

**STATEMENT BY MS. MICHELE KLEIN SOLOMON, PERMANENT
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(IOM) TO THE 55th SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF
WOMEN**

**General Debate agenda no. 3 “Access and participation of women and girls
in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion
of women’s equal access to full employment and decent work”**

New York, 28 February 2011

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) appreciates having the opportunity to take part in this important debate. I would like to offer a few comments on education and migrant women and girls.

Almost half of the 214 million international migrants in the world today are female. While women have always migrated as accompanying spouses and family members, contemporary migration dynamics have shown a considerable increase in the number of women migrating independently to pursue opportunities of their own. Over the past decades, efforts towards girls’ education have allowed an increased number of women over the world to obtain secondary and tertiary education. In particular, in most regions of the world, women enrolled in tertiary education outnumber men (with the exception of Sub Saharan Africa and Southern and Western Asia)¹. This increased education level among women worldwide, by its empowerment effect and the opportunities for personal and career development it creates, accounts in no small part for the growing number of women migrating independently to pursue study or career opportunities of their own. For some of them, particularly among the most highly qualified ones, leaving their country is the only way to access the high level occupations for which they were trained.

¹ Women’s World 2010

Mr. Chairman,

As you know, most industrialized countries have developed immigration systems and regulations with the objective of attracting the most qualified workers to put their skills at the service of economic development. Within this global competition for human capital, and despite the skills they bring with them, migrant women are still disadvantaged for several reasons.

First of all, women in tertiary education are significantly underrepresented in the fields of science and engineering that are usually favored and prioritized by immigration countries, whereas, they remain predominant in education, health and welfare, social sciences, humanities and the arts (Women's World 2010).

Second, in addition to the sectors where women dominate, the types of professions women occupy tend to be more often linked to the public sector and more often bound to the national context (such as education, law, social work and public administration) than professions where men dominate. This has important implications for the transferability of those skills, and may confront women with credential recognition difficulties.

Third, for all those reasons, in situations where immigration systems identify a lead migrant or primary applicant within the household as a strategy to maximize chances of success, women are more likely than men to be the secondary migrant. This is a very important element as research has shown that the entry status of women conditions the way in which their skills will be perceived on the labour market. Additional research shows that migrant women's insertion in the labour market tends to be made more difficult by gender and ethnic stereotypes that may contribute to limiting them to low skilled occupations, often offering the lowest levels of remuneration, career prospects and social protection. As a result of those difficulties, a significant proportion of skilled and highly skilled migrant women find themselves unable to access skilled employment and put their education at use.

Mr. Chairman,

IOM recently published a study on this phenomenon of underemployment and deskilling amongst qualified migrant women. "*Crushed hopes: underemployment and deskilling in skilled migrant women*" is a collective publication comprising a review of international literature on the subject of deskilling and underemployment from a gender perspective and case studies from Switzerland, Quebec and the United Kingdom. These case studies highlight the processes by which migration status, labour market dynamics and gender stereotypes combine to keep highly qualified women away from employment commensurate to their education and to push put them into low skilled occupations. These combined effects prevent them from taking part fully in their host society as well as from contributing as robustly as they could to the development of their home countries, for example by sharing their skills and know-how and sending higher levels of remittances.

I would therefore like to build a case for a collective reflection on foreign credential recognition systems and how they tend to disadvantage migrant women. This issue is absolutely key to achieving greater gender sensitivity in skilled admission systems and therefore to maximizing the empowerment and contributions of migrant women. The second aspect I wish to emphasize is the need to re-examine efforts made to facilitate migrants' integration. Too often, women accompanying their spouses are considered as non-economic migrants when they have skills they dearly want to apply. Equally, efforts need to be made to help migrant women combine qualified work and family responsibilities, as childcare can be an important challenge when relocating to a new country and often remains the sole responsibility of women.

I would like to encourage governments to consider some of the biases certain migration regulations can have and their impact on migrant women's ability to use their know-how. Only by applying a gender lens to those fundamental

migration policies can we make sure women's opportunities are maximized and their economic and social contributions are both facilitated and properly acknowledged.

To conclude, Mr. Chairman, IOM is committed to working to assist and protect the most vulnerable and remains dedicated to working resourcefully and effectively with governments and other partners to this end, as we have done since the first day 60 years ago, when the Organization was created.

I thank you.