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The gendered impact of out-migration on rural communities in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Implications for rural development interventions

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This paper will provide a broad overview of migration patterns in the region and discuss how these patterns affect gender relations in rural communities, and the implications for rural development interventions.

The diversity of the region and the lack of systematic research means that clear regional patterns cannot be identified. However, lessons can be derived from specific research on some countries in the region, and the findings of research in other global regions. In addition the paper will draw on two case study projects from rural areas in the region characterised by significant out-migration, on which the author worked ('Eco-lan', an initiative to develop organic agriculture in Ukraine, and 'COSWA', a project implemented by the International Organization for Migration in Azerbaijan, designed to mitigate push factors for economic migration from the region by promoting rural development). On the basis of these case study projects and review of other research, the paper will focus on a number of issues related to migration and its gendered impacts. These are summarised briefly below.

Migration patterns in the region

Migration in Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS has gone through a number of phases in the transition period, including mass migration based on ethnic repatriation movements in the period after the break-up of the Soviet Union and the former Yugoslav states, and subsequent less massive, but significant, economic migration both between poorer and more wealthy CIS states (eg labour seeking migration to Russia), between countries in the region and countries in Western Europe and North America, and rural – urban, and seasonal migration within countries.

This broad pattern of migration in the region masks a diversity of different types of migration, including permanent or short term migration, official and unofficial migration, forced and voluntary migration and international and intra-national migration. It is important to be clear on these distinctions as (a) the type of migration will determine how visible or invisible the real scale of migration is in the official data that

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determines policy making and (b) the different types of migration will have different impacts on women and men in rural source communities as they affect the extent to which migrants remain 'connected' to their communities.

Pull and push factors

Women and men's choices to migrate are based on a number of push and pull factors. These can include factors as diverse as the wish to live in an ethnic 'motherland', the wish to escape patriarchal and conservation social norms in some rural areas, or economic push and pull factors related to job seeking migration. Based on the experience of the Eco-Lan and COSWA, one significant push factor in the region has been entrenched problems in the rural economy resulting from the de-collectivisation of agriculture (ie the dissolution of Kholkhozes) without corresponding changes in market systems and infrastructure – although paradoxically the economic crisis in the 1990s also led to a growth in reliance on rural subsistence farming, and some urban to rural migration, in some countries in the region. Another significant push factor in many countries in the region has been the 'modernisation' of agriculture, with a move from state or family farms to commercial agri-businesses with an associated drop in employment and change in forms of employment.

Migration and the impact on rural development

Migration has both positive and negative impacts on rural communities. The main positive impact is the sending of remittances (both economic and 'social'), although there is some debate about whether these lead to development or dependency. However migration also leads to rural depopulation, and change in the population structure – along lines of both gender and age. This is linked to a rural brain or labour drain as it is primarily working age women and men who migrate, meaning that older women and boys and girls are likely to be over-represented in source communities. This change in population structure may also have impacts on family life, community cohesion and systems of governance.

Migration and Gender

There is a significant literature on migration and gender, and a recent emphasis on the 'feminisation of migration'. However, most research on gender and migration focuses on the different experiences of women and men as migrants, rather than on the gendered impacts on source communities.

Nonetheless, it is clear that migration affects the gender roles, access to and control over resources and gender needs of women and men in source communities, and a number of gendered impacts on source communities have been identified. These include the:

- gendered nature of remittance sending, and of the control and use of (individual and collective) remittances;
- impact of gender specific 'brain drains' and labour shortages on source communities;
- impact of women's migration on family care in source communities, and the creation of gendered 'care chains';
- increase in *de facto* female headed households in the context of male out migration, and the fact that this *de facto* status limits female household heads' control over resources (such as land or housing) or access to credit;
- extent to which women's empowerment as a result of migration (including empowerment of women migrants and women in source communities taking on new roles in the absence of male migrants) can transform gender relations.

Policy implications for rural development

These patterns suggest a number of policy responses for rural development in areas of out-migration, which will be explored. In brief these include the following:

- 'Efficiency' or instrumental approaches to rural development (ie focusing on how women and men can best contribute to rural economic development in the context of migration, without considering the wider impact on their lives) should be avoided. For example, responding to male labour

shortages as a consequence on migration by simply working to incorporate more women into the formal agricultural labour force will be problematic, unless policy support *also* responds to the impacts of migration on women's other roles (for example family care, subsistence agriculture and community level decision-making).

- If out migration is to be reduced, then rural women and men need to be given opportunities in a changing rural economy. Social and economic change can be used to promote gender equality, but this implies active interventions to respond to the needs of both women and men. For example it is key that steps are taken to ensure that the women (and men) who are permanently resident in source communities are given economic opportunities, and included in decision-making roles in local systems of governance.
- If the women and men who remain in source communities are expected to lead on rural economic activities and rural development interventions, they need to be need to have access to the relevant resources and information. In practice rural development projects in the region still often target male 'farmers' or household heads with extension services, information or project resources, even where males are absent for significant as a result of labour migration.