



2ND WORLD CONFERENCE OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN

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Emerging Migration

As it stands, approximately **272 million** people live outside of their country of origin, of whom approximately **48% are women**. In addition, by 2018 alone, the number of internally displaced persons was estimated to have reached a historic high of **41.3 million**, mainly due to conflict and violence. Three-quarters of these people, or 30.9 million, lived in 10 countries, including Syria, Colombia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Furthermore, an **unknown number** of people remain displaced due to **disasters that occurred** over the course of 2018¹⁹. Many of these people decided to settle in urban centres, others moved to other areas due to conflict or environmental disasters but remained in rural areas.

Migration can also be a positive experience, providing more and better opportunities for Indigenous Peoples when it comes to employment and education. Income generated by them in urban areas is often spent on supporting families still living in their communities.

There are diverse reasons accounting for the **mobility of Indigenous Peoples**. Despite the **lack of disaggregated data**, migration patterns of Indigenous Peoples can be defined as follows: **rural-rural, rural-urban, temporary, transnational, international, voluntary or forced**. Furthermore, for some of them, migration is a way of life, part of their culture and identity, as is the case for the Tuareg in North Africa, the Saami in the Nordic Polar Circle, or the semi-nomadic Maasai peoples in Kenya, near the border with Tanzania²⁰.



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Trade or temporary mobility to diversify income in low farming seasons are some of the reasons that have historically prompted many Indigenous Peoples, both men and women, to leave their homes **on a temporary basis**. In these cases, one can speak of a **voluntary and temporary migration**, i.e., after fulfilling the objective of the trip, people **return** to their community of origin, as is the case of Mayans from Guatemala who go to the south of Mexico, in Chiapas, for the coffee harvest before returning to their lands²¹.

The emergence of **Nation-States** and **borders** has had a lasting effect on these relations between different peoples and territories, and has divided communities and even families through the establishment of borders. Mobility of many Indigenous Peoples for whom it is part of their identity, culture, way of life and livelihood has been and continues to be affected by these developments. However, there are cases where arrangements have been made for **Indigenous Peoples to move more or less freely across one or more borders**. For example, the **Torres Strait Treaty** allows inhabitants of **Australia and Papua New Guinea** to travel between these two nations **without a passport or visa** (although under strict conditions). Furthermore, the **Economic Community of West African States Treaty**, allows nomadic pastoralist populations to transit through member countries²².

¹⁹ Observatorio de Desplazamiento interno, *Informe Mundial sobre Desplazamiento Interno (GRID) 2019*



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However, these agreements do not guarantee that the rights of these peoples will be respected. The Amazighs in the Sahel have historically moved between Morocco, Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, Tunisia, Egypt and Nigeria. Yet some countries, such as Algeria or Libya, have **denied passport applications** to some of the members of these peoples, **thus denying civil and political rights and in turn not only affecting mobility, but also access to public services such as health and education for these peoples**. This hinders the fulfilment and respect of women's **sexual and reproductive rights**. **Armed conflicts and the emergence of extremist parties** also affect the mobility of these peoples, who are forced to **change their route**, which in turn affects their **access to basic goods and food** to survive in the desert²³.

Moreover, when the **balance** between economic income from temporary migration or commercial exchanges and traditional use of the territory is **threatened**, whether by the emergence of armed conflicts, the impacts of climate change or the presence of state development programmes or extractive and agro-industrial companies that lead to environmental degradation and contamination of natural resources, the resulting **food insecurity and worsening poverty conditions** of Indigenous Peoples force them to **abandon** their territories. For example, in the case of some Indigenous Peoples in Malaysia and Indonesia, the **expansion of palm plantations** has destroyed the forest where they traditionally lived. Consequently, these peoples have been forced to leave their territory²⁴.

²⁰ A/HRC/EMRIP/2019/2/Rev.1

²¹ Organización Internacional para la Migración, *Indigenous Routes: A Framework Understanding Indigenous Migration*, 2008, Ginebra

²² A/HRC/EMRIP/2019/2/Rev.1

²³ A/HRC/EMRIP/2019/2/Rev.1

²⁴ A/HRC/EMRIP/2019/2/Rev.1



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Internal displacement, as well as **international migration**, affects Indigenous Peoples, and particularly indigenous women, and therefore threatens the **survival of their culture**, since **their physical ties with their ancestral territory** are broken and they therefore **unable to practice the rites and traditions related to the reproduction of life and traditional knowledge**, thus **threatening the transmission of this knowledge and cultural identity to the younger generations**. In addition, on the migration routes, as they are dependent on intermediaries or coyotes, women are particularly exposed to **gender-based violence, sexual violence and human trafficking**, as they are deprived of the safety of the community, sometimes without the linguistic skills in the dominant languages, and with scarce economic resources.

The migration of a family member usually implicates an important economic stress for all the family. In addition to the transportation and other travel fees, the high amounts required by the “coyotes” make the migration project very expensive. Besides, when we talk about informal migration, there are higher risks for the migrant, such as human trafficking and deportation. But the promise of a better future overcomes these difficulties, and leads many families to getting into debts in order to fund the migration costs.

In other cases, depending on the culture, after the departure of the husband, women who are left behind are denied access to their land by the **patriarchal structure** of traditional communities that **reserve land inheritance for men**, as is the case of the Maasai in Kenya²⁵. This is a reason for women to **migrate to urban centres** in search of work opportunities in order to fulfil the needs of their families.

Once at the destination, be this in an urban centre within the same country or outside the country of origin, the **living conditions and legal status of migrant women** is also critical. Integration in urban centres is hampered by economic status, racial discrimination, literacy levels and language skills. These factors of vulnerability mean that indigenous people, with equal skills, have **lower paid jobs with less job security** than non-indigenous workers²⁶.





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Similarly, Indigenous Women have higher unemployment rates than non-indigenous women in urban centres in developing countries. However, this should be interpreted as meaning that employment of these women is more **precarious and of lower quality**, which forces them to **combine various activities in order to live**. Indigenous women and girls are also more exposed to gender-based violence. Enforced disappearance of women in Canada is predominant among Indigenous populations, whilst in Vancouver, 80% of sex workers are indigenous.²⁷

In turn, many **Indigenous Youth** find themselves in a "no-man's land" between **urban societies** that do not fully accept them and their **indigenous communities**, which often **do not provide them with the opportunities they need and desire**.

Social and family precariousness due to family breakdown and loss of cultural identity increases the vulnerability of Indigenous Girls and Young Women to **domestic violence, labour and sexual exploitation, and human trafficking**. For the same reasons, indigenous migrant families are also more prone to depression, alcohol or drug dependency, and even the risk of being killed²⁸.

A recent report of the **Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**²⁹ highlights the **lack of information** regarding migration of Indigenous Peoples. It denounces the fact that the **World Migration Organization's Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration** hardly mentions Indigenous Peoples as a **vulnerable group**, while the **United Nations Global Compact on Refugees** does not **refer to Indigenous Peoples**. This lack of focus from the perspective of Indigenous Peoples' rights makes the specificities and needs of Indigenous Peoples and women migrants invisible, which in turn prevents the **policies, programmes, or laws of protection adapted to Indigenous Women** from being developed and implemented³⁰.

²⁵ A/HRC/EMRIP/2019/2/Rev.1

²⁶ International Labor Organization, *Implementing the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169. Toward an inclusive sustainable and just future*, 2019, Switzerland

²⁷ A/HRC/EMRIP/2019/2/Rev.1

²⁸ Foro Internacional de Mujeres Indígenas, Mairin Iwanka Raya, *Indigenous Women Stand Against Violence*, 2006



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Finally, it is important to note that the Covid-19 pandemic had an important impact on Indigenous Peoples mobility. Movement restrictions have had disastrous economic effects in agriculture as well as in the informal sectors, avoiding basic incomes to satisfy basic needs. The ground and air border closing stuck many informal workers in dramatic situations, unable to come back to their homes and without any income. Even with the shut down of all economic activities, undocumented workers are not eligible for public assistance. Moreover, their limited access to health services, and sometimes even to respect social distance because of their life conditions, put many Indigenous migrants in particularly vulnerable conditions.

Guiding questions:

- What are the possible factors that influence migration in your community?
- Are there measures to stop young people from migrating?
- What is the relationship between community members who have stayed and those who have left, and in the case of those who return, do these people manage to integrate back into the community?
- Do you consider there to have been opportunities and best practices that have resulted from migration?
- How does migration impact indigenous youth? Do you know of experiences of youth recovering their cultural identity?
- What is the impact of migration on women sustainability in your community?
- What is the impact of the pandemic on mobility and migration at a local level?
- What is the role of the Elders in the migratory processes of your community?
- From your community experience, are there good practices of intergenerational dialogue in the migratory context?

