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IOM International Organization for Migration

## MIGRANT WOMEN NEED ACCESS TO DECENT AND SKILLED JOBS COMMENSURATE WITH THEIR EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE, SAYS IOM INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

*Geneva, 8 March 2011* - Increased attention should be given to the situation of skilled migrant women for whom qualifications and education do not always translate into higher-skilled employment in destination countries, says the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as it marks International Women's Day today.

Over the past decades, worldwide efforts to increase girls' access to education have allowed an increased number of women to obtain secondary and tertiary education. This increased level of education amongst women accounts for the growing number of women migrating on their own to pursue study or career opportunities.

For some of them, especially the highly- skilled , leaving their country can be seen as the only way to access the high level jobs to which they aspire and for which they invested time and resources to be trained. For others, pushed to migrate for security or economic reasons, they hope their professional experience will help them integrate successfully into their new society.

However, the migration experience does not always live up to their expectations as many barriers remain when attempting to transfer skills from one country to another.

“Women tend to be under-represented in the most sought after professions by industrialized countries - IT, engineering, and business - and more concentrated in occupations that tend to be less easily transferrable because of national regulations, such as education, public administration and law. And so it is difficult to have their skills recognized in the host country labour market and to find employment matching their qualifications,” explains IOM Deputy Director General Laura Thompson.

Besides the difficulty in obtaining recognition of their foreign credentials, migrant women face other obstacles including the lack of professional and social networks, ethnic and gender-based discrimination, and family responsibilities. As a result, women are often pushed to low or unskilled occupations considered “women's work”, such as elderly and child care or domestic service, which offer poor working conditions and low wages.

IOM's forthcoming publication “*Crushed Hopes: Underemployment and Deskilling in Skilled Migrant Women*”, gives voice to the plight of high skilled migrant women unable to translate their education and professional skills into decent work.

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One of those women, whose accounting degree has not been recognized in her new country decided to go back to university and retrain while doing petty jobs to support her sons. “My profession was what I wanted to do since I was a little girl - a passion for which I worked a lot over the years. It is hard to think that all those efforts to study, excel and perfect my skills have come down to nothing,” she says.

“The social and emotional toll on skilled women unable to exercise their profession should not be under-estimated,” insists Laura Thompson.

Previous studies, corroborated by the forthcoming IOM publication, have shown that under-employed and de-skilled women are likely to suffer from demoralization, shame, depression, powerlessness, stress, intense frustration, unhappiness, anxiety as well as feeling invisible and trapped.

One woman migrant recounts: “I had always been very active and busy, making my own money so when I was stuck at home, had no job and was very dependant financially, I felt like a piece of my body had been cut off.”

Generally, the more severely underemployed they are, the more likely they will be to experience several of these disorders.

Although migrant women represent 105 million international migrants, almost 50 per cent of the global international migrant population, and most are migrating in search of employment opportunities, they are still not offered the same opportunities as their male counter-parts and are, therefore, still often disproportionately affected by risks arising from mobility.

“The economic implications of de-skilling are also enormous. Failing to utilize the wealth of skills, experience and know-how migrant women bring with them is not only a missed opportunity for the economies of countries of destination, but for also for countries of origin,” concludes Thompson. “It is, therefore, vital for governments to critically review some of the biases implicit in migration regulations. Only by applying a gender lens to those fundamental migration policies can we make sure women’s opportunities are maximized and their economic and social contributions are both facilitated and properly acknowledged.”

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