

Migrant Empowerment and Action for Human Development

Women In Migration

GFMD-Civil Society Days 2015, Istanbul, Turkey

‘Migrant women’s social and political agency should be at the forefront of recognizing and supporting their leadership’

Migrant women’s contributions should be viewed in the full range of human development—as social, political, cultural, and economic agents of change. ***Despite, and often precisely due to the challenging conditions they face, migrant women are visionary and organized forces for change within their destination and origin countries.*** As survivors of xenophobia, labour exploitation, exclusion from social protections, and physical and sexual violence, migrant women have not simply been victims, but organize for political, social, and economic rights. Moreover, migrant women lead change from their multiple identities—as workers, students, parents, and LGBT individuals—in many public policy arenas from education, to healthcare, to housing. Migrant and diaspora women should be supported beyond “economic success-story” models to collectively and safely organize to uphold a rights-based agenda. Migrant women’s social and political agency should be at the forefront of recognizing and supporting their leadership.

- Migrant Women as Change-Makers-

- As survivors of xenophobia, labor exploitation, exclusion from social protections, and physical and sexual violence, migrant women have not simply been victims, but organize for political, social, and economic rights.
- Migrant women lead change from their multiple identities—as workers, students, parents, and LGBT individuals—in many public policy arenas from education, to healthcare, to housing.
- Women’s political agency and stories remain largely overlooked in the media and public discourse. They are generally portrayed as victims, not protagonists.

-Social and Political Agency-

Migrant women’s social and political agency should be at the forefront of recognizing and supporting their leadership. In destination countries, migrant women are often the majority of grassroots organizers who:

- Challenge xenophobia
- Create mechanisms to address violence and set up social and economic support networks
- Build migrant workers centers that negotiate with employers for labour rights
- Lead migrant rights movements and public campaigns to reform national policies

In origin countries, migrant women can gain economic independence, shift gender relations, and participate politically with new knowledge and leadership. They are leading civil society claims on decent work, public services, against violence, and for land rights. Transnationally, migrant women’s networks lead many civil society efforts to gain access to decent work, labour and social protections, gender-empowerment and rights-based development policies, and advocate as a common voice with governments, private sectors, and in global processes such as the Global Forum on Migration & Development (GFMD) and the UN High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development (HLD) (2006, 2013). Indeed, migrant women are emerging as a growing force for human rights and development globally.

-Recommendations¹-

1. In order to genuinely facilitate migrant empowerment, states and private sector employers should adopt gender-sensitive and rights-based policies that create conditions where migrant women can claim full rights and social protections to enhance their capacity to participate civically.
2. States should adopt and implement ILO Convention 87, ensuring freedom of association and protection of the right to organize, particularly for undocumented migrant women workers.
3. States should adopt and implement CEDAW, and in particular, provisions to ensure national policies that allow for the equal participation of women in political and public life. States should incorporate CEDAW General Recommendation 26 on migrant women workers, particularly provisions that facilitate social and political participation such as policies to protect against discrimination in all migration cycles, and rights-based education and training programs for women migrants and officials. In particular, under CEDAW General Recommendation 26, countries of origin and destination should institutionalize the *“active involvement of women migrant workers and relevant non-governmental organizations in policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.”*
4. Governments must recognize that women migrants often experience multiple forms of discrimination and must actively prioritize ending all forms of discrimination against women, regardless of legal status or factors including race, ethnicity, nationality, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, health and pregnancy status, or occupation.
5. States should give particular attention to migrant women and girls with disabilities and should play a key role in protecting their human rights, agency and leadership roles.
6. States should provide access to justice mechanisms, due process, and legal assistance to migrant women and girls so they can defend their rights and confront rights violations in the workplace, home and community.
7. States and international processes such as the GFMD should ensure that organized migrant women are recognized and engaged in the policy spaces that impact their lives. This entails eliciting ongoing collaboration from migrant women’s organizations and networks engaged in rights-based organizing.
8. The GFMD and HLD processes should establish regional and international permanent roundtables with migrant and migrant women’s organizations and trade unions. Civil Society should play a central role in governance regarding migration policy, with a place at the table similar to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

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¹See also Women and Migration 2013 Advocacy Document in English, Spanish, French: <http://wgmwg.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/final-advocacy-doc-ENGLISH.pdf>