



IOM Director General's Message on International Women's Day 2016

On International Women's Day 2016, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reaffirms its unwavering commitment to gender equality and empowerment for the hundreds of millions of women and girls across the globe who have left their homes, whether by force or by choice, and often in search of a better life. Like all migrants, these women and girls demand our attention and must be at the centre of our global development agenda.

The [United Nations' official theme for this year's International Women's Day](#), "Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality", promotes a bold vision for ensuring that gender equality, women's empowerment and women's human rights play a central role in achieving the recently adopted [2030 Sustainable Development Agenda](#).

This agenda, formulated through 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), recognizes not only the inherent necessity of protecting the rights of women and girls, but also that protecting their rights will enhance their potential to contribute meaningfully to sustainable development.

As we strive to achieve the SDGs, it is crucial that we ensure that they apply to migrant women and girls just as much as they apply to women and girls who have remained in their home communities.

Fundamental to the SDGs is their emphasis on equality, empowerment and inclusion irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity or origin. The application of the SDGs to 'all people' is consistent throughout the 17 goals. Moreover, the principles of equality, empowerment and inclusion are explicitly pointed out in SDG 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment, and in SDG 10 which refers to social, economic and political inclusion for all.

The goals in themselves are ambitious and admirable. They also raise some important issues concerning equality.

The first is that equality and empowerment are not only important goals in their own right, but they can have a cyclical component to them. Extending access to resources and opportunities to migrant women and girls can contribute to sustainable development, which can in turn open up further opportunities for women and girls.

Thus, when making the links between gender, migration and development, we must always remember to consider how gender and migration can impact development and also how development might impact gender and migration.

The most atrocious manifestation of gender inequality is violence against women and girls, with migrant women and girls often being particularly vulnerable. Such violence, such as domestic violence and forced marriage, can sometimes be a driver of migration for women and girls.

It is also a major challenge along migration routes, where sexual violence in particular is a serious concern. In the host community, various legal, linguistic, economic, cultural and other barriers can make migrant women and girls more vulnerable to violence and exploitation, particularly those who are undocumented or dependent on family members or employers.

Many migrant women and girls might also undergo certain forms of violence that have been brought to host communities from origin communities, such as harmful cultural practices like female genital mutilation. And for millions of women and girls who are victims of trafficking, violence is the distressing cause of their migration. Compounding the situation even further is that the prevalence of violence against migrant women and girls tends to reinforce gender inequalities.

The second issue concerning equality is the notion of intersectionality. In order to fully understand the specific advantages and disadvantages experienced by migrant women and girls, we must consider how different personal factors intersect with each other, rather than thinking of these factors independently.

The importance of collecting data that is disaggregated by both gender and migration status needs to be factored in. Despite the lack of consistently disaggregated data, we know from various research studies that migrant women tend to face an array of distinct challenges.

For example, in many contexts and for various reasons, migrant women tend to be affected disproportionately by unemployment, underemployment and deskilling compared to migrant men, non-migrant women and non-migrant men.

And for many migrant women, a reduced family and social network in the host community often results in an increased double-burden in terms of reproductive and productive roles that other social categories are less likely to face.

Both of these examples can exacerbate inequalities both between migrant women and migrant men, and between migrant women and non-migrant women. While gender and migration status are two key factors playing a role here, other factors such as age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, class, and ability, among others, should also be considered.

The SDGs are a much-needed step in the right direction if we want to ensure that sustainable development is a global reality. And it is clear that gender and migration considerations must remain an integral part of the global development agenda if we are to be successful in achieving the SDGs.

As we can see, so many of the challenges to development affect and are affected by the experiences and concerns of migrant women and girls. We will only be able to eliminate violence and discrimination, increase economic and educational opportunities, and achieve overall equality, including gender equality, by fully including migrant women and girls in the development equation.