



Statement of Network for the Protection of Women Migrants' Rights (NPWMR) on International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) 2026

In the conduct of IMRF 2026, we amplify the voices of women migrants, calling for right based, gender responsive and intersectional approach that place migrants, their communities and families at the center to address the long standing issues faced by migrants, from access to justice, social protection, affected by war and conflict, xenophobia to meaningful participation.



The second IMRF convenes at a critical moment marked by a convergence of global crises, from escalating war and conflict, climate crisis, soaring inflation, poverty and food insecurity, to a deepening financial debt crisis. We emphasise the challenges faced by women migrants, who make up nearly half of the global migrant population. Women continue to occupy traditional roles in the workplace across many sectors and occupations,¹ including care and domestic work, manufacturing, and informal services. These low-wage positions relegated to migrant women are often undervalued, with rights inadequately protected in policies and in practice. As the IMRF Progress Declaration explicitly calls for gender-responsive policies, we strongly urge states to refrain from regressing on rights and recognise women migrants as rights-holders who can actively contribute meaningfully in policy-making.

In the current context, we observe that global migration governance is becoming increasingly restrictive, with more governments prioritising deterrence in the name of sovereignty and security rather than safeguarding the rights of all migrants. Externalisation of borders and increased arbitrary detention have made us question how securitised approaches have been weaponised by governments to control the categories of migrants who get *in and out* of their borders. The shift in migration control through bilateral and regional agreements goes beyond national territories, often without adequate human rights safeguards, as documented by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants.² These trends raise serious concerns about states' compliance with international human rights standards and the global commitments set out under the Global Compact on Migration.



It is critical to acknowledge that migrants are not only disproportionately affected by global crises and often positioned as passive recipients of services; rather, they have shown remarkable resilience and resistance through community solidarity and organising by extending support and refuge for distressed and abused migrants. Many are documenting issues grounded in their lived experiences and gendered analysis to stimulate conversations and advocate for change. We stress that migrants are also the key contributors to rights-based solutions and sustainable development, and governments must listen and learn from their unique experiences and demands.

¹ <https://ilostat.ilo.org/blog/where-women-work-female-dominated-occupations-and-sectors/>

² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a80302-report-special-rapporteur-human-rights-migrants-gehad-madi>

Complementary of the Network for the Protection of Women Migrants' Rights (NPWMR) Statement

Rights, Justice, and Dignity: Women Migrants and the Global Migration Governance

The second International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) will be hosted by the President of the UN General Assembly at the United Nations in New York on 5-8 May 2026. This is taking place at a critical moment marked by a convergence of global crises, from escalating war and conflict, climate crisis, soaring inflation, poverty and food insecurity, to a deepening financial debt crisis. While some member states have been weighing in on their achievements in meeting the GCM objectives and debating language in areas where they see synergies or a lack thereof, the intentions and commitments of member states will be driven mainly by political motivations and geopolitical alignments, rather than by the centrality of human rights for migrants and their families in migration governance.

We emphasise the challenges faced by women migrants, who make up nearly half of the global migrant population. Women continue to occupy traditional roles in the workplace across many sectors and occupations,³ including care and domestic work, manufacturing, and informal services. These low-wage positions relegated to migrant women are often undervalued, with rights inadequately protected in policies and in practice. As the IMRF Progress Declaration explicitly calls for gender-responsive policies, we strongly urge States to refrain from regressing on rights and recognise women migrants as rights-holders who can actively contribute meaningfully in policy-making.

In the current context, we observe that global migration governance is becoming increasingly restrictive, with more governments prioritising deterrence in the name of sovereignty and security rather than safeguarding the rights of all migrants. Externalisation of borders and increased arbitrary detention have made us question how securitised approaches have been weaponised by governments to control the categories of migrants who get *in and out* of their borders. The shift in migration control through bilateral and regional agreements goes beyond national territories, often without adequate human rights safeguards, as documented by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants.⁴ These trends raise serious concerns about states' compliance with international human rights standards and the global commitments set out under the Global Compact on Migration.

It is critical to acknowledge that migrants are not only disproportionately affected by global crises and often positioned as passive recipients of services; rather, they have shown remarkable resilience and resistance through community solidarity and organising by extending support and refuge for distressed and abused migrants. Many are documenting issues grounded in their lived experiences and gendered analysis to stimulate conversations and advocate for change. We stress that migrants are also the key contributors to rights-based solutions and sustainable development, and governments must listen and learn from their unique experiences and demands.

As a network of organisations working to centre the rights of migrant workers, especially women, we share key priority areas where state responses are crucial: **access to justice, social protection, migrants affected by war and conflict, xenophobia, and meaningful participation**. Across these areas, we call for a renewed commitment to rights-based, gender-responsive, and intersectional approaches that place migrants and their communities at the centre.

Access to Justice

³ <https://ilostat.ilo.org/blog/where-women-work-female-dominated-occupations-and-sectors/>

⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a80302-report-special-rapporteur-human-rights-migrants-gehad-madi>

It is worthy to note that the adopted Sustainable Development Goals include access to justice, acknowledging that access to justice is part of the development of ‘peaceful and inclusive societies’ and ‘effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels’.⁵ The concept of justice from migrant women’s perspectives may vary and perhaps be more than just a legal and administrative process. For many migrant women, justice is not only about accessing courts or filing complaints, but about restoring dignity, securing decent work conditions, freedom from violence and exploitation, or experiencing social inclusion. In other situations where legal systems are inaccessible or exclusionary, migrant women often view justice in terms of practical outcomes, such as recovering unpaid wages, safety, or gaining recognition and respect from the community.

Migrants, particularly those in irregular situations, temporary labour schemes, or informal sectors, face significant structural barriers to seeking remedies for rights violations. Often, administrative procedures do not allow irregular migrants to access complaint mechanisms due to risks of detention or deportation, a lack of legal information, language barriers, high costs, and complex bureaucratic procedures. Despite commitments under the GCM, accountability mechanisms remain weak, and labour and migration governance systems continue to operate in silos, leaving migrants without effective remedies.

We strongly urge governments to ensure firewalls between labour rights protection and immigration control, enabling migrants, regardless of migration status, to report cases of abuse and exploitation. Governments must also guarantee non-prosecution and protection of victims of exploitation and trafficking, in accordance with international law. In addition, the establishment of Government-funded compensation schemes is highly important so that all migrant workers can access compensation for labour exploitation, especially in cases where the recruiter or employer’s identity is unknown.

Migrants in War and Conflict Situations

State-led responses to war and conflict situations are frequently inconsistent and often exclude migrants and refugees from emergency and direct assistance. Migrants fleeing conflict often face additional dangers in transit and destination countries due to restrictive border policies, pushbacks, and detention practices, which exacerbate their vulnerabilities. Migrants, refugees and their families are among those severely affected, often excluded from protection systems, shelter, and direct access to services. For instance, the ongoing escalation of conflict across West Asia, including armed conflict and military aggression involving the United States in Israel, Gaza, and Iran, has directly impacted a region that is structurally dependent on migrant labour. Since 28 February 2026, widespread disruptions have been recorded, including over 21,300 flight cancellations and major maritime interruptions affecting approximately 20,000 seafarers.^{6,7} These systemic shocks have left tens of thousands of migrant workers stranded in Lebanon, alongside an estimated 4,000–6,000 migrants attempting to flee from Iran, many of whom are from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and other South Asian countries seeking to move to neighbouring safer countries.^{8,9}

⁵ Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 16 states: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg16>

⁶ Reuters (2026) – Airline disruption due to West Asia conflict <https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/airline-travel-industries-scramble-with-fallout-middle-eastern-conflict-2026-03-03/>

⁷ International Maritime Organization (IMO) – Strait of Hormuz disruption <https://www.imo.org/en/mediacentre/pressbriefings/pages/statement-on-the-strait-of-hormuz.aspx>

⁸ Sirat, S. (2025, September 29). Pakistan, Iran deport over 6,000 migrants in one day <https://amu.tv/202706/>

⁹ Reuters (2024) – Migrant workers stranded during Lebanon conflict escalation <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/lebanons-migrant-workers-stuck-limbo-thousands-flee-conflict-2024-10-05/>

In conflict situations, migrant workers are facing compounded vulnerabilities as a result of structural inequalities that significantly limit their ability to seek safety during crisis situations. Many are unable to evacuate due to financial constraints, lack of access to public shelters, and restrictions embedded within the *kafala* (employer sponsorship) system, which limits their ability to freely exit the country.^{10,11} A growing number of employers are unable to pay salaries, placing thousands of workers at risk of job loss and financial insecurity. This situation not only threatens livelihoods but also deepens social and economic vulnerability for families across Lebanon, Bahrain and particularly for migrant workers.

At the same time, access to information has been constrained during this critical period, as laws penalising the spread of “rumors” of “fake news” about the war have reduced the flow of information, including on migrant conditions, further increasing migrant exposure to risk.^{12,13} However, migrant workers continue to perform essential frontline roles during the conflict, including maintaining critical infrastructure, delivery services, and healthcare support, while facing heightened risks to their physical safety and security¹⁴. At the same time, women domestic workers remain especially vulnerable to abandonment by employers without access to passports, wages, or safe shelter.¹⁵

We call on states to take urgent action to ensure safe evacuation pathways and that equal access to shelters and humanitarian assistance is provided to all migrants, regardless of nationality and status. We also stress the importance of providing adequate protection from forced or unsafe labour and of strengthening coordination between governments and embassies. In the context of West Asia, structural reforms are crucial, particularly addressing the *kafala* system, ensuring wage protection, and improving transparency through disaggregated migrant data, which are essential to prevent migrant workers from becoming invisible casualties in the ongoing crisis.¹⁶

Social Protection

We strongly believe that access to public services and social protection systems is key to the fulfilment of the rights of women migrants and to ending the exploitation of migrant workers. It is an

¹⁰ Migration Policy Institute – Gulf Migration & Kafala System Overview
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/gulf-region-gcc-migration-kafala-reforms>

¹¹ Human Rights Watch – Kafala sponsorship system and labour dependency
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/27/lebanon-abolish-kafala-sponsorship-system>

¹² Human Rights Watch – Information control / misinformation laws (Qatar)
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/01/22/qatar-5-year-prison-sentence-set-fake-news>

¹³ Human Rights Watch – UAE digital speech environment and restrictions
<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/united-arab-emirates>

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch (2026)-Gulf Countries: Conflict, Hardships Leave Migrants in Limbo, Temporary Measures Needed to Protect Workers’ Rights <https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/03/31/gulf-countries-conflict-hardships-leave-migrants-in-limbo?>

¹⁵ Amnesty International – Migrant domestic worker abandonment in Lebanon
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/06/lebanon-abandoned-migrant-domestic-workers-must-be-protected/>

¹⁶ Labor Justice Gulf Migrants – Migrant invisibility & data gap statement
<https://laborjusticegulfmigrants.org/solidarity-statement-march-2026/>

important step to creating equity between national and migrant workers and realising sustainable development.¹⁷

The exclusion of migrants from access to public services is a deliberate policy of certain governments. Some seek to take advantage of migrant labour, while avoiding responsibility for the social cost of their migration. Meanwhile, others have intentionally imposed restrictions on migrants' access to public services in order to create a "hostile environment" for those in irregular situations.

Women migrants' lack of access to social protection systems amplifies risk factors to labour exploitation and trafficking in countries of destination. The lack of social protection, in particular pensions and affordable healthcare, greatly affects women's choices regarding migration. This gap creates conditions for distress migration, where workers, often women, feel compelled to leave their communities in search of better economic opportunities. Unfortunately, such migration often leads them into unstable and feminised labour within the informal sector. This sector is typically characterised by low wage payments, absence of proper labour contracts, contractualisation, and poor working conditions.

We call on governments to address these systemic issues to improve the welfare of migrants and their families, both in origin and destination countries. Governments must consider portable and inclusive social protection systems to address the cycles of precarity and inequality. Being able to move with the benefits to which migrant workers have contributed is critical to migrants' benefiting from their labour and to realising the development potential of migration.

Xenophobia and Discrimination

Over the years, the differential treatment of migrants in policies and practice perpetuates the idea that migrants are somewhat less deserving of rights protection and fuels harmful stereotypes. Such stereotypes include migrants being willing to work for less money and in worse conditions, or being a drain on the resources of the country. These stereotypes are extremely damaging and contribute to xenophobic attitudes.

We observed how migrants are increasingly portrayed as threats to national security, economic stability, or even to cultural identity. Such narratives are often amplified by political actors and media, fuelling discrimination, violence, and exclusion. Combating xenophobia requires more than awareness-raising, it demands structural change and accountability.

We strongly encourage governments to create spaces for cross-sectoral dialogue to ensure that xenophobia is addressed through an intersectional lens. Migrant communities and support organisations that represent them should be consulted and participate in policymaking, program planning, implementation, and evaluation. Significantly, we call on governments to ensure accountability for hate crimes and violence against migrants, by integrating anti-racism and inclusion frameworks into migration policies and addressing the root cause of xenophobia, including equal protection of their labour rights and access to social protections.

Meaningful Participation of Migrants

¹⁷ International Labour Conference, Resolution concerning fair and effective labour migration governance, 106th Session, para.10; *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/70/1, SDG targets 1.3 and 10.4; Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Concluding Observations: Russian Federation, E/C.12/RUS/CO/6, 16 October 2017, para.37.

At the start of the IMRF in New York, it is crucial to address that many migrant women leaders and workers will not be able to participate and represent migrants and refugees, mainly due to budget constraints and visa and security issues. This is a stark reality of how migrants are often excluded from decision-making processes that directly affect their lives. Despite commitments to whole-of-society approaches, migrant voices, particularly those of women in low-wage work, remain marginalised in policy negotiation spaces. It is important to understand that participation is not only a matter of physical presence but having access to spaces where their urgent demands and perspectives are considered and integrated into policymaking.

Migrants bring in valuable lived experiences, knowledge, and demands that can guide migration governance towards rights-based and people-centred solutions. We urge states to localise their commitment to a whole-society approach so mechanisms for meaningful participation and representation can be institutionalised at all levels.

This moment also presents an opportunity to reaffirm the principles of human rights, solidarity, and shared responsibility and to place migrants at the centre of states' development efforts.

We call on Member States to take concrete steps to implement rights-based, gender-responsive, and inclusive migration policies through genuine civil society engagement, having mechanisms for accountability, and the placing of the human rights of all migrants at the top of states' agenda. Ensuring migrants' rights, dignity, and well-being is not only a moral imperative but also essential for building just, resilient, and inclusive futures for all migrants.

The **Network for the Protection of Women Migrants' Rights (NPWMR)** is a regional network of organisations and alliances focused on the issue of women migrants. NPWMR works closely with national and sub-regional organisations and alliances in advocating and campaigning for women migrants' issues and demands.

Visit our [NPWMR](#) Facebook page for more information.