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The intersections  
between **education,**  
**migration and**  
**displacement** are not  
gender-neutral



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



Global  
Education  
Monitoring  
Report

**B**eing on the move, whether as a migrant or a forcibly displaced person, has gender-specific implications both for education responses and for education outcomes. In a few cases, movement creates opportunities to break free from social moulds, but in others, it exacerbates gender-based vulnerability. Meanwhile, the education and skills that women have or gain can affect their ability to exercise agency or mitigate vulnerability in migration and displacement contexts. This calls for a gender lens to be used in analyses of education.

Two compacts endorsed in December 2018 recognized the importance of education for migrants and displaced persons. The Global Compact on Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration, endorsed by 152 out of the 193 United Nations Member States, outlines a range of non-binding commitments on education, in areas including access to education, content of education and the need for gender-responsive interventions in non-formal and vocational education. The Global Compact for Refugees, which espouses the principle of refugee inclusion in national education systems, makes explicit references to the need for flexible programmes for girls.

### **GENDER DIMENSIONS IN MIGRATION AFFECT EDUCATION**

Globally, the share of females in the total international migrant population has remained stable, going from 49% in 1990 to 48% in 2017. However, looking beyond averages, some countries are major hubs of gender-specific emigration, such as the Philippines for women and Nepal for men.

Likewise, an analysis of internal migration patterns in 58 countries between 1970 and 2011 showed that the share of women has not changed much over the decades. Exceptions include China, where the gender ratio, which used to be skewed towards males, has equalized among younger migrant workers. Moreover, although the share of women who migrate has not changed radically, the share of women who migrate independently or for work, rather than as accompanying family members, has increased. This phenomenon has been termed the feminization of migration and research documents the ways in which demand and supply for migrant women's labour are affected by unequal gender norms in the labour market.

### ***Migrant child labourers, poverty and education should be considered through a gender lens***

Poverty is often a push factor for internal migration, and along with adults, it also affects children, who see their education disrupted when they move to find work. In Ethiopia, a study of nearly 5,300 out-of-school girls from six regions found that on average, they migrated unaccompanied at age 14. Few attended school after moving; most entered paid employment. In Indonesia, about 59% of child domestic workers in Jakarta and other metropolitan areas were girls from rural areas. More than half had primary education only; a further 26% dropped out at grade 7 or 8. In Peru, over 95% of domestic workers were women and most were rural-to-urban migrants who had migrated at a young age.

It is important that children are informed of their rights. Training teachers to help protect child domestic workers' education rights is one way to achieve this. Anti-Slavery International, a non-government organization, arranged regular visits to schools to raise teacher awareness and established school-based liaison officers for child domestic workers in the Philippines and developed teacher training programmes in Peru. In the United Republic of Tanzania, trade unions, in collaboration with the International Labour Organization, mobilized teachers as watchdogs for children recruited into domestic labour.

While education opportunities can be out of reach for many migrant young women, migration can sometimes offer opportunities. In Cambodia, UNESCO and the government developed a programme, implemented by non-government organizations, that delivered textbooks, teacher guides and teacher training for literacy classes for women working in the garment industry. The programme was rolled out to 11 factories in 2017, with a plan to reach 14 additional factories in 2018.

### ***Gender factors influence the education of children left behind by migrating parents***

In some countries, school fees can restrict access to school for poor migrant children. In South Africa, migrant parents may not be able to benefit from the fee exemption opportunities that are available for other poor families, which can have a disproportionately negative effect on girls. In Shenzhen, China, parents made more effort to obtain the right paperwork for boys' education and were more likely to pay to send their sons to state schools geographically distant from migrant communities. As a result, girls were much more likely to be attending lower quality migrant schools.

Being left behind as a child can also disrupt education in ways that differ by gender. In Cambodia, left-behind children were more likely to drop out of school, and the effect was worse for girls: three-quarters of 600 household heads suggested that, if necessary, they would take a girl out of school instead of a boy. A study of 400 children in 10 rural communities in China who did not live with their parents found that they experienced increased stress and workload, which often led to depression. Left-behind girls were particularly vulnerable, since they faced greater psychological burden as a result of heavier workloads. In Mexico, parental migration had a negative effect on the school attendance of 16- to 18-year-old girls, who had to take on more household chores.

In internal migration, the gender of the migrating parent is important. Analysis conducted for the 2019 *Global Education Monitoring Report* based on the China Education Panel Survey showed that children with absent mothers scored substantially lower in mathematics, Chinese, English and cognitive tests than children with both parents present. Analysis using Indonesian data from 1993 to 2014 found that when the mother migrated, education spending dropped by up to 30% and children were more likely to be absent from school and achieve lower grades. In Thailand, adults perceive mothers' migration as negatively affecting children's well-being more than fathers' migration.

In international migration, variable effects according to the gender of the migrating parent have been observed. In some cases, maternal emigration can have a worse effect than paternal emigration: in Nigeria, when mothers emigrated and the father was the caregiver, the effect on child well-being was negative. Children of migrant mothers from the Philippines are about 5 percentage points more likely to be behind in school than children of migrant fathers. In other cases, the education of children with a migrating father suffers more. In Guatemala, the probability of enrolment in school was 37 percentage points lower if fathers migrated internationally.

### **Migrant women face deskilling in many contexts**

Many women who migrate to get married or join their spouses find themselves unemployed or underemployed. Analysis from Australia finds that while married migrant men are more likely to have prosperous careers, married women are more likely to experience a career cost. Gender norms in society, such as expectations about domestic responsibilities and occupational segregation, determine

women's labour force participation and the extent to which their skills are used.

In India, analysis of four rounds of the National Sample Survey showed that 90 million women migrated for marriage between 1983 and 2008. These women have low rates of participation in the labour force, owing to their lack of adequate vocational skills and tertiary education and the disproportionate burden of care responsibilities they face, especially in urban areas.

Most female migration for employment is associated with domestic work or the care industry. Migrant women are a growing share of domestic workers. In Spain, 60% of domestic workers were migrants in 2012 compared to 5% in 2000. In the United States, over one-quarter of homecare workers are immigrants, 85% of whom are women. Of foreign-born female workers with no more than a secondary school certificate in the United States, one in nine works in an in-home occupation.

This has been viewed as a 'global care chain', where migrant women take care of children or the elderly in high-income countries, using their wages to pay for household care in their countries of origin. In domestic work globally, 73% of migrant workers and 81% of national workers were female. A preference for female labourers in some manufacturing sectors is linked to the stereotype that they may be more pliable and docile and may work for less compensation even in exploitative conditions.

Female migrants face higher levels of deskilling. An analysis of brain waste of high-skilled immigrants in the United States estimated that between 2009 and 2013, 32% of foreign-educated women and 27% of foreign-educated men were underemployed or unemployed, compared to 21% of US-educated men and women.

Deskilling is common in the care industry. In the United Kingdom, an analysis of 60 migrant women found that all of them felt that they had been deskilled. Many migrant women who were once professionals become downwardly mobile, for instance, by becoming care assistants, and are discriminated against and sometimes penalized because of perceived or real language challenges.

There are few interventions to develop the skills of migrant women. In Argentina, a vocational training programme was launched in 2006 to teach migrant domestic workers

vocational skills and make them aware of their rights. In Nepal, private training institutions offer women 2-day orientation sessions on human trafficking laws and regulations and 30-day skills training programmes (Tayah, 2016).

### **Gender aspects of migrant remittances have an impact on education**

Remittances from migrant family members ease financial constraints and can open up opportunities for girls' schooling. However, migration also changes household composition, which may have a negative effect on girls' schooling if they have to take up additional household chores. Remittances may also foster a 'culture of migration', whereby the prospect that low- or semi-skilled migration could generate high returns may prompt early school leaving. In practice, the impact of remittances differs by migration context and by the gender of senders and recipients.

Globally, remittance-receiving households headed by women tend to spend more on education. In Mexican migrant families, when men migrated and left women with a greater role in household decision-making and resource allocation, there was a positive effect on girls' education. But in Albania, parental migration led to decision-making power shifting to grandfathers, who attached a lower value to girls' education than to boys' education, and the probability of dropout increased among girls.

When children are left behind as a result of parental migration, the increased chore burden tends to fall on older girls, as in Mexico, where the school attendance of 16- to 18-year-old left-behind girls was negatively affected. In China, parental migration led to increased domestic and farm work among girls. In Kyrgyzstan, girls disproportionately had to take on unpaid family work in migrant households. In Jordan, remittances had a larger positive impact on the education attainment of men compared to women.

### **DISPLACEMENT EXACERBATES GENDER IMBALANCES IN EDUCATION**

In many contexts, the education effects of displacement are not gender-neutral. Greater attention needs to be paid to the specific vulnerabilities of displaced men and women and to how gender relations in both communities of origin and of refuge influence displacement experiences.

### **Gender gaps in education access affect many displaced populations**

In many contexts, refugees experience gender gaps in access to school. Barriers to refugee girls' education include lack of safe transportation, low affordability and inadequate gender-responsive teacher training. In Mali, focus group participants reported that internally displaced girls were dropping out of school in adolescence to avoid mixing with men and to support families at home.

In Ethiopia and Kenya, for every 10 boys, only 7 refugee girls are enrolled in primary school and only 4 in secondary school. In Dadaab camp, Kenya, enrolment rate gaps existed at all levels: at preschool (48% of girls and 62% of boys among 3- to 5-year-olds), primary (47% of girls and 76% of boys among 6- to 13-year-olds) and secondary (7% of girls and 22% of boys among 14- to 17-year-olds). An accelerated learning programme that condensed the Kenyan eight-year curriculum into four years increased access relatively more for refugee boys than for girls. In Mogadishu, Somalia, an analysis of 486 settlements in 17 districts found that only 22% of internally displaced girls over 5 years old had ever attended school, compared with 37 percent of boys.

Norms and education development in host communities also affect access. For Afghan refugees in Pakistan, the primary net enrolment rate for girls was half that of boys in 2011. While social and cultural norms demand that adolescent girls should only be taught by women, there are very few female teachers. By contrast, Afghan refugee girls in the Islamic Republic of Iran have enjoyed higher levels of access to education as a result of more positive attitudes towards girls' education.

### **Teaching resource shortages in refugee education have a gender angle**

In many displacement settings, safety concerns and cultural practices result in a shortage of female staff. The share of female primary teachers was 10% at Dadaab camp, Kenya, in 2016, and 16% at Dollo Ado camp, Ethiopia, in 2014. The difficulty of recruiting qualified female teachers is compounded by an inability to retain them in areas experiencing violence. In Pakistan, female teachers displaced by violence were hesitant to return to work, fearing for their security in areas where militant groups target schools. This generates a vicious circle: few girls obtain good education, which means few are able to become teachers; gender norms require female teachers to teach female students, which means few girls obtain

good education. And safety issues constrain both female teachers and students, exacerbating the problem.

More targeted interventions are needed to improve the supply of female teachers for refugees. In Chad, the Little Ripples programme trained and employed Sudanese refugee women to provide early childhood education through play-based learning for 8,000 children aged 3 to 5 in 2 refugee camps. In Dadaab, Kenya, the Borderless High Education for Refugees project trained 400 teachers through onsite and online courses at all levels and women were included through special affirmative action initiatives. In Kakuma camp, the Teachers for Teachers project was set up to establish an all-female cohort that would provide a supportive space for women to participate and share their experiences.

### **Child marriage and gender-based violence risks rise in displacement settings**

The context in 9 of the top 10 countries with the highest rates of child marriage is fragile. Among adolescents, while boys may drop out of school to find work, the lack of economic opportunities for girls makes them more reliant on men, which can increase the likelihood that they will experience early pregnancy and early marriage.

Of adolescent girls escaping conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, many did not attend school. Some had been raped and married the perpetrator, while others were forced to seek marriage for stability and due to lack of other options. In Lebanon, Syrian female refugees are more vulnerable to school drop-out and child marriage due to their protection challenges, with distance to school, lack of transportation and school fees being the key issues. In Jordan, 25% of Syrian refugee marriages in Jordan registered under sharia court in 2013 were of 15- to 17-year-old girls, which was almost twice the rate for Jordanians.

In 18 countries, girls and women were targeted because armed groups were opposed to them getting an education, according to the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack's *Education Under Attack 2018* report. In Afghanistan, the Islamic State targeted 94 co-educational schools from 2013 to 2016. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, there are several accounts of incidents where girls were forcibly taken from school by military fighters and raped. In Yemen, several school principals and heads of education received WhatsApp messages threatening school bombings if girls continued at school.

Girls are vulnerable to gender-based, often sexual, violence in displacement contexts. In South Sudan, between December 2013 and October 2017, nearly all of the 1,200 children who reported experiencing sexual violence were girls. In Ukraine, girls faced abuse by soldiers.

Younger men in displacement contexts face high rates of physical violence as well as sexual violence. Loss of status, vulnerability and lack of employability lead to severe psychological impacts. Specialized or targeted services in humanitarian response efforts are often targeted at girls and women, which perpetuates harmful stereotypes that boys are able to cope with such hardships, less vulnerable and less in need of such services.

Displaced boys, and particularly those who are unaccompanied, also face hardships that are often ignored. They lack the legal status to gain employment and do not benefit from social protection schemes. They are often placed in accommodation with other boys, separately from women and families. An analysis of the vulnerabilities that 13- to 17-year-old refugee boys faced in Greece, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey included restricted mobility, since they are more likely to be viewed as a security threat and face detention. Syrian refugee boys living in Jordan reported that their experience of violence is a key challenge and a major reason for dropping out of school.

### **Teaching resilience and life skills has important gender dimensions**

Adult education is often overlooked in humanitarian settings and, where it is considered, often focuses on formal education rather than on non-formal resilience or life skills training. For instance, out of a US\$60 million programme for education in emergencies in 16 countries, there was only one project of US\$70,000 on youth and adult literacy and language. This omission needs to be addressed, because education can play a major role in building resilience and creating new opportunities for women that might not have been available before. For Dinka women from South Sudan who fled to Kakuma camp, Kenya, displacement increased opportunities to study and improved their opportunities to work outside the home and to access positions that were customarily reserved for men when they returned to Sudan.

Language and literacy barriers impede the ability of displaced populations to access information, which can be a particularly severe challenge for women. An analysis of understanding of questionnaires on access to services

in northeast Nigeria found that while 66% of internally displaced men understood written material, only 9% of women did. In Mali, 68% of internally displaced women could not read or write, compared with 32% of men.

Where programmes exist, many barriers prevent adult women from participating. An analysis of adult internally displaced people in Medellín, Colombia, revealed that lack of participation in education was linked to factors such as family obligations, low literacy levels and lack of confidence. South Sudanese female refugees who tried to access education and other services in Cairo, Egypt, were exposed to sexual harassment and violence on the way to class.

However, the experiences of refugee women in non-formal education settings suggest that these interventions do support their agency and resilience, even if they do not fully help them realize their aspirations for economic opportunity and freedom from violence. Refugee women from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq and Somalia attending English language classes in a community centre in London appreciated the contribution these classes had made to their family well-being and social networks.

### **TEACHERS ARE KEY TO BREAKING DOWN GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN MIGRANT AND REFUGEE COMMUNITIES**

Teachers often fulfil multiple roles, helping migrant and displaced children feel included and thrive in the education system and beyond.

In slums, where many internal migrants settle, teachers can help girls overcome gender-related challenges and stay in school. A study of informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya, found that girls were reported to be vulnerable to sexual harassment and even violence at school outside the presence of teachers. An analysis of rural-to-urban migrant adolescents in Beijing, China, found that teacher support partially mediated the relationship between perceived discrimination and anti-social behaviour, with girls experiencing more positive benefit from teacher support than boys did.

Not much is known about how the intersection of migration, displacement and gender is addressed in teacher education. In India, a toolkit for middle school teachers developed by the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development and the Digital Intercultural Exchange advises teachers to

discuss gender as a factor in migration. It urges teachers to stimulate discussions on how gender influences migration, gender stereotypes and gender equality.

In the case of international migration, gender equality is addressed under the umbrella of teacher training for diversity. For instance, in Austria, competences on social and gender diversity and providing effective learning environments for students of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds are essential goals of initial teacher education.

Teacher education in gender-responsive approaches to teaching is often unavailable for teachers in refugee camps. However, some interventions have combined teacher training, community linkages and infrastructure support to achieve progress on gender-responsive teaching. In Kenya, in the Dadaab and Kakuma camps, World University Service of Canada and Windle Trust Kenya introduced a remedial programme that provided special teaching and learning aids targeting girls to trained teachers with exceptional grades at secondary school graduation level. The programme also employed community mobilizers to make sure that parents and community understood the importance of the remedial programme. As a result, teacher attitudes, community support for girls' education, and interactions between boys and girls improved. The project is being further scaled up.

Training can help female refugee teachers to serve as role models. In Kunama refugee camp in northern Ethiopia, on-site training for female teachers provided through an International Rescue Committee project made them more confident in serving as role models in their community.

Teachers can provide vital sexuality education. A study of refugee and migrant 16- to 24-year-olds in Australia found that secondary schools were the first places in which they were exposed to sexual education issues. In Montreal, Canada, a study revealed significant knowledge gaps among migrant women from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in their knowledge, attitudes and practice around HIV and sexually transmitted infection prevention. It highlighted the need to reach these groups with relevant information in their own languages.

**A GENDER PERSPECTIVE IS NECESSARY IN UNDERSTANDING AND PLANNING TO MEET THE EDUCATION NEEDS OF MIGRANTS AND DISPLACED PEOPLE**

The 2019 *Global Education Monitoring Report* emphasized the need to include migrants and refugees in national education systems, and also called for more planning to respond to the needs of these populations. As this short review has outlined, many of these needs have gender dimensions. These range from the vulnerability of rural-to-urban migrant girls who end up as domestic workers deprived of education opportunities to the vulnerability of refugee boys, often unaccompanied, who have limited opportunities to develop their skills. They encompass the deskilling of international migrant women in the 'global care chain' as well as the increasing chore burden that left-behind girls face when a parent migrates.

Still, research on the experiences of girls and women or boys and men in migration and displacement contexts – and how these can be affected by education – remains limited. More analysis on the intersection of gender, education, migration and displacement is needed on a wide variety of issues, including the gender-specific dimensions of remittance use, gender-responsive teaching practices and the empowerment impact of non-formal education opportunities. To fulfil their potential for instilling resilience, education systems need to recognize these needs and respond to them.

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Developed by an independent team and published by UNESCO, the *Global Education Monitoring Report* is an authoritative reference that aims to inform, influence and sustain genuine commitment towards the global education targets in the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework.

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ED/GEM/MRT/2019/WP1

