from street vendors to waste pickers and home-based workers, such as garment workers and domestic workers.<sup>79</sup> A study on Latin America and the Caribbean, for instance, found that in 7 of the 15 countries covered, 9 out of 10 domestic workers were employed informally.<sup>80</sup> Migrants working in the informal economy experience higher levels of precarity, being excluded from social protection, and are more likely to face abuses, violence, exploitation and human trafficking.<sup>81</sup>

While women migrants seem overall to be disadvantaged compared to men migrants in terms of labour market inclusion, evidence points to women migrants’ patterns of remitting a larger proportion of their salaries than men migrants.<sup>82</sup> Even though earning generally less than men, women migrants remit approximately the same amount, if not more, than men.<sup>83</sup> They also appear to remit more through in-person cash transfers than men, due to their overrepresentation in the informal economy, where they are less able to access diverse financial services and have less access to both digital services and the skills to use them. This gendered imbalance was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic with the move to digital services, which raised more difficulties for women migrants to remit.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Mehzer et al., 2021.

<sup>74</sup> ILO, 2021a.

<sup>75</sup> OECD and European Commission, 2018; Donato et al., 2014.

<sup>76</sup> Reis, 2020; Ncube et al., 2020.

<sup>77</sup> Achouche, 2022.

<sup>78</sup> ILO, 2018:25.

<sup>79</sup> WIEGO, n.d.

<sup>80</sup> WIEGO, 2022.

<sup>81</sup> Jaji, 2021.

<sup>82</sup> UN Women, 2020.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.; Platt et al., 2017.

<sup>84</sup> UN Women, 2020; Lim and Datta, forthcoming.

Beyond the labour market and financial inclusion, gendered patterns can also be seen in education and training, housing and health. While education and training empower migrant women, family and professional responsibilities and language barriers undermine their access to education and adult learning.<sup>85</sup> In the case of children in the specific context of refugee camps, families may prioritize the education of boys over that of girls, due to social norms.<sup>86</sup> When displacement provides new education opportunities for girl refugees, physical access to school may be dangerous because of harassment and discrimination. Migrant women in precarious socioeconomic situations, including due to lower incomes, may also experience less access to housing compared to migrant men, or lower rates of securing housing that is adequate and safe.<sup>87</sup> As can be seen in research on France, loss of income may further push migrant women into homelessness, with a significant likelihood that they will fall victim to prostitution rings or to resort by themselves to sex work to regain their financial autonomy.<sup>88</sup>

All these aspects impact migrants' mental and physical health in destination countries. While migration can overall increase health outcomes for migrants, migrant women tend to have worse health than migrant men and different health needs.<sup>89</sup> The causes are grounded in gender inequalities, including in terms of access to health-care services, with acute implications for those in irregular situations, especially for sexual and maternal health care.<sup>90</sup>

Migrants' mental health can also be highly gendered. In the case of separated families, connections with children and other family members in the origin country play an important role, especially for women, and have been facilitated by digital technologies.<sup>91</sup> As has been shown by research on migrant women from Latin and Central America in the United States, digital technologies enable mothers to continue their caregiving role at a distance despite feelings of emotional distress.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, caregiving responsibilities are not drastically redistributed within households when mothers are away, although fathers in the country of origin may come to temporarily fill the caregiving role, as can be seen in Indonesia and the Philippines.<sup>93</sup> While migrants' transnational ties are an important source of comfort and support, this may not be the case for transgender and non-binary migrants, especially refugees who may have cut ties with their relatives back home and be further socially excluded in destination countries due to their gender, without appropriate support from health and social services.<sup>94</sup>

Gender discrimination and stigmatization in countries of destination often overlap with racial and cultural stereotypes, supported by rising anti-immigrant discourses in some countries of destination.<sup>95</sup> Migrant men from Muslim countries have, for instance, been portrayed as threats because of alleged dangerous masculinity in diverse regions, such as in Europe following incidents of sexual harassment in Germany in 2015.<sup>96</sup> Stereotypes of women's hypersexuality in destination countries have also impacted migrant women, such as Venezuelan women in Peru and

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<sup>85</sup> Women in Diaspora Communities as Champions of Learning to Live Together, 2019.

<sup>86</sup> North, 2019.

<sup>87</sup> Chapman and Gonzalez, 2023.

<sup>88</sup> Infomigrants, 2023.

<sup>89</sup> Lindsjö et al., 2021.

<sup>90</sup> Trapolini and Giudici, 2021.

<sup>91</sup> Bauloz, 2021.

<sup>92</sup> Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 2016; Pineros-Leano et al., 2021; Cook Heffron et al., 2022.

<sup>93</sup> Lam and Yeoh, 2018.

<sup>94</sup> Hermaszewska et al., 2022.

<sup>95</sup> See for instance the IOM statement on the situation of migrants in Tunisia (IOM, 2023b).

<sup>96</sup> Herz, 2019; Wyss, 2022.

Brazilian women in Portugal, stigmatizing them as prostitutes and leading to heightened risks of experiencing sexual harassment and gender-based violence.<sup>97</sup>

## Gender-based violence in displacement settlements

Although not representing the majority of refugees worldwide, some 6.6 million refugees are estimated to live in settlements, among whom 4.6 million are in managed camps and 2 million in informal settlements, often in protracted displacement situations.<sup>a</sup>

While poverty and destitution are major drivers of gender-based violence, living in settlements exacerbates gender vulnerabilities, with increased risks of intimate partner violence. Insecurity and close proximity also lead to increased risks of gender-based violence, especially rape, when women and girls move in and around settlements, collecting wood for cooking and getting water at water points, for instance.<sup>b</sup> In al-Hol camps in the Syrian Arab Republic, instances of rape and torture have been reported against women and girls, with cases of slavery committed by the ISIS.<sup>c</sup> In other contexts, transactional sex is at times resorted to as a coping mechanism to secure a livelihood.<sup>d</sup>

A study focusing on the Rohingya population living in a camp in Bangladesh highlights the interlinkages between the masculinity crisis that Rohingya men can experience in the camp and increased gender-based violence.<sup>e</sup> Stereotypical constructions of masculinity based on identity, wealth, power, education and breadwinner status starkly contrast with Rohingya men's experience in the refugee camp, which may lead to deep feelings of dissatisfaction and to increased gender-based violence, especially within households.

Gender-based violence is, however, not limited to women and girls, as men and boys also tend to be victims, as reported in the context of Kakuma refugee camp, for instance.<sup>f</sup> Rape and other sexual violence can be a tactic of torture and humiliation during armed conflicts, sometimes continuing in camp settings, and often accompanied with stigmatization and discrimination within communities of destination, as victims of sexual violence are still predominantly considered to be women and girls.<sup>g</sup>

<sup>a</sup> UNHCR, n.d.

<sup>b</sup> Johnstone and Perera, 2020.

<sup>c</sup> Kube and Lee, 2022.

<sup>d</sup> World Vision Canada, n.d.

<sup>e</sup> Safa et al., 2023.

<sup>f</sup> UN Women, 2022.

<sup>g</sup> Refugee Law Project, 2013.

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<sup>97</sup> Esposito, 2020; Pérez and Freier, 2023.

## Return

As with the other stages of the migration cycle, return to the country of origin is underpinned by gender dimensions that influence the varied reasons for migrants of all genders to return (or not), their experiences and their circumstances post-return. As is the case in other stages of the migration cycle, the gender dimensions of migration status and the type of permit in destination countries play a role in the decision to return and the experiences upon return, including in terms of reintegration.

In migrant households with persons of different genders, the decision to return is also a function of gender roles and dynamics. In sociocultural contexts where the division of family and household labour is gendered, more women than men are likely to return when family members in the country of origin need care.<sup>98</sup> Return migration is also an outcome of low life satisfaction in the country of destination, with gender mediating how men and women interpret life satisfaction.<sup>99</sup> For instance, income disparities between women and men that tend to favour men can lead to gendered experiences of life satisfaction and differences in the impetus for return migration. Attachment to the family has also been shown to play a stronger role for some women compared to men, motivating their return home.<sup>100</sup>

Gendered income differences also suggest that men are more likely to return due to “return of innovation”,<sup>101</sup> which occurs after migrants have acquired relevant skills and adequate capital for investment in the country of origin. Men’s return of innovation is facilitated by investment policies and incentives in the country of origin designed to attract diaspora investment, such as in Ghana, where migrant capital is mobilized and integrated into domestic development policies.<sup>102</sup> Ghana encourages investment and return, as illustrated by its declaration of 2019 as “The Year of Return”, targeting the Ghanaian and African diaspora at large. A similar policy is followed by Senegal, which depicts returned Senegalese businesspeople as the “ideal returnees”.<sup>103</sup> The framing of development in economic terms in countries such as Ghana and Senegal, among many other African countries, means that it is mostly men who are able to take advantage of policy incentives put in place to lure return migration for development purposes. As illustrated in the case of Romanian migrants who returned from Italy, it is also mostly men who can transfer substantial sums of money and use the skills and networks they have acquired in the country of destination and those they created there to facilitate their reintegration.<sup>104</sup>

Considering that migrants returning to their countries of origin often face a relatively higher unemployment rate, women who return without additional skills or upskilling are likely to face labour market reintegration challenges.<sup>105</sup> Migrant men are likely to return with higher skills which contribute to their “successful return”. These patterns of successful return underscore the importance of the – often highly gendered – types of occupation held by migrants in their country of destination, that frame their successful return and reintegration in the country of origin.

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<sup>98</sup> UN Women, 2018.

<sup>99</sup> Schiele, 2021.

<sup>100</sup> IOM, 2020.

<sup>101</sup> Cerase, 1974.

<sup>102</sup> Kleist, 2013.

<sup>103</sup> Sinatti, 2019.

<sup>104</sup> Vlase, 2013.

<sup>105</sup> Kurniati et al., 2017.



Women are more likely to engage in “return of failure”, that is, return occurring while migrants’ “migration goals” have not been met.<sup>106</sup> For women migrants, this is often due to their gender roles within the family and household, and is exacerbated by the job insecurity and economic precarity that many migrant women, especially those in low-skilled occupations, experience. The COVID-19 pandemic brought the gender dimension of return migration into sharp focus. Migrant women were disproportionately affected by the pandemic because most work in the services sector (79.9% against 56.4% men),<sup>107</sup> and this sector was the most affected by travel restrictions and lockdowns. Income loss led to economic precarity and insecurity, including the loss of secure accommodation, which in turn, in some cases, exposed migrant women to heightened risks of sexual and gender-based violence.<sup>108</sup> After losing their employment in the informal sector in Thailand, for example, migrant women who returned to the Lao People’s Democratic Republic during the COVID-19 pandemic experienced heightened discrimination and gender inequality in terms of unpaid care work and vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence.<sup>109</sup> While the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic on migrant women may have prompted their return, migrant women’s lower income – or lack of income – seems to have also created obstacles for them to afford the costs of return, as can be seen in a survey of overseas Filipino workers.<sup>110</sup>

The case of Ethiopian women primarily working as domestic migrants, who returned from the Gulf countries after escaping exploitation or being deported due to irregular status, provides a telling example of the reintegration difficulties associated with return of failure.<sup>111</sup> Their reintegration journey is paved with obstacles, including coping with trauma from their time in destination countries and stigma from their communities for not meeting their migration goals.<sup>112</sup> These have in turn undermined their labour market inclusion in an already difficult socioeconomic context.

Categorizations of specific return situations as successful return or return of failure remain, however, highly context specific. Returns that could be termed as failures may not be considered so due to prevailing gender norms and have even been resorted to by some migrant men as a strategy to reclaim their masculinity and the social status associated with their gender in their country of origin. This has been the case, for instance, for some married migrant men from Africa in the United Kingdom, whose spouses earn more than them and who have seen their breadwinner status threatened. These migrant men have decided to return to their countries of origin where they enjoy a high social status by virtue of their gender, irrespective of the income gained abroad.<sup>113</sup> Return migration for purposes of reclaiming masculinity was also observed among South Korean men who returned to their country of origin in response to the perceived marginalization of their masculinity in the United States.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Cerase, 1974; Jaji, 2021.

<sup>107</sup> ILO, 2021a.

<sup>108</sup> Jaji, 2021.

<sup>109</sup> Cámbara, 2022.

<sup>110</sup> IOM, 2021c.

<sup>111</sup> Adugna, 2022.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*; Nisrane et al., 2020.

<sup>113</sup> Pasura and Christou, 2018.

<sup>114</sup> Suh, 2017.

Return migration may also entail the negotiation of different gender norms between countries of destination and origin. Some migrant men in the Gulf countries have been found to have internalized more traditional and patriarchal gender norms and transferred them into their households upon return.<sup>115</sup> Migrant women returning to their country of origin may also experience issues in re-adapting to the social norms of their communities of origin.<sup>116</sup> This is particularly evident when return migrants' occupations and lifestyles in the country of destination would lead to stigma and socioeconomic exclusion, if disclosed. Such disclosure can happen through transnational social networks through which information is channelled between destination and origin countries. For example, both returned migrant women and men could face stigma if they worked as sex workers, even if as victims of human trafficking,<sup>117</sup> or freely lived their diverse gender identities in the country of destination.<sup>118</sup> The intersection of gender and sexuality thus influences reintegration.

Gendered difficulties in labour market reintegration and social inclusion in turn negatively impact returned migrants' health, together with health problems that migrants, especially women, have when coming back to their country of origin.<sup>119</sup> These health issues can be highly gendered as linked to experiences in countries of destination, deportation or return decisions and stigmatization upon return. These gendered health issues are compounded by gendered barriers to health-care access, including in terms of lack of information and discrimination related to sex work abroad, including as victims of human trafficking.

## Promoting gender-responsive migration governance: The need for urgent action

Diverse strategies have been adopted to tackle gender equality, with more recent calls being made for adopting a gender-responsive approach, including in the Global Compact for Migration. A gender-responsive approach to migration governance entails adopting and implementing transformative policies and programming that tackle not only gender discrimination experienced by migrants but also the underlying structural gender inequalities. As illustrated in Figure 9, this approach is at the opposite end of a gender-biased one that actively discriminates based on gender, and goes a step further than the gender-specific one, which does not deal with more profound systemic inequality issues.

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<sup>115</sup> Joseph et al., 2022; Samari, 2021; Tuccio and Whaba, 2018.

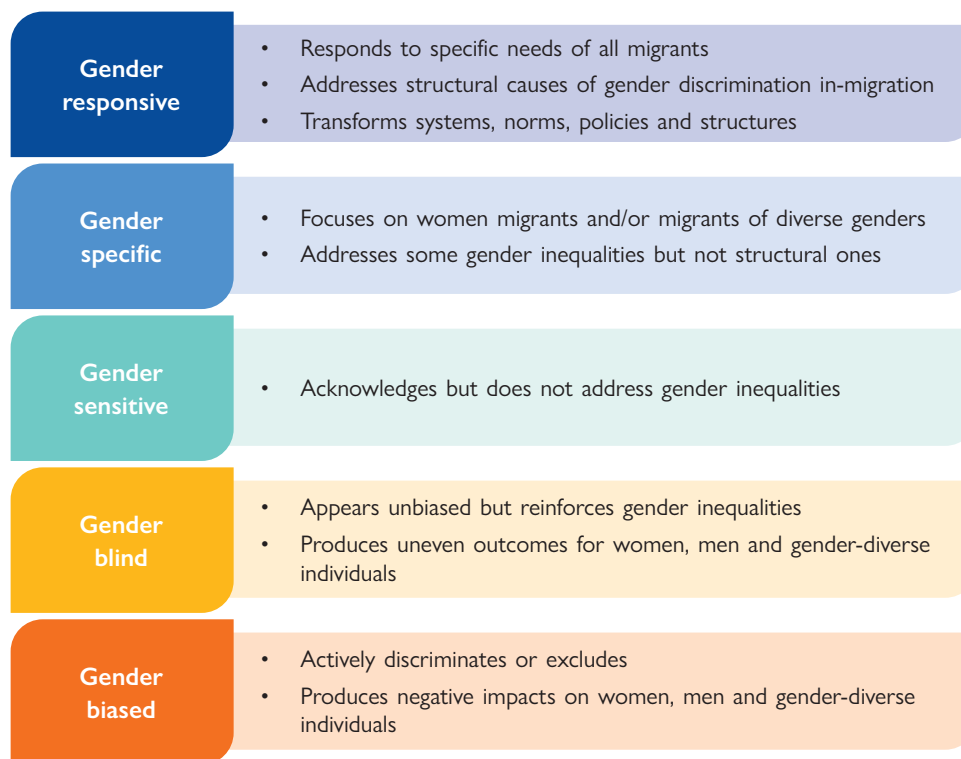
<sup>116</sup> Liu, 2020.

<sup>117</sup> Ong et al., 2019.

<sup>118</sup> Alcalde, 2019.

<sup>119</sup> European Union–IOM Knowledge Management Hub and Samuel Hall, 2023.

Figure 9. Continuum of gender approaches



Source: Adapted from Gender + Migration Hub, n.d.

Ensuring gender-responsive governance, in turn, requires evidence-based design and implementation of migration policies. While statistical data play a central role in informing migration policies, a gender data gap exists today, undermining a better understanding of the gender dimensions of migration and gender inequalities throughout the migration cycle.<sup>120</sup> Calls have been made for gender-disaggregated data capturing individuals' self-identified genders, with Canada being the first country to include a mandatory question on gender in its 2021 population census, followed by New Zealand in 2023.<sup>121</sup> Investing further in sex-disaggregated data, however, remains essential, given social norms that may hinder some countries from moving to gender disaggregation and the difficulties that may be entailed for individuals to self-identify as gender diverse. Migration data are today not all disaggregated by sex, including when it comes to bilateral data on asylum and refugee patterns and remittances, among others, undermining the possibility of undertaking any comprehensive gender analysis to inform migration policies, operations and programming.<sup>122</sup> Undertaking a gender analysis also calls for combining quantitative data with qualitative data, including voices of migrants of diverse genders, to more comprehensively understand the gendered needs, priorities and vulnerabilities that need to be addressed to improve gender equality.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>120</sup> Abel, 2022.

<sup>121</sup> United Nations, 2020; IOM, 2021d; Hennebry et al., 2021; Government of Canada, 2022; Government of New Zealand, 2023.

<sup>122</sup> Abel, 2022.

<sup>123</sup> CARE, 2023.

Nevertheless, exploring some key gender dimensions at each stage of the migration cycle highlights the extent to which migration is beset by gendered obstacles, challenges and vulnerabilities for men, women and gender-diverse individuals, often reflecting broader systemic gender inequalities. While an exhaustive mapping of gender-responsive migration policies and interventions is beyond the scope of this chapter, four key challenges cutting across the whole migration cycle and drawing from the previous sections are identified below and highlighted in Figure 10. All relate to gender norms that more broadly underpin structural gender inequalities and require adopting and implementing gender equality policies and interventions, including education and awareness-raising.<sup>124</sup> Each challenge is complemented by a promising practice or innovative intervention selected across a wide range of geographies. These most notably showcase the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach and of local initiatives and practices that often involve migrants of all genders or are designed in a gender-responsive manner, and that can be leveraged at the local, national, regional and global levels of migration governance.

Figure 10. Cross-cutting gender challenges throughout the migration cycle

	Pre-departure	Entry	Stay	Return
Stereotypes	Migration decisions and opportunities to migrate (at individual, household and structural levels) shaped by breadwinner and caregiver stereotypes	Migration pathways for family migration, labour migration and international protection are based on gendered stereotypes	Labour markets are gendered, and social inclusion depends on stereotypes such as stigmatizing masculinities and hypersexualization	Stereotypes impact on how returning migrants are perceived as successful or failures, with implications for health access and outcomes
Access to information	Information on emigration, regular pathways and rights in countries of destination	Information on emigration, including online application processes	Information on recruitment and inclusion services	Information and support on reintegration, including labour market and health
Digital divide	Online information services for migration	Online application processes	Online recruitment platforms, digital money (e.g. remittances), social connections and others	Online reintegration services
Regular migration pathways	Limited regular pathways exacerbate gender vulnerabilities; irregular migration risks are highly gendered	Restrictive requirements hinder migration based on skills and contribute to family separation	Rights and benefits often limited along gender lines (e.g. by BLAs), which exacerbates vulnerabilities in gendered occupations and fuels informal work	Gendered patterns of migrant return as either success or failure impacts health outcomes.

<sup>124</sup> UNDP, 2020.

### Cross-cutting challenge 1. Addressing gendered stereotypes of migrants

Traditional gender stereotypes of the man as breadwinner and woman as caregiver have important impacts on migrants and, when coupled with rising anti-immigration discourses, nurture portrayals of women migrants as intrinsically vulnerable and victims, and men migrants as security threats and bogus refugees.<sup>125</sup> Without downplaying the vulnerable situations in which women may find themselves, these stereotypes disproportionately impact men migrants who may be in vulnerable situations, negate women migrants' agency, contribute to render gender-diverse migrants more invisible and disempower migrants in contrast to their vast contributions to origin and destination societies.<sup>126</sup>

Gender stereotypes of migrants are relayed by diverse actors, from politicians to humanitarian actors and the media. However, working with the media can be key in shaping balanced and positive perceptions. In 2021, as part of the joint ILO–UN Women Safe and Fair Programme, the ILO partnered with the Alliance of Indonesian Journalists Jakarta to organize media engagement programmes for promoting the safe and fair migration of all Indonesian women.<sup>127</sup> A Media-Friendly Glossary on Migration, focused particularly on women migrant workers, is also available for journalists in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).<sup>128</sup> In addition to providing a list of key relevant terms and rights-based definitions, the glossary offers a list of inclusive terminology with terms to avoid using, as they may perpetuate gender stereotypes of migrants (Table 1).

Table 1. Inclusive terminology summary

Avoid	Prefer
Alien, economic migrant, or foreign worker	Migrant worker
Helper, maid, servant, auntie	Domestic worker
Host country, receiving country	Country of destination, destination country, State of destination
Illegal migrant	Irregular-status migrant, undocumented migrant
Labour import/export	Labour migration
Protecting women	Protection of women's rights
Sending country, home country	Country of origin, State of origin
Slave	Person in forced labour
Unskilled work	Elementary occupation
Victim	Survivor

Source: Adapted from ILO, 2020.

<sup>125</sup> Ward, 2019; Gereke et al., 2020; Delgado Moran, 2020; Holloway et al., 2022.

<sup>126</sup> McAuliffe et al., 2019.

<sup>127</sup> ILO, 2021b.

<sup>128</sup> ILO, 2020.

### Cross-cutting challenge 2. Improving gender-equal access of migrants to information

Access to information throughout the migration process can be highly gendered. While the examples in this chapter focused on information for prospective migrants in countries of origin, this also applies to migrants in countries of transit and destination, and upon return to countries of origin. It is even more difficult for transgender and other gender-diverse migrants to access information, often relying on informal sources.<sup>129</sup> Access to accurate information, including on migrants' rights, is essential to decrease gender-based vulnerabilities throughout the migration cycle.

Among diverse interventions that may support a gender-responsive provision of information on migration, migrant resource centres (MRCs) have been established in countries of origin and destination as a one-stop-shop for information. In origin countries, they combine diverse services under one roof – from pre-departure orientation and community awareness to personalized online, phone or in-person counselling and even, in some cases, support for returned migrants – resulting in a decrease in the likelihood of irregular and unsafe migration, increased awareness of regular migration pathways and effectively providing information on assistance while migrating.<sup>130</sup> While supporting all migrants irrespective of their gender, some of these MRCs, such as in Bangladesh, provide gender-sensitive and tailored support to women before migrating and upon return.<sup>131</sup> In Indonesia, an Integrated Gender Responsiveness One Roof Services Office was launched in 2021 as the first pilot in the ASEAN region.<sup>132</sup> It relies on a multi-stakeholder partnership between the Government, migrant workers unions and women's crisis centres to ensure gender-responsive services to prospective migrant workers.

### Cross-cutting challenge 3. Bridging migrants' gender digital divide

Today's digital society, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, raises considerable gender inequalities: women and girls constitute the majority of the estimated 2.7 billion people worldwide who are unconnected, with major variations in women using the Internet across least developed and developed countries.<sup>133</sup> For migrants, access to and usage of digital solutions and digital literacy and skills often depend on connectivity in their country of origin, and on gender roles, as digital tools may be associated with men in the household division of labour.<sup>134</sup>

A number of initiatives have been adopted to decrease the gender digital divide worldwide, from basic digital skills development to STEM education programmes for women, including migrants and refugees.<sup>135</sup> As the leader in new technological developments and digitalization, the private sector is important in fostering gender digital inclusion. In the financial sector, some financial technology companies are moving towards migrant-centric and gender-smart designs for digital remittances that are affordable, accessible and promote financial resilience.<sup>136</sup> Among other similar initiatives, and together with the United Nations Capital Development Fund, Ping Money – a financial technology company licensed in the United Kingdom and funded by Gambian migrants, offering digital remittances services to migrants from the Gambia – has worked on formalizing remittances channels, including by offering the possibility for migrants in the United Kingdom to directly pay water and electricity bills for their families in the Gambia and

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Dennison, 2022; ICMPD, n.d.

<sup>131</sup> Raus and Roma, 2020.

<sup>132</sup> ILO, 2021c.

<sup>133</sup> ITU, 2022.

<sup>134</sup> McAuliffe, 2023; Saïd, 2021.

<sup>135</sup> See for instance Poya, 2021; AFS Intercultural Programs, 2022.

<sup>136</sup> Ogba et al., 2021. See also Singh, 2021; GSMA, 2018.

launching a mobile wallet for families receiving remittances.<sup>137</sup> A comprehensive market scanning revealed gender differences in Gambian households, with women less aware of mobile money. Considering gender dynamics at play – whereby information tended to reach women through their male relatives more effectively – Ping Money launched a brand awareness campaign through football sponsorships, the main sport in the Gambia.<sup>138</sup> This not only resulted in increasing the number of men clients but also that of women who were encouraged to use mobile money services by their men relatives.

#### Cross-cutting challenge 4. Enhancing regular migration pathways in a gender-responsive manner

Existing regular migration pathways raise diverse challenges throughout the migration cycle with important gender implications.

Enhancing regular migration pathways in a gender-responsive manner would require diversifying the types of pathways and improving their quality, especially in terms of migrants' rights and entitlements. In terms of diversification, regularization schemes of irregular migrants in destination countries are often not considered regular migration pathways, although they are intrinsically complementary, filling the gaps in and the flaws of regular pathways when those create situations of irregularity.<sup>139</sup> Regularization schemes have long been adopted by States in different forms, sometimes targeting irregular migrants working in specific sectors (such as domestic work or the fishing industry) or more broadly implemented for humanitarian and integration reasons.<sup>140</sup> Although not gender-specific, these schemes effectively reduce vulnerabilities associated with irregularity, including gender ones.<sup>141</sup> A recent illustration is that of the temporary protection status adopted by Colombia in 2021 to regularize the status of Venezuelans irregularly in the country, with more than 1.8 million permits granted so far.<sup>142</sup>

While the quality of family migration pathways can be addressed by revising entry requirements and ensuring entitlements, rethinking BLAs in a gender-responsive and rights-based manner is today essential, including for a gender-responsive implementation of the Global Compact for Migration.<sup>143</sup> BLAs are an important source of the continued gender segregation of labour worldwide, and are not accompanied by the necessary protection of migrants' rights, exacerbating gender vulnerabilities, including to exploitation. As highlighted in the Guidance on bilateral labour migration agreements, produced by the United Nations Network on Migration, a gender-responsive approach to BLAs calls for rights-based agreements that explicitly protect migrants according to international labour and human rights law instruments rather than including a vague mention of national laws, as it often is the case.<sup>144</sup> For instance, the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Honduras explicitly lists international labour principles and rights that must be secured into each party's labour laws and practices, rather than assuming they are already part of those laws and practices.<sup>145</sup> While not referring to gender, such a rights-based approach is a first step towards gender-responsive BLAs when duly grounded in the principle of non-discrimination, including on gender grounds, and extending to any additional gender-relevant international instruments, such as the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>137</sup> Hossain et al., n.d.

<sup>138</sup> Ogba et al., 2021.

<sup>139</sup> Triandafyllidou et al., 2019.

<sup>140</sup> OSCE, 2021.

<sup>141</sup> Rojas Coppari and Poirier, forthcoming.

<sup>142</sup> Government of Colombia, n.d.

<sup>143</sup> UNGA, 2018a, objective 5, para. 21(a), read in light of the gender-responsiveness guiding principle; UN Women, 2021.

<sup>144</sup> United Nations Network on Migration, 2022. See also Lim, 2016.

<sup>145</sup> Government of Canada, 2013.

<sup>146</sup> Lim, 2016; United Nations, 1979.

IOM's new Gendered Migration Research Policy Action Lab (GenMig) is designed to bring together stakeholders from around the world to address these challenges and more (see text box below).

## GenMig

### GENDER AND MIGRATION RESEARCH POLICY ACTION LAB

A multi-stakeholder initiative leveraging impact research to support gender-responsive policies, operations, programming and practices in migration



Designed as a highly collaborative venture, GenMig focuses on impact knowledge and research for supporting gender-responsive policies, operations, programming and practices. GenMig leverages the global knowledge and expertise of IOM and its partners to drive actions for addressing gendered vulnerabilities and empowering migrants of all genders in line with the Sustainable Development Agenda and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

As an innovation incubator, GenMig brings together a global network of partners from research institutions, governments, United Nations agencies and intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector committed to gender equality. Find out more about GenMig, including how to join the partner network, here: [www.iom.int/gender-and-migration-research-policy-action-lab](http://www.iom.int/gender-and-migration-research-policy-action-lab).



## Conclusion

This chapter has explained the interactions between migration and gender, although providing an overview of the gender dimensions of migration is a challenging exercise. First, gender is not a neutral term today, influenced by the gender biases possessed by the overwhelming majority of the global population, including gender backlash and anti-gender movements, which have been growing over the past decade.<sup>147</sup> Approaching the notion of gender through a rights-based approach enables a more neutral analysis, highlighting discrimination and focusing on rights protection without promoting the rights of one gender over the others. From this perspective, and as apparent in this chapter, a gender-responsive approach is not only about women's rights but more broadly about striving for gender equality, although today's reality remains that of disproportionate gender discrimination against women and persons with diverse gender identities, including throughout the migration cycle. This discrimination cannot be isolated from wider practices of State underinvestment in care provision and social protection, resulting in women and other minority groups being recruited into these sectors to augment weak State welfare provisioning.<sup>148</sup> This is happening in contexts where women and other minority groups face structural and systemic barriers to accessing the pathways to full rights and access to citizenship.

Second, as migration is intrinsically a gendered phenomenon, the interconnections between migration and gender are diverse, if not infinite. Taking a migrant's perspective, however, enables a better understanding of gendered experiences throughout the migration cycle, which are shaped by diverse opportunities and obstacles related to prevailing gender norms. Far from positing a deterministic view of the role of gender in migration, migrants' perspectives showcase the agency of migrants in navigating gender norms and roles and coping with existing discrimination in countries of origin, transit and destination.

Third, the interactions between migration and gender cannot be understood without taking into account other factors that intersect in shaping migrants' migration decisions, trajectories and experiences, as neither migrant groups nor gender groups are homogenous. Among other factors, age and life cycle play important roles, alongside structural factors such as migration policies underpinned by gender norms and biases. Limited and restrictive regular migration pathways end up exacerbating existing vulnerabilities relating to the division of labour in households and highly gendered sectors of work, creating distinct challenges in terms of irregularity and informality.

Today, the importance of addressing gender inequalities in migration cannot be underestimated. Just as the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the interdependency of our individual fates, gender inequalities in migration underscore broader systemic gender inequalities that deny human development for all. Adopting a gender-responsive approach to migration governance is thus a necessity to empower migrants of all genders and further gender equality more generally as the "prerequisite for a better world".<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> UN WGDAGW, 2020.

<sup>148</sup> Gamage and Stevanovic, 2019.

<sup>149</sup> United Nations, 2021.

## Appendix A. Key terms and definitions

**gender** The socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for individuals based on the sex they were assigned at birth.

*Source:* IOM, 2023a.

**gender equality** The equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of all individuals of all genders. Equality does not mean that all individuals are the same, but that rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on one's sex assigned at birth, physical sex characteristics, gender assigned by society, gender identity or gender expression. Gender equality also requires that the interests, needs and priorities of all individuals should be taken into consideration.

*Source:* IOM, 2023a.

**gender norms** Gender norms are ideas about how men and women should be and act. We internalize and learn these “rules” early in life. This sets-up a life-cycle of gender socialization and stereotyping. Put another way, gender norms are the standards and expectations to which gender identity generally conforms, within a range that defines a particular society, culture and community at that point in time.

*Source:* UN Women, n.d.

**gender role** A set of societal norms dictating what types of behaviors are generally considered acceptable, appropriate or desirable for a person based on their actual sex or perceived sex or gender.

*Source:* IOM, 2021a.

**transgender** [A term] used by some people whose gender identity differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans, transgender and non-binary are “umbrella terms” representing a variety of words that describe an internal sense of gender that differs from the sex assigned at birth and the gender attributed to the individual by society, whether that individual identifies as a man, a woman, simply “trans” or “transgender,” with another gender or with no gender.

*Source:* IOM, 2021a.

**non-binary** An adjective describing people whose gender identity falls outside the male–female binary. Non-binary is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide variety of gender experiences, including people with a specific gender identity other than man or woman, people who identify as two or more genders (bigender or pan/polygender) and people who don't identify with any gender (agender).

*Source:* IOM, 2021a.

For definitions of other relevant terms, see IOM, 2021a and 2023a.

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