



## Civil Society Key Advocacy Messages GFMD Roundtable 1: Women, Migration and Development

*Disclaimer: The following content reflects only the outcomes of the GFMD Civil Society Thematic Dialogues. Therefore, the challenges and opportunities outlined are limited to what emerged during the discussions. These ideas may evolve as further analysis and discussions take place.*

### Challenges

#### 1. Challenges in accessing services and justice mechanisms

##### a. Difficulty accessing health and reproductive health services

- i. Women continue to face numerous barriers to accessing reproductive health services, especially undocumented women and women with an irregular migration status.
- ii. The absence of firewalls in data and information sharing creates a fear of repercussions when trying to access healthcare services, particularly impacting sexual and reproductive health rights. Many women with irregular status do not seek medical attention for fear of being detained and/or deported, putting their health and lives at risk.

##### b. Access to information

- i. There is a lack of accurate information around rights, services and opportunities in receiving countries, compounded by language barriers and insufficient access to interpretation and language services.

##### c. Access to justice, particularly affected- abuse at home and workplace

- i. Fears of repercussions and lack of suitable justice systems are particularly present, especially for incidents of abuse at home, when seeking essential services, and in the workplace.
- ii. The absence of firewalls hinder access to justice, regardless of migration status. For instance, migrant women in irregular situations who experience gender-based violence often do not report their circumstances due to fear of employer retaliation, detention or deportation.

##### d. Access to political participation and decision-making

- i. Migrant women also face barriers to participation in political and democratic life. In the case of Europe, there is still a lack of representation of migrant women in elected bodies at the local, national, and European levels and a lack of engagement with migrant women associations in decision-making processes.

#### 2. Inequality issues and abuse in employment

- a. Women often face restrictions that prevent them from working in certain industries, which results in skilled female migrants being excluded from many job opportunities. Additionally, many women start their migration journey with limited economic resources due to lower access to paid work or wages in their home countries. In

many cases, resources are also depleted as available financial capital is typically invested in the migration journeys of men who go first to pave a route.

- b. Due to the gendered division of labour, migrant women workers are often funnelled into unregulated and exploitative sectors such as domestic work and sex work.
- c. The value of unpaid and paid care is often not recognised and is limited to "unskilled" employment.

### **3. Inadequacy/lack of gender-responsiveness inclusivity and considerations in policies**

*Includes: issues such as family separation, lack of care for post-natal and pregnant women, the effects of migration detention, GBV such as body searches and forced undressing, integration policies -including mental health support and access to livelihoods- for returnees.*

- a. Tendency to link the addressing of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) with anti-trafficking policies, rather than recognising GBV as a distinct policy area that requires separate attention.
- b. Lack of differentiation regarding the needs of individuals based on gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, context, and language is essential for providing comprehensive support.
- c. The absence of data on migrant women, girls, gender-diverse migrants and their specific challenges makes them vulnerable at the source, during transit, and at their destination. This lack of data is also connected to a prevalence of gender-neutral migration policies that ultimately neglect gender considerations.
- d. Immigration detention systems are inherently harmful to women and gender-diverse people's human rights as they can place them at higher risk of GBV and cannot adequately provide appropriate sexual and reproductive health rights and services - negatively impacting women and gender-diverse people's physical and mental health.

### **4. Dependence on husband/spouse's status and marriage for documentation, regularisation, and access to services**

- a. In regions such as North Africa and the Middle East, many migrant women are unable to register for necessary documents independently and often require their husband's assistance and/or presence. The reliance on regular or nationalised spouses can lead to increased susceptibility to domestic abuse, as women may fear the consequences of losing their legal status.
- b. Having immigration status independent of their spouses is crucial for their safety and autonomy. Unfortunately, the fear of losing their residency status often compels women to remain with abusive partners.
- c. Indirect impacts of immigration detention can exacerbate these issues. When male breadwinners are detained, women find themselves in increasingly insecure positions due to the aforementioned discriminatory policies and patriarchal cultural attitudes. In such situations, women and girls may be forced into exploitative labour or rely on other male community members to secure their livelihoods- opening potential vulnerabilities to abuse.

### **5. Gender-based violence and harassment**

- a. Gender-based violence and social isolation are significant issues faced by migrant women, both during their journey, in transit, and in their destination countries. These women often encounter unique risks due to inadequate recognition of their gender-based vulnerabilities, including sexual abuse and violations of their sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR).

### **6. Challenges due to patriarchal expectations: unequal expectations of care, social isolation**

- a. Existing support systems—such as legal, psychological, and social services—are often lacking or unresponsive to the specific needs of migrant women. Further, NGOs and governmental programs may unintentionally reinforce gendered expectations, neglecting the broader needs of these women. Family violence often heightens during times of financial distress, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive support and resources tailored to migrant women's experiences.
- b. Women with disabilities, who represent at least [19% of the global population](#), are among the most marginalised, facing heightened risks of abuse, violence, and exclusion. These risks are further compounded by the intersecting challenges migrant women face, as well as the effects of patriarchal expectations and social isolation. Migration policies often exclude individuals with disabilities or health conditions, forcing many to conceal their conditions, which restricts access to services and justice. Existing systems frequently fail to meet the needs of migrant women with disabilities, leaving them more vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination.

## 7. Specific barriers faced by Indigenous women

- a. While comprising only [6% of the global female population](#), Indigenous women carry a disproportionate burden of poverty, accounting for over [19% of the world's extremely poor](#), and face unique vulnerabilities during migration. With life expectancies 20 years lower than non-Indigenous populations, they are often forced to leave their lands due to climate change and resource exploitation, jeopardising their roles as custodians of 'Indigenous Knowledge Systems, languages and protectors of the land and the oceans. Migration policies frequently fail to address these intersecting challenges, compounding their marginalisation and mental health risks.

### Reframing of opportunities to look at the actions needed to ensure women and gender-diverse persons have access to rights first and foremost and emphasise the crucial need to move away from instrumentalising framing

#### 1. Develop inclusive and gender-sensitive mechanisms for accessing services

- a. **Improve access to services**
  - i. Create firewalls between health, justice, and essential services and immigration authorities.
  - ii. Design new or modify existing social security systems to ensure the portability of benefits.
- b. **Improve access to information and services with inclusive language**
  - i. There is a need to allocate a budget for national sending offices to improve information dissemination for women, such as regular radio programs and workshops conducted in local languages.
- c. **Improve access to healthcare and sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR)**
  - i. Establish centralised support services (health, mental health, and domestic violence) co-designed with migrant women in countries of destination and return.
- d. **Improve access to safe and decent work**
  - i. Reform labour laws to include protections for migrant women workers, who are often excluded from many existing laws recognising domestic work as work.
- e. **Improve access to education**
  - i. Increase opportunities for upskilling and reskilling.
  - ii. Provide access to childcare programs to facilitate attendance in schools and higher education.
  - iii. Promote skills recognition to enhance job opportunities.

## **2. Design policies and implementation that centre the protection and best interests of the family and migrant women**

- a. Focus on family reunification and prevent children from being left behind.
- b. Create and strengthen mechanisms to keep families together during the migration journey, avoiding detention for women and families. Ensure that resources are allocated to gender-responsive interventions, such as alternatives to detention.
- c. Remove structural barriers affecting migrant women with disabilities and Indigenous women (migration exclusion policies).

## **3. Expand and build upon gender-specific migration pathways**

- a. Establish regular migration pathways that are sensitive to gender and consider intersecting factors of vulnerability, including women with disabilities, Afro-descent and Indigenous women and gender-diverse persons.
- b. Recognise that migration can provide safety and protection for victims of gender-based violence (GBV).
- c. Create further pathways to regularisation independent of marital status and ensure these mechanisms are easy to access, particularly for migrant women lacking documentation.
- d. Design gender-inclusive and responsive policies that account for gender diversity and ability.
- e. Ensure that all women are included, recognising that lesbians and transgender women are often excluded under a heteronormative framework. Recognising same-sex unions as equal in access to visas and permits is also crucial.

## **4. Strengthen support for caregivers**

- a. Establish support mechanisms specifically for primary caregivers, migrant women, and those who remain in the countries of origin due to global care chains and are heads of households. Develop specific policies to support these women and promote greater economic independence.

## **5. Need to address perceptions of migrant women**

- a. Address and change discriminatory, infantilising, victimising and instrumentalising perceptions of migrant women, recognising them as agents in their own migration journeys, separating them from the basket of "women and children" as vulnerable groups into different groups with differing needs who are subject to overlapping vulnerable situations.
- b. Acknowledge that migrant women should not be viewed as instruments for economic development; their choices and wishes must be respected.
- c. Promoting the positive contribution of migrant women - not limited only to economic contribution -, including those with a disability and Indigenous women.

## **6. Reform systems to ensure that policies address the specific needs of women and gender-diverse people**

- a. Engage migrant women and civil society organisations (CSOs) in the policymaking process in the design, development and implementation of policies addressed to women and gender-diverse people.
- b. Expand regular pathways for GBV survivors.

## **7. Enhance political participation**

- a. Enhancing the participation of migrant women in political and democratic life is a necessary step to building inclusive and democratic societies. The participation of migrant women as an under-represented group can positively contribute to public governance, transparency and accountability.