

Women and men migrant workers: Moving towards equal rights and opportunities – Gender equality at the heart of decent work, Campaign 2008-2009

Migrant workers are persons who migrate from one country to another with a view to being employed otherwise than on their own account. All migrant workers, irrespective of sex or other personal attributes, should have the right to treatment no less favorable than that applied to national workers in respect of, among other things:

- remuneration (including family allowances);
- hours of work;
- overtime arrangements;
- holidays with pay;
- restrictions on home work;
- minimum age for employment;
- apprenticeship and training;
- women's work and the work of young persons;
- trade union activities;
- participation in and enjoyment of the benefits of collective bargaining;
- accommodation and social security.

Women migrant workers tend to be employed in a restricted range of occupations, including manual work in agriculture, factories or Export Processing Zones (EPZs), but mostly jobs related to stereotypical female roles as caregivers, nurses, domestic workers, and low-status workers in the catering, hotel, and entertainment industries. By the very nature of the work they undertake, women and girls can be particularly vulnerable when employed for work outside their own countries. They may be subject to exploitation and abuse not only because they are outside the legal protection of their country of origin, but also because they often hold jobs for which there is little protection under social legislation. Their situation is often made worse by the lack of autonomy and the strong relationship of subordination that are typical of these jobs. They may be subject to gender-based violence and sexual abuse, especially if they are working as domestics or sex workers. In addition, these women are usually young, poor, and isolated from their families, whom they have left in their countries of origin. They do not speak the language of the host country, are unaware that they have rights that are being infringed, and usually do not know where to go for help. At worst, they may be victims of coercive recruitment and employment practices or human trafficking. Young women and girls are at particular risk of being trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation.

Because of high and persistent unemployment, many countries have introduced policies to reduce the number of immigrants and are now confronted with the problem of migrant workers who are in an irregular situation and/or illegally employed. Although the statistical evidence is not clear, it can be assumed that a great many of these workers are women. Gender-blind immigration policies in destination countries can have disproportionately negative effects on women immigrants and leave them at higher risk of irregular employment and deportation.

Find out more:

- [ILO – International Migration Programme \(MIGRANT\)](#)
- [ILO – Programme for the Promotion of the Declaration \(DECLARATION\)](#)
- [ILO – Sectoral Activities \(SECTOR\): Health Worker Migration](#)
- [ILO – Social Security Department](#)
- [ILO – Bureau for Workers' Activities \(ACTRAV\) on Migrant Workers](#)
- [ILO – Bureau for Employers' Activities \(ACT/EMP\)](#)
- [ILO – ITC International Training Centre on migration and trafficking](#)
- International Labour Standards on Migrant Workers
- [C97 Migration for Employment Convention \(Revised\), 1949](#)
- [C143 Migrant Workers \(Supplementary Provisions\) Convention, 1975](#)
- [Resource Guide - Gender equality in the world of work](#)
- [Gender Equality and Decent Work - Selected ILO Conventions and Recommendations Promoting Gender Equality](#)