



IOM International Organization for Migration
OIM Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations
OIM Organización Internacional para las Migraciones

STATEMENT

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BY
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Dear Mr. Chairman,

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) appreciates the opportunity to address this Committee today in relation *inter alia* to the Secretary General's report on "Violence against Women Migrant Workers".

Almost half of the total number of migrant workers in the world today is women. While women have always migrated as accompanying spouses and family members, contemporary migration dynamics have shown a considerable increase in the number of women migrating independently to pursue opportunities of their own. Labour migration may benefit women through economic as well as socio-cultural empowerment. But these opportunities are often marred by stereotypes, discrimination and pervasive harassment, as the SG's report indicates that "*Violence against women migrant workers persists, and women continue to be subjected to violence and their rights violated throughout every stage of the migration cycle. Such violence takes many different forms [...and] undocumented women migrant workers remain particularly vulnerable to violence, exploitation and discrimination.*"

Due to their dual vulnerability as migrants and women, they are still disproportionately affected by a variety of risks arising from their mobility. During every stage of their migratory experience, women migrant workers may be more exposed to human rights violations compared to their male counterparts. They frequently have to deal with difficult living and working conditions, increased health risks, a lack of access to social services and various forms of abuse such as the confiscation of passports by their employers. Women migrant workers tend to integrate gender segregated sectors that are largely informal and unregulated therefore offering them little or no protection. These women tend to have limited or no bargaining power and few or no opportunities for establishing networks to receive information and social support. Irregular women migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to harassment, intimidation or threats as well as economic and sexual exploitation including trafficking and racial discrimination. Often times, they face incarceration and/or deportation if they attempt to leave their employer.

Mr. Chairman,

While they face these challenges already in “normal” times, during economic downturns the situation of migrant workers and in particular that of women migrant workers becomes even worse. The financial crisis has provoked an examination of our societal values. IOM believes it is crucial to guard against policies aimed at sending migrant workers home as it will not only have negative consequences for development given the drop in remittances, but also may lead to tensions between host and migrant communities during this economic struggle. Reduction in wages and poorer working conditions will impact on the quality of life and health of migrants and families left behind. Furthermore, discrimination and stigma of migrants, mistakenly perceived as taking the jobs of local workers, will fuel marginalization and xenophobia which will have major negative impacts on migrants’ well being as well as of hosting societies. And all this is particularly relevant for women migrant workers, who are frequently confined to low-skill and “typical women’s work”, particularly in the informal economy, in domestic services, hotel and catering services, the care sector, the entertainment and sex industry, and agriculture or assembly lines. These areas of work are quite regularly characterised by bad working conditions, low pay, high insecurity and a high risk of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse. The impact of the financial crisis is likely to make this even worse.

Mr. Chairman,

IOM through its gender mainstreaming policy is committed to ensuring that the particular needs of all migrant women are identified, taken into consideration and addressed by IOM projects and services. This translates inter alia in the Organization's commitment to address the issue of violence against women migrant workers in order to promote their physical, social and economic well being. The Organization strongly believes that migration can function as a catalyst for setting off an empowerment process for women migrant workers but acknowledges that the actual empowerment is influenced by the context in which the migration occurs, the type of movement, and the characteristics and status of the women involved. Empowerment is more likely to occur when the migration engages women in employment outside the home, notably in formal sector occupations, and takes place within the legal framework for an extended period. In order to create an environment conducive to safe and empowering migration, IOM recommends that women migrant workers have the same access to protection and safety at work and to legal redress mechanisms as the domestic workforce. Policy-makers, practitioners and the public need to be better informed about the vulnerability of women migrant workers, including their vulnerability to discrimination, exploitation and abuse throughout all stages of the labour migration process.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, it is crucial not to neglect these women, whether those left behind by a migrating husband, or those migrating as qualified nurses, or those migrating irregularly into informal sectors where they play such an important role in care-giving and yet most of the time remain socially invisible. To ensure their protection and breaking the cycle of violence against women, including women migrants requires broad and active commitment of state and non-state actors, including men and boys, as well as a change in thinking among families, communities and societies: much remains to be done for all of us.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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