

## The Growing Feminization of Migration

### Women as Agents of Interculturalism

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### "Role of Migrant Women in the Promotion of Multicultural Identities" PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE

Seminar on "The Role of Migrant Women in the Promotion of Multicultural Identities"  
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#### I. First Plenary Session

What are the implications of the growing feminization of migration?

The increasing feminization of migration implies that more women are leaving their countries and are taking with them their culture, customs, traditions and religion to countries with a different background and are thus increasingly becoming vehicles of multiculturalism (and maybe also interculturalism).

Given the formative role that women play in their host societies, given that they are usually charged with the care of children in their early childhood years, the most malleable years in a person's life, they have a great influence in the openness of the new generations to other cultures. Indeed, depending on the kind of relationship that they establish with the local population, and with other migrants, they can already be agents of interculturalism.

#### II. Second Plenary Session

What is the economic and social role of migrant women?

Like all migrant workers, they are a source of remittances to their home countries, which are significant in the economic strategy of developing nations. This has an important social effect in their home societies, especially if the migrant woman becomes the principal breadwinner of the family. This could lead to a mix-up in the traditional roles of father and mother, especially in relation to the children. On the other hand, the absence of

the mother could be detrimental to the caring and rearing of the children, and requires greater attention on the part of the father.

For the host country, the migrant woman allows local women to engage in productive and administrative activities that she would otherwise have to forgo, or at least carry out only partially in order to fulfill her duties at home and towards her children. Very often, they also substitute the children's parents in terms of care and affection for the children. They also give local people greater security in carrying out their social and occupational responsibilities by caring for the elderly.

Like any migrant, also the women are employed in essential economic activities that local people are no longer willing to carry out, hence they are an economic asset to the host population.

On the other hand, women who migrate to be reunited with their husbands provide the effective and affective family support that is essential in the life of one who is displaced from his usual environment.

III. How do migrants, and migrant women in particular, contribute to affirm the importance of cultural diversity?

Migrant women can be firm in affirming their identity, and not be assimilated in the host society, since everyone has the right to an identity. By demonstrating the positive aspects of her culture and traditions, with due respect for others, the migrant woman can show that all cultures have something with which to enrich other cultures, and thus pave the way to openness towards different cultures, customs and traditions. This will also give visibility to what cultures have in common. This opens the way to tolerance, even sympathy, but it does not mean accepting everything in another culture indiscriminately.

It is vital to distinguish between what the receiving societies can and cannot tolerate in other cultures, what can be respected or shared with regard to followers of other religions (see EMCC 65 and 66), and to have the possibility of giving indications in this regard also to policymakers, towards a proper formulation of civil legislation, with due respect for each one's competence.

It is also important to accompany the dialogue partner in the process of thinking out the ethical and actual dimensions, and not only the theological and religious ones, of the consequences of requests addressed to civil society, while duly respecting the distinction between civil and religious dialogue.

Cultural diversity has also to be considered in the context of the unity of the human race and the fundamental equality of all individuals and peoples, who are all endowed with human dignity and the corresponding rights and duties, including that of respecting the laws of the host nation.

"The unity of the human family requires that the whole of humanity, beyond its ethnic, national, cultural and religious differences, should form a community that is free of discrimination between peoples and that strives for reciprocal solidarity. Differences between the members of the human family should be used to strengthen unity, rather than serve as a cause of division" (Pontifical Message for the World Day of Peace 1989, 3).

It is therefore not only the migrant that must adapt to the host society, but the latter has also to make some adjustments with respect to migrants. Only in this way will true integration come about, "in a context of intercultural pluralism which goes beyond mere tolerance and reaches sympathy" (Pontifical Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2005, 3). Through the acceptance of this pluralistic reality, we are led to search for mutual understanding towards living in a harmony of differences. This means to live as one reality, unity in diversity, and to construct a common destiny.

IV. How can a gender-based approach of integration promote the empowerment of migrant women?

Allow me first of all [to] reiterate that for the Holy See, gender means male and female, and nothing more. A gender-based approach would take into consideration those practices in the migrants' countries of origin that are discriminatory to women, and would therefore safeguard their rights and dignity that their home communities and local traditions do not respect, especially if they are societies that are male-oriented. It would also take into account the discriminatory practices in the host societies, in spite of the effort to have fair legislation, thereby enabling migrant women to protect their rights so that, together with the fulfillment of their duties, they would be able to positively contribute to their host societies, and consequently also to their countries of origin.

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