

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

Check against delivery

**Statement by Louise Arbour, Special Representative
of the Secretary-General for International Migration**

--

**Global Migration Group (GMG) Side Event to the
62nd Session Commission on the Status of Women**

Maximizing the contribution of rural women migrants

13 March 2018, New York

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the governments of Indonesia, Italy and Mali as well as the GMG for the kind invitation to speak here today. I am very pleased to join a distinguished panel to discuss rural dimensions of migration, and in particular, ways to maximize the contribution of rural migrant women to sustainable development.

In response to your question, let me start by tackling the importance of the rural dimension. Around three-quarters of the extreme poor worldwide base their livelihoods on agriculture or other rural activities. A significant number of them are women, who often have less access to land, financial services, and markets than their male counterparts.

And although global migration data are not disaggregated by rural or urban origin of migrants – a knowledge gap that I hope the international community will bridge soon - available data seem to reveal that a significant proportion of international migrants come from rural areas. For instance, up to 40 percent of international remittances are estimated to be sent there.

In this context, I would like to highlight four issues.

First, it is crucial that any action to address migration in rural areas is responsive to the specific roles, voices, capacities, vulnerabilities and needs of migrant women and girls. We must follow, indeed strengthen, best practices for their protection and empowerment.

Second, rural women are quintessential drivers of development, one way of which is through migration – yet they are often overlooked and overexploited in that process while their contributions are underrecognized. Contrary to widespread but unfounded perceptions, women are not passive actors in migration processes: they represent almost half of the world’s migrants and they contribute around US\$2.3 trillion to global productivity.

Migrant women have a higher rate of employment than the average for women worldwide, and they send a higher proportion of their earnings home in the form of remittances than their male counterparts, all the while being subject to discriminatory working conditions, including unequal pay.

Before these issues can be properly addressed, we need a new narrative that recognizes migrant women as rights-holders, agents of development and, most importantly, leaders that bring dynamism, innovation and cultural richness to societies. In particular, their contribution in the care sector, whether care for children or the elderly, must be adequately valued and remunerated, and working conditions must be in line with international standards for all workers.

Third, structural barriers to rural migrant women's empowerment need to be addressed. Women face multiple risks and discrimination before, during and after migration. Their vulnerabilities include high exposure to sexual and gender-based violence, forced labor, human trafficking and modern slavery, inadequate access to sexual and reproductive health services, and structural barriers to employment. We need to work towards conducive environments – and normative frameworks - for women to benefit equally from migration, ensuring that their rights are respected throughout their journey.

Fourth, the accessibility of legal migration pathways for rural populations is crucial if we are to achieve safe, orderly and regular migration for all. Seasonal and circular labor migration schemes targeting agricultural migrant workers – especially youth – are an important step towards maximizing the contribution of rural women migrants. In addition, through a whole-of-government approach, migration policies need to be aligned with efforts towards the formalization of the informal economy, especially in the agricultural sector and in rural areas.

To conclude, let me emphasize that migration brings both opportunities and challenges to rural areas and rural women, in particular. Our collective efforts to ensure that migration is a matter of choice, rather than an act of desperation, as part of the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, will go a long way to improve the lives of rural women migrants and ensure that they, in particular, are not left behind.

Thank you.