

Commentary: Gender, Migration and Policy Making in light of the 60th Anniversary of International Migration

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Gender and migration as a recognised sub-field or epistemic community is a relatively recent development as the review of English language publications indicate (Pisarevskaya et al. 2019). It only really expanded substantially from the beginning of the century, following the rapid growth of female labour migration, especially in sectors of domestic work and care. Theoretically concepts, such as the global care chains (Hochschild 2000; Parreñas 2001) and accompanying transnationalism, especially through transnational families (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; Huang, Yeoh, Lam 2008), framed these migrations. Although women formed a substantial proportion in earlier migrations from the 19th century (Donato and Gabaccia 2015), they remained largely invisible and seen as dependents of men. The slow but steady growth of publications in the 1980s and 1990s focussed primarily on women labour migrants and refugees. By the beginning of the 1990s, Castles and Miller (1993) included the feminisation of migration as one of the four major trends characterising the current age of migration, due primarily to the growing presence of women in labour migration in Europe, the Middle East and Japan. Portes (1997) too identified gender and households as a key development at the turn of the century. In 1998 evidence on the percentage of women in international migration stocks was released by the UN Population Division for the years from 1965 to 1990. It clearly showed that globally women already formed almost 46.5% of migration stocks in 1960 and that by 1990 this had increased to 47.9% (49.1% UN revised figures) (Zlotnik, 2003). However, the evidence does not substantiate the view that feminisation has been linear, but rather that it is dynamic and complex. Some have suggested we should distinguish between the feminisation of migration and the feminisation of the 'migratory discourse' in which women are conceptualised as actors of migration (Vause and Toma 2015).

In terms of putting gender and migration on the agenda in English-language journals, *International Migration Review* led the way with a special issue in 1984 introduced by a path breaking article by Mirjana Morokvasic. Since then, journals have played a major part in disseminating research and discussions on theoretical, empirical and policy making aspects of gender and migration. *International Migration* has in particular encouraged authors to consider policy recommendations. So how has this been applied to its production of knowledge over the past 30 years or so? And to what extent is one able to have an impact on policies affecting migration and rights? How should this be pursued and with whom? Is there clarity about how discussions on gender aspects of migration, circulation and processes of settlement translate into policy?

The first articles on women and migration appeared in the mid-1990s in *International Migration* and included a report from the Beijing Conference as well as articles on Jordan, Puerto Rico and Turkey followed by a greater number of articles in the period 2000-2010. The real upward shift occurred in a special issue on *Women and Migration in Globalizing Asia: gendered experiences, agency and activism* in 2010 edited by Gaetano and Yeoh. As the sub-title suggests, the editors sought to draw attention to the significance of gendered migration in Asia and thereby go beyond the usual focus on Europe and North America as well as recognise the need to address policy issues to improve the conditions of migrant workers through concerted efforts of diverse actors and institutions at different levels from the national, regional and the global. They acknowledged that progress in improving the lives of migrant women in Asia had been weak, and thus emphasized the crucial role of non-state actors in pushing forward policy and delivering services. In terms of themes, labour market issues, trafficking and the lack of recognition of skills have been recurrent themes in the steady stream of articles in *International Migration* since 2010. Its coverage has been global with a good mix from the Global South and North (see Martin's contribution, this issue). In terms of addressing policy making, a few have engaged primarily with issues such as gender and global governance (Hennebry and Petrozziella 2019). Palmary et al. (2018) highlighted the paucity of studies of gender, migration and policymaking and presented an example of how to undertake an analysis of policymaking based on gender debates. Their study of policies towards the protection of vulnerable migrant women in three countries (Bangladesh, Singapore and South Africa) applied a method of structured comparison to explore policymaking within specific socio-political contexts in post colonial situations and how research was used by advocacy organisations and policymakers. In all the cases, the central messages used for advocating for policy change were shaped by gender narratives.

More common have been articles highlighting gender discriminatory policies or the failure to address the differential outcome of policies and especially its impact on women without entering into the policymaking process itself. However, many have also found it challenging to formulate policy recommendations. As we have seen, although there have been insightful articles on gender, migration and policymaking, there remains much further thinking to be done in addressing the engagement of academics in policy changes to improve gendered outcomes in an era when, apart from valued skilled migrants, national regulations have often been tightened in terms of immigration, integration and settlement policies.

Even in terms of skilled migrants, many of the criteria tend to discriminate against women (Kofman 2014; Boucher 2020) who also encounter greater brain waste due to negative attitudes and non-inclusive practices. Elo et al. (2020) suggest that one needs a total rethink of migration and integration policies for the governance of talent migration, including I would add for so-called trailing spouses. They also suggest that "an EU body or a workgroup could carry out a detailed comparative policy analysis to detect malfunctioning policies and best practices and update the current situation through a handbook or a guideline". How, one might ask, will this recommendation be translated into effective policy? Ghorashi (2020) highlights the lack of connection between proactive labour organizations, societal initiatives, government policy,

academic research and the lived experiences of refugees in her studies of Iranian educated refugee women in the Netherlands and suggests that it is vital to develop an infrastructure that can connect all the preceding constituencies. Yet policy change may be even more intractable in this case, especially when migrant women are from Muslim countries from which many destination states portray them as locked into unchanging cultures and unremittingly subject to patriarchal control (Kofman et al. 2015).

Most research, however, engages with those undertaking low skilled labour. Despite the ratification of ILO Convention 189 Domestic Workers 2011 (in 2021 by 33 states, especially in Latin America and Europe), domestic workers still do not enjoy standard labour conditions in many countries due to their work being undertaken in households. Ratification in itself does not guarantee a notable increase in social protection as Marchetti (2021) argues based on a comparative analysis of 9 countries in her EU *Domequal* project (<https://domequal.eu>). In some countries (Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Philippines) there was a strong synergy with the ILO, government and civil society, with domestic work not being solely or largely a matter of international migrants but inclusive of internal migrants, the displaced and the urban poor. Here, the effort to improve conditions was part of a wider societal and political discussion. In other states, such as Germany and Italy, there was no broader mobilisation and adjustment of existing legislation, since domestic work was viewed as an issue affecting international migrants alone. Apart from the conditions of work and social protection, states still do not recognise the value of care work in migration policies. It seems unlikely that the recognition of care work as essential services during the pandemic will translate into more possibilities for permanent migration and the right to family reunification yet this shift would be most effective in improving their conditions of work and reduce the number of irregular migrants.

Over the past 30 years or so, there has been an enormous accumulation of knowledge about different types of gendered migration flows, transnational relationships, intersectionality between categories and, more recently, the need to decentre knowledge production beyond Europe and North America (Kofman 2020; Mora and Piper 2021). Yet we still have to contend with absurdly stereotypical views of migrant women and men and gendered relationships underpinning much policymaking and, in many instances, a lack of progress in advancing migrant rights. In seeking to use academic research and engage with policymaking, Basok and Piper (2013: 275) urge us to gain a better understanding of the social mobilization of knowledge through national and transnational networks and “how power relations among activists shape the generation and mobilization of knowledge”. If *International Migration* wishes to encourage engagement with policymaking and the diversity of actors involved, it would be worth establishing a forum to discuss the relationship between research, social mobilization and policymaking that acknowledges prevailing power relationships and politics.

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