

Report from the Event

# I Congress on Women in the Context of Migration

San Salvador, El Salvador  
18-20 December 2018



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Conferencia Regional sobre Migración  
Regional Conference on Migration

## Background

The I Congress was held following up on Decision 10 of the XXIII Meeting of the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM), celebrated in Panama City on 14-15 December 2018. The implementation of several activities is approved in Decision 10, including the following:

*“a. I Regional Congress: Women in the Context of Migration, to be held on 17-19 December 2018 in El Salvador, with support from IOM.”*

## Context

The RCM, as a regional consultation process with a commitment to the human rights of migrants, has promoted various initiatives throughout its 23 years of existence. The migration of women is a current phenomenon with a highly significant impact on the regional migration dynamics. Actions need to be implemented to further address this matter at the regional level and within each RCM Member Country.

The RCM Member Countries have identified the increasing importance of the role of women in migration dynamics. Different modes of this type of migration have been observed: women are not only migrating by themselves but also accompanied by their children, or they settle in the country of destination and subsequently make every effort to achieve family reunification.

In 2017, with the Government of El Salvador as President pro tempore (PPT) of the RCM, work lines were developed to address the topic of migrant women with the aim of creating spaces for learning and reflection in order to enable the RCM Member Countries to broaden their knowledge about the intrinsic link between women, migration and development. Thus, in compliance with the commitment taken on by the RCM Member Countries at the XXI Regional Conference on Migration, a forum entitled “Women, Migration and Development: A Strategic Challenge for the Region” was held on 27-29 November 2017 in El Salvador.

The conclusions of the forum highlighted the need to continue analysing all phases of the migration processes from a gender perspective: prior to departure from the country of origin, as well as the experiences, expectations and consequences in countries of transit, destination and return. In this regard, special emphasis was

made on the opportunity to mainstream a gender perspective in public policies and national and regional programmes that directly or indirectly address the conditions which have an impact on the entire migration process.

In addition, in line with the recommendations formulated during the forum the suggestion is made that the above-mentioned public policies and programmes be promoted at the national level, in synergy with the various regional initiatives of the spaces for dialogue, thus achieving a higher impact on the beneficiary populations.

The RCM Member Countries address the subject of migrant women in an ongoing manner and are providing technical assistance for the development of the document entitled “Guidelines for the Assistance and Protection of Women in the Context of Migration”, within the framework of the project “Strengthening Public Policies to Protect and Empower Migrant Women in Mesoamerica” implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and financed through the IOM Development Fund.

The Guidelines respond to the commitment of the eleven RCM Member Countries to promote and protect the rights of migrant women in the region. Through this instrument, countries of origin, transit and destination join efforts to benefit migrant women. The Guidelines will be used as a reference for the development, design and implementation of actions within each country that is committed to addressing the matter.

In addition to the support that has been received from IOM and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as observer organizations of the RCM, the RCM Member Countries have set a precedent to ensure that migration of women occurs in optimal conditions, with respect for their rights and potentializing them as agents of change for themselves as well as their families and communities.



## Objective of the Congress

To provide a space for discussion, dialogue and the development of conclusions, based on the experience of the participating delegations, on the topic of women in the context of migration.

## Methodology and Contents

The methodology included working groups, panels and discussions. The following topics were addressed under the thematic structure of the RCM: women and work; gender-sensitive data; women and the Global Compact for Migration; migrant boys, girls and adolescents; the role of women and their prominence in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); violence against women; public policies; etc.

## Participants

Delegations from the following countries attended the Congress: Belize, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama, including representatives from the following institutions:

- Institutions in charge of providing protection and assistance to women;
- Migration Offices;
- Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

Furthermore, representatives from the Regional Network for Civil Organizations on Migration (RNCOM) and some of the observer organizations of the RCM participated as well.

## The Congress

The Congress was conducted at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of El Salvador on 18-20 December 2018 and consisted of four main sessions:

Presentation of the document entitled “Guidelines for the Assistance and Protection of Women in the Context of Migration”;

- Working groups;
- Thematic panels;
- Simultaneous discussions

The main results from each session are described below:





## Presentation of the Guidelines for the Assistance and Protection of Women in the Context of Migration

IOM presented the document and provided information to the audience about the commitment of the Government of El Salvador as President pro tempore (PPT) of the RCM in 2017, with Migrant Women as the central theme. As part of the work plan, the need was highlighted to discuss and analyse why women migrate, and the topics of gender-based discrimination and political discrimination were addressed. In addition, mechanisms were explored to improve the living conditions, job opportunities and education of women who migrate with the purpose of reuniting with their families, those who migrate with their families and those who migrate by themselves.

Undoubtedly, 2017 provided a broad view of the topic of women in the context of migration. Institutions or mechanisms addressing the topic of women were established in each RCM Member Country in that year. In addition, a workshop was held in September 2017 to develop the first draft of the document that is currently known as the “Guidelines” and in November of that same year, a forum on women in the context of migration was celebrated. These events were highly relevant and enriching and enabled the participants to analyse and discuss the topic of women in the context of migration in a comprehensive manner.

### Working Groups

#### Objective:

To mainstream specific actions addressing the topic of migrant women in the central themes and working groups of the RCM.

1. Four working groups were established:
2. Liaison Officer Network for Consular Protection;
3. Liaison Officer Network to Combat Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking;
4. Liaison Officer Network for the Protection of Migrant Boys, Girls and Adolescents;
5. Ad Hoc Group on Extraregional Migrants.

The participants identified actions and recommendations from the Guidelines for the Assistance and Protection of Women in the Context of Migration that could be applicable in the work of the different networks or groups of the RCM.



Some recommended actions are summarized below:

- To seek the establishment of gender units at consular offices;
- To establish a system to train civil servants, including consular officers, on the Guidelines for the Assistance and Protection of Women in the Context of Migration;
- To establish a single consular register in the RCM Member Countries;
- To promote the inclusion of non-governmental organizations providing assistance and protection to migrant boys, girls and adolescents;
- To harness good practices on protection of boys, girls and adolescents that are implemented in other regions and to replicate them in the countries in the region;

- To promote inter-institutional coordination aimed at providing comprehensive assistance to boys, girls and adolescents;
- To provide training on the Guidelines for staff from institutions involved in providing assistance to boys, girls and adolescents;
- To establish a network of shelters for boys, girls and adolescents;
- To provide training for the coalitions on the Guidelines and a gender perspective;
- To include information in the reports prepared by each country during the meetings of their respective networks about their advances and good practices related to gender;
- To provide interpreting services with a gender-based approach in providing assistance to extraregional migrants;
- To create synergies between inter-institutional and inter-sectoral actions with a gender-sensitive approach and awareness of the topic of women in the context of migration.

## Panels

Each topic was addressed through discussions where panellists answered three questions, guided by the facilitator. After each intervention, time was provided for questions and comments of the audience.

### Panel: Labour Rights and Women in the Context of Migration

Representatives of the Foundation of San Carlos Scalabrinian Missionaries, representing RNCOM; the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); and the Central American Integration System (SICA) participated in this panel. The panel was facilitated by a representative from the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The topics that were discussed included the following:

- An increasing number of women are pressured to leave their homes and, in some cases, to migrate in search of better living conditions. The reasons are diverse, including structural conditions in the countries of origin, demographic characteristics, insufficient job offers, economic inequality, family reunification, organized and social crime, natural disasters, the adverse effects of climate change, violence and gender-based discrimination, or simply the need to survive.
- The need for economic autonomy is one of the key factors driving the



migration of women.

- Despite the increasing participation of women in the labour market in Latin America and the Caribbean in the past decades, women migrate due to lack of protection, limited access to social security through the labour market, increased vulnerability as a result of the need to take on family responsibilities almost exclusively on their own, and social exclusion because of the fact that women have less access to resources and power than men.
- These inequalities persist in the countries of destination, and gender roles have a significant impact on the employment opportunities that are available to migrant women. The labour market, including migrant labour, continues to be highly segmented by gender, class and ethnicity, thus perpetuating inequalities and discrimination.
- Protection of labour rights and access to decent employment and livelihoods is, therefore, a key pillar to ensure the well-being of migrant women and reduce the situation of vulnerability and precariousness that they experience in the labour market in order to enable them to be agents of change for themselves as well as their families and communities.

### Panel: Women and their Experience in Migration Processes – Part I

This panel included the participation of special guests who have experienced the different stages of the migration process. Each woman told her life story, highlighting how migration has represented an opportunity for reintegration and entrepreneurship. The panel was facilitated by the Vice-Minister for Salvadorans Abroad, who created a space for friendly and enriching dialogue.





The topics that were discussed included the following:

Migration has multiple gender dimensions: women and men migrate in different ways and for different reasons. For example, some women have less control over decision-making and therefore, it becomes more difficult to differentiate between forced and voluntary migration and the implications of forced return to their communities of origin.

At this point, efforts implemented by governments to provide assistance and protection to migrant women were highlighted, as well as the accompaniment of civil society and observer organizations involved in the matter.

#### **Panel: Women and their Experience in Migration Processes – Part II**

The panel was facilitated by Fundación para la Justicia y el Estado Democrático de Derecho, representing RNCOM, and included the participation of a young migrant woman, UNDP and a representative of the Government of Belize.



The topics that were discussed included the following:

Women are more likely to become victims of violence and discrimination during migration and in the host countries. In some cases, women migrate to escape from places where they fear for their physical integrity and are afraid of returning, even though, in general, these places have not been classified as dangerous.

This has implications on how and why women return to their communities and countries of origin and how they reintegrate into their communities.

Multiple factors of the current regional context enable foreseeing significant impacts on the dynamics of migration processes, which will necessarily translate into new and greater challenges relating to the successful social integration of migrants in their communities of destination. In addition, migrant women have different assistance and protection needs throughout the migration process, including return.

#### **Panel: The Role of Migrant Women and their Prominence in the Sustainable Development Goals**

This panel provided a space for dialogue which enabled representatives from the governments of Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic as well as UN Women to address the importance of including information on the work with migrant women in the voluntary reports on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in each country. Furthermore, a series of recommendations were made in order for governments, international organizations and civil society organizations to



contribute to the achievement of the SDGs that are most relevant to migrant women.

The topics that were discussed included the following:

- Gender equality is not only at the centre of the agenda of the SDGs but has also been identified as a factor which facilitates and accelerates progress towards the achievement of the SDGs. A specific goal has been established for gender equality – Goal 5, Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. In addition, gender is addressed in 12 of the 17 goals, which include targets disaggregated by gender or gender-specific targets.
- The following goals are particularly, albeit not exclusively, relevant for migrant women in the region:
  - » 5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls: migrant and refugee women experience violence throughout every stage of the migration process. Gender-based violence can force women and girls to migrate, and they can become victims of violence during migration or in countries of destination. Migrant girls are more likely to become victims of trafficking or sexual exploitation.
  - » 5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work: 11.5 million (17.2%) of the 67.1 million domestic workers worldwide are international migrants; 8.4 million (73.4%) of the migrant domestic workers are women or female adolescents.
  - » 8.5 Achieve full and productive employment and decent work: in many cases, host countries limit or prohibit employment for refugees or the spouses of migrants. Female migrants and refugees are often limited to “female” work, which is less valued than other types of jobs.
  - » 8.7 Eradicate forced labour and end modern slavery and human trafficking: migrant women and boys, girls and adolescents are at risk of being forced and subject to trafficking, exploitation and mistreatment.
  - » 8.8 Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments: protecting labour rights, especially those of women and children who emigrate and who are at greater risk of suffering exploitation or abuse. Migrant women with stereotypically female roles (such as home care and household work) tend to be isolated, and therefore are more vulnerable to exploitation, violence and abuse.

## Thematic Discussions



The Congress provided a space for thematic discussions where representatives from the RCM Member Countries, observer organizations and civil society presented their good practices, success stories and existing legislation and policies. The discussions stimulated dialogue and enabled the participants to analyse and identify challenges and advances related to the topic of women in the context of migration in the region.

Six central themes were established and two working groups were created. Each presentation had a duration of approximately 20 minutes. The delegations used the time allocated to them to distribute information sheets, texts, research studies, technical tools or other materials.

The most relevant elements of the presentations include the following:

GOOD PRACTICES	EXISTING LEGISLATION OR POLICIES	SUCCESS STORIES
Costa Rica: Good practices related to temporary shelters, prevention of violence, and sexual and reproductive health	El Salvador: Responsibilities of the Attorney General's Office concerning the implementation of the Equality and Equity Law (LIE) and the Special Comprehensive Law for a Life Free of Violence for Women (LEIV)	RNCOM: Regional research study: Intraregional migration of girls, female adolescents and young women, Phase I
RNCOM: Advances and challenges concerning the human rights of women, related to the Global Compact for Migration	Dominican Republic: Health as a universal right in legislation and access to health care for migrant women	RNCOM: Work performed by SOVIC (S.O.S. Víctimas del conflicto armado colombiano en Panamá) Foundation
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC): Capacity-building for officers in charge of implementing the law on detection, investigation and prosecution of the crime of migrant smuggling  Experiential training methodology	Mexico: Implementing the Migration Policy of the Mexican State in regard to assistance, protection and integration of women in the context of mobility	RNCOM: Efforts aimed at benefiting migrant women implemented by Fundación para la Justicia y el Estado Democrático de Derecho
Nicaragua: Coordination of inter-institutional actions aimed at facilitating comprehensive health care and assistance for boys, girls and adolescents in vulnerable situations, ensuring that they are not separated from their parents	Mexico: Public policies and a gender perspective oriented toward ensuring equality between women and men	
Guatemala: A stance on the SDGs and women, and a methodology of strategic agendas and public policy instruments which enables viewing women from a perspective of intersectionality of rights and ensures conventionality control		
El Salvador: Good practices of the gender units of public institutions, and particularly of the Office for Gender Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs		

Panama: Migration regularization: a new visa application for the purpose of family reunification		
IOM: Good practices in economic empowerment of women of the RCM Member Countries, experiences of the BA-1 project.		

## CONCLUSION

The participants recommended that this Congress be held annually, given the importance of increasing the visibility of women in the context of migration throughout the entire migration process, as well as their contribution to the development of societies of origin, transit and destination. During the Congress the feminization of migration was recognized, as well as the mainstreaming of human rights in providing timely assistance to this migrant population group. In addition to creating synergies to address migration in a comprehensive manner, the Guidelines for the Assistance and Protection of Women in the Context of Migration and this first congress reflect the recognition of this subject within the RCM. Furthermore, they pose the challenge of implementing these technical tools within the agendas and public policies of the member countries of this regional consultation forum with the resources that are available.



## List of Participants:

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Special Guest	Emma Villalobos	Honduras	Business woman, owner of the enterprise named "Copias e impresiones y útiles escolares Génesis"	yadiravillalobos07@gmail.com
Special Guest	Esmeralda Cruz	El Salvador	Owner of the dressmaking shop "Laly Factory"	jadeamtuanett@gmail.com



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