Gender-Responsive Implementation of the Global Compact for Migration in Europe

Policy Brief

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Spotlight: Labor

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OVERVIEW

In 2018, the international community came together to establish the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM). The GCM sets out a "common understanding, shared responsibilities and unity of purpose regarding migration" in order to make "migration work for all." This includes 23 objectives and 10 cross-cutting and interdependent principles, one of which concerns gender-responsiveness. The implementation of the Compact occurs at the global, regional, national, and local level and is organized through bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation and partnerships.

Labor emerges as a central policy area in Objective 2 (Minimize adverse drivers), Objective 5 (Pathways for regular migration), Objective 6 (Conditions that ensure decent work), Objective 7 (Reduce vulnerabilities), Objective 16 (Empower migrants to realize full inclusion), and Objective 18 (Invest in skills development).

For example, according to Objective 16, migrants are to be granted access to decent work for which they are qualified, as well as full participation in labor markets. Labor considerations are essential for understanding not only the drivers of migration, but also the economic status and inclusion of migrants, wherein gender dynamics play a central role.

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OVERVIEW

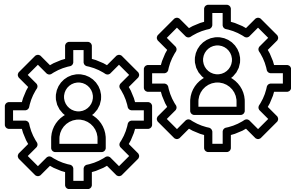
In this policy brief, we present findings from our analysis on the gender-responsive implementation of the GCM in Europe in the area of labor using our Gender-Migration Index (GMI). The GMI is a guidance tool for gender-responsiveness and migrant-inclusion in policy planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. It consists of a three-part indicator system that centers lived experiences of women, girls, LGBTQIA+, and gender diverse migrants by strengthening civil society engagement in international review processes, such as the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF). The GMI is premised on participatory action research and reflects our vision of gender justice beyond borders and our mission of shrinking spaces between migrant communities and governing bodies.

The policy brief focuses on Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) submitted for the 2022 IMRF and includes 13 European countries: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Moldova, The Netherlands, Portugal, the United Kingdom, North Macedonia, Serbia, Spain, Sweden. Key labor-related aspects considered in our analysis involve: wage gaps, employment discrimination, workplace harassment, gender bias in recruitment, and gender targeted employment training.

Gender-Migration Index (GMI)

Content

Engagement



Commitment

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MENTION OF GENDER DYNAMICS

Country	Gender-Indicative Words in Relation to Labor	Gender-Responsiveness
Belgium	3	
Finland	3	
Spain	2	
Germany	2	
Sweden	1	
Moldova	1	
Serbia	0	
The United Kingdom	0	
Greece	0	
North Macedonia	0	
Denmark	0	
Portugal	0	
The Netherlands	0	

Our GMI analysis shows that mention of gender dynamics in this policy area can be described as limited. While labor policies generally carry gendered implications, there is a near complete absence of any gender-indicative words (i.e. women, girls, LGBTQIA+, gender diverse, gender identity, and sexuality) in the examined VNRs.

In the few countries where gender dynamics are mentioned such as in Spain, discussions focused on ensuring non-discriminatory working conditions for immigrant workers, particularly women and minors of working age. Likewise in the VNR of Sweden, there are references to gender considerations, compliance with the principle of equality, and initiatives like the Swedish-Somali Business Program (SSBP) aimed at helping women and young people find employment.

ENGAGEMENT WITH GENDER DYNAMICS

In terms of engagement with gender dynamics in the VNRs, namely the ways through which the needs and challenges of women, girls, LGBTQIA+, and gender diverse migrants are meaningfully considered in existing labor programs/policies/initiatives/approaches beyond their mere mention, gender responsiveness across all analyzed countries is moderate at best, limited at worst.

More specifically, Sweden, the United Kingdom, North Macedonia, Portugal and Serbia show very limited engagement with gender dynamics in the context of labor. Their VNRs merely highlight general policies on fair employment, recruitment, and workforce integration. However, these points appear to have no explicit focus on gender-related aspects in the labor market. For example, North Macedonia mentions two national legal frameworks that govern foreign employment, including the Law on Foreigners and the Law on Employment and Work of Foreigners. However, while these frameworks include provisions for quotas on the number of foreigners who may be employed in North Macedonia, they do not include any gender quotas.

Spain, on the other hand, shows a slightly moderate engagement with gender dynamics in labor policy through multiple initiatives specifically targeting gender equality and anti-discrimination such as labor inspectorate campaigns to ensure non-discriminatory working conditions against women, provision of complaint forms in multiple languages to enable the reporting of rights violations, and gender awareness campaigns. Spain's gender considerations in the area of labor is also evident in the ratification of ILO C190 - Violence and Harassment Convention. Notably, most countries analyzed in this policy brief e.g North Macedonia, Portugal, Denmark, Moldova, Finland have yet to ratify and implement ILO C190.

In a similar vein, Belgium's engagement focuses on harmonizing data collection methods in the context of labor with an emphasis on gender-specific data; however, this engagement does not translate to any further gender-specific initiatives (GMI Indicator 1.3).

COMMITMENT TO GENDER DYNAMICS

Our GMI analysis shows that commitment towards gender responsiveness via planned programs/policies/initiatives can be described as limited. Among the analyzed countries, the gender-responsive commitments that are mentioned, while limited, are referenced primarily in the context of national strategies.

Spain, again, demonstrates a slightly moderate commitment to gender dynamics in the labor market, with strategic plans and policies aimed at ensuring gender equality. For example, the Master Plan for Decent Work and the Strategic Plan for the Labour and Social Security Inspectorate (ITSS) 2021-2023 includes specific measures to address gender-based disparities in the labor market.

At the same time, several of the analyzed countries lack targeted initiatives that address the unique challenges facing migrant women and gender diverse migrants. Serbia's VNR, for example, references two labor migration-oriented policies, namely the Economic Migration Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2021–2027 and the Employment Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2021–2026. While these policies seek to improve labor market access and opportunities for migrants, they target the entire working population without an explicit focus on gender.

Similarly, the Netherlands mentions compliance with EU Directive 2014/67/EU which, in part, has the objective to ensure fair treatment and prevent labor exploitation. Nonetheless, the Directive does not explicitly mandate any gender-specific measures in the labor context. As a result, although the Netherland's VNR cites compliance in this regard, commitment to gender-specific action plans that tackle issues such as wage gaps, employment discrimination, or workplace harassment are not noted as such.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our GMI analysis regarding the mention of, engagement with, and commitment to gender dynamics in the VNRs of Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Moldova, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, and the UK, we propose the following recommendations for a gender-responsive implementation of the GCM concerning labor until the 2026 IMRF:

MENTION OF GENDER DYNAMICS

- In line with GCM Objective 1 (Collect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies), robust mechanisms for the collection of gender-disaggregated data on migrant workers must be developed. This should include not only data on employment status, wages, working conditions, and access to social protections, but also data on the recognition of qualifications of third-country nationals so as to facilitate their participation in the labor market.

- Develop participatory consultations with migrants, civil society, and labor unions to better understand challenges in the labor market. For example, the Center for Migration, Gender, and Justice serves as the first-ever NGO Focal Point to the UN Committee on Migrant Workers Rights.

ENGAGEMENT WITH GENDER DYNAMICS

- Ratify and implement existing international frameworks that address gender dynamics in the context of labor. This includes the ILO Domestic Workers Convention (ILO C189), the ILO Convention on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work (ILO C190), and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CMW). Of note here is that none of the analyzed countries have ratified the CMW.

- Increase financial support for civil society, I/NGOs, and related initiatives dedicated to gender-responsive labor migration policies through the Multi-Partner Trust Fund. The Fund includes a gender marker which ensures that all programs, both funded and in the pipeline, integrate gender equality and women's empowerment throughout the project cycle. This can facilitate intra-regional mobility as demonstrated in the existing joint program of the Western Balkans.

RECOMMENDATIONS

COMMITMENT TO GENDER DYNAMICS

- Align commitments in labor protections of migrant workers as part of the GCM with the EU's revised Single Permit Directive. The Directive amends several key provisions in terms of application procedures, change of employers, and unemployment for migrant workers.

- In leaning on findings of the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), EU countries should standardize and streamline recognition processes for third country nationals to reduce delays and inconsistencies in labor market access. This connects with GCM Objectives 16 (Empower migrants to realize full inclusion) and Objective 18 (Invest in skills development).

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