

Protecting and empowering women migrant workers promotes gender equality, upholds basic human rights, human development, and principles of good governance.

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International migration for work is becoming a long term feature of the Asian region in the recent context of globalization. There are several demand and supply related reasons for this.

on the *demand* side:

- ❖ integration of global and regional economies and markets through liberalized trade and investment flows;
- ❖ demographic factors such as lower birth rates, ageing, a static or declining workforce in high income countries, accompanied by rapid labour force growth in low income countries;
- ❖ local labour in richer countries of employment being recruited into better jobs and avoiding low end jobs even during economic downturns. This creates a demand for overseas workers in these sectors;
- ❖ a booming immigration industry and informal social networks that facilitate and sustain migration flows;
- ❖ cheap labour of overseas workers contributing to economy of countries of employment.

on the *supply* side:

- ❖ increasing economic inequities between labour short, high income countries and labour surplus, low income countries and within the latter;
- ❖ the use of remittances by countries of origin for economic development.

A new feature of international migration for work is the increase in the numbers of overseas women migrant workers, which in countries like the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka exceed the numbers of male migrants. While women overseas migrant workers are recruited into both skilled and unskilled jobs, the majority are concentrated in low status jobs at the lower end of the job hierarchy, where they suffer abuse. Women as human beings have human rights. Gender discrimination against women and girls is a fundamental denial of human rights. Such discrimination is both a cause of migration to meet survival needs and a consequence of rights violations throughout the migration process.

Poor and unskilled overseas migrant workers – women and men - face many similar types of problems throughout the migration process. But women migrant workers experience these in a qualitatively different way from men, and are often at a greater disadvantage. There are also some abuses perpetrated only or more commonly against women. Women are therefore disproportionately disadvantaged, despite their substantive contribution. This is grounded in their more marginalized position

in society and the impact of gender stereotypes. Further, poor and unskilled women migrant workers are in many respects at a greater disadvantage than professional women migrant workers. Interventions that do not take account of and address these differences, disempower women, especially poor women migrant workers.

Continued discrimination, violence and exploitation of women migrant workers thwarts human development. It is a drain on economic resources, productivity and economic growth. It contravenes principles of good governance. Protecting and Empowering women migrant workers thus promotes gender equality, upholds basic human rights, ensures human development and good governance.

As practitioners – governments, UN agencies, international organizations, donor agencies, NGOs, community-based organizations, policy oriented academic and research institutions – we are all committed to responding to the concerns of women migrant workers. This briefing kit seeks to fortify that commitment.

This kit is specifically *intended*:

- ✱ to enhance awareness and understanding of the vulnerabilities of overseas women migrant workers to discrimination, exploitation and abuse, throughout the migration process;
- ✱ to enhance an understanding of overseas women migrant workers not just as victims, but as survivors and a productive force;
- ✱ to promote policies, legislation and programmes that prevent abuse and protect and empower women migrant workers;
- ✱ to enrich an understanding of why and how prevention of discrimination and abuse of overseas women migrant workers should be addressed as issues:
 - promoting gender equality and ending all forms of discrimination, racism and xenophobia;
 - upholding basic human rights;
 - ensuring sustainable development and principles of good governance.