

POLICYBRIEF

May, 2024

Towards Gender-Responsive Migration Governance

Tess Pilkington

Policy Recommendations:

- The perspectives and inputs of migrant communities and organizations should be supported and included in international governance processes.
- Sex-disaggregated data should be collected uniformly across countries and gender-based analyses should be integrated more systematically into policy cycles.
- National gender-related migration policies need to be aligned at the provincial level to ensure people of diverse genders at the grassroots level can access sufficient support and resources.
- Existing legislation, policies, and indexes should be leveraged to strengthen global migration governance legal frameworks and processes.
- Transparency and accountability processes should be implemented to ensure progress is made on the gender-responsive migration governance implementation process.

Introduction

Although gender affects all migrants at all stages of the migration process, it often has specific implications for women and girls, as well as marginalized groups such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTQIA+) persons. Deeply entrenched gender inequalities, which manifest in gender-specific forms of discrimination, such as access to education, decent work, social protection, and sexual and gender-based violence, are all major drivers of migration.

For many women, migration can be a positive experience leading to a better life, enhancing their livelihood opportunities, autonomy, and empowerment. However, along the migration route, women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people can be exposed to serious violations of their human rights, and for many these violations do not stop once they arrive in their places of destination. In destination locations, labour markets are often highly segregated and grant women limited access to information, decision-making power, and control over resources. This makes migration a gender equality issue.¹

¹ “How Migration is a Gender Equality Issue,” *UN Women*, last accessed on 26 April 2024, <https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/explainer/migration/en/index.html>.

The international community increasingly acknowledges the importance of gender-responsive migration governance that is not only gender sensitive in policy but also in practice. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) recognizes the different forms that gender-responsive migration governance might assume.² For example, taking into account gender at all levels of governance and all stages of migration; responding to the different realities of migrants by promoting and protecting their human rights; ensuring that laws, policies, programmes, and services recognize and address the specific needs, challenges, and situations facing migrants as a result of intersectional inequalities; and promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

This policy brief presents the findings of a roundtable discussion, organized by UNU-CPR in collaboration with UN Women³ and the Migration for Development and Equality (MIDEQ) Hub.⁴ The roundtable convened UN agencies, academics, international organizations, and civil society, in order to facilitate the exchange of best practices, resources, and guidance, focusing on mainstreaming a gender perspective in migration governance, particularly in the context of implementing the GCM.⁵ Discussions were guided by several key questions: How can data and evidence contribute to supporting gender-responsive migration governance? What specific measures can governments, international organizations, and stakeholders, including civil society, adopt to ensure that migration governance is attuned to gender considerations? In what ways can partnerships be cultivated and strengthened to enhance the implementation of these goals? Moreover, what actions are imperative to ensure that the GCM effectively contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a specific emphasis on SDG 5, which pertains to gender equality?

Strengthening Migration Data

Disaggregated data can reveal underlying migration patterns and trends, potentially bolstering practical laws, policies, programmes, services, and factual statements.⁶ Sex disaggregated data can help policymakers and practitioners better understand gender-related vulnerabilities during the migration process and how gender shapes migratory labour market experiences, including job opportunities, sector involvement, and working conditions. Sex disaggregated data also aids in dispelling harmful gender stereotypes which feed into the framing and narratives we associate with gender in migration. Tracking women's decisions to migrate recognizes women's agency, autonomy, and resilience, and can help dispel the oversimplified narrative of women as victims of migration.⁷ A more nuanced understanding facilitates the development of inclusive government policies and programmes that optimize labour migration.

While the practice of collecting data, particularly for women, remains sporadic, there are initiatives underway that can guide future efforts. The UN Women project, "Making Migration Safe for Women," for instance, interviewed more than 12,000 migrant women in three different regions of Niger on their migration experiences to, from, and through the country. It revealed that many women migrants lacked "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."⁸ In Ghana, where there is a significant Chinese migrant population, the MIDEQ Hub interviewed 1,200 migrants and found that the drivers of migration for both men and women were predominantly economic, and that inter-marriage between Chinese and Ghanaians acted as a key mechanism for navigating labour rules and regulations for business success.⁹ These findings were incorporated into the MIDEQ Hub's Gender Impact Preassessment which trains stakeholders to anticipate the impact of gender in migration in Ghana and serves as a model for other migration corridors.¹⁰

2 United Nations General Assembly, "Resolution Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, adopted by the General Assembly at the 73/195 meeting," United Nations, 11 January 2019, A/RES/73/195. See: <https://www.iom.int/resources/global-compact-safe-orderly-and-regular-migration/res/73/195>.

3 UN Women is the global champion for gender equality, working to develop and uphold standards and create an environment in which every woman and girl can exercise her human rights and live up to her full potential. See: <https://www.unwomen.org/en>.

4 Funded by the UKRI Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) (Grant Reference: ES/S007415/1), MIDEQ unpacks the complex and multi-dimensional relationships between migration and inequality in the context of the Global South. See: www.mideq.org.

5 The fifth event in a series of migration policy roundtables, "Towards Gender Responsive Migration Governance" was organized by UNU-CPR in partnership with UN Women and the MIDEQ Hub. Speakers included Heaven Crawley (UNU-CPR and MIDEQ Hub), Seemin Qayum (UN Women), Meena Poudel (MIDEQ), Jenna Henneby (Wilfrid Laurier University), Mary Setrana (MIDEQ Hub), and Felipe González Morales (UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants). Watch the recording here: <https://youtu.be/GF5YrR5fF2k?si=tDyMmF4dQesiT5lu>.

6 Guy Abel, *Gender and Migration Data* (KNOMAD Paper, 2022). Accessible at: https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/knomad_paper_44_gender_and_migration_g.abel_oct_2022_1.pdf.

7 "Gender and Migration," *Migration Data Portal*, last accessed on 26 April 2024, <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/gender-and-migration>.

8 Economic Empowerment Section UN Women, *Strengthening Migration Programming from a Gender Perspective: Lessons Learned* (UN Women, 2023). Accessible at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Strengthening-migration-programming-from-a-gender-perspective-Lessons-learned-en.pdf>.

9 United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and the MIDEQ Hub, *Migration and Inequality in the Global South: Evidence from the MIDEQ Hub* (Geneva: UNRISD, 2023), p. 8. Accessible at: <https://cdn.unrisd.org/assets/library/reports/2023/mideq-policy-report-2023.pdf>.

10 MIDEQ Hub Gender Preassessment.

Canada is actively addressing the gender data gap in alignment with its commitment to gender equality, leveraging tools such as the Gender Results Framework (GRF),¹¹ which tracks Canada's progress on advancing gender equality over six key indicators, and the Gender-Based Analysis (GBA+) framework.¹² Statistics Canada has advanced the field by establishing new standards concerning sex and gender variables and classifications.¹³ Furthermore, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has embraced progressive practices, exemplified by the introduction of gender self-identification on passports, reflecting a commitment to capturing a more nuanced understanding of gender identities within migration data.¹⁴ Together, these initiatives provide a systematic process for integrating gender-based analysis into the policy cycle.¹⁵

It was clear from the discussion that collecting sex disaggregated data should be mainstreamed into national statistical strategies to fill the gender data gap and better inform analysis of the influence and role of gender at every stage of the migration process. Achieving uniformity in data measurement processes across States, such as ensuring that States include temporary migrants and detainees in their data collection, is also important for gathering accurate migration data. Addressing these disparities necessitates incorporating the perspectives of migrant women into the data collection process. It also necessitates complementing data collection with comprehensive research models to give due consideration to migrant perspectives.

Societal Structural Barriers and Limitations Impacting Migrants: The Case of Nepal

Evidence presented at the roundtable suggests that States can be responsible for creating or allowing heightened vulnerability and violence for migrant women by denying them access to safe and legal migration routes.¹⁶ In Nepal, for instance, women continue to grapple with systemic challenges in obtaining citizenship and national identity cards, a process that still man-

dates the involvement of men. While numerous institutions exist to facilitate migration in Nepal, their predominant focus on formal channels renders them largely inaccessible to women. This structural bias has a discernible gendered impact, perpetuating a system whereby women encounter barriers to accessing available resources and support. Most notably, women seeking to migrate increasingly turn to alternative, often informal migration routes via India. Acknowledging and studying structural issues such as these is crucial to developing effective interventions and dismantling barriers that perpetuate cycles of vulnerability for migrant women.

Participants heard that there is a crucial need for systemic alignment at the provincial level. The Government of Nepal's fifteenth national five-year plan (2019/20–2023/24) demonstrates an awareness of gender- and migration-related issues within the GCM and SDGs.¹⁷ However, the existing structure is highly centralized, lacking effective dissemination to provincial or local levels. This centralized approach poses a significant challenge since policies fail to reach and address the nuanced needs of communities at the grassroots level. The current system calls for a more decentralized and inclusive approach.

Translating Policy into Effective Practice to Optimize Gender-Responsive Global Governance

Speakers at the roundtable identified several ways that gender-responsive migration policy can effectively be translated into practice:

Involve all stakeholders to develop inclusive gender-responsive migration governance: The GCM underscores the need to adopt comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approaches to address migration challenges and enhance migration governance.¹⁸ Such a framework incorporates migrant networks and diasporas, local communities, civil society, civic and human rights organizations, academia, the private sector, government actors, and the media.

11 "Gender Results Framework," *Government of Canada*, last accessed on 26 April 2024, <https://women-gender-equality.canada.ca/en/gender-results-framework.html>.

12 "Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus)," *Government of Canada*, last accessed on 26 April 2024, <https://women-gender-equality.canada.ca/en/gender-based-analysis-plus.html>.

13 "Immigration and ethnocultural diversity statistics," *Statistics Canada*, last accessed on 26 April 2024, https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/subjects-start/immigration_and_ethnocultural_diversity.

14 "IRCC Sex and Gender Client Identifier Policy," *Government of Canada*, last accessed on 26 April 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/identity-management/naming-procedures/sex-gender-policy.html>.

15 Dr. Jenna L. Henneby, PhD, "Raising the Bar: Measuring Progress on Gender-Responsive Migration Governance." Accessible at: <https://unu.edu/media/10948>.

16 UNRISD and the MIDEQ Hub, *Migration and Inequality in the Global South: Evidence from the MIDEQ Hub* (Geneva: UNRISD, 2023), p. 8. Accessible at: <https://cdn.unrisd.org/assets/library/reports/2023/mideq-policy-report-2023.pdf>.

17 *The Fifteenth Plan: (Fiscal Year 2019/20 - 2023/24)* (Singhadurbar, Kathmandu: Government of Nepal National Planning Commission, 2020). Accessible at: https://www.npc.gov.np/images/category/15th_plan_English_Version.pdf.

18 United Nations General Assembly, "Resolution Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, adopted by the General Assembly at the 73/195 meeting," *United Nations*, 11 January 2019, A/RES/73/195, p. 6. Accessible at: <https://www.iom.int/resources/global-compact-safe-orderly-and-regular-migration/res/73/195>.

A more effective mechanism is essential to amplify the voices of migrants in policy discussions: Financial resources are crucial to facilitate this, particularly at the local and regional levels. Mobilizing migrant women’s organizations becomes imperative, necessitating support to gather, mobilize, and obtain the necessary resources for advocacy and policy initiatives. Shrinking the gap between migrant communities and governing bodies through inclusion in international governance processes and meetings can facilitate direct communication between migrants and migration governance actors.¹⁹

Political will is needed to translate the commitments made by governments into effective implementation: UNU-CPR is actively engaging in research alongside the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to explore strategies for mobilizing political will and bridging the gap between formal endorsement and practical execution.²⁰ This collaborative research effort focuses on political economy contexts in low- and middle-income countries, where more than 70 per cent of refugees and internally displaced persons reside, and examines how political will shapes development and peace responses in these settings. The latest output of this initiative takes the form of a policy paper which offers six indicators to observe and measure the commitment of stakeholders to initiate and sustain actions over time. Accurately measuring governments’ political will to fulfill their commitments in enhancing migration policy is necessary for holding them accountable.

Leverage current legislation and policies to enhance implementation: Leveraging existing legislation, policies, and indexes would strengthen the global legal framework and processes on migration governance. Existing international agreements can overlap or complement each other, and therefore can enhance migration policy and practice when jointly considered. Meanwhile, distinct legislation and policies can cater to the diverse experiences and needs of migrants and should be implemented in conjunction to provide comprehensive support.

UN Women’s online tool, “Policies and Practice Guide to Gender-Responsive Implementation of the Global Compact for Migration,” serves as an extension of the GCM, providing specific policies and practices aligned with all 23 objectives that shed light on the unique experiences of women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals while underscoring their heightened vulnerability to human rights violations.²¹ Leveraging international agreements like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the GCM’s Objective 10 to prevent, combat, and eradicate trafficking in persons in the context of international migration,²² ILO Convention 189 on the rights and contributions of domestic workers to the global economy,²³ and ILO Convention 190²⁴ on violence and harassment are all fundamental to building an international web of effective legal strategies and functions.

Improve access to information for migrants: Interactive resources and outreach programmes should be implemented to improve migrants’ access to information on the benefits, risks, and challenges of migration as well as their human rights at all stages of the migration process.

To provide migrant women and people of diverse genders in Niger access to information about the benefits, risks, and challenges of migration from a gender perspective, UN Women created an interactive online explainer tool, “How Migration is a Gender Equality Issue,” which utilizes clear infographics, data, and explanations.^{25,26} In doing so, it contributes to Objective 3 of the GCM, “Provide accurate and timely information at all stages of migration.”²⁷

19 The Center for Migration, Gender, and Justice (CMGJ) is a migrant-, women-, and youth-led non-profit NGO that addresses human rights at the intersection of migration and gender through research, advocacy, and education. See: <https://www.migrationgenderjustice.com/>.

20 UNU-CPR Project, “Development and Peace Responses to Forced Displacement: The Role of Political Will.” See: <https://unu.edu/cpr/project/development-and-peace-responses-forced-displacement-role-political-will>.

21 “Policies and Practice,” *UN Women*, last accessed on 26 April 2024, <https://ppguide.unwomen.org/>.

22 United Nations General Assembly, “Resolution Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, adopted by the General Assembly at the 73/195 meeting,” *United Nations*, 11 January 2019, A/RES/73/195, p. 18. See: <https://www.iom.int/resources/global-compact-safe-orderly-and-regular-migration/res/73/195>.

23 ILO, Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). See: https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C189#:text=Recognizing%20the%20significant%20contribution%20of%20and%20substantial%20income%20transfers%20within.

24 ILO, Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190). See: https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C190.

25 “How Migration is a Gender Equality Issue,” *UN Women*, last accessed on 26 April 2024, <https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/explainer/migration/en/index.html>.

26 Economic Empowerment Section UN Women, *Strengthening Migration Programming from a Gender Perspective: Lessons Learned* (UN Women, 2023). Accessible at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Strengthening-migration-programming-from-a-gender-perspective-Lessons-learned-en.pdf>.

27 United Nations General Assembly, “Resolution Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, adopted by the General Assembly at the 73/195 meeting,” *United Nations*, 2019, A/RES/73/195. See: <https://www.iom.int/resources/global-compact-safe-orderly-and-regular-migration/res/73/195>.

Collaborate with communities to bolster their capabilities and cultivate partnerships to facilitate more effective gender-responsive migration governance:

Engaging migrant communities in collaborative workshops that embrace local customs, such as dance, serves a dual purpose: it enriches migration governance by deepening insights into migrant experiences and perspectives while also empowering the most marginalized voices.²⁸ By enhancing accessibility to supportive migrant hubs and forging stronger institutional partnerships, migration resources become more readily available. The University of Ghana's Centre for Migration Studies (CMS) exemplifies this approach, offering free walk-in support to migrants bolstered by a rich network of national and international partnerships.²⁹

For data to serve as a tool for both governments and civil society, transparency and accountability must be ensured:

The CMS plays a crucial role in the Labour Migration Working Group in Ghana. Following the MIDEQ Hub's study on the China-Ghana migration corridor, CMS is responsible for reporting on gender-related initiatives. This includes ensuring that the labour department oversees recruitment agencies effectively by incorporating migrant voices, educating workers about their rights, and monitoring agency activities closely. Quarterly meetings track progress and document data on sensitization programmes by recruitment agencies, holding governments accountable for gender-responsive actions and promoting gender-responsiveness within labour migration frameworks.

Transformative data approaches should permeate the entire policy cycle, guiding decisions at every stage and influencing policy modifications, to unveil structural causes of gender discrimination:

Measuring progress in gender-responsive migration policy and GCM implementation necessitates establishing clear benchmarks for gender-responsiveness. These indicators should align with a global gender equity agenda – linking these indicators to various SDGs fortifies their interconnectedness. Existing indicators that function beyond UN agencies, such as the Gender Equality Index³⁰ and the Gender-Migration Index,³¹ should be leveraged to encompass diverse gender in migration perspectives. Most importantly, the inclusion of the voices of migrant women is central to this process.

Systemic-level metrics are needed that go beyond isolated initiatives and measure comprehensive, system change:

To align our efforts effectively, we must strive for gender equality goals and aim for outcomes that extend beyond the GCM. Notably, the GCM tends to overlook aspects such as sexual reproductive health rights and LGBTQIA+ rights. Scrutinizing trends such as the increasing participation of women in migration with permanent status and their access to sexual and reproductive health rights can allow us to assess the effectiveness of systemic transformations and the realization of gender-inclusive migration objectives.

About the Author: Tess Pilkington is Policy Communications Associate at UNU-CPR.

Acknowledgements: The Author gratefully acknowledges guidance from Heaven Crawley and comments from Jack Durrell.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the United Nations University.

ISBN: 978-92-808-6630-8 © United Nations University 2024.

All content (text, visualizations, graphics), except where otherwise specified or attributed, is published under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike IGO license (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO). Using, reposting, and citing this content is allowed without prior permission.

Citation: Tess Pilkington, "Towards Gender-Responsive Migration Governance," *UNU-CPR Policy Brief* (New York: United Nations University, 2024).

28 MIDEQ Hub Gender Preassessment.

29 The Centre for Migration Studies (CMS) at the University of Ghana undertakes migration research, teaching, training, capacity building, policy assessment, development, and dissemination. CMS is the only centre of its kind in the West African sub-region and is a regional leader in learning, teaching, and research related to migration. See: <https://cms.ug.edu.gh/>.

30 "Gender Equality Index," *European Institute for Gender Equality*, last accessed on 26 April 2024, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2023>.

31 "Gender-Migration Index," *Center for Migration Gender and Justice*, last accessed on 26 April 2024, <https://www.migrationgenderjustice.com/gmi>.