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**GENDERED PATTERNS OF GLOBAL WORKFORCE MOBILITY:
WOMEN’S MIGRATION, ECONOMIC AGENCY, AND THE
RESTRUCTURING OF HOUSEHOLD LIFE**

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ABSTRACT

Global workforce mobility has become increasingly gendered, with women participating in international labour migration as independent workers, income earners, caregivers, and household decision-makers. Women’s migration is shaped by unequal labour-market opportunities, global demand for care and service work, economic pressures, educational aspirations, and changing family structures. This research paper examines gendered patterns of global workforce mobility by focusing on women’s migration, economic agency, and the restructuring of household life. It explores how migration can increase women’s access to income, employment, skills, financial resources, and decision-making authority while simultaneously exposing them to occupational segregation, insecure employment, discrimination, and unequal care responsibilities. The paper further considers the effects of female migration on household income, remittances, caregiving arrangements, marital relationships, parent–child relationships, and gender roles. It argues that women's migration can challenge conventional gender hierarchies but does not automatically produce empowerment. Outcomes depend on labour conditions, migration policies, household relationships, social

protection, and institutional support. A gender-responsive approach is therefore necessary for understanding and improving the outcomes of global female labour mobility.

Keywords: Global workforce mobility, women's migration, gender, economic agency, labour migration, household restructuring, remittances, care work, gender roles, transnational families.

I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization has significantly transformed the movement of workers across national boundaries. International labour migration is no longer predominantly characterized by male migration, as women increasingly participate independently in global labour markets. Women migrate for employment in domestic work, healthcare, education, hospitality, agriculture, manufacturing, professional services, and other sectors. Their movement is influenced by economic inequality, labour demand, limited employment opportunities in countries of origin, family strategies, educational aspirations, and personal goals. The growing participation of women in international labour migration has consequently created new patterns of workforce mobility that require gender-sensitive analysis.

Gender plays an important role in determining where women migrate, which occupations they enter, the wages they receive, and the degree of protection available to them. Global labour markets frequently reproduce traditional assumptions about women's work by concentrating migrant women in occupations involving caregiving, domestic service, cleaning, hospitality, and other forms of reproductive labour. Although these occupations provide important employment opportunities, they can also involve low wages, informal employment, limited social security, and weak bargaining power. Thus, women's international mobility can simultaneously create economic opportunities and reproduce gender-based inequalities. Understanding this contradiction is essential for assessing the real contribution of migration to women's empowerment.

Economic agency represents an important dimension of women's migration experiences. Earnings from overseas employment can improve household income and provide women with greater control over financial resources. Migrant women may contribute to children's education, healthcare, housing, savings, debt repayment, and productive investments through remittances.

Their role as income earners can strengthen their bargaining position within households and challenge traditional expectations that men should be primary providers. Migration can also expose women to new professional skills, social networks, institutional environments, and ideas concerning gender equality and individual autonomy. However, economic contribution does not necessarily guarantee control over income or equal decision-making authority.

Women's migration also produces substantial changes in household organization. When women who previously performed substantial amounts of unpaid care work migrate, household responsibilities must be redistributed. Fathers, grandparents, relatives, older children, or paid caregivers may assume childcare and domestic responsibilities. Transnational families may maintain relationships through digital communication, telephone calls, financial transfers, and periodic visits. While these arrangements can demonstrate household resilience, prolonged physical separation may create emotional and relational challenges. This paper therefore examines gendered global workforce mobility through two interconnected dimensions: women's economic agency and the restructuring of household life. It argues that migration outcomes are shaped by the interaction of individual agency, labour-market structures, migration regimes, gender norms, and family strategies.

II. WOMEN'S MIGRATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECONOMIC AGENCY

Women's participation in international labour migration can transform their economic position by providing access to income-generating opportunities that may be limited in their countries or communities of origin. Migrant employment can provide women with regular wages, professional experience, and opportunities to accumulate savings. For households facing unemployment or low wages, women's overseas employment may become an important livelihood strategy. In some cases, migrant women become primary or major contributors to household income. This economic contribution can alter perceptions of women's roles and strengthen their position in household decision-making.

Remittances represent one of the most visible economic outcomes of female labour migration. Women commonly send part of their earnings to parents, spouses, children, and other relatives.

These financial transfers may support household expenditure on food, education, healthcare, housing, and other essential needs. Some families use remittances for agricultural investment, small businesses, property acquisition, or savings. Female migrants may also develop greater financial literacy and experience in managing income across borders. However, remittance sending can create considerable pressure because migrant women may feel responsible for meeting the financial expectations of multiple family members.

Economic agency extends beyond earning and transferring money. It also involves women's ability to control resources and participate in important decisions. Women who earn independent incomes may have greater influence over children's education, household purchases, healthcare, savings, and investment decisions. Migration can provide women with opportunities to negotiate family relationships from a stronger economic position. In some cases, women who previously depended economically on husbands or other relatives may gain greater autonomy. Nevertheless, patriarchal norms may continue to restrict women's control over their earnings, meaning that employment abroad does not automatically eliminate gender inequality.

International migration may also expand women's social and professional capabilities. Working in a foreign environment requires migrants to navigate new institutions, cultures, languages, employment systems, and social networks. These experiences can strengthen confidence and independence. Women may acquire occupational skills, financial-management abilities, communication skills, and knowledge of workers' rights. Such capabilities can remain valuable after return migration or may influence the aspirations of other household members. Migrant women can consequently become important sources of social and economic change within their communities.

Despite these opportunities, the labour markets accessible to migrant women remain strongly segmented by gender. Many women are employed in domestic service, caregiving, cleaning, hospitality, and low-paid service occupations because these sectors have strong international demand. Domestic and care work can involve long working hours and limited separation between workplace and private life. Women may experience wage inequality, discrimination, harassment, contractual insecurity, and limited access to labour protections. Migrant status can further increase vulnerability when employment and immigration rights are closely connected.

These conditions demonstrate that women's economic agency is shaped by structural constraints as well as individual choices.

Strengthening women's economic agency therefore requires more than encouraging migration. Migration policies should provide safe recruitment systems, transparent employment contracts, fair wages, legal protection, social security, and effective mechanisms for addressing exploitation. Pre-departure training and financial education can help migrants understand contracts, manage earnings, and identify available support. Destination countries can strengthen labour inspection and legal protections for migrant workers, while origin countries can support financial inclusion and productive investment of remittances. When women have access to rights, resources, and decision-making power, global workforce mobility can contribute more effectively to long-term economic empowerment.

III. RESTRUCTURING OF HOUSEHOLD LIFE AND TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Female labour migration can significantly reshape the structure and functioning of households. When women who previously performed childcare, household management, and other forms of unpaid reproductive work migrate, these responsibilities must be redistributed. Fathers, grandparents, siblings, relatives, or hired caregivers may become responsible for children and household activities. In many cases, extended family networks provide essential support that allows women to participate in international employment. Such arrangements demonstrate that households can adapt to migration, but they may also create new pressures for those who assume additional responsibilities.

The concept of transnational families helps explain how family relationships continue despite geographical separation. Migrant women may remain actively involved in family life through digital technologies, telephone conversations, video calls, messaging applications, and financial transfers. These forms of communication allow mothers and partners to participate in decisions concerning education, healthcare, household expenditure, and emotional support. Digital connectivity can reduce the psychological distance created by migration. Nevertheless, remote

participation cannot completely substitute for physical presence, particularly in situations involving young children or family members requiring intensive care.

The relationship between migration and motherhood is particularly complex. Women may migrate to improve their children's economic opportunities while simultaneously experiencing emotional difficulties associated with separation. Remittances can improve educational and material conditions, but children may also experience feelings of loneliness, uncertainty, or reduced parental contact. The consequences depend on the quality of alternative caregiving arrangements, children's age, family communication, and the duration of migration. Supportive caregivers can help maintain stability, while consistent communication can preserve emotional relationships between migrant mothers and children.

Migration can also transform marital relationships and gender roles. Women's increased financial contributions may challenge conventional ideas of male economic authority. In some households, husbands become more involved in childcare and domestic work as a consequence of women's migration. Such changes may encourage more equitable gender relations. In other households, however, women continue to bear the primary responsibility for emotional support, financial transfers, and family decision-making despite being physically absent. This creates a transnational form of the gendered double burden in which women combine paid employment with continuing expectations of unpaid family care.

The restructuring of household life also highlights the unequal distribution of care at the global level. Migrant women frequently enter occupations involving childcare, elderly care, cleaning, and domestic work in destination countries. Their labour allows other households to manage work and family responsibilities, while their own households must reorganize care in their absence. This creates transnational care chains in which care responsibilities move across households and borders. Although migrant women gain employment through these arrangements, their own families may rely on other women, particularly grandmothers and female relatives, to provide unpaid care.

The long-term consequences of these transformations can extend across generations. Children may develop different perceptions of gender, employment, migration, and family responsibility

by observing migrant mothers and changing household roles. Daughters may develop stronger educational and occupational aspirations, while sons may become more accustomed to participating in domestic responsibilities. However, migration does not necessarily eliminate traditional gender norms. Household expectations, cultural practices, and unequal care responsibilities may continue to place disproportionate burdens on women. Policies supporting affordable childcare, family reunification, social protection, parental leave, and migrant workers' rights can therefore help ensure that women's labour mobility contributes to more equitable rather than merely reorganized forms of family life.

IV. CONCLUSION

Gendered patterns of global workforce mobility demonstrate that women's migration is both an economic and social phenomenon. Women increasingly participate in international labour markets as independent workers and household income earners, challenging traditional representations of migration as primarily male-led. Their earnings can improve household living standards, support children's education and healthcare, and contribute to savings and investment. More importantly, economic participation can strengthen women's bargaining power and provide greater opportunities for financial autonomy. However, the extent of empowerment depends on women's ability to control resources and make decisions rather than simply their ability to earn income.

The labour-market structures surrounding women's migration remain an important source of inequality. Women migrants are frequently concentrated in undervalued occupations associated with domestic and reproductive labour. Insecure employment, wage discrimination, limited social protection, harassment, and restrictive migration arrangements can constrain economic agency. Therefore, migration should not automatically be considered an empowering experience. Safe recruitment procedures, fair employment contracts, effective labour protections, social security, and access to legal assistance are essential for ensuring that women's participation in global labour markets produces sustainable benefits.

Female migration also restructures household life by redistributing childcare, domestic work, emotional support, and financial responsibilities. Transnational communication allows migrant

women to remain involved in family decisions, but physical separation can affect parent–child and marital relationships. Remittances can improve material conditions while alternative caregiving arrangements can create new forms of emotional and social responsibility. The emergence of transnational care chains further demonstrates that women's migration is connected to broader global inequalities in the organization and valuation of care work.

Overall, women's global workforce mobility should be understood through an integrated gender, labour, and household perspective. Policies should recognize migrant women as workers with rights rather than simply as sources of remittances or flexible labour. Stronger labour standards, social protection, affordable childcare, family-support policies, safe migration channels, financial inclusion, and access to justice can strengthen women's economic agency. Future research should investigate long-term effects on household decision-making, children's development, gender relations, return migration, and intergenerational mobility. A gender-responsive approach can help transform international labour migration from a system that frequently reproduces inequality into one that supports economic independence, social transformation, and more equitable household relationships.

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