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## Key Issues of Female Migration, Urban Relocation and Remaking Home



Author:

Kate Neyts

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The author:

**Kate Neyts**

Research Intern at UNU-CRIS

kneyts (@) cris.unu.edu

**United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies**

Potterierei 72, 8000 Brugge, BE-Belgium

Tel.: +32 50 47 11 00 / Fax: +32 50 47 13 09

[www.cris.unu.edu](http://www.cris.unu.edu)

**United Nations University Institute on Globalization, Culture and Mobility**

Sant Manuel Pavilion, Sant Pau Art Nouveau Site, C/Sant Antoni Maria Claret, 167

08025 Barcelona, ES-Spain

Tel: +34 935 565 991

<http://gcm.unu.edu/>

## **Executive Summary**

This policy report is complementary to the ethnographic project “Women of the World: Home and Work in Barcelona”, carried out by the United Nations University, Institute on Globalization, Culture and Mobility (UNU-GCM). The project aims to explore key aspects of migration, relocation and settlement in an urban context with a specific gender focus by means of oral and visual documentation. This policy report will give more attention to related women’s migration topics, as well as concepts that are underexposed in (female) migration literature, both on the process of relocation as well as on the process of settlement. Firstly, a broad explanation on the feminization of migration, women in transnational communities and the concept of remaking home is given. Secondly, we explore the social aspects of relocation and settlement by providing an overview of opportunities and challenges for women as they attempt to rebuild a home in an unknown city and try to integrate in the community. We will give a background in academic literature, provide a short overview of existing supranational literature and connect the existing knowledge to the oral documentation collected in the “Women of the World” project. To further make the link with this project, we also present Barcelona as a city of migration, with specific attention to “the Interculturality Plan” and the “Anti-Rumour campaign”. The report concludes by presenting several policy

recommendations to better understand the social aspects of remaking home in the city and so promote the integration of female migrants within host societies.

## **Aims and objectives**

This policy report aims to complement the “Women of the World” project by giving more attention to topics that are underexposed in (female) migration literature, such as the social aspects of rebuilding a home in a hitherto unfamiliar city. It therefore focusses on both the opportunities and the challenges of this process, which were mainly identified based on the oral documentation from the afore mentioned project. Furthermore, it also aims to formulate policy suggestions that are targeted to better accommodate female migrants in the city, as they attempt to remake a home.

## **Introduction**

Experiences of migration can be very different for men and women, not only because women are more prone to physical and sexual abuse while travelling, but also because of the cultural aspects of living in a transnational community and rebuilding a home (IOM, 2002). It has been recognized in the past few years that a gender perspective is essential to understanding both causes and consequences of international migration (UN, 2006). In 2002, the United Nations (UN) Commission on Population and Development adopted a resolution, asking to incorporate gender

perspectives in all its research on population policies, levels and trends, including the gender dimension of migration. Various international protocols have been put in place to protect the rights of migrants and especially women and children, for example the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and The International Convention on the Protection of Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (UN, *ibid.*). However, the spotlight is often still on women traveling as dependents, refugees or victims of trafficking, whereas women are regularly migrating on their own (UN-INSTRAW, 2007). Much attention is also given to the process of departure and arrival, less on the process of integrating in the community and the least on what it entails to remake a home. The UNU-GCM project “Women of the World: Home and Work in Barcelona” explores key issues of relocation: those of remaking home, reinventing tradition, changing values, creating new identities and remaking the city; with visual and oral documentation. This report will give a short overview and a broader background of key issues in gender, migration and urban relocation. Firstly, it will provide information on the feminization of migration and women who are living in transnational communities. Secondly, it will elaborate on remaking home, especially focusing on the social aspects of the process of rebuilding a home in the city, with special attention to the city of Barcelona. Finally, several recommendations are

presented to incorporate the social aspects of remaking home in future policy-making.

## **1. Key issues of female migration**

### **Feminization of Migration**

In migration studies it is often agreed that the “feminization of migration” is one of the most apparent trends within migration streams over the past few decades. This does not point to the fact that more women are crossing (transnational) borders; rather it means that women are migrating independently in search of employment or independence, preferably than traveling as a dependent to a family member (UN-INSTRAW<sup>1</sup>, 2007).<sup>2</sup> This results in some very specific forms of female migration, such as the labour migration of domestic workers and caregivers, sectors where we can find many immigrant women, but also the trafficking of women for the sex industry and organized migration for women to be married. This also means that existing ideas about gender roles and gender identities are shifting, with newly-defined and evolving masculinities and femininities as a result (UN-INSTRAW, 2006). Therefore, both the UN-INSTRAW (*ibid.*) and the International Organisation for Migration (2007) advice researchers and governments to continuously insert a gender

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women

<sup>2</sup> See also UN (2006), UN-INSTRAW (2006), UNDP (2010), UN-INSTRAW (2010) and UN Women (2013)

perspective in relation to migration issues. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has also been asking for the identification of the needs of migrant women and the inclusion of gender consideration in international, regional and bilateral policy issues (IOM, 2010).

### **Women in transnational communities**

Studying transnationalism, meaning that migrants are seen as representatives of a more globalized world, also asks for a gendered approach to the subject, since women and men experience immigration and citizenship in different ways. (Al-Ali, 2003)

The effects and conditions of gender diaspora is a topic that is less exposed within migration literature. Al-Ali (2003) concluded for example that the conditions for moving transnationally are not always available to women, or limited within a set of normative and cultural gendered rules. A study by Salih (2001) on Moroccan immigrant women in Italy concludes that their transnational movements are determined by the roles women are expected to perform in the household. More concretely, this entails that men, who act as providers, are expected to send remittances home to their families and visit occasionally. Women, however, are expected to take full responsibility for the daily care of both their children and their homes in both the host and the origin country. Bouras (2009) concluded in her paper on Moroccan women in the

Netherlands that Moroccan migrant women's transnational lives are closely connected to family cycles, which implies that their different roles as daughter, mother or wife determine their transnational activities. Therefore we can conclude that leading a transnational life is heavily determined by a woman's position in patriarchal structures and her role within the household. The UN-INSTRAW (2007) however, points out that women, who become economically independent and possibly provide for their transnational family, can experience a higher self-esteem, personal autonomy and status.

Another UN-INSTRAW study (2010) shows that thanks to regularization programs in, for example, Spain, many families have had the chance to reunite. However, case studies from Spain by UN-INSTRAW (ibid.) show that many regular immigrants choose not to reunite their entire family, but use their new status differently, for example for circular migration.

Despite these elements, family separation always emerges in studies as the most painful aspect of the migratory experience, regardless of whether the move was voluntarily or not. This is especially the case for female (labour) migrants who have left (young) children in their home country and are sometimes separated for a long time. These women suffer from the social stigma of "abandoning" their family, which adds to the pain of separation (UN-INSTRAW, 2010). In a time when we are celebrating globalization and

transnationalism, nation-state borders have become real obstacles to many immigrant women who want to be reunited with their children and family (UN, 2005). Therefore, the UN (ibid.) has made the policy suggestion to “grant the right for women migrant workers to choose their own motherhood arrangements” (UN, 2005, p.6.)

### **Remaking Home**

“Making home” in a new country or region brings on its own questions, situations and difficulties. Many aspects of this process have been underexposed in migration studies (Al-Ali, 2003).<sup>3</sup>

From a policy perspective, we can say that regional conventions often focus on immigrant workers. Broader conventions in Europe include The European Convention on Human Rights (1950) and the European Social Charter (1965).<sup>4</sup> In the end, it is mainly national laws that provide the principal support for immigrant women. Especially gender-sensitive policies can increase the promotion and protection of the rights of female immigrants. Required activities include

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<sup>3</sup> We must mention that this work by Al-Ali is the seminal work on remaking home, and other academic literature on the subject is lacking

<sup>4</sup> In other regions, there is the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Regional Convention on Migration in the Americas; the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa; and similar, smaller initiatives in Asia and Arab countries (UN, 2006)

sensitization initiatives for women immigrants and the training of officials to be aware of gender specific immigrant situations (UN, 2006).

According to UN-INSTRAW (2010) the living conditions of immigrant women are heavily determined by their health status and their working conditions. They found that (female) immigrants’ access to health services is often limited, even in countries that offer broad health coverage for its citizens. The problems include a lack of access to public-health systems, but also reluctance from female foreigners to visit these services as they do not want to leave work for it, they have trouble communicating with the service providers, they lack information about the health-care system or the costs are too high. This especially affects female immigrants, both for biological reasons (pregnancy and child-birth), as well as social reasons (they are responsible for family health-care). The working conditions of domestic workers<sup>5</sup> are very diverse. Some are treated as members of the family, some are treated with unacceptable working conditions that border slavery or forced labour. This is often due to a lack of regulation and the invisibility of domestic workers. Therefore, the UN-INSTRAW (ibid.) also calls for a reevaluation of domestic work.

The refugee scholar Liisa Malkki (1995) was one of the first to point out that “emplacement is the flipside of displacement”, thereby referring to the fact that migration (eventually) means remaking home, which entails reconstructing life, place in the community and ultimately, identity. It is for that reason that in the “Women of the World: Home and Work in the city” project, 16 immigrant women that have integrated in the city of Barcelona were interviewed on their migration experience as well as their experience in rebuilding a home. Many of them have indicated that their “emplacement” in a new country or city did not mean creating a new identity, but adding a new feeling of identity to their already existing personality. Rebuilding a home in an urban area can also be a matter of interaction with the city. Many of them felt like their life in the new city, although difficult at first, gave to them feelings of joy of life, freedom, stability and happiness. When asked what they offered to Barcelona, many indicated that they gave the contribution of their family, their knowledge, their motivated personality and their zest for life.

We must also mention that relocating to the city is something entirely different from moving to rural areas. Migrants often chose to move to the city, as the interviewed women did, because there are more job opportunities, better schools and better or other social and cultural facilities than in rural areas. Also, rural

infrastructure projects are declining in a struggling economy, making the city a more attractive place to relocate to. However, often, migrants are met with discrimination by local residents (Han, 2014). We elaborate on the opportunities and challenges of remaking home in the city in the next chapter.

## **2. Social Aspects of Remaking Home**

As said before, this paper focusses on the social aspects of rebuilding a home in the city from a gender perspective. The dual responsibility of work and family often hits women the hardest. They can face double discrimination on the labour market, due to being women and foreigner, and their residence may depend on the relationship with their male partner (IOM, 2002). However apart from challenges that women may face upon integrating in a new home; there are also opportunities for them to create their own space and their own role in society. Although these can be found in international literature, we especially identified them from the interviews with the 16 immigrant women from the “Women of the World” project.

### **Opportunities**

A study by the UN (2006) showed that immigrant women are active instigators of change. They may contribute to economic growth, by starting an independent business for example. Other than that, immigrant women form ties between the origin and destination countries. They also develop their

own networks, thereby stimulating and facilitating the immigration of other women.

The UN-INSTRAW (2010) calls the impact of migration on women's social and personal empowerment most interesting.<sup>6</sup> Female immigrants are faced with a new society, with new possibilities and are possibly moving away from traditional and patriarchal society (UN, 2005; UN, 2006). Often they get the chance to have more authority in their lives. They also become familiar with new norms on women's rights and opportunities and may have more opportunities to participate in wage employment or gain access to financial resources they have never had before (UN, 2006). It is also mostly in urban areas that more self-employment activity, often in the informal sector, can be found (UN, 2009). The women that were interviewed for the project support these findings. Deepti from India has, since arriving in the country, started her own business, a shop that sells Indian clothing and other typically Indian things. Other than that, she has most definitely created a space for herself and her culture in Barcelona as she started giving guided tours on "India in Barcelona". Bombo from Senegal works in an association for Sub-Saharan female migrants in Barcelona and tries to identify and fulfill the as yet unaddressed needs of these women. Huma from Pakistan started her own cultural association on Social and Educational

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<sup>6</sup> See also UN Women (2013)

Operations for Pakistani women and actively works with them to integrate them in with the city, the country, the new culture and new values. Lilia from Cuba has her own restaurant, Lingling from China started her own translation company and Nora from Argentina started her own acting studio. In their individual ways, they have tried to connect their identity and culture to the city by building something new.

What is also interesting is that immigrant women may influence their society of origin by taking up a mediatory role and representing the rights and opportunities for other (immigrant) women. When women become economically, socially and politically empowered through international migration, it often also benefits the broader community, as their empowerment can lead them to contribute to the lives of others in the society (UN, 2006). Bouras (2009) mentioned that men generally experience a loss of social status in the process of immigration and, as a consequence, have a stronger orientation towards the community of origin. Women however, do not experience gain status loss and may gain in social status. Therefore, they are more interested in their situation in their new country. Female immigrants can form cultural linkages between different geographical locations and in their own, become a sort of "cultural resource" (Al-Ali, 2003). According to another UN study (2009), it is also often women who are part of the



networks and communities in the city that work to influence for example better quality housing and services. We see this again in the women that were interviewed for the “Women of the World” project. Bombo from Senegal, Huma from Pakistan, Maritza from Colombia and Nora from Argentina are, for example, very active in associations for female migrants or women’s rights issues. Fatima from Morocco and Deepti from India both work as intercultural mediators and Sithy from Cambodia is a contact person for Erasmus students from Cambodia. They each try to make a difference for the people from their region to integrate better in the city of Barcelona, coming from their own experiences as a female immigrant. At a different level, the European Women’s Lobby (EWL) recognizes the existence of many of these immigrant women’s societies and aims to integrate them more, in hopes of having a better representation of immigrant women in Europe (EWL, 2007)

### **Challenges**

Although we want to emphasize with this report that there are interesting opportunities for immigrant women as they rebuild a home, obviously they are also faced with different obstacles.

First of all, foreign-born women in Europe often face a gendered labour market and lack job opportunities in higher qualified jobs (Vidal-Coso, 2014). Labour participation by

female immigrants is mostly lower than among native women and they tend to have lower earnings (UN, 2006). According to the same UN study (ibid.), many immigrant women perform what are considered “culturally appropriate activities” such as taking care of the family and domestic work. Therefore, a lot of immigrant women are involved in the domestic or the services sector. However, the upside is that due to this, some countries have gender-adapted immigration policies that affect the admission of migrant women for employment reasons. For example, Canada and the US have explicit immigration programs for the admission of “live-in caregivers”, jobs often filled by immigrant women (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2003). Already in 2005, the European Commission called for policies that would mobilize all groups to the labour market and give more attention to immigrant women (Pavan-Woolfe, 2005). As of 2009, many countries have ratified the international labour standards and 49 countries have ratified the Migration for Employment Convention, which obligates States to provide among others free and accurate information to immigrants and prevent discrimination against immigrants (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2015). Also in the interviews, several women have indicated that they had difficulties entering the formal labour market. Bombo from Senegal and Maritza from Colombia were literally told they had no option but to search for work in the

caregiving sector. It is, therefore, no surprise that many of them started their own initiatives, as described in the previous section.

Another challenge regarding integrating in a new country involves not only finding a job, but also being treated respectfully and fairly. The attitudes of the host society can be very determinative towards immigrants and their experiences of remaking home. If the population in the host country perceives immigrants as a threat, they may respond with suspicion, fear or even violence (Jolly & Reeves, 2005). According to the UN (2006), immigrant women are at higher risk of discrimination, exploitation and abuse than either male migrants or other female workers. They suggested that informing potential women emigrants of their rights and what they can expect would help them prepare for migration. In terms of policy, the UN inspires to eliminate gender discrimination with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)<sup>7</sup> that has many provisions directed at immigrant women, such as the elimination of sex role stereotyping and provisions concerning education, employment and health (UN, 2006). Many of the interviewed women have dealt with name-calling, but they have indicated that it does not affect them (anymore). Bombo from Senegal stated that a

lot of prejudice exists against Sub-Saharan female migrants and that people generally do not listen to them. Furthermore, Joice from Venezuela indicated she was denied a chance to work at different stores because she is South-American. Fatima from Morocco said there are many existing stereotypes regarding Muslim women, that they are very submissive and not well educated, while that is not the case at all, and Nilza from Mozambique also mentioned having to fight stereotypes as an African woman.

Although many immigrant women can feel empowered by the migration experience, it also often entails a language barrier, which can be quite an obstacle when integrating into the community. In fact, migrant women can lose autonomy when crossing borders, as they do not know the language and have difficulty adapting to the new society. Also, when children adapt more quickly than their parents to a new language and social system, the migration experience might result in intergenerational tensions, which could complicate the process of rebuilding a home for a woman and her family (UN, 2006). In addition, the same UN research (ibid.) shows that immigrant women may not be able to benefit from language and skills training courses, because they experience barriers in the access to these classes, usually due cultural constraints and practical problems (transportation, day care). Regularly, these language classes are also too academic and

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<sup>7</sup> See also UN-INSTRAW (2006)

not sufficiently adapted for women with little previous education. Immigrant women's associations are often able to bridge these barriers. Many of the interviewed women have indicated they had to learn Catalan to be able to integrate into society and find employment. Some of them already had knowledge of Spanish, but still had to learn Catalan to fully integrate. Huma from Pakistan for example, lived in Madrid for years before coming to Barcelona and spoke Spanish well, but still had to learn Catalan to fit in. Fatima from Morocco only spoke French upon arrival and could not communicate with anyone in the first few months, until she met a nurse who spoke French and later learned Catalan.

Lastly, there is also a lack of recognition of the qualifications, degrees and skills of people from other regions. This matter was addressed by the IOM in 2005, who called for a gender-balanced migration policy, including an international diploma recognition scheme (Pavan-Woolfe, 2005). From the women who were interviewed, some acknowledged that they had skills or degrees that were not recognized in Barcelona, however, not all women have actually attempted to use their qualifications. Therefore, the problem might be more extensive. Nilza from Mozambique for example, said her driver's license from Mozambique was not recognized, so she had to retake a driver's test in Barcelona. Deepti from India had a degree in economics; however this degree was not recognized in

Barcelona. Edna from the Philippines studied English Philology for two years before she came to Barcelona. She would like to finish her degree, but then she would have to start all over again in Barcelona, because her credits are not transferrable.

### **3. Barcelona as a city of migration**

Throughout this report, we have made links with the "Women of the World: Home and work in Barcelona" project and connected some of women's stories with the aspects of remaking a home in the city. To further make the link with this project, we elaborate on Barcelona as a destination city for migrants.

Barcelona is a very socio-cultural diverse habitat, which has its own advantages and difficulties. To live together in this diversity, the local government has created its own strategy for living together, named the Interculturality Plan. The idea is to make interculturalism and the relationship and interaction between citizens a fundamental part of the city practices by defining a list of principles, strategies and targets to implement on local government level. It is remarkable that city departments as well as citizens were asked for their input in public opinion surveys to evaluate diversity, the difficulties in interaction, common elements shared by all Barcelona residents and identify spaces of interculturality in the city. This input formed the core content of the plan. A website was created to host public discussion on the plan

and to show the evolution of the project. In-depth interviews were held with experts and people from different sectors in the city, public working sessions were held in territorial and sectorial councils and the public consensus on interculturality was monitored. The result was a focus on interaction and the promotion of several issues, such as the trilingualism in the city (Catalan, Spanish and language of origin), making sure that new immigrants have access to business support and are supported in their entrepreneurial ideas, and addressing discrimination with the Anti-Rumour campaign (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2009; Cities of Migration, 2012). The plan is paying off, as Barcelona is currently 3rd in the Council of Europe's (CoE) Intercultural Cities Index (CoE, 2014).

The "Anti-Rumour campaign" was designed to "fight fiction with facts". To battle the persistent rumors that immigrants were "invading the city", "crowding the health services" and others, the city recruited and trained "anti-rumor agents" to dispel these myths, to contradict uninformed ideas about immigrants and to combat discrimination. To get the message out to the inhabitants of the city, 80 local organizations that work in the field of social cohesion were contacted and connected through a website that offered information, free training session and online guides. Furthermore, the government organized public debates with local figures, supported street theatre and comic videos on

the subject and produced comic books about a local woman and her Peruvian caregiver. These comic books actively dispelled existing myths by portraying them in everyday situations and were a huge success with the locals. (Cities of Migration, 2014)

### **Conclusion**

As migration studies have been increasingly recognizing the gendered dimension of migration processes, more attention is being given to the feminization of migration, the determinants, possibilities and difficulties of women in transnational communities and (urban) integration processes. However, they mainly focus on the gender segregated labour market, irregular immigrants and problems of regularization and health needs. If anything, this paper has shown that many aspects of relocation are still insufficiently considered. Remaking home entails many different social aspects that could receive more attention. Immigrants, and often especially women, are confronted with many difficulties as they try to rebuild a home in a new country and city. They face a gendered labour market, low paid functions and, often, bad working conditions. They regularly face the double burden of discrimination, for being a woman and a foreigner. The language barrier can form a significant obstacle in integrating into society and lastly, the recognition of their skills is often insufficient. On the other hand, in terms of empowerment, rebuilding a home can bring many opportunities. The research in

combination with the oral documentation from the “Women of the World” project has shown that women are highly motivated to shape a place for themselves in the new city and have a true entrepreneurial spirit. Not only do they start new business or other initiatives, they also try to take up an active role within their community and often act as (cultural) mediators. The “Women of the World” project has brought many different stories from female immigrants in the city of Barcelona together and this report has analyzed their struggles and their successes. Therefore, in the next section, we form several policy recommendations to better accommodate female migrants in the city as they attempt to rebuild a home.

## Policy Recommendations

As many aspects of relocation and integration are still underexposed, the author firstly suggests giving more attention to the social aspects of rebuilding a home, both in academic literature as in policy-making. Following a call from the UN (2005) that it will no longer be necessary to write reports singularly on “gender and migration”, but that it will be taken into consideration that *all dimensions* of migration are gendered, we also suggest that research and policy on crossing borders and integration should always be gender sensitive. Furthermore, we propose an expansion and sensitization of the existing vocabulary used to describe migration and gender situations. More concrete suggestions could focus on the opportunities women can create for themselves and their potential for entrepreneurship and (cultural) mediation.

- Female entrepreneurship in the city can be stimulated by providing guidelines with best practices, success stories and tips and clues for starting an own initiative, directed at female immigrants.
- The potential of women to be a (cultural) mediator can be stimulated.
  - On micro-levels, this is possible by identifying representatives in the immigrant community and addressing them to start collaborating with the city government or other agencies.
  - On macro-level this is possible through a better integration of female immigrant’s societies, as suggested by the European Women’s Lobby (2007), for a better representation of female immigrants at the (supra-)national, regional or local level.
- The empowerment of immigrant women in the city can be stimulated by identifying the needs of these women better and addressing them. This includes housing and health needs, but also more specific needs, such as access to financial resources and (language) education.
- To address existing labour market access obstacles and discrimination, countries could start by ratifying and implementing the ILO’s “Migration for Employment Convention”.

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