

# Eliminating gender-based violence as vital to migration governance for resilience and social development

## GFMD Side Event

25 January 2024, 15:00 to 16:30 – Room CICG - F

On the margins of the 14<sup>th</sup> Summit of the GFMD, UN Women together with the Gender+ Migration Hub, Resignificadas ONG, and the Women in Migration Network co-organized a side event to discuss the urgency of preventing GBV as part of effective migration governance and the importance of addressing the needs of survivors of GBV when designing and implementing migration laws, policies and services. The event was co-sponsored by Canada, the Philippines, One Young World and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls.



**Moderator:** *Vani Saraswathi, Editor-at-Large & Director of Projects at [Migrant-Rights.Org](https://migrant-rights.org)*

Ms. Saraswathi opened the event by sharing that in her work she had seen women migrating to find jobs abroad in an effort to escape violence at home, including intimate partner violence. She explained that many of these women were trapped in a cycle of exploitation with no recourse for redress or the ability to safely return home. Ms. Saraswathi underscored the specific challenges of addressing GBV through an intersectional lens, in particular the criminalization and marginalization facing queer and transgender people increasing their risks to trafficking.

**Opening remarks:** *Eilis Pourbaix, First Secretary, Migration and Refugee Affairs, Canada*

Ms. Pourbaix began her remarks by highlighting the multifaceted nature of human mobility, and how it was shaped by people's diverse and intersecting identities. She identified some of the challenges that migrant women faced that increased their risk to GBV, including dependency on sponsors for economic support, limited access to education or employment and social isolation.

Ms. Pourbaix added that they also often faced increased barriers to reporting violence and accessing necessary support such as fear of deportation due to precarious immigration status, limited knowledge of the legal system as well as racism and discrimination. She presented Canada's strategy to address GBV, which included a partnership between migrant integration and settlement organizations and anti-violence sector organizations in the country with the aim to ensure that migrants at greater risk of violence had necessary avenues of support. Ms. Pourbaix reiterated Canada's commitment to gender-responsive implementation of the GCM and the critical importance of designing policies and programmes for migrants that recognized and addressed vulnerabilities and systemic inequalities and the urgency to prevent and eliminate GBV and exploitation at all stages of migration.

### **Panel discussion**

*Arnel Ignacio, Administrator, Overseas Workers Welfare Administration*

Mr. Ignacio shared that globally there were around 1.13 million migrant women from the Philippines. He discussed the way in which gendered roles contributed to women's more precarious labour which increased their risk of gender-based violence and exploitation. Mr. Ignacio explained that victims of illegal recruitment, trafficking and those working without documentation were mostly women from rural communities and those in conflict and disaster-prone areas, who had limited information or no access to safe and regular migration pathways. He shared some examples of measures put in place in the Philippines to address gender-based violence, including a new bill under consideration that sought to expand existing legislation to protect against online violence and harassment. Mr. Ignacio underscored the importance of empowering migrant women to ensure they had access to the information needed to make informed decisions, including through orientation programmes. He concluded by highlighting the importance of taking a whole-of-society approach to tackling gender-based violence.

*Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls*

Ms. Alsalem recognized the importance of safe migration and its role in contributing to women's empowerment. She underlined the responsibility of states to protect and fulfil the human rights of all migrant women and girls and how central this was to protect them from gender-based violence and exploitation. Ms. Alsalem stressed that the ratification of key international human rights instruments in addition to the human rights-based and gender-responsive implementation of the Global Compact for Migration were key to protecting and promoting the rights of migrant women. She called for an increase in the availability of safe and regular migration pathways for migrant women and girls, while ensuring that they could access necessary legal protections and services. Ms. Alsalem underscored the need for providing human rights-based and gender-responsive training to key immigration personnel to ensure they could effectively respond to the needs of migrant women and girls. She added that there was a need for greater oversight and monitoring of private recruitment agencies and brokers that oversee employment programmes and work permits. Ms. Alsalem promoted the role of pre-orientation programmes in equipping

migrant women with the necessary skills and information on their rights and responsibilities, adding that it was important that such sessions included a strong focus on reducing women's risks of gender-based violence. She proposed some concrete steps to better protect the rights of migrant women and girls including by ensuring that reception and detention facilities were specially adapted to their needs, the importance of implementing mechanisms for early detection of victims of gender-based violence and eliminating sex-specific bans and discriminatory restrictions on women's migration. Ms. Alsalem concluded by stressing the need to establish firewalls between public service providers and immigration authorities, especially for the provision of essential services to survivors of violence.

*Inkeri von Hase, Global Coordinator, Making Migration Safe, UN Women*

Ms. von Hase opened her remarks by recognizing that gender-based violence was a grave and profoundly damaging human rights violation, rooted in deeply entrenched gender inequalities. She drew attention to the findings of the 2023 Secretary-General's report on violence against women migrant workers, including that according to the ILO 40.7 per cent of young migrant women had faced violence at work compared to 26.8 per cent of non-migrant women. Ms. von Hase stressed that certain migrant women faced a much greater risk of violence, including to sexual violence, in particular those migrating via irregular routes. She called for improved data on the experiences of violence against migrant women, including on the forms, frequency and severity of violence. Ms. von Hase concluded by underscoring the urgent need for gender-responsive and human rights-based migration policies with more safe and regular migration pathways available to women in all sectors and at all skill levels and improved access to essential services for all survivors of violence irrespective of migration status.

*Natalia Murillo Villa, Founder of Resignificadas NGO and OYW ambassador*

Ms. Murillo Villa discussed the multifaceted nature of gender-based violence and the approach taken by Resignificadas NGO to tackle it in all its forms. She underscored the importance of research and advocacy to better address the root causes of GBV and in particular the need for better information on violence experienced by migrant women. Ms. Murillo Villa provided examples of good practices to promote the rights of migrant women and protect them from violence, including through awareness raising and direct service provision. She concluded by underscoring the need for greater information sharing among migrant women, on the risks of gender-based violence and where they could go to get help, including by establishing peer support networks.

*Andrea Petro, Founder of the OCM foundation for the migrant Colombian diaspora*

Ms. Petro provided an overview of the Colombian Organization for Migrants which was established to meet the humanitarian needs of migrants and returnees, with a focus on providing counselling and support to Colombians living abroad. She underscored the importance of defending the rights of all migrants, including by facilitating access to services and improving

access to information in an effort to strengthen their resilience and strengthen social development.

**Closing remarks:** *Jenna Hennebry, Project Leader, Gender+ Migration Hub*

Ms. Hennebry recognized the important role of core international instruments in addressing violence against women. She stressed that gender-based violence extended beyond just intimate partner violence or workplace violence and included structural and state violence and its specific manifestations when carried out against migrant women and girls and LGBTIQ+ migrants. Ms. Hennebry highlighted how women migrant workers were often made more vulnerable to violence as a result of policies and practices designed to ‘protect’ or ‘help’ them. She shared a specific example of how a lack of access to safe and regular migration pathways could increase irregular migration and women’s risk to violence. Ms. Hennebry called for strengthening gender-responsive implementation of the GCM with measurable outcomes and indicators for addressing and preventing violence. She ended her remarks by underlining a real need for structural change by exploring how migration could be reimagined to address the conditions that produce violence, including by centering a feminist approach to international migration policies.