



# Resolutions To Action

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## Development and Migration: Empowerment of Women on the Move

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*I have had a complete account of what you have done for your mother-in-law after your husband's death; you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know previously. .. Ruth 2:11*

### EXPERIENCE

In just the past month, we have heard the stories of migrant women from all over the world. Mandesa from Nigeria attempted to enter Spain on a boat to the Canary Islands. Juana from Mexico works as a nurse with elderly patients in Los Angeles. Asian mafia trafficked Sunitha from Sri Lanka to Australia. An Albanian sells his sister to a man migrating to Italy.

Migration is a global phenomenon. It requires a global response. No set of policies formulated to control and criminalize can hope to manage well the present flow of peoples between countries. In the United States we continue to experience the divisiveness and ineffectiveness of such policies.

Focusing on the feminine face of international migration in its relation to development leads to policy from which all can benefit: the migrants, the countries of origin, and the countries of destination.

### Who are migrants today?

In 2005, 191 million persons migrated. This means that about one in 30 of the world's people were on the move from their region of origin to another region of destination.

Migration has an increasingly feminine and youthful face. In some countries, the percentage of women migrants is as high as 80 percent. In the United States more than half of all international migrants are women and about one-third of migrants from developing countries are aged between 12 and 24 years old.

Women and children, in particular girls, are among the most vulnerable. They suffer more in situations of conflict and experience greater personal violence, discrimination, cultural restrictions, and oppressive gender practices than do men. On the other hand, feminine migration has the potential to provide great benefit to families and society in both sending and receiving countries. Good immigration policy should empower women in ways that promote these benefits.

### SOCIAL ANALYSIS

Why are they on the move? Many migrate to escape poverty and lack of decent work. Although globalization has benefits, unskilled and poorly educated men and women experience its negative effects as an increase in poverty and marginalization. Aspects of recent free trade agreements have resulted in increased poverty among those who can least afford it.

Some people migrate in the hope of finding treatment for disease and

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malnutrition. Others depart because disasters like tsunamis, hurricanes, or earthquakes leave them homeless and vulnerable. All too often, war, political persecution, and discrimination caused by political, cultural, and religious differences force their movement. In some cases, particularly for women suffering torture or sexual violence at the hands of those who should most protect them, little choice is left but to flee their country of origin or transit.

An effective immigration policy must be one that is a rights-based approach which is linked with trade and foreign policy, which allows the development of countries of origin as well as benefiting the country of destination.

#### **A rights-based gendered look at migration policy:**

Information on female migration is generally inadequate but we know that the experience of women migrants often differs both positively and negatively from that of men:

**Positively**, migration can be empowering and assist in development:

- It can permit migrants to escape conflict, personal violence, discrimination, cultural restrictions, or oppressive gender roles to assert greater autonomy over their lives.
- It can offer economic opportunities and decision-making power.
- It can offer better education and access to health care for both themselves and their children.
- Through remittances it can provide income for impoverished families in the country of origin.
- By filling the gaps in labor force it can benefit countries of destination. Moreover, these working women pay taxes, contribute to social security funds, and serve as leaders in their families and communities.

**Negatively**, women and girls face greater personal risks and loss of the benefits of development :

- They often experience coercion, violence, theft, and fraud.
- There is great risk of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections including HIV/

AIDS, particularly if the women have little education;

- The loss of the services of well-qualified women migrants hurts the home country particularly in the health and education sector.

### REFLECTION

In the Book of Ruth, the story of Ruth and Naomi provides a model story of migration. We see the push-pull factors at play. We see the vulnerability of the women but also the positive benefits when they are accorded their rights and treated humanely. In rereading the story as one about migration, what responses are called forth in use with regard to our treatment of women immigrants and refugees?

A second illustrative story, Jesus' encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mt.15:21-28; Mk. 7:24-30) shows how Jesus himself is transformed through his contact with this "foreign" woman. How does this encounter challenge us to change our behavior?

Catholic Social Teaching calls us to reflect on the international treaty that has been developed to guide the dealings of all countries with migrants and their families: *The Convention to Protect the Rights of Migrants and their Families*. It can be used to challenge our elected leaders as they debate over development of a comprehensive immigration law. Use of existing international norms in our treatment of migrants could assist the US to become a just and moral force. See: <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/cmw.htm>.

### ACTION

**A**dvocate for a US policy on immigration that requires our government to:

- Develop and implement just policies that lessen the potential for abuse of individual migrants.
- Develop trade and investment policies which provide for robust and sustainable economies in the migrants' countries of origin.
- Ratify international conventions which protect and promote the rights of all, particularly migrants,

women and children: *Conventions on the Rights of Migrants; Convention to Eliminate all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; Convention on the Rights of the Child*. (See <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law>)

- Participate in International Forums on Migration with intent to protect the rights of migrants.
- Be actively cooperative in the development of a Human Rights Council to ensure the promotion of the human rights of all. (See: <http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/>)

Within our religious institutes:

1. Educate members and colleagues about the gender dimensions of migration which increase the risk to women, using, e.g. DVDs: *Sisters and Daughters Betrayed; So Deep a Violence*; and Video: *Of Hopscotch and Little Girls*.
2. Promote Millennium Development Goals, specifically #1 Eradicate Poverty, #2 Education for Girls, #3 promote gender equality and empower women. (See [www.millenniumcampaign.org](http://www.millenniumcampaign.org).)
3. Within those countries where our members live and minister, alert members to assist in monitoring compliance with international human rights treaties.
4. Provide services to migrants and their families, e.g. safe houses for victims of trafficking.
5. Hold government accountable for its promises of real social and economic development:
  - Demand that all governments, who for over 35 years have pledged 0.7% Official Development Assistance, fulfill that commitment.
  - Demand that debt cancellation promised at the G8 meeting two years ago be fulfilled without burdensome conditions for all impoverished countries.
  - Develop and implement fair (not free) trade agreements to give priority to the needs of the poorest countries.
6. Ensure that our congregations who employ women migrants act justly with regard to their salaries and benefits.