



---

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Committee on Emerging Social Issues

Second session  
1-3 November 2005  
Bangkok

**SOCIALLY VULNERABLE GROUPS: SELECTED ISSUES: EXAMINING  
PROGRESS TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT: NEW TRENDS AND CHALLENGES**

(Item 5 (d) of the provisional agenda)

*Note by the secretariat*

**SUMMARY**

The present document addresses the recognition by the Commission at its sixty-first session of the challenges in achieving gender equality and the advancement of women in the region and its request that the secretariat assist the member Governments in their endeavours towards full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and other internationally agreed development goals.

The document examines the interrelationships between poverty, development and migration from a gender perspective. Both the causes and the consequences of women's escalating mobility within and between countries are analysed. The strategic importance of regional and subregional cooperation and agreements which allow expansion of the space for regular female migration as well as protection of potential victims of trafficking in women is discussed.

It is proposed that ESCAP members and associate members give increased attention to the gender aspects of the trade, migration and development nexus, the movement of people as a result of conflicts and the incorporation of gender perspectives into all areas of United Nations work related to peace and security, in line with the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) of 31 October 2000 relating to women, international peace and security.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Introduction .....	1
I.    THE BEIJING +10 REVIEW .....	1
II.   MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND GENDER EQUALITY IN THE ESCAP REGION .....	4
III.  THE NEW IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION THROUGH A GENDER LENS .....	7
A.  The gender-specific causes and consequences of international migration .....	7
B.  Overlooked costs and benefits from migration .....	8
C.  Cooperation through trade regulations .....	9
D.  Migration in Central Asia .....	9
IV.  BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL COOPERATION AGAINST TRAFFICKING .....	10
V.   INTERNAL MIGRATION THROUGH A GENDER LENS .....	12
A.  Gender-specific reasons and outcomes of internal rural-rural and rural-urban migration .....	13
B.  Major challenges of internal migration for official statistics and for realization of the Millennium Development Goals .....	15
VI.  WOMEN’S MIGRATION, POVERTY AND DEVELOPMENT .....	15
VII. CONCLUSIONS .....	16

## **Introduction**

1. During the past year, the Asian and Pacific region has witnessed the reaffirmation of the commitment to promote women's empowerment and achieve gender equality at the highest level of policymaking. As reported at the first session of the Subcommittee on Socially Vulnerable Groups, held in Bangkok from 13 to 15 September 2004, the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and Its Regional and Global Outcomes was held in Bangkok from 7 to 10 September 2004, and adopted the Bangkok Communiqué as the region's proclamation to the international community of its commitment to promote women's empowerment and achieve gender equality.

2. The four other regional commissions of the United Nations, the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Economic Commission for Europe, also organized a regional review and appraisal. Together with their outcomes, the outcome of the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting, including the Bangkok Communiqué, served as the inputs into the global review and appraisal processes. The global review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, also known as the Beijing+10 review, was carried out by the Commission on the Status of Women (one of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council) at its forty-ninth session held in New York in February-March 2005. The two-week meeting reviewed the progress made since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 10 years earlier and underscored the need for Governments to do more to achieve gender equality and facilitate the advancement of women. The Declaration adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women was the outcome of the meeting. It reaffirmed the commitments made in Beijing and called for further action from Governments for full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

### **I. THE BEIJING +10 REVIEW**

3. The global review and appraisal in February-March 2005 was attended by approximately 80 ministers, over 1,800 government representatives from 165 countries, and more than 2,600 representatives of civil society organizations from all regions of the world. This extraordinary level of participation clearly signalled the large amount of interest in and high expectations related to the 10-year review. A side event to highlight the perspectives of the Asian and Pacific region was organized during the meeting and attracted the attention of delegations from all over the world. An information kit containing a review of the status of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the Asian and Pacific region and the Bangkok Communiqué were distributed to the delegations, making available to the rest of the international community the best practices and lessons learned in the Asian and Pacific region. One issue highlighted at the ESCAP side event was the situation of women in international trade and migration.

4. Delegations attending the global review and appraisal welcomed the progress that had been made in the status of the world's women over the last decade. Improvements in girls' education, the economic advancement of women and increased political participation, as well as reforms to eliminate discriminatory laws, were among the areas in which notable progress had been made. The experiences of the Asian and Pacific region were rather similar, in that the region has achieved considerable progress in ensuring the access of women and girls to education and health services, harmonizing international and domestic laws and instituting special mechanisms in government to promote women's advancement and gender equality. Best practices and experiences were shared during the discussions held at the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. During that session, innovative ways of promoting gender equality, ranging from appointing high-level commissioners on gender issues and establishing interdepartmental taskforces to organizing women's caucuses and campaigns to encourage greater participation in decision-making, were recommended. The consensus that empowering women was one of the most effective tools for development and poverty reduction was reiterated.

5. However, the Commission on the Status of Women also acknowledged that gender equality was far from a reality in most of the countries in the world. Ten years after Beijing, the global review and appraisal alerted the international community to the many areas in which women's equality was still not a reality. Those include the continuing high rates of violence against women, including in armed conflict, the increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS among women, gender inequality in employment, and lack of sexual and reproductive health rights and of equal access under the law to land and property. The Asian and Pacific region shares these challenges. The Bangkok Communiqué recounted the region's gaps and challenges and called for further action to:

- Combat the continuing violation of human rights and all forms of discrimination against women and girls
- Strengthen national machineries and mechanisms for the advancement of women and gender equality
- Develop gender-sensitive indicators and sex-disaggregated statistics
- Forge close cooperation and partnership with stakeholders
- Create an enabling environment to support policies and affirmative action programmes to ensure women's access to economic resources and opportunities, education and health
- Increase the accessibility, availability, affordability and quality of reproductive health services, especially for poor, young and marginalized women
- Reduce the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS
- Promote gender mainstreaming as a systematic approach to ensure the gender-responsive implementation of policies and plans to be institutionalized

- Address the negative impacts of globalization and trade liberalization, such as job insecurity and violations of labour rights
- Provide adequate social and legislative protection to vulnerable women
- Reduce and alleviate poverty
- Support and recognize community and independent media to counter the negative and stereotypical portrayal of women and girls
- Protect women and children in situations arising from militarism, war and armed conflict, and in particular, from the use of rape and sexual violence and hostage-taking as a strategy of war
- Mainstream women in environmental decision-making at all levels in the context of environmental degradation, pollution and climate change and their impact on gender relations

6. Both the global and the regional review processes called for further attention to be paid to women's role in conflict resolution and the peace process. With the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) relating to women, international peace and security, on 31 October 2000, and the agreed conclusions on women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and resolution and in post-conflict peacebuilding, adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-ninth session in February-March 2005, countries have increasingly recognized the positive impact of women's proactive involvement in conflict prevention and post-conflict improvements in governance for development and reconciliation. Furthermore, the development dimension of conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, in particular the contribution of women in those processes, has been highlighted as a critical element of capacity development for successful poverty reduction measures.

7. As part of the global review and appraisal processes, the United Nations launched a new publication entitled, *2004 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women and International Migration*.<sup>1</sup> The publication suggests that women have always constituted a significant portion of the world's migrants, but what has changed is the scale of the migration and the entry of women into migration streams that had previously been predominantly male. The last four decades have seen steady growth in the numbers of international migrants, to an estimated 175 million in 2000, up from an estimated 75 million in 1960. While some migration is global in scope, significant levels of immigration occur within the same region. According to the *World Survey*, in South-East Asia, considerable migration takes place from Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand to Hong Kong, China, Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan Province of China. In South Asia, there is continuing migration

---

<sup>1</sup> United Nations publication, Sales No. E.04.IV.4.

from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar and Nepal to India. It is estimated that in 2000, there were almost 19 million female migrants in Asia.<sup>2</sup>

8. Following the regional and global review and appraisal process, the Commission, at its sixty-first session, recognized those challenges and demonstrated its reaffirmation to promote women's empowerment and achieve gender equality in line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as other internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, by adopting resolution 61/10 on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. In that resolution, the Commission emphasized that women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming could make an important contribution to the development process as a whole. The adoption of the resolution demonstrated the Commission's commitment to undertake further action to fully and effectively implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, and promote gender mainstreaming as a strategy to achieve gender equality, including the strengthening of institutional mechanisms that work towards the advancement of women and gender equality. The Commission recommended a coordinated approach to formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, especially in the context of poverty reduction, to promote gender equality, and called for the full and equal participation of women in such processes for achieving sustainable development. Issues of importance that were underscored in the resolution included the rights and welfare of women migrant workers, trafficking in women, women's economic empowerment, women's role in disaster management, and the impacts of globalization on women. Furthermore, the secretariat was requested to continue to promote the implementation of the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, and to mainstream gender assessments into all programmes in order to promote the participation of women in economic, social and political decision-making. The secretariat will prepare a report on the implementation of the resolution for submission to the Commission at its sixty-second session.

## **II. MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND GENDER EQUALITY IN THE ESCAP REGION**

9. The Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals have opened a new door for the advancement of gender equality. They recognized that meaningful and sustainable reductions in poverty levels could not be achieved without acknowledging the prevailing social structure in which women are systematically marginalized and disadvantaged. The Goals have become the centrepiece of a common agenda embraced by various development partners, including Governments and the development assistance community. The vision articulated in the Millennium Declaration, the urgent need for holistic and integrated approaches to poverty reduction, is supported

---

<sup>2</sup> 2004 *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women and International Migration* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.04.IV.4), p. 10.

by the concrete, time-bound and measurable goals, targets and indicators. It also communicates to all stakeholders that gender inequalities are closely intertwined with every development challenge that the Goals are attempting to address. While a number of specific goals have more obvious relevance to gender equality, such as Goal 2, Achieve universal primary education, Goal 3, Promote gender equality and empower women, and Goal 5, Improve maternal health, the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals underscore the reasons why the other five goals will not be achieved successfully without gender equality. The following brief analysis of selected indicators directly related to women's empowerment and gender equality for the Asian and Pacific region illustrates some of the challenges faced by the region.

10. In comparison with other parts of the world, the Asian and Pacific region has improved markedly, particularly in regard to girls' access to education. One indicator to assess the progress made towards achieving Goal 2 is the net enrolment ratio in primary education. Yet, closer examination of the statistics shows that certain countries or subregions in Asia have much work ahead of them as education enrolment rates for girls are noticeably lower than for boys. For instance, in 2001-2002, primary net enrolment ratios were 73.0 and 85.3 in South Asia, while in West Asia they were 77.7 and 87.9, for girls and boys respectively.<sup>3</sup> Low enrolment rates exacerbated by the gendered, unequal access to education are evident in sub-Saharan Africa, with girls having a ratio of 58.5 and boys 65.8. In contrast, the Latin American and Caribbean region boasts net rates for girls and boys of 95.9 and 95.6.

11. It is important to note that primary enrolment rates do not ensure that children will complete primary school. Thus, there are other indicators to monitor how effective educational systems are in keeping children in school: the proportion reaching grade 5 and the primary completion rate. Again, primary education completion rates indicate that the gender gap is most prominent in South and West Asia as well as in sub-Saharan Africa.

12. Education is a continuous process; it does not stop at primary education or basic literacy levels. Thus, it is essential to look at other indicators, such as the ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education and the ratio of literate women to men aged 15-24. These indicators are tied to Millennium Development Goal 3, which has as its specific target to "eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015". With these gender-sensitive indicators, the educational landscape in Asia and the Pacific becomes very complex. For instance, while the region overall recorded an increase in adult literacy from 80 per cent in 1990 to 86 per cent in 2000, the majority of the illiterate population were

---

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, 1990-2005", table 2 (source: United Nations Statistics Division, "World and regional trends", Millennium Indicators Database, [http://millenniumindicators.un.org/unsd/mi/mi\\_goals.asp](http://millenniumindicators.un.org/unsd/mi/mi_goals.asp) (accessed August 2005)).

still women, according to a report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.<sup>4</sup>

13. At the subregional levels, while South-East and East Asia have made significant advances in lowering female illiteracy rates, illiteracy among women is still pervasive in South Asia. In West Asia, women's literacy rate in the Islamic Republic of Iran is 79.74 per cent. In the Pacific, specifically Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, girls' enrolment rates drop after a couple of years of school. Maldives has made great strides, with high literacy rates for girls, but unfortunately they cannot continue to tertiary education owing to the lack of higher educational institutions. In Central Asia, although the institutional infrastructure exists, girls' enrolment rates have been on the decline starting in 1991, and it has the highest dropout rates in the region. The exception is Armenia, registering gender parity at primary and secondary levels of education.<sup>5</sup>

14. The participation of women in the labour force historically has also been high in the Asian and Pacific region. However, recent International Labour Organization (ILO) statistics captured a drop in the percentage of women wage employment in the non-agricultural sector between 1990 and 2003 in some countries in North and Central Asia. In general, women still have a smaller share of paying jobs than men, and more women than men work in low-status jobs. Equally worrying figures were estimated by ILO, indicating that the youth unemployment rate (aged 15-24) for women is significantly higher than that of men in a number of countries in the region.

15. When it comes to the political empowerment of women, the Asian and Pacific region has a considerable amount of work ahead. According to the Interparliamentary Union, the number of parliamentary seats occupied by women is alarmingly lower than that of men in all subregions of the region. Some progress has been made at the local government level, particularly in South Asia, in terms of the representation of women. However, the quality of their participation in decision-making processes needs to be closely examined.

16. The prevalence of HIV in the Asian and Pacific region increased between 1990 and 2004. As the AIDS epidemic worsens, more girls and women are infected. The share of women in the HIV-positive population in Asia increased from just over 10 per cent to almost 30 per cent between 1995 and 2004.<sup>6</sup> For physiological reasons, and because they typically lack power in sexual relations with men, women and girls are more vulnerable to HIV infection.

---

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO, *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2003/4* (Paris, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> ESCAP, *Partnerships Moving Beijing Forward: Advancing the Status of Women in Asia and the Pacific: A profile of the ESCAP Region* (Bangkok, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2005* (New York, 2005), p. 25.



### **III. THE NEW IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION THROUGH A GENDER LENS**

17. Migration in general, and migration of women in particular, has become increasingly recognized as an important issue for planning and policymaking in many countries. International migratory streams are increasingly becoming feminized and the reasons for the international movements of women and girls are becoming more diverse. While formerly women moved as dependants, they now move as independent persons, in increasingly large numbers, crossing international borders as students and as workers who are the principal wage earners in their households. According to the world migration report,<sup>7</sup> over the past 30 years, women have increasingly moved from Asian countries to Gulf Cooperation Council countries as well as from less wealthy to more wealthy Asian countries, mainly for work in services. A large percentage of these were domestic workers.

18. In the next biennium, 2006-2007, the Gender and Development Section of ESCAP plans to further develop its work on exploring the interrelationships between trade, poverty, development and migration. ESCAP could also facilitate the sharing of experiences of national machineries and mechanisms for women in dealing with the trends outlined in the present document. The understanding and development of appropriate policy responses to these issues could benefit from analysis from a gender perspective, including both the causes and consequences of the escalating mobility of women within and between countries, giving particular attention to rapidly changing or altogether new challenges and opportunities for realizing women's human rights. This includes raising awareness and creating better understanding of the effects of women's and girls' increased involuntary and voluntary work-related mobility on reproductive care systems, migration laws, and multilateral and bilateral trade rules and agreements. Attention also needs to be given to the strategic importance of regional and subregional trade agreements which allow expansion of the space for regular female migration.

#### **A. The gender-specific causes and consequences of international migration**

19. Major changes in national policies and the economies as well as approaches advocated by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in the 1980s, such as the structural adjustment policies and increasingly those changes related to privatization and globalization, have meant lower levels of government spending on social services and a reduced role for Governments as service providers, with a larger role for transnational transactions, global markets and the private sector. Structural adjustment policies were meant to ensure repayment of official debt; however, the economic restructuring entailed reducing spending on food subsidies and social development, such as on health and education, with the result that women in particular had to try to provide for their families with little government support. Added to such policies has been the social impact of

---

<sup>7</sup> International Organization for Migration, *World Migration 2005* (Geneva, 2005).

globalization which has resulted in a trend towards less secure and often exploitive work, forcing many women to look for work far from home as a survival strategy. The *2004 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women and International Migration*<sup>8</sup> also points out that women are increasingly likely to migrate alone and are more likely to be the principal wage earners for themselves and their families. In addition, relatively inexpensive information and communication technology (ICT) enables people to communicate across borders easily while the media and advertising raise awareness of “modern” lifestyles in the world’s major urban centres. This has resulted in increased awareness among women of options within and outside their home countries and has tended to open up a range of new opportunities for them.

20. Gender inequality in itself is a major cause of migration. Women move to escape from abusive and discriminatory situations and to gain access to social, economic and political opportunities domestically and internationally. International marriage brokering is also a major business in some countries of the ESCAP region. However, brides easily find themselves in a vulnerable situation in a foreign country where they have no social support and do not know the language. Some of this trend is due to demographic changes, such as an ageing population in Japan and distorted sex ratios in China, in addition to the desire of young women to move from agricultural communities to urban areas in wealthier Asian countries.

### **B. Overlooked costs and benefits from migration**

21. Whether the absence of adult women from households and communities may also have considerable hidden social and economic costs has yet to be properly documented in research and subjected to policy discussion. By migrating, some women may move away from situations where they live under traditional, patriarchal authority to situations where they are empowered to exercise greater autonomy over their own lives and may become more self-sufficient. Women who stay behind when their husbands or children migrate also generally take on larger familial and economic responsibilities.

22. In a number of countries, increasing numbers of women of vastly different ages and levels of education leave behind dependants, spouses and elders for a very considerable part of their own working lives. Many children grow up with one parent, siblings and other relatives. A recent study by the United Nations Children’s Fund calculated that 10-20 per cent of Filipino children, and 2-3 per cent of Indonesian and Thai children, have a parent overseas.<sup>9</sup> The effects of such prolonged absences on children’s lives in terms of basic cognitive development, quality of care, health status and educational achievements might vary considerably subject to the household composition, social characteristics of the remaining adult care givers, resource situation and availability of services from

---

<sup>8</sup> See note 2 above.

<sup>9</sup> John Bryant, “Children of international migrants in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines: a review of evidence and policies”, UNICEF Innocenti Working Paper 2005-05, April 2005.

government and non-governmental organizations. Some preliminary evidence has indicated that children accompanying migrants have greater difficulties than those staying behind. Early studies of the situation of children brought along to Malaysia and Thailand from Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar suggest that they are generally poorer than those in their home countries. In such cases, specific interventions to address this subgroup might be justified. However, other research shows that remittances from migrant parents tend to improve the quality of health, education, food and housing for family members left behind.

23. The prolonged absence of adults and, increasingly, very young people from very sizeable numbers of households and communities in certain countries and districts of a country might have profound effects on knowledge transmission across generations in such basic areas as agricultural and environmental knowledge as well as artisan skill traditions. As migrants return to their home communities, the elderly generation may already be gone, and there may be few public external memories from which such vital life skills can easily be revived.

24. On the positive side again, long-term female migrants tend to bring home new social and technical knowledge and leadership qualities that vitalize their home communities. Globally, but also true for wealthier Asian countries, women participating in the labour market increasingly depend on migrant domestic workers, generally from other Asian countries.

### **C. Cooperation through trade regulations**

25. The rounds of trade negotiations conducted under the auspices of the World Trade Organization (WTO) over the years have given more attention to trade in services. Mode 4 of the General Agreement on Trades in Services (GATS) under WTO includes the movement of natural persons. However, countries that receive a large number of migrant workers have so far tended to prefer bilateral memorandums of understanding or interpret the GATS Mode 4 as not having as an aim easing of the free movement of people. An understanding of the relationship between trade agreements and migration policies as well as the pros and cons of bilateral labour agreements is needed to better inform policy options.

26. For example, Japan and the Philippines have signed a bilateral agreement concerning migrants performing care of the elderly, domestic work and work as entertainers. Workers in this category are predominantly women, as are most of the large number of domestic workers in places such as Hong Kong, China, and Singapore. Employment is crucial for poverty reduction and people will always move to where the jobs are to be found. Within the context of regional integration and cooperation, migration must be addressed as a part of trade.

### **D. Migration in Central Asia**

27. While not necessarily new trends, it is worth noting how changes in political and economic systems as well as conflicts in some parts of the ESCAP region have shaped migration, and human

/...

trafficking, patterns. For example, in the five Central Asian republics, the intraregional movements of people are partly a legacy of the Soviet era, but greatly accentuated by the differential economic performance between the five republics, resulting in massive movements of people into relatively wealthier neighbouring countries. The absence of transparent visa and recruitment procedures has resulted in irregular migration aided by commercial travel and employment agencies. The retrenchment and even collapse of social protection systems have had dramatic consequences for older women, and women as care providers and state employees. The declining financing of the educational system and the devaluing of educational qualifications have reversed educational attainment levels, decreased enrolment and increased the dropout rates for girls more than for boys.

28. In Central Asia, as well as in other parts of Asia and the Pacific, declining job opportunities motivate young people to migrate under illegal and risky circumstances. Recent studies have demonstrated the problems of applying the sharp distinction between smuggling and trafficking as defined by the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime of 15 November 2000 and its Supplementary Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and instead pinpointed the continuum between the two.

29. A study by the International Organization for Migration on trafficking in the Central Asian region<sup>10</sup> indicates that trafficking for sexual and for other labour exploitation is increasingly common. Central Asia experiences a high level of trafficking of men and boys compared with the whole Asian and Pacific region, often for forced labour and often within countries. The scale of impoverishment after the end of the Soviet era has created a vast pool of women and men who opt for risky migration, having minimal information about the risks attached to their choices and rights. Illegal trade in both goods and people often follow similar routes. Small-scale trading by small-scale predominantly female entrepreneurs who often cross borders illegally due to the constraints on legal movements is also used as a cover-up for trafficking. Investigations suggest that trafficking for both forced labour and sexual exploitation is on the increase. The trafficking routes include destinations in the Middle East, South-East Asia, East Asia and Europe.

#### **IV. BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL COOPERATION AGAINST TRAFFICKING**

30. Bilateral and regional cooperation against trafficking is facing the challenge to develop and apply a rights-based approach in dealing with trafficking. The issue of application of the definition of trafficking in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, to determine the scale of trafficking and application of the definition to actual court cases constitutes pressing challenges. The Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human

---

<sup>10</sup> International Organization for Migration, *Fertile Fields: Trafficking in Persons in Central Asia* (Geneva, 2005).

Trafficking<sup>11</sup> recommended that anti-trafficking measures should not adversely affect the rights and dignity of migrants, of internally displaced persons, refugees and asylum-seekers. It also recommended that such measures should not infringe on the rights of all persons to move freely. The sheer scale and composite nature of international migration call for comprehensive gender-sensitive programme approaches to migration and trafficking, which link the national level to the subregional and regional levels so as to ensure coordination and ultimately effective implementation. Such frameworks, of which the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative on Trafficking (the COMMIT Initiative) is one early example, must strive to establish mechanisms that reflect and reconcile the interests of State parties, from origin, transit and destination countries, of different categories of migrants, including trafficked women, girls and men, and of other parties.

31. On 29 October 2004, in Yangon, ministerial representatives from Cambodia, China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam, the six Governments of the Greater Mekong Subregion, signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation against human trafficking. The memorandum is a comprehensive document covering trafficking in all persons, but recognizing the vulnerabilities of women and children to trafficking. It is backed by a subregional plan of action based on an extensive six-country consultation process which included, in addition to the government agencies, international development agencies, NGOs and other agencies. The plan comprises a training programme for personnel, cooperation in the investigation and prosecution of traffickers, facilitation, establishment and implementation of bilateral agreements, harmonization of procedures for the repatriation of victims, establishment of international standards and good practices on repatriation, regional cooperation to prevent and suppress illegal brokering practices and regional cooperation in the tourism sector. The flexible process-oriented approach taken, the level of commitments involved and the comprehensiveness of the plan of action render the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative on Trafficking a highly relevant experience which other Asian countries, such as Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Timor-Leste, could consider. ESCAP could facilitate the exchange of such good practices and strategies for addressing trafficking in persons. For example, Central and South Asian countries could also draw on such experiences as well as their own to reach subregional-level understanding and commitment, such as the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children, signed by the members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation on 5 January 2002, in order to combat trafficking. Where there is no strong subregional initiative, communities and civil society can play a lead role.

---

<sup>11</sup> See the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Economic and Social Council (E/2002/68/Add.1).

## V. INTERNAL MIGRATION THROUGH A GENDER LENS

32. Evidence indicates that internal migration involves vast and increasingly socially diverse populations in the Asian and Pacific region. Well-established push-and-pull factors are not only still important but their importance has increased following recent macroeconomic reforms, which have also created new factors. These reforms have also led to infrastructural development that has eased mobility and served as conduits for rapid urbanization, driven by expanded formal and informal employment opportunities in and around megacities and regional centres. Internal migration is currently of great importance for livelihoods and overall development almost everywhere in the Asian and Pacific region. It is estimated that in China, well above 100 million people move in a year. In India, the absolute number is also high (above 10 million as a conservative estimate). Internal migration has become very sizeable in absolute terms and much larger than the more focused international migration in many other countries in South Asia, South-East Asia and East Asia.

33. Migration patterns vary not only with subregional development trajectories but also within subregions, states and districts. These patterns have yet to be captured by official statistics in poverty reduction strategies and in social and environmental policy formulation. Broadly speaking, there are four migration streams: rural-rural, rural-urban, urban-rural and urban-urban. In South-East and East Asia, manufacturing and other export-led industries, combined with lifting of employment and movement controls, have led to rapid increases in both short-term and long-term migration. In South Asia, while rural-to-rural migration is still of enormous importance, rural-urban migration is on the increase as a result of manufacturing, agro-processing, construction and new information technology service-oriented employment. Within many countries, the rural poor migrate seasonally from impoverished mountain regions and lowland areas into export-oriented agricultural regions, which can absorb high numbers of seasonal labourers.

34. A striking and hitherto often ignored tendency in the social composition of these enormous numbers of people on the move within their own countries is the increasing proportion of women relative to men, and of younger persons, even children, as compared to older persons. Closely related to this sex and age composition is the gender-based segmentation of particular streams of internal migrants. While women, and increasingly younger, often unmarried, women, leave for manufacturing, food processing, tourism, and domestic service jobs, young boys mostly leave for construction work and certain other urban services, such as transport. The increasing predominance of women and girls among internal migrants, the sex-differentiated nature of many formal and informal labour markets and the gender-specific reasons for and consequences of these movements raise a host of questions about the ability of Governments to realize economic and social development. The numbers of persons involved have an impact on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other development indicators in such areas as poverty levels, health and education status at the district, state and central levels in a number of countries in the Asian and Pacific region.

35. Owing to rigid controls on migration in many countries, men and women are often smuggled from one country to another in search of work as illegal migrants. However, a large and growing number of men and women are being trafficked from one country to another and often become victims of forced labour, such as in the fishing industry (mainly men) or in the sex industry (mainly women). There are large-scale internal, generally rural-to-urban, flows of migrants and trafficked persons in a number of ESCAP member countries. Appropriate policies and planning of such flows and an analysis of their gender dimensions would improve the ability of Governments to manage urban development.

**A. Gender-specific reasons and outcomes of internal rural-rural and rural-urban migration**

36. In South Asia, rural-to-rural movement from disaster, conflict-prone or impoverished rural mountain and plains areas to more prosperous and less disaster-prone rural areas is nothing new. The gender-specific causes, and consequences, for which women and girls leave their home communities for weeks and months remain mostly undocumented in statistics and poorly understood by policymakers. These women migrants often come from marginal and landless households and are compelled to opt for temporary migration to secure food for themselves and their dependants. They struggle to save some income for repayment of accumulated debt and to undertake some minor yet pressing investments. They characteristically work under highly exploitative and unsafe conditions, living in temporarily settlements of makeshift shelters on public or private land, without access to drinking water or sanitary facilities. As women's social networks under these circumstances tend to remain weak, women and girls are at risk of sexual abuse from employers, male members of the host population and co-workers. Children are either left to stay behind in these settlements without proper care or access to schooling, or join their parents in often hazardous and demanding work in fields, road construction sites and stone quarries, all of which are unfit for children.

37. The social composition of these female agricultural day labourers and construction workers comprises a large number of widowed, divorced and abandoned women, who have too few or meagre social entitlements to mobilize and who see no option other than temporary migration as a survival strategy. In many cases, women's meagre entitlements are the result of discriminatory marriage and inheritance laws. They often have limited capacity as they tend to be functionally illiterate. This situation makes seasonal migration a necessity rather than a choice for many of them.

38. The results of such movements for many poor people are, in development terms, often mixed or even negative. Migrant women and men are able to meet their basic need for food temporarily, but the working and living conditions add nevertheless new and serious, often lethal, risks to the already poor state of health of adults and children. The results of such regular or irregular movements affect both school enrolments and dropout rates.

39. The overall picture of rural-to-rural migration is more nuanced, however, as a not insignificant number of poor migrants effectively tap price and wage differentials created by new  
/...

opportunities for the sale of agricultural goods or services in new or expanded rural markets and invest some of the income in education and directly productive on- and off-farm investments. Longer seasonal migrations to more distant labour markets are still mostly undertaken by male household members, leaving the running of farms and households to the women, children and older persons. The absence of able-bodied men for months every year is counteracted by women working excessively long hours, and in addition having to rely on their children's irregular, if not regular, involvement in the manual reproductive and productive work that is largely unaffected by labour-saving technologies, infrastructural development and credit institutions.

40. The emphasis of the economic and social policies of recent decades on largely urban, export-led growth, expansion of education, infrastructural development and the new massive outreach of the consumer-oriented mass media have unleashed the escalating migration of women and men from rural hinterlands to urban centres in the different subregions of the Asian and Pacific region.

41. Rural-urban migration is increasing rapidly in a number of Asian countries, owing to a whole set of push-and-pull factors, including diversified and expanding formal and informal sectors resulting from export-oriented industries, tourism and the diverse service needs of the rapidly expanding urban population, with changing socio-demographic characteristics in terms of household composition, age structure, nuptiality and fertility rates. There is considerable female-dominated migration in both South Asia and South-East Asia to manufacturing industries. The rather significant influx of young, often unmarried women with elementary or higher education into the manufacturing industries has made these women, at least for an intermittent period, important income earners for their families and communities and foreign currency earners for their countries. The overall positive consequences of these women's labour participation are documented as mixed at best, if seen in terms of health outcomes, status in the family and community and political empowerment. Thus, such women-led industrialization has resulted in short-term economic growth, based on exploitative labour conditions, reflecting limited, if any, labour rights. The labour organization often mimics the strict social hierarchies into which the young semi-skilled and unskilled female workers have been placed in their own families. While the rather considerable national economic gains of such labour force participation should not be underemphasized, the longer-term social gains and costs of these industries also have to take into account the societal costs of job-related chronic health problems which are incurred later as successive age classes of these former women workers become middle-aged and elderly.

42. The picture in terms of economic empowerment shows some new diversity, as countries such as Cambodia have chosen to enforce labour protection laws in the face of the phasing out of the Multifibre Arrangement. However, a very significant number of rural married and unmarried women and girls migrate to unregulated, unsafe and relatively profitable jobs in the informal tourism and domestic service sector. The composite reasons for the massive entry into these service sectors are a



mix of general and specifically gender-based conditions. Increasing urban-rural differentials related to one-sided urban growth and underinvestment in the agricultural sector, falling commodity prices, stagnant or declining agricultural wages, land fragmentation as a result of population growth and environmental degradation might seem like gender-neutral factors, but they often have gendered consequences.

**B. Major challenges of internal migration for official statistics and for realization of the Millennium Development Goals**

43. Internal migration, of women in particular, may have a positive or negative effect on their health status and that of their children as well as on educational attainment. Whatever health services and educational facilities may be available, women and their children may be hindered in their access in terms of time, money and distance, whether in a rural or an urban setting. Women with few resources depend heavily on social networks for childcare support and help in times of sickness or childbirth. Having family and friends nearby is very important; however, many women calculate that migrating in hopes of finding paid work is worth the move to a new place. If she can find work that pays enough to leave some savings, she can improve the nutritional and health status of the family as well as contribute to the costs associated with schooling. However, for government officials, planning is difficult without good statistical data. In large urban cities, considerable numbers of people live in makeshift shelters without secure tenure and in areas for which Governments rarely can or wish to provide services. In order to make schools and health services accessible to migrants, information is needed and strategies must be put in place to improve access to the most basic services, such as safe water and sanitation.

**VI. WOMEN'S MIGRATION, POVERTY AND DEVELOPMENT**

44. The interconnections between macroeconomic reform, lending and debt policies, public sector reforms, cuts in public subsidies, services and employment, changed terms of care, small-scale, female-dominated subsistence farming and small and medium-sized enterprises, privatization of the commons and increasing female irregular and regular international migration are well established. The lack of accurate information and plans for managing this movement of people who use migration as a means of bare survival or a route to a better life forces many to migrate illegally and allows space for criminal trade in people for forced labour and sexual exploitation. The sharp growth in international tourism with its entertainment industry also opens new niches for the sex trade. The sex trade in turn supports the growth of the entertainment industry and thereby tourism as a development strategy, which becomes an important source of government revenue.

45. Women migrants as senders of remittances are increasingly becoming central to the economic and social development of their home countries and communities. The significance of remittances should be related to GDP and to the currency reserves in the specific countries involved. For a number of ESCAP members, such as Bangladesh, the Philippines, Nepal and Sri Lanka, remittances

/...

represent a very significant source of foreign exchange. Establishing formal arrangements for workers going overseas and receiving remittances as a by-product of the migration process represent the two ways in which Governments can secure benefit and a way to cope with unemployment and foreign debt. One prime example in the ESCAP region is the role of the Government of the Philippines in the emigration of nurses and maids to Japan, the Middle East and the United States of America. There has also been considerable migration of entertainers, through private brokers. The Government of the Philippines also passed regulations permitting mail-order bride agencies to recruit girls and women to marry foreign men as a matter of contractual agreement. As reports of high levels of violence against mail-order brides became public, this business was banned. It has, however, been very difficult to close all the organizations involved. Furthermore, other countries, such as Sri Lanka and Thailand, have promoted the migration of workers. In the case of Sri Lanka, the migration is overwhelmingly that of women, who bring in vast remittances as maids and nurses in the Middle East and Asia. There is some evidence to suggest that, owing to their social obligations, migrant women remit relatively more of their income than men. However, since female migrants tend to earn less than their male counterparts, the total revenue from women's remittances might be lower.

46. The households and communities receiving remittances use them to invest in education, to access health-care services and improve nutrition, all of which are important to improve the well-being of older persons, women in reproductive age and children, and have a positive effect on social and economic development goals and indicators.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

47. The Asian and Pacific region has demonstrated its commitment to promoting women's empowerment and achieving gender equality in line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action by improving the status of women and girls in a number of areas. However, as shown above, there are still many challenges waiting to be tackled. The process of globalization continues to evolve, creating new and emerging challenges for the region. The impacts of globalization are manifested in a variety of forms, including migration, trafficking, trade, HIV/AIDS, and ICT, characterizing some of the region's challenges accordingly. There is also the need to address the fundamental inequality between women and men in households, communities and societies in the socio-cultural context. The guidance of the Committee on how best those challenges can be addressed is invited.

. . . . .