

# I O M   N E W S   R E L E A S E

IOM  
17, route des Morillons  
CH - 1211 GENEVA 19  
SWITZERLAND  
Tel: +41.22.717 91 11  
Fax: +41.22.798 61 50  
Internet: <http://www.iom.int>



IOM International Organization for Migration

## **EQUAL RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SAFE MIGRATION: A PRE-REQUISITE FOR DEVELOPMENT SAYS IOM**

**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

No.1/2010

**GENEVA** – 8 March 2010 - Migration policies must offer equal opportunities to migrate to both women and men to reduce women's vulnerability during migration and to optimize the positive development impact of migration in communities of origin, says the International Organization for Migration (IOM), on the occasion of International Women's Day 2010.

Although migrant women - representing 105 million people, close to half of the migrants worldwide — are increasingly involved in labour migration flows independently and as main income-earners, they are still not offered the same opportunities for legal migration as their male counter-parts and are therefore still often disproportionately affected by risks arising from mobility.

According to IOM Deputy Director General Ambassador Laura Thompson: “Although labour migration policies in countries of destination may appear gender-neutral, they continue to be biased and based on a model that focuses on skilled, traditionally male-dominated jobs. Those are the types of occupations mostly covered by permanent labour schemes.”

The work performed by women migrants, such as care and domestic services, although essential to the economies of destination countries, is frequently under-valued and poorly integrated in admission policies.

“We advocate for more gender-sensitive labour migration policies, acknowledging that men and women have different needs and opportunities, before, during and after migration. More opportunities to migrate legally would prevent a lot of women from getting trapped in irregular, exploitative and abusive situations, including human trafficking,” says Ambassador Thompson.

The lack of legal avenues for migration often forces women to resort to smugglers and other intermediaries, which greatly increases the risk of violence and abuse en route to their destination.

In the receiving countries, stereotypes and discrimination also often lead women to work in unregulated or poorly regulated sectors exposing them to abuses including limited freedom of movement, withholding of wages and documents, low pay, physical violence and sexual abuse.

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**For additional information:**

Jean-Philippe Chauzy Tel: 41 22 717 9361 - Mobile: 41 79 285 4366 [pchauzy@iom.int](mailto:pchauzy@iom.int)  
Jemini Pandya Tel 41 22 717 9486-Mobile: 41 79 217 3374, [jpandya@iom.int](mailto:jpandya@iom.int)

Sending and destination countries cannot continue to turn a blind eye to the plight of these migrant women, the need for whose labour is actually increasing.

“These women are meeting a growing demand for care and support services in destination countries – a demand that has been largely unaffected by the global economic downturn. Receiving countries therefore need to promote and sustain the opening of legal migration channels providing decent employment opportunities and access to benefits. This is the only way migration can truly benefit both sending and receiving countries, as well as the migrants, their families and their communities,” Ambassador Thompson observes.

IOM’s recently published “Gender and Labour Migration in Asia” highlights how families back home can benefit from women’s migration.

It cites the case of Filipina domestic workers holding regular migration status in Italy who, through their remittances, are able to improve the housing, health and the socio-economic status of their family, and in particular, their children’s school prospects back home.

Female migrants send approximately the same amount of money home in remittances as male migrants. But research suggests that they tend to send a higher proportion of their income, which is generally lower than that of men. They also usually send money more regularly and for longer periods of time, mostly to other women left in charge of their children.

Regular migration status would help reduce the social cost of women’s migration by allowing them to return to visit their families more often, access decent work, earn more and send more money home to improve their families’ future.

“As we celebrate International Women’s Day, we need to reaffirm our commitment to women migrants and their empowerment. Our priority is to ensure that their migration experience is positive and a force for development. Let us all work towards achieving this goal,,” says Ambassador Thompson.

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