



Photo: UN Women/Fikerte Abebe

# STRENGTHENING MIGRATION PROGRAMMING FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

LESSONS LEARNED



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LESSONS LEARNED



**ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT SECTION  
UN WOMEN**

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# INTRODUCTION

This compilation of key lessons learned from phase one of the Making Migration Safe for Women programme aims to support policymakers and practitioners in designing and implementing gender-responsive migration policies and programmes to ensure that they can contribute to advancing gender equality for all migrants and promote the empowerment of migrant women and girls at all stages of migration. The programme is funded by the government of Germany.

The overall goal of phase one was to ensure that migration is safe and regular for all women migrating from, into and through Niger and that international norms and standards for protecting and promoting migrant women's rights were strengthened. To this end, the programme worked towards the achievement of three outcomes:

1. National governments develop and strengthen migration policies, laws and services that are gender-responsive.
2. Migrant women and their organizations advocate for the promotion and protection of migrant women's rights.
3. Governments and relevant international human rights bodies ensure the promotion and protection of migrant women's rights through strengthened global norms and standards.

The innovative design of the programme meant that the emerging issues and specific challenges of migrant women identified in Niger fed into the advocacy and policy work being done at the global level, and vice versa.

The following are the key lessons learned and examples of good practices from phase one of the Making Migration Safe for Women programme.



Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

# LESSON

# 1

## CENTRING MIGRANT WOMEN'S VOICES

To ensure that gender-responsive migration governance responds to the gender-specific needs and realities of all migrants, especially women and gender-diverse persons, migrants must be included in the design and development of relevant policies, programmes and services. The adage, “nothing about us without us”, offers an important feminist insight: the lived experiences of migrant women and gender-diverse migrants must be taken into consideration and addressed in migration programming and policymaking. To this end, migrant women and gender-diverse migrants must be empowered as partners to share their experiences, knowledge and expertise at all levels in a meaningful way.



Photo: UN Women/Rash Caritativo

## KEY TIPS

1. Take an intersectional approach when designing migration programmes, ensuring they respond to the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by migrant women based on any number of interconnected characteristics including gender, age, income, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, marital and family status, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, migration status, health status, HIV status, pregnancy, place of residence and economic and social situation.
2. Apply a bottom-up approach: It is important to learn from and listen to migrant women and their organizations to learn about their experiences and priorities and how to address them. This requires consulting them at all stages of programming and learning from their lived experiences to understand their key challenges and how best to tackle them (*see Example 1*).
3. Build the leadership of migrant women, in particular by amplifying their voices at global, regional and national meetings, to ensure their knowledge and experiences can help shape the outcomes of policy discussions in these spaces.
4. Design more targeted programmes which address the key issues affecting migrant women and girls at all stages of migration, including:
  - a. Increasing access to training, decent work and social protection
  - b. Improving access to services
  - c. Eliminating gender-based violence and improving access to essential services for survivors
  - d. Eradicating trafficking of migrants
  - e. Ensuring gender-responsive reintegration into countries of return.

### EXAMPLE 1

#### Case study from Niger

As part of the Making Migration Safe for Women programme in Niger, focus group discussions were held with migrant women to understand what information, if any, they received prior to migration and what information they would have liked to receive before their departure. The focus group discussions also helped to better understand how migrant women in Niger seek information, what sources of information they most trust, and how information on safe migration could be provided (e.g. through trainings, radio campaigns, peer educators and online). The insights shared by migrant women were instrumental in shaping programme activities aimed at providing migrant women with access to the information needed to ensure that their migration experience would be safe and rewarding.



Photo: UNAMID/Albert Gonzalez Farran

# LESSON

# 2



## STRENGTHENING DATA, EVIDENCE AND KNOWLEDGE

The availability of comprehensive sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics on migration continues to be severely lacking. Yet data are critical to understanding the experiences of migrant women as well as gender-diverse migrants. Gender statistics can give us a true picture of how their experiences of migration may be different or more challenging because of gender and other intersecting characteristics. The collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data are crucial to better understand the experiences of migrant women in all their diversity. In turn, the data can be used

to support the development of migration policies and programmes which better reflect and address the realities of those they are designed to assist. The Making Migration Safe for Women programme developed a survey tool to collect data on the experiences of migrant women in Niger, which was the first of its kind ([see Example 2](#)). The programme has also produced knowledge products which fill existing gaps in the literature to not only increase the availability of information but also to provide tools for advocacy and to support the development of relevant policies, programmes and services.



## KEY TIPS

1. Improve the use and collection of sex-disaggregated data and provide robust evidence and research on migrant women, with a particular focus on women migrant workers, including those in the informal economy. Use both quantitative and qualitative methods to better understand their lived experiences including first-hand evidence collected through surveys, focus group discussions and other forms of qualitative interviews.
2. Strengthen the capacity of staff in national statistics offices and/or relevant ministries and departments on the collection, analysis and use of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics on migration.
3. Increase the collection, analysis and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics on violence against migrant women and girls, through a combination of prevalence data, administrative data and qualitative data.
4. Develop knowledge products such as reports, policy briefs, infographics, social media assets and videos to provide information on the situation of migrant women.

### EXAMPLE 2

#### Survey on the situation of migrant women in Niger

In order to address the lack of data in the context of migration in Niger, UN Women and the Institut National de la Statistique du Niger (INS) conducted a study of the situation of women migrating from, to and through Niger, as well as those returning to the country. A survey instrument was piloted between February and June 2022 in the city of Niamey with a sample of 120 migrant women. Based on the lessons learned from this pilot, 1,200 additional women were interviewed in three regions of Niger—Niamey, Zinder and Agadez—to collect quantitative information on their experiences migrating from, into, through and returning to Niger to help design more effective gender-responsive migration programmes and inform policymaking. The findings have been compiled into a report and a guide produced on how to develop surveys on the links between gender and migration.



Photo: MINUSMA/Marco Dormino

# LESSON

# 3



## IMPROVING ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Migrant women and girls often lack information about their rights or entitlements under the law, the challenges they may face on their journey and on arrival, and where and how to access services. As a result, many women migrate without being fully aware of the gender-specific risks and difficulties they may face during the various stages of migration, and how to navigate them. It is critical that women and girls have easy access to information on their rights as well as on the potential gendered risks, such as trafficking in persons, labour exploitation, unethical recruitment practices and sexual and gender-based violence ([see Example 3](#)).



Photo: UNMISS

## KEY TIPS

1. Provide accessible information in simple language and in appropriate formats (e.g. oral, written, electronic) to ensure that migrant women and girls understand their rights and obligations at all stages of migration.
2. Provide gender-responsive information on safe migration through the development and implementation of trainings, outlining the risks and realities of regular and irregular migration and provide orientation sessions on the culture and laws in countries of destination. These trainings must be inclusive, recognizing the gender-specific challenges faced by all migrants.

### EXAMPLE 3

#### UN Women explainer, 'How migration is a gender equality issue?'

As part of the global component of phase one of the Making Migration Safe for Women programme, UN Women produced an interactive explainer which provides an overview of all aspects of migration from a gender perspective. Using infographics and data, this explainer seeks to provide migrant women and other stakeholders with access to clear and helpful information about the benefits, risks and challenges of migration. In doing so, it contributes to Objective 3 of the Global Compact for Migration, 'Provide accurate and timely information at all stages of migration'. The full explainer can be accessed [here](#).



Photo: UN Women/Emad Karim

# LESSON

# 4

## PROMOTING CAPACITY-BUILDING

Developing the capacity of governments, civil society organizations and other relevant partners is an integral part of migration programming to help ensure such stakeholders understand the linkages between gender and migration and the specific vulnerable situations, challenges and needs of migrant women. They will thereby be better equipped to design and implement policies and practices that respond to the needs of migrant women, providing them with access to full and accurate information on safe migration and ensuring they can make informed decisions about how and where to migrate (*see Example 4*).



Photo ID: CK-CO099 World Bank

## KEY TIPS

1. Establish or strengthen partnerships with migrant women's organizations, including by providing them with resources where possible to support them in their work. Where they do not yet exist, support the establishment of migrant women's organizations.
2. Build the capacity of governments and civil society organizations to provide them with the most up-to-date knowledge and information on the gender dimensions of migration, including guidance for integrating a gender-responsive approach into policy and programme delivery.
3. Provide or organize gender-responsive training for officials at borders and ports of entry on recognizing and responding to cases of trauma and abuse, including victims of trafficking and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.



Photo ID: NNS-ID013 World Bank

### EXAMPLE 4

#### Capacity-building of civil society organizations in Niger

Accurate and timely information is essential for safe, orderly and regular migration, allowing people to make informed decisions about whether to migrate and how to do so safely. A study conducted by the International Organization for Migration in Niger showed that many migrant women were unaware of the risks they might face during their journeys, relying almost entirely on information provided by friends, family or other contacts, which may not be accurate or up to date. However, existing awareness campaigns in Niger often fail to address the specific needs of migrant women and girls. To address this gap, UN Women organized a two-day training for civil society organizations on designing advocacy campaigns for the protection of migrant women's rights. As key partners in identifying and reaching out to current and potential migrant women, these trainings provided civil society organizations with the tools needed to organize and conduct awareness-raising campaigns for migrant women, to help ensure they have the information they need for safe migration.

# LESSON

# 5



## ADOPTING A MULTI-STAKEHOLDER APPROACH

Addressing the linkages between gender and migration requires the active involvement of all relevant stakeholders: migrants, civil society organizations, youth, governments, UN entities, academia and faith-based organizations, among others. By working together, different stakeholders play important roles in coming up with innovative solutions to address some of the main challenges related to migration, while at the same time ensuring that women's rights are fully protected and promoted at all stages of migration.



Photo: UN Women/Aurel Obreja

## KEY TIPS

1. Build partnerships across governments, UN agencies and civil society organizations including women's organizations, faith-based organizations, migrant organizations and the private sector, to ensure a comprehensive vision of international migration which firmly integrates a gender perspective.
2. Convene groups of experts from all sectors, including migrants themselves, to exchange knowledge and help bridge gaps among stakeholders. This helps increase the understanding of issues from different perspectives and helps create innovative approaches for promoting a gender perspective in migration policies and programmes (see Example 5).



Photo: MINUSMA/Harandane Dicko

### EXAMPLE 5

#### Expert Meeting on Migrant Women Human Rights Defenders

In November 2021, UN Women, in collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, hosted a multi-stakeholder consultation to explore the complex challenges facing women human rights defenders who work on migration or are migrants themselves. As part of this consultation, a poll was conducted to determine whether UN Women should develop a set of Expert Recommendations to guide UN Member States and other stakeholders on how to effectively protect and promote the rights of migrant women human rights defenders. The results of the poll showed unanimous support for this proposal.

In July 2022, UN Women organized an Expert Meeting in partnership with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants to finalize the *Recommendations on the Protection of Women Human Rights Defenders at Risk in Migration Contexts*. This Expert Meeting brought to the table a diverse group of stakeholders, including migrant women human rights defenders and their organizations, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, and other UN entities, to share knowledge on using international human rights instruments to strengthen the protection of migrant women human rights defenders. The meeting also worked to identify opportunities for greater collaboration among various stakeholders to step up efforts to protect and promote the rights of migrant women human rights defenders and women human rights defenders working with migrants.

# LESSON

# 6

## ALIGNMENT WITH KEY NORMATIVE FRAMEWORKS

Designing migration programmes to align with key normative frameworks ensures the centrality of a gender-responsive and human rights–based approach. The Global Compact for Migration (GCM) is the only internationally agreed framework covering all dimensions of migration and provides a comprehensive framework for the design of effective migration programmes. The Making Migration Safe for Women programme was designed to align with the framework of the GCM and aims to contribute to the successful implementation of the gender-responsive guiding principle in its programme and policy work (see Example 6).



Photo: H6 Partners



## KEY TIPS

1. Design migration programmes in line with the framework of the Global Compact for Migration, including a strong focus on the human rights–based, gender-responsive and child-sensitive guiding principles.
2. In an effort to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls at all stages of migration, programmes should be aligned with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and relevant CEDAW general recommendations, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the fundamental International Labour Organization conventions.
3. Engage civil society and migrants’ organizations, particularly migrant women’s organizations, national human rights institutions and employers’ and workers’ organizations, in the implementation and monitoring of the GCM and relevant conventions at international, regional and national levels. Ensure that a gender perspective is included in the implementation and review of these frameworks.

### EXAMPLE 6

#### **Policies and Practice: A Guide to Gender-Responsive Implementation of the Global Compact for Migration**

Building on the gender-responsive approach outlined in the guiding principles of the GCM, the [policies and practice guide](#) outlines the main needs, challenges and experiences of women, girls and gender-diverse persons at all stages of migration and provides concrete measures that can be taken to address them. It recognizes the ways that gender-based discrimination and structural inequalities can create more vulnerable situations for migrant women and girls and gender-diverse migrants. It takes into consideration the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination they may face while highlighting the positive contributions that all migrants make in countries of origin, transit and destination.



Photo: UNICEF/Tomislav Georgiev

# LESSON

# 7

## CHALLENGING NARRATIVES

Narratives about migrants, especially those in the media, are often fed by racism, xenophobia and gender stereotypes and do not provide an accurate reflection of the experiences of migrants or their contributions to the socioeconomic development of countries of origin, transit and destination. Challenging these biases can be critical in developing a more positive perception of migration and migrants that is grounded in facts rather than falsehoods. There is an urgent need to use data, as well as migrant women's stories and first-hand experiences, to change negative narratives on migration (*see Example 7*).



Photo: UNAMID/ Albert González Farran

## KEY TIPS

1. Prioritize changing the common narrative on migration, including by working with the media on gender-responsive reporting on the situations of migrants and ensuring that migrant women can tell their own stories.
2. Develop targeted campaigns which centre migrant women's experiences and present a holistic picture of migration that includes not only the challenges but also the benefits. Promote a narrative that portrays migrant women as agents and rights holders rather than depicting them through a lens of vulnerability.



### EXAMPLE 7

#### Changing narratives through knowledge products

Throughout phase one, UN Women has produced a range of knowledge products at the global level which seek to show the realities of migration from a gender perspective. In addition to producing an infographic explainer on *How migration is a gender equality issue*, the programme has developed a series of policy briefs which explore understudied areas of migration. The policy brief, *Racially marginalized migrant women: Human rights abuses at the intersection of race, gender and migration*, takes a deep dive into the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination experienced by racially marginalized migrant women. It seeks to expand the reader's understanding of race and gender in migration governance, using case studies and examples to help reframe the narrative. In doing so, it provides policymakers and practitioners with the knowledge needed to improve access to services and human rights protections for women who are marginalized because of their race, gender and migration status.



# CONCLUSION

## APPLYING THESE LESSONS TO FUTURE PROGRAMME DESIGN

At the heart of these lessons learned is a need for greater integration of gender equality principles and women's rights into migration programming. Designing programmes which are built from the ground up by centring the voices and experiences of migrant women helps to ensure that programmes are responsive to migrant women's needs and the specific challenges they face. Commitment and buy-in are also critical, requiring a collaborative effort among all stakeholders – governments, UN entities, civil society and faith-based organizations, and youth leaders.

In line with the Sustainable Development Goals, good and effective migration governance rests on the principles of gender equality and women's rights and empowerment. They are interlinked. Achievements in one area directly affect the others. The Making Migration Safe for Women programme has demonstrated the benefits of designing a migration programme with the achievement of gender equality at its core: migrant women's voices are heard, their organizations are empowered, and policies are strengthened to address their needs and experiences.



**UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION  
DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY  
AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN.  
A GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND  
GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED  
TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON  
MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.**

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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