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STAFF AND PROGRAMME POLICIES ON GENDER ISSUES

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INTRODUCTION

1. Whereas the Organization has been taking steps for some time to address gender issues relating both to IOM programmes and activities as well as internal staff considerations, there was a growing recognition that a comprehensive approach was necessary to deal more effectively with such matters. Consequently, in February 1995 a Working Group on Gender Issues was formed, chaired by the Deputy Director General, to address a range of gender-related concerns faced by the Organization. The Working Group's task was to institutionalize and mainstream existing measures and efforts, and to make further progress toward ensuring that gender issues are an integral part of IOM's planning and actions.
2. To this end, the Working Group, comprised of a representative from each unit in Headquarters and working in close coordination with field missions, developed the attached policy statements, to serve as guiding principles for the Organization in the two areas of programmes and activities and internal staff considerations. The statements are designed to formalize and codify the Organization's commitment to identifying and addressing the needs of migrant women in IOM's projects and services, as well as to ensuring equality of opportunity and treatment of men and women within IOM.
3. In the ten years since the Third World Conference on Women was held in Nairobi, and in preparation for the Fourth Conference held this year in Beijing, IOM has taken stock of its achievements and its shortcomings on gender-related issues. By endorsing the proposed policy statements, the Council will formalize the Organization's long-standing commitment to female migrants, and will affirm its commitment to making equal opportunity and treatment of all IOM staff a reality. A draft resolution will be submitted to the Council for its consideration.

I. GENDER-APPROPRIATE POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR MIGRANT WOMEN

IOM POLICY

4. IOM is committed to ensuring that the particular needs of all migrant women are identified, taken into consideration and addressed by IOM projects and services.

RATIONALE

Millions of migrant women

5. Today, at least 50 million women are international migrants.¹ Their participation in migration flows fluctuates over time and, as a consequence of differences in immigration policies, varies from one receiving country to another. Women's migration is also shaped by their role in the country of origin. As a result of these factors, the proportion of women in the many different streams of migration flows ranges from virtually none - Southern African miners working in South Africa, for example - to virtually all - Asian nurses working in the Gulf States.

6. In current national estimates of permanent migration flows and stocks of foreign or foreign-born in the traditional immigration countries and Western Europe, the presence of women fluctuates around 50 per cent. For industrialized countries as a whole, women constitute over 50 per cent of migrants.²

7. The proportion of women among migrants living in the developing world varies widely from country to country. But, taken as a whole, more than 45 per cent of migrants in developing countries are women.³

8. Migrant women, as women in general, have historically been marginalized as members of the societies in which they live, and despite the fact that they account for around half of the migrant population, their particular needs have often been overlooked in migration-related programmes. That their condition is insufficiently studied is, in part, cause and consequence of this marginalization.

Migrant women face particular problems

¹ Data on migration flows are incomplete and incompatible and estimating migration by women is hampered by these shortcomings. Some countries count inflows by migration type, others count stocks of foreign-born population. Some countries do not collect statistics on migration at all. The years in which information is gathered varies as does the type of information compiled; for instance, how a "migrant" is defined may differ or data may not be broken down by sex.

² Estimates of foreign-born or foreign population, depending on country. International Migration Policies and the Status of Female Migrants. United Nations, New York. 1995. p. 60.

³ Ibid.

9. The growing attention paid to migrant women at the international level is an expression of the increasing focus on women's rights and special needs that has taken place over the last two decades in various fields. In the early eighties, for example, a number of studies were published which contrasted the distribution of food and health care to male and female children in South Asian families. This was followed by a number of similar studies in other parts of the world, and eventually led to specific recommendations and policies aimed at improving the survival and development of female children.

10. In the field of migration, refugee women were the focus of attention earlier than migrant women in general, a consequence of urgent protection concerns. The problems of rape, sexual exploitation, and other forms of gender-related violence suffered by refugee women began to be denounced and documented ten to fifteen years ago in the context of pirate attacks on Vietnamese boat people. Violence against refugee women had existed before, but for a variety of complex reasons it was not openly addressed by the international community. Since then, both awareness and sensitivity have evolved with the times, and the problem has become accepted as a legitimate subject of public discussion and intervention, as recent humanitarian crises have shown.

11. This acceptance has helped focus attention on migrant women's needs beyond protection and, subsequently, on the experiences of migrant women who are not refugees. More is being learned today, for example, about female migrant flows, the economic role of migrant women, and gender-specific adaptation problems. Early studies on some of these issues exist, but the results of such research has, to date, been limited and its results rarely translated into policies which promote change.

12. Yet many elements of women's experiences as migrants are particular to their gender or are more prevalent to migrant women than to migrant men. These experiences touch all facets of everyday life and impact on migrant women's ability to secure their future. Some of the problems faced are:

Economic

- Many migrant women have limited access to employment and social welfare programmes due to their status as a "dependant" or other limitations on the conditions of their admission to the host country.
- Migrant women face double discrimination in the labour market: being both female and foreign. Discrimination in hiring can distort migrant women's access to the labour market, making them poor wage-earners. Data show that migrant women generally earn less than native-born and migrant men, and less than native-born women.

- The exploitation of migrant women may be compounded by their presence in marginal jobs and in the informal sector, the fringes of the economy where regulation rarely reaches, as well as low educational levels and poor command of the language in the host country.
- Abandonment by her husband or family can be economically devastating for a woman regardless of where she may live. In a new country, an abandoned woman usually does not have the community and family support she might be able to count on in her home country.

Social

- Migrant women frequently lose the ability to participate in decision-making at the community level. Traditional participatory mechanisms may not exist in host countries, leaving migrant women at the mercy of those who, legitimately or not, speak for them. Alternatively, they may be thrust into decision-making roles to which they are not accustomed and for which they may not be prepared.
- Finding ways to reconcile the demands of public (work) and private spheres (family duties) is particularly challenging for migrant women who often confront the least flexible working conditions.
- Migrants must often move back and forth between two cultures: that from which they came and that of their new country of residence. For migrant women this is often compounded by having to take the responsibility of resolving conflicts arising among family members with different levels of acculturation.
- Traditional gender roles, suspended when one spouse lived abroad while the other remained at home, may be re-established to the detriment of women in reunited families.
- Often the double role of women in society is a major source of conflict both between migrants and host country nationals, and within the migrant family itself.

Legal Status

- Legal residence may be linked to a migrant woman's relationship with a citizen or "primary" migrant. If that relationship changes, she may face expulsion.

Health

- In many countries, access to health care corresponds to legal status. Such policies leave migrant women vulnerable to poorer health outcomes. Migrant women are especially vulnerable in terms of reproductive health, even after taking into account social and biological risk factors that apply to the female population in general.

- Migrant women working in unskilled and informal work are especially vulnerable to work-related injuries.
- Migrant women are particularly vulnerable to psycho-social stresses; divergent sets of cultural expectations, marginalization in the host society and in the labour market, and the double burden of family and work are but a few examples.
- Migrant women may suffer physical and sexual abuse during travel or in countries of destination. The consequences of, for example, rape may include community rejection, further damaging the concerned woman personally as well as her relationship with family members and her ability to raise her children.

Why an IOM policy on migrant women?

13. The IOM policy on migrant women is based on and responds to the following three factors. Taken as a whole, they point to the need for an articulated policy and compliance with it:

- women constitute a substantial proportion of migrants;
- migrant women are exposed to specific risks and discrimination which warrant special considerations;
- the needs of migrant women have not been sufficiently taken into account in migration related policies and programmes.

14. Compliance with the policy means that IOM is responsible for:

- improving awareness and understanding - within IOM as well as outside - of the conditions and needs specific to migrant women;
- ensuring equal access to IOM projects and services so that migrant women can fully participate in and benefit from them;
- designing and implementing migrant women-specific projects and services, where and when appropriate.

INITIAL ACTION

15. In order to do so, IOM will:

- submit to the Council for its approval a resolution including the policy statement and the IOM Staff Policy on Gender Issues;
- it is envisaged to create the position of IOM Coordinator for Gender Issues to ensure implementation of the Organization's gender policies in programme and staff issues, subject to a direct contribution from its membership to fill the position:

- carry out training in gender-appropriate programme planning and implementation at senior *and* junior levels;
- incorporate the policy into all new and existing IOM training materials (e.g. the Project Handbook and the migration modules);
- identify and initiate research projects on women and migration;
- include a section in all project documents which explains how the project addresses the needs and participation of women beneficiaries (or why this is not necessary);
- have each Bureau and Department report to the Director General, within the context of the Policy Planning Council, details of its new and continuing activities on behalf of migrant women.

2. IOM'S STAFF POLICY ON GENDER ISSUES

IOM POLICY

16. Equality of opportunity and treatment of men and women is a guiding principle of IOM.

RATIONALE

17. Since the early 1980s, the United Nations agencies and affiliated organizations have been committed to increasing the number of women at all professional levels, and especially in decision-making positions. IOM has increased the number of female staff members in the professional categories from 24 in December 1989 (19.2 per cent) to 58 by September 1995 (24.5 per cent). During the same years, the Organization has grown from 125 to 237 professional staff members. Recognizing the implications of such organizational growth, it is clear that even with a stated policy goal of balanced representation, considerable opportunities to increase even more the percentage of women at all levels of the IOM personnel establishment have been lost. It should be noted, moreover, that in terms of numbers there is only minimal representation of women above the P4 level. For historical and cultural reasons general staff positions in IOM have tended to reflect traditional gender roles, and therefore imbalances.

18. Reports of other institutions on efforts to achieve gender balance in their personnel structures, and equality of treatment in their everyday practices, reveal another reality which IOM must address: the mere adoption of a policy, no matter how well intentioned and strong, will not lead to that policy's realization if it is not supported by concrete efforts to give it full effect. Comprehensive and structured action, sustained over time, will be required to redress the imbalance which currently exists, and to create both the conditions of service and the working climate that will attract and retain the most qualified staff.

INITIAL ACTION

- Submit to the Council for its approval a resolution including the policy statement and the statement on Gender-Appropriate Policies and Programmes for Migrant Women.
- It is envisaged to create the position of IOM Coordinator for Gender issues to ensure implementation of the Organization's gender policies in programme and staff issues, subject to a direct contribution from its membership to fill the position.
- A detailed Plan of Action addressing gender issues with regard to recruitment, career development and equality of treatment will be drafted by a working group composed of representatives of the Division of Personnel, OD/HRD and the IOM Working Group on Gender Issues, and submitted to the Director General for approval.

- Through this Plan of Action, IOM will ensure that recruitment and staff development policies and procedures appropriately address gender issues. In light of the current imbalance, concerted efforts will be made to identify, promote and recruit qualified female candidates.

TARGETS

- Equal opportunity and treatment of men and women staff reflected in all IOM staff policies and actions.
- Increase the proportion of women in the professional categories overall to at least 35 per cent within two years; emphasis in this process to be given to those levels where women are currently under-represented.
- Increase the proportion of women staff members at all levels where they are under-represented to at least 40 per cent within five years.
- Achieve a gender-balanced staff within the next ten years.