



ADOLESCENT AND YOUNG WOMEN MIGRANTS*

Chapter 4

Adolescent and young women are an important and too often overlooked part of the migration phenomenon. They represent about half of all migrants in their age group and constitute about five percent of the total global migrant population. They are believed to be a larger segment of those who are trafficked for sexual exploitation and forced labour. Adolescent and young women migrate in all of the categories of migration—labour movements, family reunification and formation, and forced migration. They are also a significant part of the families left behind in countries of origin by migrating parents and spouses.

Adolescent and young women migrants often face triple forms of discrimination—as women, young people and migrants. In many cases, gender based discrimination is itself a reason that they migrate—either to escape restrictions on their freedom, gender-based violence or to seek better lives in other countries. These young women face significant challenges and discrimination, at the same time they have opportunities resulting from migration. For many adolescent and young women, migration is a liberating experience. They may be the beneficiaries of increased educational opportunities in countries of origin or destination. As the recipient of remittances or as a breadwinner in a new country, they may be able to define how their own and their household’s financial resources will be spent. They may experience greater rights and personal freedom (although this depends largely on where they migrate and under what conditions).

But for others, migration is source of violence and disruption. Migration routes, particularly for those moving in an irregular manner, can be dangerous for adolescent and young women who face the strong potential for sexual attacks. They may be employed in unregulated industries with little regard for their well-being. Whether left behind or migrating on their own, they may face long periods away from parents or spouses; in some cases, the migrating family member may never return. Early marriages and pregnancies can undermine their health and safety.

This chapter examines the lives, needs and accomplishments of adolescent and young women who are affected by migration. Four distinct categories of adolescents and young women are so affected: 1) those who migrate with family members, 2) those

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who migrate on their own, 3) those born in destination countries to migrants, and 4) those living in the country of origin after one or both of their parents migrate.

The chapter takes a gendered perspective in examining the experiences of adolescent and young women. As explained in the 2004 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development:

“... gender is a core organizing principle of social relations, including hierarchical relations, in all societies. It views the migration of women and men as influenced by beliefs and expectations about appropriate behaviours for women and men and between women and men, which are reinforced in economic, political and social institutions. A gender perspective acknowledges the influence of gender inequalities that exist in both origin and destination countries and illustrates how those inequalities can empower women but can also handicap them in the migratory process¹.

The next three sections of the chapter focus primarily on adolescent and young women who have migrated and the causes and forms of migration involving this population. The next section examines the impact of migration on gender roles in the context of migration of adolescents and young women. The following one identifies legal frameworks applicable to the migration of adolescents and youth, pointing out gaps in law and policy. Section Five includes the broader categories of interest, examining the needs of adolescent and young women who migrate, those born to migrants (regardless of their own citizenship) and those left behind in origin countries. It focuses on three areas of particular importance in understanding the impact of migration on adolescents and young women: education, health, and decent work. The final section provides policy conclusions and recommendations for empowering young migrant women and ensuring their protection from abuses.

Policies should be developed to offer girls more opportunities to study, while recognising the reality that many of them may also engage in part-time employment, inside or outside their household. Flexibility for school entry or re-entry is critical. To encourage parents to send their children to school, educational curricula in rural schools need to be reviewed and revised to ensure the inclusion of practical skills that will help children and adolescents make the transition to employment. Curricula

should reflect the shifting needs of the local labour market (agriculture, micro-enterprise) and include work-based training.

A best practice in the area of relevant training for transitioning into the workforce is Nigeria's 'National Open Apprenticeship Scheme', targeted mainly to unemployed youth and those who left school, providing vocational training for a period of six-to-36 months. The scheme reports that 90 per cent of those trained found work.²

Apprenticeships can be an excellent way for young people to transition into the labour market, but experience has shown that host governments need to establish monitoring systems to ensure that young people are getting maximum benefit and not being exploited. To safeguard youth rights, policies should define guidelines for the establishment of apprenticeships, vocational training and internships that are applicable in different socio-cultural contexts.

TRENDS IN MIGRATION OF ADOLESCENT AND YOUNG WOMEN

This section focuses on patterns and trends in migration of adolescent and young women. It presents statistics on the number of adolescent and young women; examines the causes of their migration; and describes typical forms of migration that they pursue.

Numbers

Women and girls have been an important component of international migration during the past six decades. As of 2010, about 49 percent of the world's migrants were female, up from 46.6 percent in 1960.³ Although data have improved significantly in the past decades, sex and age disaggregated information is often missing in migration data sets and analyses. As a result, information about adolescents and youth (that is, those who are 15-24 years of age) disaggregated by sex is difficult to find on many subjects. Yet, this is a critical age for many migrants and citizen-born children of migrants in destination countries as well as young people left behind in countries of origin. The lack of such data is especially critical regarding migrant flows, where the prevalence of young women may be considerably higher than in migrant stock numbers that reflect the cumulative outcome of past migratory movement.

The gender distribution of international migrant stocks varies substantially by region⁴. The proportion of legal immigrants overall who are women is particularly high in the traditional immigration countries (North America and Oceania) and in Europe. It is lowest in North Africa and Southern Asia. Differences can also be seen among different emigration countries. While the Philippines has considerably higher proportion of female migrants living abroad (60 percent, Mexico has far fewer female emigrants (45 percent)).⁵ Unfortunately, comparable data on age is not available for emigration patterns as is available for immigration.

According to the UN Population Division, adolescents (15-19) and youth (20-24) represent about 5 and 7 percent of all migrant stocks, respectively. There are more than five million 15-19 year olds, representing 48.1 percent of all adolescent migrants. The more than seven million women age 20-24 represent 48.1 percent of young migrants. As shown in Table 4.1, the share of women declines, however, in the 25-49 age group and remains lower until 65 years of age, when women represent 56 percent of migrants of that age. The pattern is somewhat different by region, however. In Africa, women represent a majority of those in the younger age group and a distinct minority in the older years. The lowest proportions of women per working age group are in Asia where less than 40 percent of migrants between 30 and 45 are women.

Table 4.1 International Migrants by Age Cohort

Age	0 to 4	5 to 9	10 to 14	15 to 19	20 to 24	25 to 29	30 to 34	35 to 39	40 to 44	45 to 49	50 to 54	55 to 59	60 to 64	65+
World	49.1	49.0	48.8	48.6	48.1	46.9	46.1	46.2	46.7	47.8	49.3	50.7	53.7	56.0
Africa	50.5	51.0	52.0	53.4	52.0	48.4	45.2	42.7	41.1	40.4	40.2	40.3	41.7	43.9
Asia	48.8	48.2	47.3	46.3	44.7	41.5	39.7	39.6	39.9	41.4	43.5	47.1	51.0	54.8
Europe	49.1	49.4	50.2	50.2	51.2	51.2	50.6	50.2	50.4	51.5	52.7	53.2	57.3	57.3
Latin America and Caribbean	47.4	48.2	49.2	50.1	50.9	50.9	50.8	50.7	50.6	50.1	49.3	48.4	49.3	51.8
North America	48.7	48.3	47.9	45.6	45.4	47.1	47.6	48.5	49.0	49.7	51.0	52.5	53.9	58.3
Oceania	49.0	49.0	49.0	49.7	50.9	52.1	52.5	52.1	52.0	51.8	50.6	49.4	49.7	52.2

CAUSES OF MIGRATION

Many different factors influence whether adolescent and young women will migrate internationally. For all women, drivers of migration may be found at the individual, familial and societal levels. The interplay between personal and societal factors is particularly important in explaining cross-border movements of adolescent and young women. As girls enter adolescence, expectations about their future responsibilities are defined not only by the interests of the individual and family but also the broader society. The relative importance of education versus early marriage and child-bearing is one factor that determines not only whether an adolescent or young woman migrates but, if so, if it will be as a foreign student or as bride. Culture also helps determine if marriage is an arranged process and the age at which marriage is acceptable for an adolescent.

Societal factors also determine the level of gender equality, especially in access to public services such as education and health, and to employment outside of the home or the conditions of work and availability of social protection. Gender inequality can be a powerful factor in precipitating migration, particularly when women have increased economic, political and social expectations that actual opportunities at home do not allow them to meet. Globalisation, with its emphasis on communications, mobility, trade and investment, has increased knowledge of options within and outside of home countries, and it has opened up a range of new opportunities for young women.

However, in countries where the effects of globalisation have increased poverty and left women with limited economic, social or political rights, international migration may be the best or only way to better their social and economic situations.⁶

FORMS OF MIGRATION

Many In an early seminal work on women and migration, Thadani and Todaro described four principal types of female migrants, distinguished by their marital status and their reasons for migrating: 1) married women migrating in search of employment; 2) unmarried women migrating in search of employment; 3) unmarried women migrating for marriage reasons; and 4) married women engaged in associational migration with

no thought of employment.⁷ Adolescent and young women can be found among all of these groups. Discussed below are the principal ways that they migrate:

Family Formation and Reunification

Family formation and family reunification are significant reasons for moving internationally as it is internally. Upon marriage, one or both spouses generally move from the family home to a new residence.

Governments often permit close family members of those already in the country to enter through legal channels. Eligibility for family reunification is not universal, however. Many contract labour arrangements preclude admission of family members. Admission rules often restrict family reunification for asylum seekers and those granted temporary protection, even in traditional immigration countries.

More open family reunification policies protect adolescent and young women. Splitting families apart deprives each member of the fundamental right to respect of his or her family life. Since the family unit is often the principal support to its members, separating families also undermines other rights. Children and women, in particular, become vulnerable to exploitation when they are separated from their relatives.

Family reunification and formation programs can, however, also invite various abuses affecting adolescent and young women. Young brides in arranged marriages, for example, may not have given informed consent either to the marriage or their migration to a new country. Mail-order marriages also hold the potential for inflicting harm on young brides. While many companies have a legitimate interest in matching spouses, some of these businesses use the lure of immigration as a pretext for trafficking and the adolescent and young women are forced into prostitution. Even in legitimate marriages, the migrating spouse may be at risk of domestic violence but unlikely to report it for fear of being deported.

To offset the negative ramifications of family reunification policies, some countries provide vehicles by which those who are victims of domestic abuse may become permanent residents without the permission of or remaining with the abusive husband/father.

Labour Migration

Migration for work and study is also common among adolescent and young women. Several distinct categories of adolescent and young women migrate for work purposes, differentiated by their skills, the permanence of their residence in the host country and their legal status. In many cases, the type of work that young migrant women are in demand for and enter is gendered, as it is for natives. Morokvasic's observation based on research in Europe in the 1980s is as timely today as it was then: "[migrant women] have been incorporated into sexually segregated labor markets at the lowest stratum in high technology industries or at the 'cheapest' sectors in those industries which are labor intensive and employ the cheapest labor to remain competitive."⁸

Overseas domestic service is a common occupation for young migrant women as is garment manufacturing, restaurant and hotel services, teaching, and work as health care aides and professionals in private homes, nursing homes and hospitals. They may migrate through official contract labour programs that match workers and employers, or they may obtain such employment after migrating, often through informal networks. Many of these jobs are highly gendered both for the migrants and their employers. In some cases, the adolescent and young women are part of the global care chain, providing child and elder care services to women working outside of the home and employing other young women to take care of their own children.

At the lower end of the skills spectrum, young women migrants manufacture garments and other items, process meat and poultry, work as nursing home and hospital aides, clean restaurants and hotels, and provide myriad other services. At the higher end of the skill spectrum, young women migrate to engage in equally gendered occupations. For example, sizeable numbers of young migrant women enter the health professions, particularly nursing and physical therapy. Others work as teachers. While higher paid than the work performed by lesser skilled young migrant women, these jobs are generally lower paid than those men perform in the same profession (e.g., nurses versus physicians).

Forced Migration of Adolescent and Young Women

About half of all refugees are women along with girls under the age of 18. Adolescent and young women who are forced migrants experience many challenges. Foremost are their special needs for legal and physical protection. Gender is not included in the international definition of a refugee as a person with a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a social group. Yet, adolescent and young women asylum-seekers may be fleeing such gender-based persecution as rape, honour killings, domestic violence, forced marriages and female genital mutilation from which their home country governments are unwilling or unable to protect them.

The protection of adolescent and young women closer to conflict situations is even more problematic. Civilians are increasingly the targets of attacks in civil conflicts, with rape and sexual violence now a recognized war crime. Rape and sexual assault also occurs during flight at the hands of border guards, government and rebel military units, bandits and others. The safety of adolescent and young women may be no more ensured once in refugee and displaced persons camps. For example, they face serious threat of rape when picking firewood, often the only source of heating and cooking fuel. Adolescent and young women have been forced to provide sexual favours in exchange for obtaining food rations for themselves and their families. Such problems do not necessarily stop when the women return home. The conflict may still be continuing and, even if a peace agreement has been signed, political instability, the continued presence of landmines and the destruction of the economy and infrastructure make conditions dangerous for women and their families.

Trafficking in Persons

A particularly troubling trend in recent years has been the emergence of professional trafficking operations. The trafficking of adolescent and young women for prostitution and forced labour has been one of the fastest growing areas of international criminal activity

Traffickers acquire their victims in a number of ways. Sometimes young women are kidnapped outright in one country and taken forcibly to another. In other cases, traffickers entice victims to migrate voluntarily with false promises of good paying

jobs in foreign countries as au pairs, models, dancers, domestic workers, etc. Traffickers advertise these phony jobs as well as marriage opportunities abroad in local newspapers and use marriage agency databases and matchmaking parties to find their victims.

While there is no single victim stereotype, a majority of trafficked women are believed to be under the age of 25, with many in their mid to late teens.⁹ The fear among customers of HIV and AIDS infection has driven traffickers to recruit younger women and girls, some as young as seven. Victims of severe forms of trafficking are often subject to cruel mental and physical abuse in order to keep them in servitude, including beating and battering, rape, starvation, forced drug use, confinement, and seclusion. Once victims are brought to their destinations, their passports are often confiscated. Victims are forced to have sex, often unprotected, with large number of partners, and to work unsustainably long hours. Many victims suffer mental breakdowns and are exposed to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV and AIDS. They are often denied medical care and those who become ill are sometimes killed.

MIGRATION AND GENDER RELATIONS

International migration profoundly affects gender relations, particularly the role of adolescent and young women in households and communities. The impacts are complex. In many respects, migration enhances the autonomy and power of women. When women from traditional societies migrate to advanced industrial societies, they become familiar with new norms regarding women's rights and opportunities. If they take outside employment, they may have access to financial resources that had never before compensated their labour. Even if their pay is pooled with other family members, this new wage-earning capacity often gives women greater ability to direct household priorities.

Adolescent and young women who are left at home as their fathers or husbands migrate also experience changes in their role. They may now have greater household and economic responsibilities. Although they may be financially dependent on remittances from their overseas relatives, the women may have substantial autonomy over decisions about how the funds will be used. Should their fathers or husbands not return home, or stop sending remittances, the women may have to assume even greater responsibility.

In other respects, migration can serve to reinforce traditional gender roles. Most young women who migrate as principal wage-earners fill highly gendered occupations. These range from domestic work to garment work as seamstresses to professional work as nurses and teachers. In turn, they often hire their sisters and cousins to take care of the children or parents left behind.

For adolescent and young women who migrate from developing to developed countries, adjustment to the new culture can be a difficult process. Barriers to successful adjustment include those within the host society as well as individual or personal ones. Among the former are racial intolerance and sexual and cultural discrimination aimed against foreign women. Many migrants are of a different race from the majority of the population of their new country. As young women, they may face the triple problem of racism, sexism and ageism in seeking employment, training or otherwise participating in the activities of the new country.

Personal barriers to adjustment include family conflicts, traumas suffered en route, illiteracy, lack of language skills, religious constraints. Changes in family roles often accompany migration. Some families have experienced long periods of separation. Male roles may change drastically in the new society. If their skills are not readily transferable to industrialized countries, the men may find themselves unable to support their families. Young women may feel the brunt of their frustrations.

"Men often feel neglected and disappointed, which sometimes brings out patriarchal habits and efforts to re-establish traditional roles -- even by force if necessary. In a situation where men are unsure of themselves, they often become sceptical about their wives. Their own feelings of inferiority can lead to their doubting the love or trustworthiness of their wives. When men mistrust their wives, they may restrict them and try to control them in an effort to boost their egos (quoted in Martin 2004)."

The adjustment may be particularly difficult in forced migration situations. Women in refugee camps generally continue to be productive members of their families, responsible for such domestic activities as food, water and firewood collection, preparation of meals and other household chores. By contrast, men often find that they cannot fulfil their traditional productive role in agricultural or other employment. Adolescent boys may believe they have no economic alternatives other than joining military forces or gangs.¹⁰ Adolescent girls may also be impressed into service as

soldiers, porters, cooks and ‘wives.’ The frustrations experienced by men can result in increased family tensions, domestic violence, depression and/or alcoholism.

International migration can lead to generational tensions, as well, particularly when children, including adolescents, adapt more quickly than their parents to a new language and social system. Seeing their children adopt unfamiliar practices may prompt some immigrants to recommit themselves and their families to more traditional, often patriarchal mores.

Immigration rules can also reinforce traditional roles. Because many adolescents and young women obtain legal residency status through family reunification or formation, their ability to exercise rights may be limited by their spouse’s willingness to support their immigration claims. Migrant women who are victims of spousal abuse, for example, may be unwilling to leave the abuser if he controls access to legal status.

INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS TO PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF ADOLESCENT AND YOUNG MIGRANT WOMEN

Not surprisingly given the types of migration discussed above, some young migrant women are especially vulnerable to deprivation, hardship, discrimination and abuse. They face discrimination due to their status as migrants, their status as women and their vulnerability as young people. They have limited access to employment and generally earn less than men and native-born women. Legally, many young migrant women are vulnerable if their residence is dependent upon a relationship with a citizen or “primary migrant”. Young migrant women, particularly forced migrants, face real risks of physical and sexual abuse during travel and in the country of destination. In short, their rights are violated frequently, drastically and all too often with impunity.

The rights of migrant workers have been specifically enumerated in various international instruments. Adolescent and young migrant women’s rights are covered in all of the core human rights instruments. Four apply in particular to this population: the Convention on the Rights of the Child, depending on the age of the adolescent; Convention Eliminating All Forms of Discrimination against Women; Convention relating to the Status of Refugees; and Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

The latter two are migration specific instruments. They do not have provisions that are specific to adolescent and young women but many of the rights articulated in these Conventions are relevant to their situation. The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol offers international protection to those unable or unwilling to return home because of a well-founded fear of persecution. Although gender is not included in the list of reasons that one might fear persecution, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and many governments protect women, girls and adolescents whose fear of gender-based persecution is well-founded. These include cases in which the persecution takes the form of female genital mutilation, domestic violence, honour killings and similar threats that are of particular concern to young women. UNHCR's guidance also encourages governments to be gender and age sensitive in their adjudication of asylum claims.

Two other international legal instruments apply particularly to adolescent and young women and children. The first pertains to trafficking in persons—the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, which supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The trafficking protocol entered into force on 31 December 2003 and currently (as of 28 March 2014), there are 159 State Parties to the protocol (including ratifications, acceptances, approvals and succession).¹¹ It sets out the responsibilities of states to prosecute trafficking violations and provides recommendations to states with regard to the protection of trafficking victims and the prevention of trafficking.

The ILO Convention on Domestic Workers that entered into force on September 5, 2013 aims to protect domestic workers through specific provisions related to conditions of work. The Convention notes that “domestic work continues to be undervalued and invisible and is mainly carried out by women and girls, many of whom are migrants or members of disadvantaged communities and who are particularly vulnerable to discrimination in respect of conditions of employment and of work, and to other abuses of human rights.”¹² Importantly for adolescents, the Convention requires that State parties take steps to ensure that the work performed by domestic workers who are under the age of 18 “does not deprive them of compulsory education, or interfere with opportunities to participate in further education or vocational training.”¹³

NEEDS AND EXPERIENCES

Adolescent and young migrant women have needs that overlap with those of girls and those of adult women but, because of their age, they have special needs as well. Migration presents both opportunities and challenges in ensuring that these needs are addressed. This section focuses on three particular areas in which adolescents and youth must be treated as distinct category: education, health and mental health, decent work and employment.

Education

One of the most important impacts of migration is on the education of adolescent and young women. The literature is mixed on this issue. Some studies show that remittances have a positive impact on the likelihood that children will stay in school for longer periods but this occurs mostly at lower ages. In an exhaustive review of the literature on the impact of remittances on school attendance, Schapiro found that “positive effects of temporary economic migration on human capital accumulation, with the gains being much greater for girls, yielding a very substantial reduction in gender inequalities in access to education.”¹⁴ She also noted, however, that the reduction in gender inequality in education may be the result in lower educational attainment for boys in migrant families.¹⁵ McKenzie and Rapoport, for example, found that the probability of attending school is 16% lower for 12-15 year old males in migrant households compared to non-migrant ones. The loss is even higher (21%) among 16-18 year old males in migrant households. At this age, girls in migrant households also experience lower educational attainment (20%) than in non-migrant households.¹⁶

Adolescent boys in migrant households appear to be dropping out of school to work, often becoming migrants themselves. The return on education for these boys is not sufficient to offset the immediate gains from entering the workforce. Research in Mexico demonstrated that teenage boys often had very detailed information about the job opportunities available in Los Angeles or Chicago, generally based on discussions with family members who had already migrated. Younger girls in migrant households, on the other hand, appear to remain in school for longer periods, perhaps because remittances that add to household income allow families to forego their earnings. However, as they get older, and more members of the household depart, they may feel

increased pressure to leave school to contribute to household activities or to marry and start their own households. An exception may arise in situations in which female education—for example, to gain nursing degrees—is known to contribute to significantly higher wages upon migrating in the future (as is the case for many Filipinas).

A study in Bolivia found that migration of parents left adolescent girls vulnerable to potential negative impacts; however, the authors found no evidence that adolescent girls were more vulnerable than were adolescent boys or younger children to these impacts. They noted, as well, that migration proved to be a source of empowerment for some adolescent girls as they took on adult roles, including decisions on the use of remittances, in the absence of their parents.¹⁷

There is considerable variation in destination countries in the extent to which young migrants and the citizen children of migrants complete secondary or higher levels of education. Studies document high dropout rates for adolescents in certain populations. For adolescent girls, teen pregnancy may interrupt schooling. Also, they may feel pressures similar to those experienced by adolescent boys to leave school to help support the family. A study of unaccompanied Russian adolescents in Israel showed no significant gender differences in acculturation and homesickness affecting schooling between girls and boys. Both groups experienced modest stress and homesickness. The factors that proved important for the successful adjustment of the adolescents were “psychological resources formed in the pre-migration period, low perceived discrimination, and high perceived social support in the host country.”¹⁸

A study of adolescent girls and boys in Spain focused on the outcomes of education. The findings compared the performance in secondary school of first generation migrants with those of the second and third. Neither first generation girls nor boys performed as well as the second and third generation but adolescent girls had a greater gap in achievement, particularly among those from Latin America. The author noted: “Given that most immigrants arrive from countries where females have lower status than males both socially and economically, it is not surprising that first-generation women continue to display this inequality in schooling in their new country of residence.”¹⁹ More promising, the differences between second and third generation disappeared for both sexes.

One phenomenon seen particularly among migrant adolescents is the ‘failure to drop-in’ to school. Especially among adolescents who migrate on their own, the aim of migration is work, not schooling. Although unaccompanied minors are disproportionately male, girls do travel on their own. Access to education for adolescent and young migrant women is particularly problematic for those who have missed years of education because of poverty, conflict or other disruptive events. Returning to school is difficult because of the loss of wages as well as conflicting responsibilities, including care of children and other family members. In many cases, schools are not equipped to address the educational needs of young women in this situation.

Health

Adolescent and young migrant women have unique health needs that require access to appropriate health and mental health services, including reproductive healthcare. Among the issues facing this population are teen pregnancy, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), HIV/AIDS and sexual and gender based violence (SGBV). Adolescent pregnancy presents multiple health problems. According to the World Health Organization, “Having babies during adolescence has serious consequences for the health of the girl and her infant, especially in areas with weak health systems. In some countries, adolescents are less likely than adults to obtain skilled care before, during and after childbirth. Complications from pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death among girls aged 15-19 years in many low- and middle-income countries.”²⁰ The health problems carry over to the children born of teenage mothers. They are more likely to have low birth weight, which, as WHO notes, can have a long-term impact on their health and development.²¹

Adolescent pregnancies are a product of many factors, including early marriage, lack of information about or access to contraception, or gender-based violence. These factors combine with socio-economic conditions to lead to early child birth. Adolescents and young migrant women are often exposed to multiple contributors to teen pregnancy. A study of adolescent Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica, for example, found notably higher rates of pregnancy among migrants than native born. The study notes, “Age, low educational attainment, urban residence, poverty and union were all significant predictors of adolescent pregnancy.”²² Similarly, a study of Latina

adolescent girls in the United States concluded “socioeconomic instability and policies limiting access to education influenced childbearing for immigrant adolescents.”²³ Another study of immigrants in the United States found that recent arrivals were at greater risk of unplanned pregnancy.²⁴

Access to reproductive health services also helps to address issues pertaining to STDs and HIV/AIDS among adolescent and young migrant women. Whereas being a migrant is not in and of itself a risk factor, migrants often find themselves in situations that put them at risk of contracting these communicable diseases. According to the *2004 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic*, “there is a strong link between various kinds of mobility and heightened risk of HIV. However, while there is a widespread prejudice that migrants “bring AIDS with them,” the fact is that many migrants move from low HIV prevalence areas to those with higher prevalence, increasing their risk of being exposed to the virus.”²⁵

Individual and social factors create special risk factors for young women. For example, crossing borders clandestinely puts young women at risk of rape by border guards, smugglers, bandits, and other criminals. Transit by small boats is dangerous not only because of the potential for capsizing but also being attacked by pirates. Young women traveling alone may have little choice but to sell sex for survival, or to establish partnerships in transit or at destination simply for protection. The risk of sexual violence also increases in sex-segregated and unregulated sectors of the economy, for example for female traders, domestic workers and sex workers.²⁶ Trafficked women are at especially high risk—not only those pressed into the sex trades but also those trafficked into domestic service and other types of forced labor. Labor migration, particularly seasonal movements, increases the likelihood of HIV/AIDS, for not only male migrants but also for stay-at-home women partners.

A number of factors, depending on the source and destination country, affect access to and use of reproductive health services. Often, lack of insurance coverage is a major barrier. Many entry-level jobs of the type that migrants are likely to hold pay no health insurance costs. Religious and cultural views of contraception affect choices, as do language barriers. It is very difficult for young women to discuss their medical problems, particularly gynecological ones, through translators—some of whom may be relatives. Use of family members as interpreters also raises ethical concerns of

confidentiality, informed consent and privacy between health professionals and patients – something lost when family members conduct medical interpretation (and when this is not the choice of the adolescent and young women).

A further health need pertains to mental well-being. For exactly the same reasons that adolescent and young migrant women are at risk of STDs and HIV/AIDS, they are often at risk of emotional and psychological trauma. Moreover, migration itself presents challenges as newcomers must adapt to new language, working and living conditions, and cultural norms. For adolescent girls and young women, these challenges come at a time of physical and emotional changes due to adolescence itself. At the same time, however, studies show a high level of resilience and self-confidence in this population.²⁷

Attention is needed for adolescents and young women to gain access to culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate programs to address tensions and traumas arising from migration.

Decent work and employment

This section focuses on challenges for adolescent and young women with regard to employment. It focuses in particular on access to decent work, problems with labour standards enforcement in the sectors in which adolescent and young women are employed, especially as pertains to domestic workers, and the particular problems experienced by those in irregular status without authorization to work.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines decent work as “opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.”²⁸ ILO’s decent work agenda is premised on the idea that “full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people, is the most effective route out of poverty.”²⁹ As such, it is imperative to ensure that all young women have access to employment that meets decent work standards, including adequate earnings, decent hours, stability and security of work, ability to balance work and family life, equality of opportunity in work, safe working conditions, adequate

social protection, and ability of workers to express themselves on work related matters.³⁰ Each of these areas has special import for adolescent and young migrant women who often find themselves in difficult work environments because of the gendered nature of their employment as well as their age and their status as foreign nationals.

Many women migrant workers face discrimination, violence and exploitation at all stages of migration. This is especially true for the most marginalized such as domestic workers, many of whom are young women or undocumented women migrants. They are caught in abusive working conditions characterized by forced labour, disproportionately low wages, exclusion from minimum wage coverage, excessively long hours of work, insufficient rest periods and leave and restrictions on movement and association. They are often marginalized from access to basic services, protection and assistance, including in crises. They face gender-based violence by various actors, detention, often in abusive situations, arbitrary deportation and legal and practical barriers to enjoying fundamental human rights and obtaining justice.

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Domestic service, as discussed above, is a common occupation for young migrant women and poses particular problems. Because the young women are employed in private homes, governments are often reluctant to monitor their working conditions. In many cases, domestic service is not regulated at all. An ILO report outlined a number of areas of concern regarding occupational hazards faced by young women employed in domestic work, noting “fatigue resulting from long hours of work, carrying heavy loads, use of toxic cleaners and solvents, high temperatures when and utilization of sharp objects deserve special attention, especially where young domestic workers are concerned.”³¹

When these workers are not only young and female but also foreign, they face added problems. Their legal status within the country may be dependent fully on the willingness of a sponsor to continue their employment. Any complaints about wages, hours and working conditions may result not only in being fired from a specific job but also deportation from the country. In some cases, the contract workers cannot leave employment or even the country voluntarily without the sponsor’s approval. This is the case in the Kafala system used in many countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council and elsewhere in the Middle East.³²

The Domestic Workers Convention seeks greater consistency in outlining state responsibilities, particularly in ensuring that parties to the treaty “take measures to ensure that domestic workers, like workers generally, enjoy fair terms of employment as well as decent working conditions and, if they reside in the household, decent living conditions that respect their privacy.” It also requires that state parties ensure that migrant domestic workers receive a written job offer, or contract of employment that is enforceable in the country in which the work is to be performed. The contract should provide the terms and conditions of employment, including the name and address of the employer and of the worker; the address of the usual workplace or workplaces; the starting date and, where the contract is for a specified period of time, its duration; the type of work to be performed; the remuneration, method of calculation and periodicity of payments; the normal hours of work; paid annual leave, and daily and weekly rest periods; the provision of food and accommodation, if applicable; the period of probation or trial period, if applicable; the terms of repatriation, if applicable; and terms and conditions relating to the termination of employment, including any period of notice by either the domestic worker or the employer.

In general, the jobs open to lesser skilled young women are low-wage ones making it difficult for them to earn adequate income for themselves and their families. As such, young migrant women, particularly those who are supporting children, often find themselves living in poverty. Many have had little access to education in their home countries and are unable to move up the economic ladder into higher paid occupations that require greater skills. Often, the jobs for which they qualify do not include health insurance for the workers or their families. Migrant workers are also often ineligible for social protections that are available to native women and their children. In the United States, for example, only 35 percent of adult migrants are covered by employer sponsored health insurance as compared to 65 percent of adult citizens despite similar rates of employment. Yet, Medicaid, the government health program for low income women and children, is not available to legal immigrants during the first five years after entry; nor are subsidies for purchased health insurance. Migrants who are undocumented or in unauthorized situations in the country are barred from receiving Medicaid except in the case of medical emergencies.³³

Often, adolescent and young women migrants are working for family members, with and without compensation. A study of adolescents in the Washington DC area found that undocumented girls were particularly likely to be working at home rather than in the outside labour force.³⁴ Such an environment was seen as providing greater safety for the young women because they would otherwise be working in the informal economy and without legal authorization. Working within the home or for family members allows them to contribute to household income by providing greater opportunities for other members of the family to engage in wage labour – for example, by taking care of children so the mothers could take employment. Yet, many young migrant women do not have a legal status within their host countries that offers them sufficient protection from abuse when they are working within these family settings. If their legal status is closely tied to their husband’s or father’s, they may be vulnerable to deportation should they protest domestic violence or exploitation of their labour.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To move forward in better protecting adolescent and young migrant women, there must be greater awareness and understanding of the conditions and needs specific to them. Countries need to take steps to ensure that they have equal access to projects and services so that these young women can fully participate in and benefit from their migration experience. In some cases, there is need to design and implement projects and services specifically for adolescent and young migrant women because mainstream programs are inappropriate to the needs of this population. The aim of policies therefore must be to maximize the beneficial aspects of migration for adolescent and young women while minimizing these potential harms. Policies need to take into account the causes of migration as well as the stages of movement, address the needs not only of those who move but also those who stay behind. In order to protect and empower young women migrants, policies should take into account and address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of this group. They must therefore be gender sensitive and based on human rights.

NINE KEY AREAS NEEDING ATTENTION INCLUDE:

1. Collecting sex and age disaggregated data. The ability to analyse the age and gender implications of international migration is severely limited by deficiencies in data. Although the UN Population Division has made strides in generating sex and age disaggregated data, the information collected by governments is not of uniformly

high quality or universally available. The data would allow for a better understanding of the reasons that adolescent and young women migrate and how gender inequality affects migration decisions among those in the 15-25 year old age bracket, so as to better inform public-policy making.

2. Improving the protection of adolescent and young migrant women's rights and their safety and security. In particular, steps are needed to protect them from labour abuses, sexual exploitation, trafficking, involuntary prostitution and other exploitable situations as well as to avoid detention. Given the triple discrimination faced by many adolescent and young women migrants, ensuring that their rights are protected is challenging as well as essential.
3. Ratifying and implementing applicable international conventions that define the human and labour rights of young migrants, including the International Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and the ILO Convention 189 on Domestic Workers.
4. Enabling adolescent and young women to participate actively in decisions that affect them, including ones on their own migration and, where they will be left in countries of origin, the migration of their parents and spouses. Decisions on migration are often made at the household level. Adolescent and young women are not generally well positioned to participate in decision-making processes that generally favour older, male members. Establishing mechanisms to ensure that decisions to migrate, or remain at home, take into consideration the views of adolescent and young women will help ensure that their migration is fully voluntary.
5. Ensuring access to secondary and tertiary education for adolescent and young women who migrate as well as those who are left behind by migrating parents. Since migration and remittances have been shown to have both positive and negative consequences, greater attention is needed to maximizing the benefits while reducing potential harm to educational outcomes.
6. Improving the economic and employment status of adolescent and young women to enable them to support themselves in dignity and safety without recourse to migration unless such movement is of their own volition. Access to education, language and skills training is an important component of this issue as is adequate

and safe housing. In this regard, special attention should be given to ensuring that adolescent and young migrant women have access to decent work.

7. Increasing the access of adolescent and young women to primary and reproductive health care services, including programs to address gender and sexual based violence, trauma resulting from travel and conflict, and sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. As discussed above, there are many barriers to access, including legal status, language barriers and cultural norms, which must be overcome to ensure that adolescent and young women migrants have the health care services that they need.
8. Preparing adolescent and young women for migration by providing information about their rights, what they might expect on route and in the destination, whom to contact if they are at risk of harm, safe housing alternatives, as well as occupational skills that are transferable to other countries. These programs should also aim to help adolescent and young women better participate in decisions within their households with regard to migration and remittance use.
9. Ensuring that adolescents and young women have access to birth certificates, passports and other documentation and communications devices needed to migrate safely and to prove one's identity and age.

NOTES

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