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Women's Labour Migration from Asia and the Pacific: Opportunities and Challenges

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Executive Summary

In an era of unprecedented human mobility, migration from and within the Asia-Pacific region has assumed gendered dimensions, with implications for migration flows, trends and patterns. Gender roles, inequalities and relations affect who migrates, why and how, and migration also has significant implications for women migrant workers (WMWs) themselves. Migration can provide opportunities to improve their lives and that of their families, help them escape from social and economic vulnerabilities, and offer avenues for greater autonomy and empowerment. Migration also, however, exposes these women to different types of vulnerabilities, discrimination and risk (Sijapati and Nair, 2014), both in their origin and destination countries, particularly where such migration carries a stigma and patriarchal norms are deep-seated.

For the broader society, the consequential effects of women's increased mobility have been significant. Sending countries have benefitted from higher inflows of remittances and changes in societal and family relations, particularly as they relate to gender roles and relations. For receiving countries, the welfare gains have been considerable, in the form of increased labour supply, opportunities for native women to enter the workforce and child- and elder-care possibilities, especially in contexts where such services are limited.

While countries in the region have adopted various measures to address the concerns of women migrants nationally, bilaterally and regionally, the ability to highlight issues concerning women migrant workers in the Beijing+20 discussions and in the formulation of the post-2015 development agenda provides opportunities for greater impact on gender equality and women's empowerment. A few key areas for consideration include: greater protection for women migrant workers; measures to maximize the potential of remittances for the workers, their families and beyond; conducive policy environments, especially in destination countries; and improvements in information, evidence and knowledge base.