

IOM Celebrates Migrant Women and Girls—and values diversity on the move

Switzerland – Women and girls represent a significant proportion of people on the move worldwide, all of whom carry with them a heart full of hope, a mind filled with ideas, and a diverse range of migration experiences.

IOM, the UN Migration Agency, stands with each and every one of them on International Women's Day 2018 and embraces the official United Nations theme: *Time is Now: Rural and urban activists transforming women's lives*. We stand together with them and raise our voices with and in support of all migrant women and girls.

On this day, we honour the women who have worked tirelessly to make their voices heard and pave the way towards women's rights and empowerment. Displaying great strength and resilience, these women have highlighted the injustice they and others have experienced simply because of their gender.

Migrant women often play essential roles in sustaining and rebuilding their families and communities. We now know that they send a greater portion of their overseas earnings home than men do. We also know they often take on more caring responsibilities related to family and household than men do – wherever they may be.

More women are in the workforce than ever before – which means that more women are seeking opportunities abroad, and contributing to their home countries by empowering themselves, their homes and communities at large. In crisis situations, women often are among the first responders. Nevertheless, the distinctive voices of women and girls usually go unheard.

We must always remember that women carry with them their own unique set of advantages and disadvantages. Indeed, their gender shapes every stage of the migration experience, starting with their motivations to migrate and continuing throughout their entire journey and on to their destination and, for some, upon their return home. For example, many women migrate to seek financial independence and empowerment, to escape from poverty, to expand their knowledge or to join loved ones. Unfortunately, many women on the move encounter hardship because of both lack of information and knowledge about information access points.

Violence against women is one all-too-common denominator underlying the distinctive challenges that female migrants face along the migration route. We must not forget that violence against women is a manifestation of deeply-rooted unequal power relations between men and women that we all must condemn.

As we have heard time and time again, many women experience sexual violence, harassment and exploitation inflicted by complete strangers, state officials, fellow migrants and even family members. IOM condemns any form of violence and discrimination against women and girls and calls for its elimination.

Women's empowerment means emancipation and the freedom to contribute to the community and society at large. Every day IOM works side by side with migrants to prevent and combat all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls, and to address the many different structural issues that fuel this violence and discrimination.

IOM, the agency I am proud to lead, values the diversity of migrant women on the move and recognizes the importance of actively listening to the different voices of these

migrant women. We strive for their empowerment, and we endeavour to amplify their voices for better policies, better practices and better programmes designed to protect and assist *all*.

At IOM, we work together with hundreds of talented women who serve in every one of our 169 member states—and dozens of other locations worldwide where IOM operates, many of whom are fighting tirelessly to further women's rights and empowerment to make gender equality a reality.

Allow me to mention two of these women here:

[Lina is a lawyer](#) who fled from the Syrian Arab Republic and works at a community centre in Turkey that is run by an IOM partner Syrian Social Gathering (SSG). She fights injustice by providing legal advice to disadvantaged women and amplifying their voices via legal representation. *"I've always felt a powerful need to help those who do not fully know their rights. I have often seen too many women in situations where they feel like they have no legal recourse."*

[Thant is a medical doctor](#) who works in Myanmar for IOM to improve maternal and child health by raising awareness of health issues and to build the capacity of midwives in rural communities. *"If there are equal rights for all human beings, it will lead to the development of my country."* Thant approaches the frontline to empower women by supporting them through health care. The craft that she brings, like many others, is instrumental in assessing the different implications on women and men of planned health policy and action. Such actions on legislation, government programmes, and practices and behaviours can often lead to a positive impact on the individual women and girls.

On the occasion of International Women's Day, IOM stands with *all* women and pays special homage to the allies who fight to secure the rights of women and girls of all ages. IOM will continue to stand with the many different voices of migrant women, value diversity on the move, strive to meet every migrant's different needs and give equal opportunities for the benefit of *all*.