

# CROSSING BORDERS II

Migration and Development from a Gender Perspective

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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**Crossing Borders II: Migration and Development from a Gender Perspective**  
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# CROSSING BORDERS II

The document Crossing Borders II: Migration and Development from a Gender Perspective is the result of a process of theoretical and conceptual reflection carried out at UN-INSTRAW. Following the initial publication of Crossing Borders: Gender, Remittances and Development (UN-INSTRAW, 2005), in which the linkages between gender, migration and development were explored from the perspective of the sending, receipt and utilization of remittances, several case studies have been conducted by UN-INSTRAW in various contexts. The evidence documented through these case studies has allowed us to revisit our initial analytical framework from a new base of understanding and today present a revised framework that looks more broadly at the linkages between migration and development from a gender perspective, taking into account but also moving beyond the question of remittances.

This Framework discusses several analytical perspectives that are crucial to a full understanding of an area as complex as migration and development. It explores how the elimination of gender inequalities could become in itself a goal of development and deconstructs the paradigm of “remittances for development,” which forms the basis of the current hegemonic discourse on migration and development theory. Thus, a revision of the underlying principles of this paradigm is proposed, in which human development is defined beyond the limits of economic growth and the role of migration in this process is analyzed. Within this same perspective, new areas of research and intervention are explored, including strategic issues such as migrants’ rights, global care chains, the impact of migration on local development and so-called “co-development,” which require a more in-depth critical analysis.

## Objectives

To this effect, the document has two main objectives. On the one hand, to rethink the dominant paradigm of “remittances for development,” which holds that the economic and social profits from migration have a positive incidence in communities of origin through the transfer of money and capacities. From a gender and human development perspective, new inequalities, new dependencies and new deficiencies become evident and feed back into migratory processes.

On the other hand, the study also explores new analytical points of view, which from a gender perspective seek to highlight the particularities women’s autonomous migration but which above all, propose a critical analysis of the inequalities and inequities that underlie the decision-making process, migratory forms and processes and consequently, the sending, receipt and utilization of remittances.

## Content

This analytical framework is divided into seven chapters, which can be read separately but which at the same time constitute an integrated document whose main thread is an exploration of the elements mentioned previously. The first section situates and presents the document as a comprehensive vision of the relation between migration and development. The inclusion of the gender perspective, as well as the human rights and development approaches, allows for the critical analysis of the predominant paradigms and highlights some of the gaps to be explored. This first section shows how the “remittances for development” paradigm is based on the principle that development derives from commercial growth, to the extent that an increase in economic resources generates entrepreneurship, increases spending and produces a type of “virtuous” circle at micro and macro levels. In short, the surfeit of monetary resources is channeled through the formal banking system and increases on one hand, individual entrepreneurship (or that of the family receiving remittances) and on the other hand creates demand for new banking services (credit, insurance, etc.) that will promote market growth. Within this model, the receipt of remittances benefits not only recipients but communities in general by promoting a “financial democracy;” generating employment (in new enterprises), decreasing the cost of goods and promoting internal consumption. As the document demonstrates however, there is in practice little evidence that supports these assertions. On the contrary, it is quite evident that the market is unable to generate development if not also accompanied by substantive support in terms of public policies.

The second section presents the analytical viewpoints that were identified by UN-INSTRAW as appropriate for framing the migration-development question from a gender perspective and suggests the strategic scenarios to be taken into account (which also give rise to sections four, five and six). As analytical viewpoint, the following are suggested:

- **Gender, as a central analytical perspective** - understood as a primary structural variable that affects micro-, meso- and macro-level processes; as a mark of subordination that is also qualified by other variables such as social class, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, etc. and which, therefore, does not affect all women in the same way; and as a changeable and flexible construction that is re-created throughout the migratory project. The conceptualization of gender as a proposed category avoids hetero-normative assumptions and does not focus exclusively on women, but tries to examine the relationship between men and women.
- **The right to development** – in the sense that any analysis of the migration-development question should be carried out from a holistic notion of human development, where economic development is not reduced to the idea of commercial growth, nor does it acquire its own meaning, but it is seen as the conjunction of several means (commercial and non-commercial) of obtaining the necessary resources for the broader objective of human development. With the aim of avoiding the individualist bias of the “remittances for development” perspective, it is proposed that access to and enjoyment of capacities and liberties be understood in collective terms. The core of the human development process is the social process that guarantees such capacities and liberties, and as such, constitutes them into rights that are recognized and exercised by the people . In this sense, “development” should be understood as the comprehensive right to fully enjoy human rights in their entirety. The change of perspective is particularly relevant to the issue of migration, as in fact the denial of the right to development of underlies the decision to migrate.
- **The spatial dimension of development** – in which a focus on “local development,” which seeks to modify the living conditions of remittance-receiving and migrant-sending communities has become evident. However, this focus ignores the structural and macro-level interventions needed to modify the structures that generate and support migratory flows in the first place. Though the global perspective may open new possibilities for spurring local-level initiatives, the local level cannot mitigate structural and/or systemic deficiencies. At the same time, the ex-

clusive focus on the impacts of migration on communities of origin fails to recognize the contribution of migrants to the maintenance of well-being in destination or developed countries, to the extent that it tends to concentrate attention on the recipients of financial resources and not on the beneficiaries of this flexible and cheap labour force. In addition, the disparity between the political agendas of countries of origin and destination in relation to the management of migration becomes evident. Given this situation, the authors propose an understanding of local development in terms of opportunities to be taken advantage of. Furthermore, these situations can and should replicate preexisting processes which, in fact, are “constructing” development, but which occur in a framework of structural restrictions that themselves require modification. Local development understood as initiatives that respond to local needs, led by local actors and using locally-available resources, and thus removed from the notion of local development as an increase in competitiveness within the territory in the context of increasingly globalized markets.

- **Migrants as protagonists of development** – the rights of migrants are not part of the present debate on migration and development. This absence means that the agency of migrants is valued only in terms of their contribution to development in origin and destination countries, and not in terms of the benefits that they themselves accrue. People migrate to support their trans-national families; the socio-economic systems of richer countries are now highly dependent on the work and contribution of migrants; and, in addition, migrants are made responsible for the development of their communities of origin. A rights-based approach to development demands recognition of those who play a leading role in the migration-development question; in that they are the persons who shape, but also make decisions about it and benefit from it. The living and working conditions of migrants must be taken into account because they should be a part of all development processes and, moreover, should be part of the analysis of the impact of migration on development.

The **third section** deals with the feminization of migration and the establishment of transnational families. Through an exploration of the major changes that have taken place in contemporary migratory movements and a discussion of both of these processes within the broader context of the current globalization of migration, an effort is made to establish the causes of gender inequality at the global level that are linked to these changes, as well as the new questions to which they give rise. In this sense, many of the non-monetary reasons behind women’s migration are highlighted, such as the need to escape oppressive family or partner relationships, the denial of the right to freely enjoy sexuality or to independently construct gender identity, etc. This analysis also shows how the current international division

of labour is highly gender-segregated, and how feminized labour sectors are especially vulnerable to irregularity, flexibility, low recognition and scarce legal protection. The fundamental role of migratory policies in channeling migratory flows towards certain sectors, as well as in the intensity and characteristics of migration itself, is also made evident, as is the extent to which these policies can restrict the full accomplishment of migratory projects, for example through the imposition of residency regulations. In a complementary way, the issue of sexuality is also highlighted as a forgotten dimension of migration studies.

In the final part of the document, **sections four, five and six** delve into the strategic proposals that UN-INSTRAW puts forward in order to reorient the debate on the links between migration and development. Section four seeks to answer the question 'what happens in destination countries?' thus establishing a thread between migratory policies and the rights of migrant women. The section takes a more in-depth look at the situation faced by women migrants in destination countries, including the different living and working conditions in which they may find themselves throughout their migratory project, and particularly in relation to two oft-hidden areas that are considered strategic: i) the labour rights of women migrants, specifically in domestic labour, which is a sector highly stratified by both gender and ethnicity; and ii) the sexual and reproductive rights of women migrants, insofar as this is an area of health that is frequently ignored, but which is of particular importance from a gender perspective. This section also looks at the impact of migratory policies on the different levels of access to human rights and on the need to recognize migrant people's human rights over and above their labour condition or their economic contribution. For this purpose, a brief overview is provided of the existence and gradual adoption of the United Nations International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families .

**Section five** takes an in-depth look at the impacts of the flow of remittances on local economies. The rich experiences of the case studies carried out by UN-INSTRAW serve as a basis for the de-construction of the "remittances for development" paradigm. A look at the main gender differences in the sending, receipt and utilization of remittances that were identified in each of the studies, leads to a questioning of some of the main supposed benefits of remittances at both the macro-level and in terms of the household and local development. The formal banking and investment of remittances are also analyzed from a gender perspective, giving rise to substantive questions concerning the role of the state in the promotion of the 'virtuous' circle of development, which is neither automatic nor necessarily oriented towards the integral well-being of the population. An analysis of the local impact of migration further provides a glimpse of the structural

flaws of development policies in migrants' countries of origin, including the way in which migratory and remittance flows only superficially alleviate these structural deficiencies.

The **sixth section** on "linking origin and destination" explores two areas which, from a transnational perspective, link these two opposite poles of the migratory chain. These are i) global care chains and ii) co-development.

Global care chains are the result of deficiencies in the provision of care (of children, the elderly, dependent persons, etc.) in developed countries, caused by women's entry into the paid labour market and men's continued scarce participation in care-related tasks. This reality has given rise to a delegation of reproductive labour and its various tasks along cross-border chains of women. Added to this are other demographic (population ageing), social (changes in women's individual expectations or the transformation of household structures), and political (absence of public care services) factors that generate a complex web of demands and supplies, in which migrant women play a fundamental role. This debate is of particular relevance to this work, as it implies a revision of the gender perspective as applied to development processes, and more concretely of the role that care plays in the social, economic, political agenda of developed countries. In this way, the role of gender as a backbone of social and economic systems is highlighted, as is the formal value given to the daily reproduction of life at different levels of analysis .

Co-development arises as an attempt to identify policy and programmatic solutions that will allow countries of origin to access benefits beyond the macroeconomic stability represented by remittances, converting what could be the negative economic and social consequences of migration into opportunities for development. From among the basic principles that should govern co-development, two are analyzed in their concrete practice from a gender perspective. On the one hand, the lack of consideration of the idea of "common interests" between origin and destination countries in terms of the active recruitment by developed countries of health personnel from developing countries, which supposes significant consequences for the women of these countries as the recruitment is influenced by gender considerations.

On the other hand, the consideration of migrants as the vectors of co-development supposes that their participation will be promoted through the strengthening of association among migrants, a principle which is frequently applied without taking into consideration the factors that hinder or limit women's participation in these associations. At the same time, gender equality is rarely considered as a development objective of the projects that are promoted within the context of association and under the rubric of co-development.





