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Gender, Migration and Development - Emerging Trends and Issues in East and South-East Asia
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UN Women East and South-East Asia Regional Office
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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Trends and Patterns of Gendered Migration within East and South-East Asia</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Linking Migration and Development</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: The Issue of Rights</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Conclusion</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preface

Migration for work, including women’s migration for work has become an enduring structural feature of the Asian region. Women constitute nearly 50% of the overseas migrant work force in Asia, and in some Asian countries women’s overseas labour migration has overtaken men’s. This is essentially driven by global and regional economic integration, through liberalized trade and investment flows, changes in the relative share of economic sectors and the composition of the labour market especially in the informal service and manufacturing sector; demographic factors such as falling birth rates and a growing ageing population; a vacuum in certain segments of the labour market; enhancing efficiency by employing cheaper and more pliable workers from poorer countries and, booming overseas service sector – all of which has generated an increasing number of “woman-oriented” jobs. This demand finds more than adequate supply of women’s labour from developing countries because of increasing structural inequities between labour-short, high-income countries of employment and labour-surplus, low-income countries of origin. Moreover, several poor countries of origin that draw on diaspora contributions and remittances of less skilled migrants, treat migration as a development strategy.

However, while migration opens up windows of opportunity to both highly skilled and less skilled women workers, poor women overseas migrants in particular suffer severe discrimination, particularly when compared to skilled and unskilled male migrant workers and even professional women migrants.

This publication examines the gender-based trends in women’s overseas migration for work and the structural basis for such trends. In this context it explores the discourse around the concept of ‘the feminization of migration’. It further highlights key gender-based violations at different stages of migration. Against this backdrop the publication addresses the mainstream discourse on migration and development, calling special attention to the need to (a) invoke a gender sensitive rights-based development paradigm; (b) look at the costs, including the social costs of migration; and, (c) take account of
the social and political dimensions of development. Finally, the publication highlights good practices whereby migration can become a ‘win-win’ situation for the different stakeholders in the migration process.

Shoko Ishikawa
Officer-in-Charge
UN Women East and Southeast Asia Regional Office
Introduction

Academic studies and reports from international organizations on contemporary flows of migration have increasingly acknowledged and highlighted a number of issues related to one of the key features of international migration today--its feminization (UN General Assembly 2004; GCIM 2005; UNFPA 2006; Piper 2005a). The notion of ‘feminization’ is linked to the issue of gender and the differences between male and female migrants’ experiences. An expanding literature on the subject of gendered migration has demonstrated that most, if not all, aspects of migration affect men and women differently, thus establishing gender as a crucial factor in our understanding of the causes and consequences of international migration (Piper 2006; Gabbacia et al. 2006).

The phenomenon of ‘feminization of migration’, is defined and understood in various ways by different people. It requires a comprehensive analysis of the complexity of contemporary patterns of international migration. Recent studies have pointed to the increasing diversification both within and across nationality groups and polarization of skilled versus lesser skilled workers in the various migration streams. Given these recent trends, ‘migration’ has evolved into, a highly stratified phenomenon. ‘Stratification’ emphasizes the combined effects of gender, ethnicity, legal status, skill level and mode of entry or exit; therefore, women’s migration is highly ‘stratified’ (Piper 2007).

This is to some extent also played out geographically: migrants with high socio-economic status tend to go to higher income and more developed countries outside of Asia as the fees charged and the skills demanded tend to be higher. At the same time, migration scholarship has shown the significance of pre-existing networks in determining the direction of migration flows. Asian women migrating within Asia as domestic workers tend to be less qualified and belong to lower income classes. Hence many of them migrate to closer destinations within the region, as demonstrated by Oishi (2005) through specific reference to Indonesians and Sri Lankans. Religion and its associated social norms, also play a certain role in coupling specific origin and destination countries. Some
Gender, Migration and Development –
Emerging Trends and Issues in East and South-East Asia

Muslim countries give preference to, and are preferred by, migrants of the same faith (e.g. Indonesian domestic workers migrating in larger numbers to the Middle East).

The gendered and stratified nature of migration has implications for labour market experience, entitlements and rights. A gender analysis, in fact, raises awareness about broader social factors that influence women’s and men’s roles and their access to resources, facilities, and services. The typical debate on the ‘migration-development nexus’ tends to be dominated by macroeconomic concerns based on narrow empirical evidence derived mostly from South-to-North migration. As a result, the social dimensions of the migration-development nexus, including its potential for higher levels of equality with regard to class, ethnicity and gender, are glossed over. Yet, incorporating a gender dimension into the analysis, invokes the very social dimensions that are so often ignored.

In the case of international migration, addressing social elements also reminds us of the daily realities of migration (as a journey and a process) and the real-life actual situations of (potential and actual) migrants who are in need of employment, health care, housing, security and education in both the origin and destination countries. Access to basic services is determined by formal and informal sets of rules and regulations defined by law, social norms and conventions. An analysis of differentiated access to systems of rights and services along with how access impacts welfare, well-being and agency of individual migrants, could shed light on social inequality based on gender (cf. Truong 1997).

Despite being global in scope, significant flows of migration also occur within regions rather than across, generally from low-income to mid-income or high income countries (UN 2004, 2006). This can also be observed with regard to international migratory movements in East and South-East Asia.
Chapter 1: Trends and Patterns of Gendered Migration within East and South-East Asia

According to the 2006 UNFPA report on women and international migration, Asia as a whole is one of the two regions in this world\(^1\) where there are still slightly more male than female migrants by the year 2005. The number of women migrating from some countries in Asia, however, has clearly surpassed that of men (ibid., p. 23). Another UN report states that “female migrants are particularly underrepresented in Asia” (2006:33). Men, by contrast, are noted as migrating from almost all developing countries in Asia without exception, whereas there are only three sources of countries from which the bulk of female migrants originate: the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia. These observations seem to contradict that a ‘feminization of migration’ has occurred. It is argued here, however, that these observations need to be qualified with regard to a number of dimensions.

**Visibility and invisibility of migrant women**

There is first of all the geographic dimension: UN reports typically make reference to ‘Asia’ by including West Asia, or the Gulf countries. It is also often not clear whether statements as those above relate to out-flowing or incoming migration. The number of women migrating from the Gulf countries in search of work is negligible; the number of women migrating to Gulf countries is only slightly little less than male migration because of the huge demand for a foreign workforce in both female and male dominated sectors. Likewise, with the exception of Sri Lanka, migration from South Asia is dominated by men (which is linked to the specific labour market demands by the destination countries this flow of migration is directed towards as well as social norms limited women’s physical mobility). However, when shifting the lens to South-East Asia, we find two countries which clearly represent the sources of the most feminized migration streams: the Philippines and Indonesia.

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\(^1\) The other region is Africa.
The second dimension is overall visibility of women in official statistics: conventionally, women were long perceived as ‘accompanying spouses’ and not as independent labour migrants. Furthermore, statistics often capture only formalized jobs under temporary contract or any other legal schemes. Women are mainly represented in these temporary contract schemes as domestic workers although they also migrate in other, albeit often informal, streams which are not captured by official statistics. Hence, it often appears statistically as if fewer women migrated from certain countries or to certain countries although in reality this is not quite the case. Recent studies that include irregular migration have, however, shown that women are well-represented in such streams (see Phetsiriseng, 2007, on Burmese migration to Thailand which is to almost 50% male and female).

Thirdly, there is the labour market dimension which explains the increasing participation of women in migration due to growing demand for jobs in highly feminized sectors (health care, domestic work, entertainment, manufacturing/textile sector) in many destination countries (particularly Hong Kong SAR, Singapore, Malaysia). This is juxtaposed with the increasing inability of men to find full-time employment in origin as well as destination countries pushing their wives or daughters into the role of main income provider (Piper 2007). This shows that the ‘feminization of migration’ can refer to a number of different issues, such as the absolute number of female migrants as out-going migrants or incoming migrants, the increasing participation rate of women (whereby the absolute number of male migrants might still be higher or the balance between the two sexes almost equal, such as in Cambodia and Viet Nam), their dominance in certain sectors or specific migration streams etc. Hence, changing labour market structures resulting in shortages or over-supply of specific types of workers at the origin and destination as well as specific social norms allowing higher or lesser degrees of women’s physical mobility determine the gendered differences in migration. A rigid gendered division of labour determines that men are over-represented in the construction sector and security services, rubber plantations or the shipyard sector in South-East Asia; and in the construction and manufacturing sector of small to medium-sized companies in East Asia, whereas women dominate in jobs connected to social reproduction (e.g. care and domestic work) or work which requires ‘nimble fingers’ (e.g. textile manufacturing).
Last but not least there is the policy dimension which is to some extent linked to social norms and understanding of men’s and women’s appropriate roles. Out-migration of Vietnamese women as labour migrants, for instance, is numerically quite low because of the government’s ban on allowing women to migrate to work as domestic and care workers. This, however, partially explains the greater use of another channel for migration: international marriage.

The feminization of migration in Asia is most visible, and thus usually associated, with out-going flows from Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines where women make up 62-75 per cent of workers who are deployed legally on an annual basis (Asis 2005). If, however, irregular migrants were factored in, the feminization of migration would involve more countries, such as women from Myanmar and Lao PDR. This is backed up by figures on regularized migrants in Thailand; in the 2007 registration by MOL in Thailand, the proportion of females among migrants was 46% in the case of Myanmar and 53% for those from Lao PDR. Yet, there are important gender variations even with regard to irregular migration: in the case of Indonesia, most irregular migrants appear to be men going to neighbouring Malaysia to work on plantations and in the construction sector. As far as existing research is concerned, most Indonesian domestic workers enter under legal contracts. In the Philippines, by contrast, men and women are more or less equally represented in irregular migration streams (Asis 2005).

In addition, and of increasing significance, are the rising numbers of international marriages between Asians with the typical scenario being a woman from a lower income country such as Viet Nam or the Philippines marrying a man

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2 South Asia is mainly a labour exporting sub-region where women’s (official) mobility is subject to serious restrictions (with the notable exception of Sri Lanka). Hence, countries such as Bangladesh predominantly send male migrants. It has to be noted, however, that mobility is not limited per se but shaped by sector and skill level. In India and Bangladesh, for instance, skilled women’ migration is not limited, but there are limits on domestic workers. In all these countries, women internal migrants outnumber men because of marriage migration. In view of this, it is the specific nature of the mobility that is restricted and this is done through official controls (sex and domestic work) and unofficial (discursive limits on single female mobility because of social construction of femininity), gendered social order that increased women’s workload which is then not easily redistributed outside of the family because of patrilocality etc. We owe these insights to Dr. Parvati Raghuram (personal conversation, 27 September 2006).

3 As pointed out by Dr. Jerrold W. Huguet (email communication with author, 10 September 2007).
from a higher income country in East Asia (Japan, Republic of Korea, Taiwan, Province of China) and also Singapore. If international marriage were included in official statistics, the gendered landscape of migration within Asia would take on a different dimension. It might appear odd to include foreign wives into the discussion of economic migration, but as argued by Piper (2003) and Piper and Roces (2003), the two streams are inter-related: many women are originally economic migrants and partly because of the temporary contract nature of their visa and work permits, they seek marriage to a local man as a strategy to enable them to remain in the destination country in a legally secure manner (worker- turns-wife scenario); or they migrate as a foreign spouses and subsequently seek to enter the labour market (often because they wish to remit money to their families back home) (wife-turns-worker scenario). But international wives are absent from statistics on economic migration in Asia – with the result that issues such as ‘integration’, ‘settlement’ and ‘citizenship’ are largely absent from policy and academic debates (unlike in Europe and North America).

**Diversified landscape of gendered migration**

Overall, changes are gradually becoming evident not only with regard to the increased volume of female migrants, but also with regard to the diversified patterns of their migration, including source and destination countries, and the qualitative nature and experience of their migration (in terms of working conditions, range of entitlements, skill levels, etc.). The largest proportion of these women, documented and undocumented, continue to work in job categories characteristically assigned to female migrants such as live-in domestic workers, care givers, entertainers, sex workers and other service employees (e.g., Asian and Pacific Migration Journal 2003). A smaller but substantial proportion of women work in the garment sector as well as agricultural and fish farm hands.

Diversification and rising numbers of migrants are also related to changing politico-economic structures. Former socialist countries such as Mongolia and Viet Nam, for instance, used to send migrants mostly to Socialist countries in Eastern Europe. Since the change from centrally-planned to market-driven systems since the 1990s, both countries have begun to actively ‘export’ increasing numbers of migrants by way of signing Memoranda of Understanding with various destination countries in Asia and to a lesser extent elsewhere. Viet Nam
has as a result become a source country of male and female factory workers in the Republic of Korea and Taiwan, Province of China and more recently also of a small number of domestic workers to Taiwan, Province of China after years of banning such migration. Mongolian labour migrants are mostly men but in the Republic of Korea there are a great number of families, albeit mostly in an irregular situation because of the lacking family unification policies for lower skilled migrants.

Cambodian out-migration, seems mainly destined for Thailand but more recently small numbers are also found in Malaysia and the Republic of Korea. In a study from 1999, their flows are divided into short-term/range border crossing (typically seasonal agricultural workers, the majority of whom are women) and longer-term/range movements (mainly as construction workers, porters, factory and food processing workers, most of whom men) (Sophal & Sovannarith 1999). A recent mapping study for UNIFEM (now UN Women), however, shows that although overall still small, an increasing number of Cambodian women are migrating not only to Thailand but also Malaysia as factory and domestic workers (Lee 2006). Migration of Laotian workers is equally mainly directed at Thailand, of whom more are female (59.4) than male (40.6%) (Phetsiriseng 2007:25). Women from Myanmar, Cambodia and Lao PDR are overtly represented in domestic employment in Thailand.

The policies of destination countries in East Asia also determine the gendered nature of migration flows. Both Japan and Republic of Korea do not allow the legal immigration of lower skilled migrants and have in turn established so-called ‘trainee systems’ to allow the legal entry of this group of migrants. Partly due to pressure by civil society organizations backed up by some employers, the Republic of Korea has begun to phase out its industrial training scheme and currently runs parallel an employment permit system for lower skilled migrants. These industrial trainees are mostly men (JANNI 2001) and the number of women among them are negligible.

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Skilled and professional women have migrated in larger numbers in response to expanding employment opportunities in business, health, education, and services (Raghuram 2000; Willis & Yeoh 2000; Thang et al. 2002); (Dumont et al. 2007 cited in UNDP Human Development Report 2009). Except for foreign doctors and nurses, of whom there are substantial numbers in the Gulf countries as well as Singapore and Hong Kong SAR, the overall numbers of skilled women moving within Asia are small. This has partly to do with destination countries’ policies. In Singapore, for instance, until recently it was impossible for a female professional migrant to bring her husband as ‘accompanying spouse’ (although this has always been possible for male professionals). Another reason might be that student migration of Asians within Asia is comparatively low (Hugo 2005), with the exception of Singapore that is developing into a regional education hub, but studies have shown that student migration is often the first step towards economic migration for the skilled (Li et al. 1996). Destination countries in the North are in fact easing the shift from a student visa to employment visas more and more in the wake of the global hunt for talent. This has not yet happened much in Asia.

Temporary contract migration

Although there are other types of migration - permanent migration, student migration, marriage migration, irregular migration - temporary contract migration has emerged as one of the predominant types of population movements in Asia as elsewhere (Piper 2007). Migration streams that are based on temporary contract work are both a characteristic of lesser skilled sectors such as domestic work and labouring jobs in the construction and shipyard sectors as well as highly skilled workers in, for example, the health and education sectors. In this type of migration, destination countries offer legal work permits for specific periods of time (ranging usually from one to three years) by tying migrants to a specific employer or sector. This allows for a high level of flexibility in the event of labour market changes allowing the disposal of surplus workers in the event of economic downturns by avoiding long term settlement. These contract labour schemes, thus, come with a bundle of restrictions especially for the lower skilled, such as no permission for family or spousal unification, than for the highly skilled migrant worker. In general, foreign worker policy in Asia can be broadly summarized as follows: limiting labour migration, limiting the duration
of migration and limiting integration (Piper and Iredale 2003). From the migrant worker perspective, although the strict regulations imposed on them have prevented their permanent settlement, it has in other ways facilitated the regular employment of fairly large numbers of foreign labour (Bell and Piper 2006). For women, the most easily accessible legal migration streams are domestic work and care work. In addition to domestic work, a significant number of South-East Asian (and other) women have also been entering East Asian countries, especially Japan and Republic of Korea, in response to a great demand for sexual labour. In order to allow these women legal entry (albeit limited to a period of six months), the already existing visa category for artists or entertainers was broadened in the 1980s to include bar hostesses (who constitute potential sex workers). As a result, migrant women, mostly from the Philippines and Thailand, entered East Asian countries to work in the lucrative sex and entertainment industries via both legal and illegal channels. More recently, however, there has been a narrowing of these visa classes in part due to US pressure to counter trafficking as for example in the case of Japan which withdrew its hostess visas after pressure from the US State Department’s Trafficking in Persons report in 2002. This resulted in tighter control of establishments and subsequently in decreasing numbers of (legal) foreign entertainers in Japan. To what extent this might have pushed more women into using illegal channels is unknown.

Changes in Female Migration
The above statistics and recent studies over the last few years point to at least two important changes in women’s migration which are relevant to the discussion here.

First, the most evident of these is the diversification of migrant women regarding origin countries in the search for overseas employment. As demands for migrant women’s labour increased in the region and the socio-political situation has changed in certain countries, opportunities opened up for women who originate from countries that had not previously been sources of migrant labour. These new faces include: Vietnamese and Thai in Taiwan, Cambodians in Malaysia, and Mongolians, Russians, Uzbekistanis and Kazakhstanis in the Republic of Korea. Needless to say, this has increased the competition on the regional labour market and has led to undercutting in terms of wages in jobs such
as domestic work. As touched upon above, this is also due to the increasing number of MOUs and bilateral agreements signed between more and more countries.

The seeking of new sources of migrant labour is not related only to demand in terms of numbers, but also to demand for a different kind of workers: those less expensive, more docile (which is also a racialized position) and/or less ‘rights’ conscious. Successful campaigns for, and enforcement of, workers’ protective mechanisms and/or rights in some countries have brought about unintended consequences in the nationality composition of their migrant work forces. An example is that of Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong SAR who have been partially replaced by less organized, and thus less vocal and assertive, nationality groups\(^5\), such as Indonesians and Sri Lankans (Ogaya 2003). Partly because of the push by an expansive web of migrant associations, the Philippine government has been more proactive in negotiating on behalf of its citizens overseas than any other sending country in Asia (Iredale, Piper and Ancog, 2005). Similarly, in Taiwan, Province of China, the proportion of Filipino women in the country’s foreign domestic worker population has plummeted significantly between 1998 and 2002 as they are more and more being replaced by less ‘expensive’ Indonesian and Vietnamese women (Lan 2003). As a result, a new stratification is emerging, whereby women are ranked in the scale of demand and wages according to their nationality, ethnicity, class, educational level, and available support networks.

Second, despite the absence of official settlement policies in Asia, changes are apparent in the prolonged duration of employment and residence among migrant women in destination countries. For example, since 2002 Taiwan, Province of China, has allowed migrant workers “with good records” (in the sense of being compliant with employer demands and their migration status) to re-enter the country to work for up to six years (Lan 2003:105). There is evidence from Hong Kong SAR that the number of Filipinas staying between five years and 15 years is increasing as more of them choose to remain (even if this entails

\(^5\) The reasons for such variable “national assertiveness” are themselves interesting.
an irregular status) there rather than returning to the Philippines (Sim & Wee 2004). There has also been a considerable rise in the numbers and types of migrant women whose legal visa status grants them the right to reside and work indefinitely in the country to which they have migrated. This is evident from the rising numbers of women who arrive as wives of citizens in countries, such as Japan (Piper 1999; Nakamatsu 2003), Korea (Lee 2003), Taiwan (UNFPA 2006), and Singapore. Yet Asia, especially East and South-East Asia, is conspicuous in terms of the total absence of debates around issues such as integration, citizenship and rights to family unification. The predominant family life experienced by international migrants who are married and have children currently is that of transnationally split families. This has serious consequences for social relations and also social policy which remain largely unexplored (Hujo and Piper 2007).

Many of the issues raised so far clearly point to the significance of broader social dimensions of development beyond narrowly economic aspects. But it is the latter, which have to date, dominated the debate on the migration-development nexus.
Chapter 2: Linking Migration and Development

The expansion of global markets and the concomitant socio-economic transformations in recent decades have led to a quantitative increase in the movements worldwide since the 1990s. With this, a renewed interest in the relationship between migration and development can be observed, triggered by origin governments’ rising interest in remittances. The relationship between migration and development was already hotly debated in the 1970s and 1980s, mostly with a negative undertone in the assessment of the impact of migration on furthering development of origin countries (de Haas 2007). The recent revival of this debate has experienced a shift in emphasis toward the positive aspects of migration and development, together with a more explicit appreciation of the reciprocity of this relationship (in the sense that a certain level of development triggers migration and migration can contribute to development in both origin and destination countries). What has taken centre stage in the contemporary debate now more than ever is the individual migrant in her role as an ‘agent of development’. This shift in attention toward migrants as potential ‘agents of development’ in the South has especially occurred in connection with the formation of ‘diasporas’ or ‘transnational communities’ (Levitt and Nyberg-Sørenson 2004). Thus, the focus has been nearly exclusively on transnational or diaspora communities in economically advanced countries in the West. The classic examples these findings are based on are Indian Information Technology (IT) workers and Chinese business people (GTZ 2006; Gomez 2007). This is a heavily male dominated category comprised of highly skilled migrants derived from the context of South-to-North migration. Other migrant groups, such temporary labour migrants are seldom taken into consideration even though this migration pattern is on the increase worldwide and the predominant feature of intra-Asian migration, in addition to being heavily feminized (Piper 2007). The specific features of this migration stream, such as temporary return or leaving families behind, may have significant and yet different development implications. Moreover, gender as a constituent element of migration has not yet entered mainstream debates on migration and development (Dannecker 2007). 

Furthermore, on the issue of policy, most research has focused on emigration or immigration rules and regulations largely ignoring the significance of other relevant policy areas. This reflects a conventional understanding of development and a narrowly defined economic paradigm, disregarding newer critiques of development thinking and newer concepts like human development. A gender lens allows us to re-direct our attention to the individual and family or household level to assess the impact of migration on personal development as well as on relational changes, and thus on the social dimensions of the migration-development nexus.

Social dimensions

Because of the time limited nature of their contracts, many migrants in Asia re-migrate in order to remain in overseas employment. This usually means that they have to pay again for recruitment fees (which tend to be excessive in many countries, see Verité, 2005) if they opt for legal channels. Also, a considerable number of women working as domestic workers manage to obtain extensions on their contracts with the result of some spending many years, if not decades, abroad. In the absence of family reunification policies for this type of migrant, migrant families become what has been termed “transnationally split households”, either with one parent working abroad or both doing so but in different countries. For those women who have children left behind, they experience a phenomenon referred to as “transnational motherhood” (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Hochschild 2002).

With temporary migration involving highly feminized streams, this entails reversed gender roles by which a wife becomes the family’s breadwinner while her husband is supposed to attend to the children and household. Marital conflict has frequently resulted from this, at least in the initial stages. Such role reversal has often challenged the masculinity of men, especially those who experience long-term unemployment in a stagnant economy (Gamburd 2001; Parreñas 2001).

As demonstrated by Carling in the case of the Philippines (2005), research and policy discourse tend to highlight women’s migration as more problematic with regard to the overall impact on families than men’s. Studies on the impact on children were for instance only conducted when mothers migrated in greater numbers (Piper 2009). This in itself reflects a gendered understanding of the ‘proper’ roles of men and women.
On an individual level, it has been noted that “although all migrants can be agents of change, migrant women are more likely to have their personal development thwarted” (than men) (UN 2006: 15). This is an overtly generalized statement which requires qualification. Research has shown that women tend to view out-migration more as part of their personal development (by breaking out of social conventions and gaining more personal space and freedom as well as higher economic/social status) than men (Dannecker 2007). In addition to narrowly defined economic reasons (which are typically the main focus in the debate on the ‘migration-development nexus’, women also (and in some cases predominantly) use migration as an escape route from unwanted marriages or to get away from abusive relationships or husbands who do not manage to provide for the family (as found by Gamburd, 2001, in the case of Sri Lankan domestic workers; and by Piper, 1997, in the case of Filipino entertainers; and by Oishi 2005 in case of various nationalities). This can also be an unintended consequence of the migration experience where the decision to migrate might have been initially driven purely by economic concerns. Sometimes women subsequently begin to appreciate life away from husbands and extended families.

Changing familial and gender relations

Research on Asian migrants has well demonstrated that migrants are socialized to treat out-migration as ‘for the sake of the family’ (Yeoh et al. 2002). In this sense, a focus on the family as unit of analysis for the investigation of the development outcome of migration is valid and important. Asis (2003), for instance, maintains that the migration of individuals in the developing world is part and parcel of family strategies for securing livelihoods. A focus on families allows us to establish a bridge between those who physically migrate and those who are left behind – and the gender dynamics and differences depending on who the migrants and non-migrants are. Studies on earlier waves of intra-Asian migration which tended to involve predominantly men going to the Middle East have mostly focused on the impact of male out-migration on women left behind, as in the case of studies on Kerala and the so-called ‘Gulf wives’ (Zachariah et al. 1999). The findings were of a mixed nature: on the one hand women benefited from higher levels of independence and decision making power; but the strain of the increased workload and responsibilities were in some cases found to have had negative implications.
More recent waves that involve greater levels of feminization have triggered studies on the impact of women’s out-migration on gender relations and families left behind. Research is particularly advanced on this in the case of the Philippines where studies have been conducted on the reconstruction of men’s sense of masculinity in the event of their wives’ taking on the role of the main income earner by way of overseas employment. Pingol (2000) argues that there are basically two types of men: those who try to adapt and make the best of the situation and those who cannot cope and burden other (usually female) members of the family with responsibilities previously taken care of by their now absent wives. The latter type of men are also often those who end up engaging in adulterous relationships, neglect work and their children. Gamburd (2001) has shown that certain male ‘vices’ such as drinking and gambling are, however, often reasons for pushing women into migration rather than the cause thereof.

Interestingly enough, the focus of research on impact of parental out-migration on children has been on the ‘absentee’ mothers and not on ‘absentee’ fathers. A case in point is the study conducted by Battistella and Conaco (1998) among elementary school children of Filipino migrants. Comparing children from families where one parent is absent to those where both parents are working overseas, they found that most disruptive impacts occur when the mother is absent. Fathers were found to be unable to take on the mothering role effectively. Thus, the degree of involvement of other women in the extended family is an important determinant of the guidance that children can get. A study headed by the Scalabrini Migration Centre (2004), however, shows a more complex and balanced picture of the so far purely negatively portrayed impact of absent mothers on their children. This study differentiates the category of ‘child’ into a number of age groups and shows by a number of indicators that ‘not all is bad’ when mothers migrate for work abroad.

This issue area of changing family relations and impact of migration on the left behind needs to be subject to more research, especially research that is based on data or surveys from different time periods to allow for an assessment of change over time. The topic of changes within family structures also represents an area which deserves more policy intervention by origin countries.
Chapter 3: The Issue of Rights

Recent reports on migration and development have highlighted that this issue works in two ways:

1. by enhancing the benefits of migration for all stakeholders (origin and destination societies as well as the individual migrants), and
2. by making migration more of a choice than a necessity. Both points essentially involve rights issues: the former in form of transparent, legal migration policies which aim at protecting basic rights for migrants (see below); and the latter refers to the ‘right to not have to migrate in the first place’ which would not only require the establishing of more job opportunities locally, but also broader social policy reforms.

Further on the individual level, not all migrants’ personal development is enhanced by the migration experience, despite the recognition that migrants are not necessarily victims but also able to be “agents of change” (United Nations, 2006: 15, with specific reference to migrant women). Respecting migrant’s rights, especially labour rights, as part of economic and social development is seen by some as the best long-term solution to reduce the pressures of out-migration (GCIM 2005; United Nations 2006; UNFPA 2006). Measures to improve the benefits of migration include providing them with a proper legal status, permission to change employer, and, for those accompanying their migrating spouses, permission to work when admitted for family reunification. For women migrants, these measures also include providing them with labour rights by acknowledging jobs such as domestic work as worthy of equal protection under labour laws as other sectors of work, or in the meantime, providing standard contracts of employment which set out the agreed rights and minimum terms and conditions of employment between employer and migrant worker. In this regard, important advancements have been made as the result of UNIFEM’s (now UN Women) migration programme in Jordan with the adoption of standard contracts for all foreign domestic workers. This could serve as a good practice model for countries of destination elsewhere.
In the case where out-migration is chosen to secure livelihoods and for personal development, it has been argued that one of the important ways to ensure protection is via skills acquisition (Piper and Yamanaka 2007). The higher the migrants’ skills, the better their negotiation power and the more likely they get ‘good deals’ (level of wages, working hours, days off). In this sense, there is a clear link to human and social capital building. The issue of ‘skills’ has received some attention in migration scholarship in a different context also: by pointing to the limitations to ‘upward social mobility’ for the lower skilled, especially in the case of female migrants (due to their positioning at the bottom end of gender and ethnically segregated job markets or in dead-end jobs such as domestic work). The issue of “de-skilling” has also been raised by scholars pointing to the case of well educated female migrants taking on low skilled work, such as a teacher turned into a domestic worker, because of the sheer demand and the relative inability to access other legal channels (Piper, 2007a).

One of the important ways of protecting female migrants and guaranteeing “successful” migration, therefore, is via the acquisition of skills or the recognition of certain jobs as skilled (skills as the category of the skilled typically comes with better rights and entitlements than the unskilled). This relates to a broader understanding of ‘rights’ in the sense of ‘right to self-development’7. This acquisition of new skills does not only refer to work-related skills (language, job training) but also to financial skills (budgeting, planning and strategizing for the future) which would assist migrant women in reaping financial rewards from their overseas employment. Too often in the past did women return to find that their remittances were all spent and no savings made (personal conversation of author with staff at the Singapore National Committee for UN Women, March 2006). In this regard, the training and skill programs offered to foreign domestic workers by various non-profit organizations in Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong SAR, partly based on a strategy developed by Filipino and Hong Kong based NGOs called ‘Migrant Savings for Alternative Investment’ (MSAI), seem important developments to ameliorate this situation (Macabuag

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7 This is also broader than the ‘right to development’ as per the 1986 UN Declaration on the Right to Development. See also next sub-section.
The MSAI strategy was pioneered by the Asian Migrant Centre in Hong Kong SAR and Unlad Kabayan, a migrant association in the Philippines to prepare migrants (mostly domestic workers) for their return. It encourages migrants’ saving and in cooperation with communities and organizations in the home countries, livelihood projects are designed and carried out with the migrants’ savings. This strategy is, thus, an attempt to link the ‘right to development’ with the ‘right to not have to migrate in the first place’.

**Rights-based approach**

What is still missing from the debate on the migration-development nexus are the broader connections between migration and development from a rights-based approach and a more fundamental understanding of the type of ‘rights’ at stake. Social rights (social security benefits, child care provisions etc.), and thus considerations for the various social dimensions, are largely absent from this debate and hardly ever contextualized with migration policies. The broader right to family life has only recently become a topic on the agenda of migrant rights’ advocates in Asia. A systematic analysis of the linkages between migration, social development and social policy has not been undertaken, and as a result the long-term effects of migration on issues such as redistribution, social cohesion, equality (gender, caste, ethnic/racial), and rights are under-explored (Hujo and Piper 2007).

As argued here, rights are one of the important ways in which to get at the fundamental root causes of migration. This was highlighted by the Migrant Committee (the Treaty Body of the International Convention for the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families) in its statement contributing to the UN High-level Dialogue on Migration and Development of the General Assembly in September 2006. In this statement the Committee recalls “that the human being is the central subject of development and should be the active participant and beneficiary of the right to development, as set forth in the Declaration on the Right to Development” (2006:2). As per Article 1 of this Declaration (from 1986), “the right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized.” What deserves
to be especially highlighted is the emphasis of rights-based approaches on being ‘people-centred’ and people’s ability to claim rights or entitlements (Grugel and Piper 2007). Within the policy making world at the global level, this is especially recognized by the ILO in its activities surrounding the revival of its rights-based approach to economic migration as well as by UNIFEM (now UN Women) (in its Empowering Women Migrant Workers in Asia - A Briefing Kit). This has specific relevance to women migrants from the South who tend to face serious constraints on realizing their labour and social rights based on the type of jobs they mostly perform and the rigidity of prescribed gender roles. A specific (and fairly well researched) example of migrant women demonstrating concrete action with regard to claiming their rights is the collective organizing of foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong SAR. These organizing activities occur ‘trans-ethnically’ (as it involves domestic workers of various nationalities) and ‘trans-institutionally’ (in form of NGO-trade union alliance) (Piper 2005b). One of the reasons that explain why Hong Kong SAR has emerged as a unique site for migrant rights activism is the political space given to trade unionism (the ‘freedom of association’ is a core labour standard championed by the ILO but its violation is widespread) and other civil society organizations as well as the opportunity for migrants to set up their own organizations (Piper 2007b).

Apart from the ILO framework for migrants’ rights in their capacity as workers, an alternative human rights framework that can be invoked to address the specific concerns and needs of migrant women is the UN Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (UNIFEM 2003). This route could prove more successful given CEDAW’s wide ratification rate.8

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Chapter 4: Conclusion

This chapter offers an initial and rudimentary discussion of the linkages between migration and development in reference to the feminization of intra-regional migratory flows in Asia. Aiming to improve their livelihoods and that of their families in the face of rising male un- or under-employment, increasing numbers of women seek work in foreign countries in different types of occupations. Migration is not necessarily their first choice but at times a reflection of changing labour market structures ‘at home’ and ‘abroad’ that offer specific job opportunities abroad in highly gendered job categories. Restrictive migration policies and the prevalence of temporary contract schemes, in combination with many migrant women’s economic and social contributions being undervalued and their work being often legally unrecognized, pose serious limitations to women migrants’ chances for personal socio-economic empowerment.

Notwithstanding the rich contributions migrants make, several reservations are therefore in order, particularly concerning a general tendency toward excessive (or at least premature) optimism with respect to the development potential of migration. On the positive side, scholars highlight a number of vehicles through which migrants impact on development in their countries of origin via remittances, investment, skill development and other forms of ‘learning’ as well as transnational communities and networks. This body of research which highlights these positive aspects, however, is largely based on very specific case studies in the context of South-North migration which tend to be male dominated. The specific features of temporary migration of lower skilled workers, many of whom women, and those who leave families behind may have significant, but very different, development implications, about which we still know too little at this point in time (Hujo and Piper 2007; Dannecker 2007).

What is clear, however, is that migration poses a new challenge in the subject area of women’s rights, development and citizenship, for research and policymakers alike (as also highlighted by IDRC 2006). Especially the conceptual and normative linkages between women’s social and economic rights as they relate to migration need further exploration in specific geographic or cultural
settings. On the policy level, a deeper analysis of the linkages between various fields of policy (migration and public/social policy) is needed to inform relevant policy developments that target male and female migrants alike as well as their families left behind.
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26
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Gender, Migration and Development –
Emerging Trends and Issues in East and South-East Asia


