



International Organization for Migration (IOM)  
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## **Integrating migration and remittances into LDC national and regional development planning, including through a gender perspective**

**A side event by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (UN Women) at the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC-IV) 9 -13 May 2011 - Istanbul, Turkey**

### **Objectives**

- Enhance the delegates' understanding on the positive links between migration and development in the LDC context in relation to remittances, diaspora engagement and transnational migration, including the importance of female migrant remittances
- Highlight, share and discuss good practices related to migration, gender and remittances
- Generate dialogue and concrete recommendations for gender-sensitive policy and programmatic responses that integrate migration, gender and remittances into LDC national and regional development planning
- Identify next steps to disseminate and facilitate scaling up of good practices among relevant stakeholders

### **Background**

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) in collaboration with the Global Migration Section of UN Women is pleased to present a joint side event on Thursday, 12 May at 1:00pm.

Since the implementation of the Brussels Programme for Action for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) for the decade 2001-2010, which contained only sporadic references to migration, increasing interest and attention has been paid to migration over the last decade. The inter-relationships between migration and development have recently been recognized as highly significant for LDCs, particularly in relation to the matter of remittances, diaspora engagement and transnational migration. Today, it is well recognized that migration can provide critical livelihood, educational and other opportunities for individuals and their families, and that the financial and indeed social remittances – such as skills, knowledge and networks – that migrants bring back to their places of origin can be the key to decent education, healthcare and other essential development indicators for individuals, families and even in some cases for whole communities. Tapping into the human capital of skilled emigrants and diaspora members constitutes an important step in promoting development in the LDCs through migration.

As an important source of income for many LDCs and a sizeable share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in LDC economies (for example Haiti (15%), Lesotho (25%) and Nepal (23%))<sup>1</sup>, remittances play a significant role in development particularly by way of income growth and investments in productive enterprises and also in poverty alleviation and reducing inequality. The World Bank estimates that, in 2010, formally transferred remittance flows exceeded \$440 billion<sup>2</sup> - of which developing countries received \$325 billion. This transfer far exceeded the volume of official aid flows, constituted more than 10

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<sup>1</sup>World Bank, *Migration and Remittances Factbook 2011*, Washington DC: The World Bank. Accessed via: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLAC/Resources/Factbook2011-Ebook.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>Ibid



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per cent of GDP in many developing countries and is almost as large as foreign direct investment (FDI) flows to many developing countries. The actual amount of remittances, including unrecorded flows through formal and informal channels, is believed to be significantly larger. It is also noted that remittances tend to be a more predictable and stable source of income than other financial flows.

Women have been, for the most part, invisible in the treatment of international migration and it is often implicitly assumed in research, policy and programmes on the issue that patterns of sending and using remittances are gender-neutral. In reality, however, gender not only influences all facets of the migration process but also affects the amount and frequency of remittances which migrants send home, as well as how the money is used. Available data illustrates that women send a larger proportion of their lower earnings than men – regularly and consistently. Of the more than \$1 billion in remittances sent back to Sri Lanka in 1999, women contributed over 62 per cent of the total. A study in the year 2000 by UN Women and IOM illustrated that Bangladeshi women working in the Middle East sent home on average 72 per cent of their earnings<sup>3</sup>. The same study revealed that 56 per cent of female remittances were used for daily needs, health care or education – a pattern which reflects the spending priorities of female migrant workers elsewhere<sup>4</sup>. Despite this available data, gender-sensitive remittance-related policies are often non-existent in long term national development strategies of the LDCs, they are rarely included in the Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSP) or Common Country Assessments (CCA), United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF), and they have not been systematically factored into the MDGs despite their contribution to development. Existing research underscores the crucial role of female migrant remittances and their potential for a *greater* role in poverty reduction and human development. Against this background, national governments, key regional and global intergovernmental processes like the Global Forum on Migration and Development, the UN and civil society actors need to take account of the gender dimensions of economic and social remittances for more gender sensitive policies and programmes that enhance prospects for maximizing the development benefits of migration.

Instituting appropriate policies requires better information and sex-disaggregated data on remittance flows, usage patterns, transfer mechanisms, as well as acknowledgement of the differences between women and men as senders and recipients of remittances. More fundamentally, policies need to be predicated on the social and economic dimensions of migration and development and the impact on income risks (rather than levels alone), income equality, investments in human capital (for example, education), gender inequality, birth and death rates, ethnic relations, political change, the environment and so on. Among the 48 least developed countries, 12 of them have no data on remittances at all, 31 of them have insufficient data and only 6 countries have relatively complete data available<sup>5</sup>. None of the LDCs have sex-disaggregated data on remittances. To be effective, gender-sensitive migration, development and remittance policies have to be designed and implemented in close collaboration between countries of origin, transit and destination. Such programmes can be implemented at different levels, including local, national, bilateral, regional, global and transnational, in complementary ways.

Other important areas of interest for LDCs regarding migration, gender and development include the importance of engaging diasporas in economic and community development; the impacts of brain drain and mitigation measures through brain circulation; vulnerability of LDCs to the gendered impact of climate change in particular on human mobility, including the risks of displacement and the need for adaptation

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Population Fund (2006) *State of World Population 2006 - A Passage to Hope, Women and International Migration*, p 29. New York: UNFPA. Accessed via: [http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2006/pdf/en\\_sowp06.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2006/pdf/en_sowp06.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. See also IOM (2005) *Dynamics of Remittance Utilization in Bangladesh*, pp. 31-32. IOM Migration Research Series. No. 18. Geneva: IOM.



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measures; and issues related to population movements in the context of national recovery strategies in post conflict, peace-building and recovery settings, including the role of women in governance, conflict resolution, and consolidation of peace and security.

The high vulnerability and low coping capacity of LDCs in relation to external shocks is probably best illustrated by the impact of natural hazards, climate change and food crises. Given the high proportion of poor and rural populations in LDCs, environmental degradation and its effects on food and water security threaten the sustainability of livelihoods and human security of populations in some of the poorest and most vulnerable countries. In disasters such as these, remittances can play an important part in how people survive and recover. However, humanitarian actors rarely consider remittances in assessments and response design. Remittances are often of great importance following disasters, as they represent a relatively stable form of income which usually increases in times of crisis and directly contributes to household income. For example, increasing remittance flows in Bangladesh have become a key element in the economy's resilience to monsoon floods.

In this age of globalization and unprecedented mobility, maximizing the positive relationship between migration and development is especially relevant for the LDCs. The 'feminization of migration' represents one of the most significant trends in recent international migration. It influences the shaping of gender roles and affects relationships between men, women and families in countries of origin as well as of destination. Migration presents opportunities for some women through education, work experience, exposure to new societies and cultures and economic independence which can release women from traditional gender roles and enable them to exercise their rights more effectively in the family, their communities in the country of origin and destination, and the workplace. However, the costs of migration must also be considered, especially for female migrant workers employed in the informal sector, including domestic and other care workers who are at a higher risk of human rights violations such as trafficking and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) as well as denial of labour rights. This is of great consequence and requires prompt action. Protecting and empowering female migrant workers thus promotes gender equality, upholds human dignity and basic human rights, and helps ensure human development and good governance.