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THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF FEMALE MIGRATION
CASE STUDY: NICARAGUA AND EL SALVADOR

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THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF FEMALE MIGRATION
IN NICARAGUA AND EL SALVADOR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Half of the world's estimated 191 million migrants today are women.[1/] Most women migrate to improve their livelihoods, and it often leads to self-empowerment. Women migrate within and across national borders, and doing so transforms not only the migrant's life, but also the life of her family in the community of origin.[2/] Monetary remittances are crucial to the survival of low-income individuals, families, and communities. Research suggests that monetary remittances augment incomes and have the potential to lift the recipients out of poverty.[3/] Aside from monetary remittances, migrants also transfer social remittances, which can be understood as values, behaviors, social relationships, and ideas derived from the migrant's experience in her host country.[4/]

The present document examines the positive effects of monetary and social remittances on the families of migrant women from two emigrating countries: Nicaragua and El Salvador. Both countries have high out-of-country migration due to high unemployment and weak economies. Research has shown that while the majority of migrants from Nicaragua and El Salvador emigrate to the United States, a large number of female migrants from Nicaragua emigrate to Costa Rica, which is closer in proximity and shares Spanish as the common language.[5/] The proximity of Nicaragua to Costa Rica allows female migrants to engage in circular migration, enabling them to see their families on a more regular basis.

This study also seeks to identify ways to strengthen the positive impact of female migration on the families in the communities of origin as well as on the women themselves.

The objective of this analysis is to identify and understand the positive effects of migration in recent years on female migrants and their families in the two emigrating countries: Nicaragua and El Salvador.

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1. OIM statistics are from 2005 accessed online at www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/pid/254 on Dec. 13, 2007.
2. UNFPA State of World Population 2006, A Passage to Hope, Women and International Migration accessed online at www.unfpa.org/swp/2006/english/chapter_2/index.html on Dec. 15, 2007, chapter 2.
3. Nyberg Sorensen, Ninna (2004) The Development Dimension of Migrant Transfers, Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS Working Papers no. 2004/16, Copenhagen p. 5f.
4. Levitt, Peggy (Winter 1998) *Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion*, International Immigration Review, Vol. 32, No. 4, p. 926.
5. Instituto Nacional de Información de Desarrollo (INIDE) July 2005, Análisis de la Encuesta Nacional de Hogares Sobre Medición del Nivel de Vida 2005 Con Perspectiva de Género, p. 49.

The first section of the study focuses on the problems that women encounter when migrating with or without legal documentation. The following chapters highlight the difference between monetary and social remittances, as well as the areas these remittances affect.

The second section analyzes by country the effects of female migration and remittances on families that stay in the communities of origin.

The final section summarizes the positive impacts of female migration on their families in the communities of origin, and it gives recommendations on how to strengthen the positive impacts of this migration on the families of the migrants and on the migrants themselves. Included in the recommendations are the following:

- To offer migrants legal mechanisms that will allow them to migrate legally, whether it is during harvest seasons or during a period of high demand for employment in a certain sector. Such legal migration would be beneficial to the migrants who are looking for seasonal work as well as to the economies of the countries of origin and destination. Examples of these programs can be found within the European Union.

- To educate women about different types of international migration as well as exploitative and abusive employment.

- To run campaigns to increase public awareness about the rights of migrants in destination countries. These campaigns should place emphasis on the rights of the migrants in the destination countries, regardless of their migrant status and possession of appropriate legal documentation, in order to prevent abuse and exploitation.

- To promote directed studies aimed at analyzing and understanding the psychological effects of female migration, especially in regards to the children and the migrant herself in the community of origin. It would also be useful to understand the long-term effects of children having access to education and medical care due to the remittances sent by female migrants. A better understanding of these dynamics would enable us to predict the effects of migration with more precision, to generate a better understanding of the impact of policies on those affected by the migratory process, and to identify actions and policies that strengthen the positive effects of female migration.

- To promote efforts to generate better employment opportunities so that the migrant population can experience more equality. Remittances, although in a limited way are useful as an instrument to fight inequality and poverty, should not be the principal mechanism to combat these issues.

THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF FEMALE MIGRATION IN NICARAGUA AND EL SALVADOR

INTRODUCTION

Half of the world's estimated 191 million immigrants today are women.[6/] Most women migrate to improve their economic situations, and this often leads to empowerment. Women migrate within their countries and across international borders.

Migration transforms not only migrants' lives but also the lives of their families in the communities of origin.[7/] Monetary remittances are crucial to the survival of low-income individuals, families, and communities. Research suggests that remittances augment incomes and have the potential to lift the recipients out of poverty,[8/] but it is also recognized that remittances should not be used as the principal mechanism in the combat against poverty.

Apart from monetary remittances, migrants also transfer social remittances, which can be understood as values, behaviors, social relationships, and ideas that are influenced by the migrant's experience in her host country.[9/]

This document aims to identify the positive impacts of female migration on the women's families in the communities of origin and also to give recommendations on how to strengthen the positive impact of migration on the migrant women's families as well as on the migrant women themselves.

SECTION I. FEMALE MIGRATION AND REMITTANCES

A. FEMALE MIGRATION

Female labor migration is a growing social phenomenon. Between 1990 and 2005, the global number of female migrants increased by 19 million, whereas male migration only increased by 17 million.[10/] The number of women who seek employment and migrate without their families, leaving behind their children, spouses, and partners is also increasing, especially across international

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6. OIM statistics are from 2005 accessed online at www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/pid/254 on Dec. 13, 2007.

7. UNFPA State of World Population 2006, A Passage to Hope, Women and International Migration accessed online at www.unfpa.org/swp/2006/english/chapter_2/index.html on Dec. 15, 2007, chapter 2.

8. Nyberg Sorensen, Ninna (2004) The Development Dimension of Migrant Transfers, Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS Working Papers no. 2004/16, Copenhagen p. 5f.

9. Levitt, Peggy (Winter 1998) *Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion*, International Immigration Review, Vol. 32, No. 4, p. 926.

10. Zlotnik, Hania (2006) Ten Points about the International Migration of Women and Girls, UN DESA/Population Division; Barahona Portocarrero, Milagros and Sonia Agurto (July 2001) Household study of Nicaraguan womn who have emigrated to Costa Rica seeking employment, ILO Project INT/00/M62/net Promoting decent employment for migrant women and improved welfare for their families in Nicaragua p. 4.

borders.[11] One of the most common reasons for this is the inability of the children and spouses to obtain the required migration visas for the country of destination. The number of women who enter into countries of destination without the required legal documentation has also increased, which makes it even more difficult for their families to migrate with them. Strict immigration laws have been developed recently in many countries, making it even more difficult for migrants to obtain visas or work permits to work in the destination countries.[12] The cost of obtaining a passport, visa, or work permit—or simply renewing a work visa while already in the host country—can surpass a month's salary; the cost and effort involved in obtaining these documents create hurdles that are difficult to overcome for many low-income or no-income migrants, thus leaving a rising number of migrants without proper documentation.[13] When the Costa Rican government announced an amnesty process for illegal immigrants in Costa Rica in December, 1998, 46% of the applicants were women.[14]

Ignorance, an acceptance that migration entails hardship, and simply 'trusting in God' that things will work themselves out are also strong factors regarding why migrants do not always enter countries legally. Many enter and stay in the destination country illegally and risk illegal migration partially due to a limited understanding of the immediate and long-term benefits of legal status. Among the benefits of legal status are the ease of visiting or reentering the destination country, access to social security and other public services, the ability to change employment or employer freely, access to legal services in cases of abuse and exploitation, and the liberty of movement within the destination country.[15]

One of the major issues with which women migrants are confronted is that the most common types of employment for female migrants are in domestic work, the restaurant business, and the entertainment industry and prostitution, the most common of these being domestic work.[16] In most countries, whether or not they are developed or industrialized, domestic work is not protected by labor law, leaving female workers vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. When workers do not possess legal work visas or residency permits, this situation is exacerbated.[17] For example, in Costa Rica, one of the main countries of destination for Nicaraguans besides the United States, the Association of Domestic Workers (ASTRADOMES) is the only organization that addresses the rights and needs of domestic workers. ASTRADOMES' main focus includes addressing discriminatory legislation, working to counter the lack of knowledge and interest among migrant domestic workers about their own rights, and organizing domestic workers to join together.[18]

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11. D'Angelo, Almachiara and Myra Pasos Marciacq (2001) Nicaragua: Protecting Female Labour Migrants From Exploitative Working Conditions And Trafficking GENPROM Working Paper No. 6, Series on Women and Migration (International Labour Office, Geneva), p. 16.

12. Sorenson p. 27.

13. Barahona Portocarrero p. 44ff.; Lutz, Helma (2007a) Vom Weltmarkt in den Privathaushalt. Die neuen Dienstmádchen in Zeitalter der Globalisierung (Opladen) accessed online at www.goethe.de/ges/pok/prj/mig/en2499278.htm Nov. 25, 2007.

14. García, Ana Isabel et al. (2001) Costa Rica: Female Labour Migrants and Trafficking in Women and Children, GENPROM Working Paper No. 2, Series on Women and Migration (International Labour Office, Geneva) p. 41.

15. D'Angelo p. 13f, p. 16; Barahona Portocarrero p. 44f.

16. Lutz.

17. HRW, Swept under the rug. Abuses against domestic workers all around the world (July 2006) Vol. 18, Number 7.

18. Barahona Portocarrero p. 45.

B. MONETARY REMITTANCES

Remittances to Central America are expected to reach US$12.1 billion by the end of 2007, and they will represent approximately 17% of the gross domestic product for El Salvador and Nicaragua.[19] Salvadorians receive the highest remittances per capita in Central America, reaching approximately 1 million adults, averaging US$300 per month. In Nicaragua, 500,000 adults receive approximately US$205 in remittances about 10 times a year.

Despite these averages, the amount individuals send in remittances varies greatly. The amount of money they send seems to depend on factors such as commitments made between family members, economic conditions in the country of origin, cost of living in the host country, and the migrant's perception of the family's need back home.[20]

C. MIGRATION AS A SURVIVAL STRATEGY

Monetary remittances are part of the survival strategies of some family groups. It is generally perceived that women are more reliable than men in sending regular remittances. A study carried out in four communities in Nicaragua suggests that men feel less obligated to send monetary support and that in some cases it is more difficult for them to find work abroad than for their female counterparts.[21] It is important to note, however, that not all families with relatives residing in other countries receive remittances.

Statistics show that remittances are one of Central America's most important poverty-alleviation programs. Seventy-five percent of remittances received are used to cover basic necessities, such as food, housing, clothing, healthcare, and payment for basic services like electricity.[22]

Studies have also shown that remittances have increased since the 1980's. Salvadorians sent US$3,316 million in remittances in 2006, and it is estimated that by 2007, US$ 3,530 million will be sent. Nicaraguans sent US$ 950 million in 2006 and are estimated to send US$ 990 by the end of 2007. In 2003, remittances to El Salvador exceeded the total amount brought in by exports, whereas remittances represented over half the value of exports from Nicaragua.

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19. Link to MIF survey results at www.iadb.org/news/articledetail.cfm?Language=EN&artid=4125 accessed Dec. 14, 2007.

20. Barahona Portocarrero p. 36.

21. D'Angelo p. 17f.

22. *IDB Remittances to Central America rise to $12.1 billion in 2007 says IDB Fund*, IDB Press Release, Nov. 6, 2007 available online at www.iadb.org/news/articledetail.cfm?Language=EN&artid=4125 accessed Dec. 14, 2007.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) released the findings of a comprehensive, region-wide study of the impact of remittances on poverty and inequality, including data from El Salvador and Nicaragua, among others. The impact of remittances on relieving indigence in the receiving households was dramatic. ECLAC found that 64% of Salvadoran households receiving remittances were lifted out of extreme poverty, and in Nicaragua, it reached 27%.[23/]

D. IMPACT OF REMITTANCES ON THE ECONOMY AND THE LABOR MARKET

Research in Latin America has shown that remittances both negatively and positively impact development in the migrants' home countries. Some argue that remittances have led to disparities between recipients and non-recipients, conspicuous consumption, reduced food supplies due to a decrease in agricultural production, rising prices, and the creation of more vulnerable economies.[24/] However, others argue that remittances have had a positive multiplier effect on productive investment as well as in increasing consumption. According to Taylor, the influx of remittances helps to compensate for the adverse effect on agricultural productivity, because the extra money generates a greater demand for goods. One also has to take into account that although migration may reduce the labor force available to work in the agricultural sector, the primary reason for migration is the lack of jobs in the economically depressed rural areas.[25/]

E. SOCIAL REMITTANCES

i. What are social remittances?

Migrants not only send capital remittances to their families and communities, but through the accessibility of modern technologies, such as inexpensive phone, fax, mail, and internet services, they also have the ability to transmit social remittances. Through these fast and immediate technologies, as well as affordable travel to and from the home country in some situations, migrants are able to participate in the daily life of their home community, whether it is in the raising of their left-behind children, dealing with family problems, or engaging in community issues. Migrants share new values, behaviors, social relationships, and ideas that are influenced by their experiences in the host country.

ii. Types of social remittances[26/]

Social remittances are constituted by the normative structures, systems of practice, and social capital as they are described below:

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23. Agunias, Dovelyn (April 2006) Remittance Trends in Central America, Migration Policy Institute, accessed online at www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?id=393 on Dec. 12, 2007.

24. Sorensen p. 13.

25. Taylor, Edward (2001) Migration: new dimensions and characteristics, causes, consequences and implications for rural poverty, *Food, agriculture, and rural development: Current and emerging issues for economic analysis and policy research*, Kostas G. Stamoulis, ed. (Rome, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations).

26. Levitt p. 933ff.

Normative structures — are ideas, values, beliefs, and norms about interpersonal behavior, ideas about intra-family responsibility, standards of age and gender appropriateness, principles of neighborliness and community participation, and aspirations for social mobility.

Systems of practice —are actions shaped by normative structures. For individuals, these include household labor, religious practices, and patterns of civil and political participation.

Social capital —is comprised of both the values and norms on which the social capital is based and socially remitted.

iii. The impact of social remittances

Societies in host countries offer both positive and negative role models, and migrants are influenced by both. The impact of social remittances on the sending community also depends on how easily social remittances are transmitted.

Studies have shown that transnational migrants transmit information about changing gender roles, such as husbands helping more with household chores, taking care of the children, or spending more time at home with their family, thus showing alternatives to traditional patriarchal family structures that predominate throughout Central America. In many developing countries, just the fact that migrant women have jobs that allow them to send money to support their families transmits a new definition of what it means to be female. This alone can affect how families and communities view women and their role in society, and it may result in more equal gender relationships in the sending family and community.

Positive experiences with a well-functioning legal system or social services in a host country may also create higher expectations of how these systems should work in the country of origin. The transfer of information related to new entrepreneurial skills can also make an important contribution, just as the migration process itself, the working conditions in the host country, and the available economic opportunities all help to create a better understanding of what migration actually entails.[27]

It must also be mentioned that the degree to which migrants absorb new values, behaviors, social relationships, and ideas is influenced by the level of their interactions with the host societies. More exposure to a host society leads to greater contact with its unique features and a greater potential to incorporate new ideas with traditional ways of doing things.[28]

Undocumented migrants, however, have very limited opportunities, if any at all, to interact with the host society. This can be seen in the example of Nicaraguan domestic workers who do not leave their workplace (i.e., their employer's home) in order to avoid the risk of being deported by the immigration police.[29]

It is important to realize that positive social remittances alone will not bring about social reform.

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27. Levitt p. 944 and Sorensen p. 14.
28. Levitt p. 940.
29. Barahona Portocarrero p. 44.

SECTION II. CASE STUDIES: NICARAGUA AND EL SALVADOR

A. NICARAGUA

i. Socio-economic context

For the past 16 years, Nicaragua's government has focused on free market reform. During this 16-year period, characterized by a steady GDP growth, the government made dramatic economic progress. It privatized more than 350 state enterprises, reduced inflation from 33,500% in 1988 to 9.45% in 2006, and cut the foreign debt by more than half. In 2006, the economy expanded by 3.7% as GDP reached US$5.3 billion.[30/]

Nevertheless, Nicaragua remains the second poorest nation in the hemisphere. Unemployment is officially estimated at 5% of the economically active population; however, an estimated 60% of workforce is employed in the informal sector. Nicaragua suffers from persistent trade and budget deficits and a high internal-debt service burden. Foreign assistance totaled 26% of the budget in 2006. Nicaragua also depends heavily on remittances from Nicaraguans living abroad, which totaled US$655.5 million in 2006.[31/]

ii. Migration triggers

Over the past 50 years, migration within and outside of Nicaragua has been prompted by natural disasters, political conflicts, lack of employment, and growing poverty, all of which are linked to the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs.[32/] Since the mid-1990s, migration has been largely caused by the country's worsening economic situation. This has been particularly visible in poor rural and urban areas. Of the population in Nicaragua, 48% percent lives in poverty, 5% is unemployed, and another 46.5% is underemployed.[33/]

As in many other developing countries, a large segment of the economically poor in Nicaragua is comprised of women. In addition, a relatively high proportion of women are the head of their households: 39% of urban homes and 28% of rural homes.[34/] At the same time, the number of Nicaraguan households with female members abroad doubled between 1992 and 1998.[35/]

Many migrants try to find work in Costa Rica, since it is close in proximity and relatively easy to reach. It is estimated that 9.5% of the total population of Costa Rica (around 4,299,000

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30. www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1850.htm available online accessed April 7, 2008.
31. www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1850.htm available online accessed April 7, 2008.
32. INIDE p.46; Saavedra, Jéssica (Posted on Tuesday, 27-11-2007) Labour Migration: Nurturing Valued Human Resource available online at www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/featureArticleAM/cache/offonce?entryId=16042 accessed Dec. 13, 2007.
33. unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/socind/inc-eco.htm available online, accessed April 7, 2008.
34. www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1850.htm available online accessed April 7, 2008.
35. INIDE p. 50.

inhabitants[36]) is from Nicaragua.[37]

Nicaraguan women often have a better opportunity to enter the labor market and earn better wages when they migrate abroad than when they find work in their home community. Remittances sent by Nicaraguan migrant women are part of household strategies, and they have become the only way that many impoverished families survive. Some recent studies define these migrant populations as 'economic refugees.'[38]

iii. Migration destinations

The 2005 census in Nicaragua showed that 21.3% of the total female population migrated within the country, and for 15.8% of the women, the main reason was to find work.[39] For migrants from Nicaragua, the major countries of destination are the United States, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, and Canada.[40] Statistics show that between 2000-2005, 56.4% of the immigrants were female, and 52.5% of the women migrated to Costa Rica, 34.4% to the United States, and 9.1% to other Central American countries and the Caribbean.[41]

iv. Female migration patterns

Female migration patterns in Nicaragua tend to be circular. Women may leave Nicaragua for several months and then return, especially over the Christmas holiday, bringing money and presents back for their families. Once their funds run out, they return to their host country to earn more money, since there are neither enough nor adequately-paid jobs in the home country.

In many cases, as we have seen, women travel without the required documentation and remain in the receiving country undocumented. This makes movement across borders and return to Nicaragua complicated and dangerous, as well as putting these women at risk of abuse.

v. Characteristics of migrant women

Migrant women come from poor households, many from rural areas. The ages of female migrants are between 15 and 40 years of age. Statistics show that Nicaraguan women who emigrate have higher levels of education than their male counterparts.[42]

The most common form of employment for women is domestic labor, however many adolescent females gather crops or are engaged in the processing and packaging of harvested products.[43]

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36. Data from 2006, www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2019.htm accessed online April 7, 2008.
37. Agunias.
38. Barahona Portocarrero p. 4
39. INIDE p.45f.
40. MPI Data Hub accessed online at www.migrationinformation.org/DataHub/countrydata.cfm?ID=477 on Dec. 15, 2007.
41. INIDE p. 49.
42. INIDE p. 50.
43. D'Angelo p.6.

vi. Remittances

Female migrants from Nicaragua reported that average incomes while working in Costa Rica were between US$100.00 and US$150.00 per month. Most women expressed that they earned decent wages in the host country, especially when compared to the very low salaries in Nicaragua; wages in rural Nicaragua are the lowest, ranging between US$25.00 and US$30.00 per month.[44/]

In Nicaragua, 87 out of 100 women send remittances to their families and relatives, compared to only 55 out of 100 men. In focus groups, women explained that men feel less obligated to send financial support and that it was more difficult for men to find work. Remittances are mainly sent through friends and relatives who are traveling, since banks and other institutions charge a commission of approximately 10% of the money wired.[45/] Recent research indicates that the monthly remittances from Costa Rica fall between US$65.60 for men and US$72.10 for women.[46/]

Female migrants send their remittances to their mothers, older daughters, or other female relatives with instructions about how to allocate the funds. More often than not, female migrants do not send remittances to their husbands out of fear that they may be squandered. Remittances are usually used for basic necessities as well as school and health expenditures for the children. At times, female migrant workers save money to purchase a pig or a calf for their family as an investment. Nicaraguan migrants also send non-monetary remittances, such as clothing, household appliances, medicines, and food items.[47/]

vii. Effects of female migration

Migrant women take on difficulties and hardships, like being separated from their families, especially their children, and working long hours in order to send remittances home on a regular basis.

Surveys show that when women leave their husbands and children behind, the household is restructured. The children rarely stay with the father; they live better with their grandmothers, aunts, or older female siblings. Men usually do not consider themselves suited for the rearing of their offspring and therefore often choose to live by themselves, leaving the reproductive labor of the wife and mother to be carried out by other female family members. This tends to lead to difficult situations that the migrant mother needs to address over the phone or when she returns.

Oftentimes, migrant mothers are also burdened with other urgent issues upon their return, such as fixing the house, in addition to taking care of issues that have gotten out of control in their absence, such as conflicts between their children and their caretakers or their children taking or selling drugs.[48/]

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44. D'Angelo p. 14.
45. Barahona Portocarrero p. 5.
46. D'Angelo p. 36.
47. D'Angelo p. 36f.
48. D'Angelo p. 17f.

viii. Positive effects of migration for the female migrant and her family

There are substantial immediate material benefits for the children, family members, and caretakers of the migrants' children in the sending community. Remittances pay for food as well as other basic necessities, such as clothing, housing, health care, and schooling, and, as we have seen, they have the potential to lift poor families out of poverty. By sending remittances, migrant women also provide the financial resources for their children to attend school and thereby encourage their children to acquire an education. Female relatives who care for the migrants' dependants benefit from remittances as well, since these remittances add to their own household budget and thus help support their family.

Among the positive effects of migration on the women migrants themselves is the opportunity to earn an income unavailable to them in their country of origin. One benefit of earning an income is that women feel more empowered. A study from Mexico showed that when women contributed 40% or more to the household income, they increased their bargaining power in the household. They felt more empowered to fight restrictions on their rights to visit friends and relatives. They also did not accept that they had to submit unquestioningly to their husband's orders, and they attempted to fight back when the husband tried to beat them.[49/]

Given the fact that many single and childfree women migrate, migration will also hopefully provide these women with financial independence and give them a feeling of empowerment, whether this is in the context of future relationships or in general decision making. Migration may also simply serve to encourage these women to take control of their own lives.

B. EL SALVADOR

i. Socio-economic context

El Salvador is among the 10 poorest countries in Latin America.[50/] The Salvadorian economy has experienced mixed results from the recent government's commitment to free market initiatives and conservative fiscal management, which includes the privatization of the banking system, telecommunications, public pensions, electrical distribution and some electrical generation, reduction of import duties, elimination of price controls, and an improved enforcement of intellectual property rights. The GDP has been growing since 1996 at an annual rate that averages 2.8% real growth. In 2006, the GDP's real growth rate was 4.2%.[51/]

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49. Wilson, Tamar D. (2003) Forms of Male Domination and Female Subordination: Homeworkers versus Maquiladora Workers in Mexico, *Review of Radical Economics*, Vol. 35 (Union for Radical Political Economics) p. 63f.

50. www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2004rank.html U.S. Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook accessed online April 7, 2008.

51. www.bcr.gob.sv/ingles/estadisticas/sr_produccion.html accessed online April 7, 2008.

However, approximately 2.4 million people (35.2%) live below the poverty line, 6% of the population is unemployed, and there is much underemployment. One problem that the Salvadoran economy faces is the inequality in the distribution of income, where the poorest 20% of the population receive only 3.1% of the nation's income. As a result, this leaves one million people unable to earn enough to provide for their families' basic needs.[52/]

ii. Migration triggers

A history of civil wars within El Salvador has created a climate of unrest and chaos, causing many Salvadorians to migrate to other countries. Natural disasters have also triggered major migration flows. According to a 2002 household study, poverty and lack of economic opportunities have become the most common reasons why Salvadorians migrate. Fifty-two percent of the migrants leave in order to find employment elsewhere, 24% migrate to improve their standard of living, and 11% leave due to poverty. Many Salvadorians cannot find work in their home country, so they migrate to other countries in order to support themselves and their families. The majority of migrants come from rural areas.[53/]

iii. Migration destinations

The United States is the main destination country for migrants from El Salvador. Other migration countries are Canada, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Honduras.[54/] Statistics show that 92% of the female migrants and 97% of the male migrants from El Salvador live in the United States.[55/]

iv. Characteristics of migrant women

Forty-seven percent of El Salvador’s migrants are female, between the ages of 15 and 30 years old. Many of the younger female migrants leave El Salvador before having children of their own.[56/]

v. Remittances

Salvadorians use remittances to buy basic necessities and pay for basic services. Only 9% of the recipients of remittances are able to put money to the side.

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52. USAID Budget, El Salvador, www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/cbj2006/lac/sv.html accessed online April 7, 2008.

53. Dirección General de Estadística y Censos - El Salvador accessed online at www.digestyc.gob.sv on Dec. 15, 2007 p. 53.

54. MPI Data Hub accessed online at www.migrationinformation.org/DataHub/countrydata.cfm?ID=474 on Dec. 15, 2007.

55. Dirección General de Estadística y Censos - El Salvador p.14

56. UNDP, 2004, p. 68

Researchers have found that in El Salvador, 82% of the remittances are spent on basic household expenses, and the remainder is used for improving the standard of living through better housing, education, additional consumption, and loan payment.[57/] A 2003 household survey showed that 84% of the money was spent on current consumption, 7% was spent on education, and 3% was spent on healthcare. Only 0.5% was invested in business and 4% used for savings.[58/]

Migrants also send non-monetary goods, such as clothes, shoes, and electric appliances.[59/] Forty-two percent use remittances to buy medicine, and 26% use remittances for the education of their children remaining in El Salvador.[60/]

vi. Effects of female migration

Female migration has positive as well as negative aspects. Some of the negative aspects found in the literature are that families experience restructuring, some families fall apart, and children of migrants frequently feel frustrated by not living with or near their parent(s) or having to live with relatives. Without direct parental supervision, children may start taking drugs or join gangs or display other negative behaviors.[61/]

However, there are many positive aspects to women's migration. For 80% of the families studied, remittances lifted them out of poverty. Remittances not only financially support the family in the country of origin, but they also contribute to raising their status and improving their quality of life.[62/] Families receiving remittances felt more respected in their communities due to the remittances they received.[63/]

Studies based on household surveys in El Salvador found that children of remittance-receiving households have a lower school-dropout ratio and that these households spend more on private tuition for their children.[64/] The survey also showed that women are more likely than men to dedicate remittances to education, health, and savings. An increased investment in education contributes to human-capital formation, thus making it likely that remittances benefit developing countries' long-term growth prospects.[65/]

Studies indicate that a higher family income because of remittances creates opportunities for household members to seek better employment (i.e., allowing younger generations to leave the agricultural sector for different employment sectors and to start small businesses).[66/]

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57 Dirección General de Estadística y Censos – El Salvador p.51f.

58 Dirección General de Estadística y Censos – El Salvador p.51f.

59 Dirección General de Estadística y Censos – El Salvador p.51f.

60. Dirección General de Estadística y Censos - El Salvador p. 51f.

61. Dirección General de Estadística y Censos - El Salvador p. 54.

62. Dirección General de Estadística y Censos - El Salvador p. 52.

63. Dirección General de Estadística y Censos - El Salvador p. 52.

64. Ratha, Dilip (June 2007) Leveraging Remittances for Development, Policy Brief, Program on Migrants, Migration, and Development, MPI p.6.

65. Agunias; Edwards, A.C. and M. Ureta, International migration, remittances, and schooling: evidence from El Salvador, Journal of Development Economics 72 (2003) 430f.

66. UNDP 2004, p. 68

SECTION III. FINAL OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

Female migrants experience physical and emotional hardships working and living in the host country, whether it is Costa Rica, the United States, or elsewhere.

The different migration patterns observed in Nicaraguan and Salvadorian women do not seem to change the effect that migration has on the families and children left behind in the country of origin. Negative effects include the need to restructure the family, risking that families fall apart and that children feel uncared for. However, there are numerous positive changes that female migration brings about for the migrant women themselves as well as for their children and extended families remaining in the country of origin.

Monetary remittances dramatically improve the quality of life and prospects of low-income families; many families are lifted out of extreme poverty. Children have access to more and better schooling, healthcare, and job opportunities. More financial independence translates into empowerment, which increases women's bargaining power about household matters and community issues, among other things. Traditional roles for men and women are beginning to be renegotiated through this process.

In addition, governments benefit from remittances sent by their migrant population. Remittances boost economies, and they also serve as poverty-reduction programs in many countries in addition to Nicaragua and El Salvador.

A. POLICIES AND ACTIONS THAT CONTIBUTE TO THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION

In May 2007, the European Union announced that it is looking at ways for the sending and receiving countries to collaborate with the issue of migration and to enable easier circular migration, and it is developing the concept of *Mobility Partnerships*.[67/] Governments in the Western Hemisphere would also benefit from establishing programs that would allow for circular migration. This would give migrants the legal status needed to protect them from exploitation and abuse, and it would also help to fill job vacancies during harvest seasons or when there is a demand for more labor without having to do so illegally. This would benefit migrants seeking seasonal work as well as the economies of the sending and host countries. Legislation projects with similar goals have been submitted to the United States Congress without success to date.

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67. Top 10 Migration Issues of 2007, Issue #8: Mobility Partnerships, the Latest Policy Fashion, accessed online at www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?id=661 Dec. 14, 2007.

GENPROM Costa Rica has developed a manual aimed at better preparing women for international migration and protecting them from exploitative and abusive forms of employment.[68/] Migrant education, information and education should be prioritized for the whole Western Hemisphere.

Public awareness campaigns on migrants' rights should be held in receiving countries, emphasizing that all immigrants, with or without documentation, have rights in the host country in order to prevent abuse and exploitation.

More studies need to be conducted in order to analyze and better understand the psychological effects that female migration has on women's immediate families, especially their children, and on their sending communities. It would also be useful to understand the long-term effects of more children having access to schooling and healthcare due to the remittances from the female migrants. A better understanding of these dynamics would generate a better understanding of their impact on those affected by the migration process, and it would also help to identify actions and policies that would contribute to the strengthening of the positive effects of the female migration phenomenon.

Although remittances can be useful in the fight against inequality and poverty, they cannot be used as the principal mechanism to deal with these issues. Governments need to work on providing more job opportunities of equal status in their countries. Neither women nor men should find themselves in the dilemma where they have to choose between being "involuntary migrants"or confronting extreme levels of poverty.

68. This manual was developed in collaboration with the ILO Migration Branch. Information accessed online at www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/gems/action/repncar.htm Dec. 13, 2007.