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Presentation by

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**Providing more legal migration channels for women migrant  
domestic and care workers**

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and environmental policies to the benefit of stability and security  
in the OSCE region”

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Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Panellists,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be here in Athens and I would like to thank and congratulate the OSCE and the Greek Chairmanship for choosing migration as the theme for this 17th Forum and more specifically for having a session on Gender on the first day which I believe is a real demonstration of commitment towards this important issue.

Providing legal migration channels for foreign domestic and care workers is a subject that I find to be of crucial importance for a broad range of reasons that I will present to you during the next ten minutes or so. But before I do that I would like to share with you some background information on female migration trends.

Today, around half of the world's 200 million migrants are women. More and more of them are migrating in search of economic opportunities and this is a trend that is not likely to reverse soon. According to the "Trends in Total Migrant Stock: the 2008 Revision" recently published by the UN Population Division, female migrants will constitute 51.5 % of all international migrants residing in the more developed regions in 2010. In Europe they will represent 52.3 per cent of all migrants. Among these women migrants, we know that a substantial proportion is involved in domestic work. In a number of OSCE countries such as France, Italy and Spain, the domestic service sector is the most important employment category for migrant women.

While data is not easily available because of the frequent exclusion of domestic work from labour statistics and because of the informal nature of this sector, research suggests that domestic workers number tens of millions and according to the European Trade Union Confederation "it is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in Europe".

These figures and facts, by themselves, build a compelling case for opening more legal migration channels for women involved in domestic and care work, but I would like to add 5 additional and I believe strong arguments in favour of orienting labour migration policies in this direction.

**Firstly:** providing legal channels for foreign domestic and care workers is a key step in providing more legal channels for women. Although it will not solve the broader issue of providing equal opportunities to women who want to migrate, it would at least prevent a lot of them from getting trapped in irregular, exploitative and/or trafficking situations.

**Secondly:** it is important to remember that women migrant domestic workers are an essential link in the economic chain of OSCE countries. There is a need and a demand for them. In fact the demand is steadily increasing due to ageing populations, the increased labour-market participation of women as well as the increasing numbers of one-parent

families. There are not enough places in retirement homes and the availability of childcare services is notoriously insufficient in many countries.

**Thirdly:** the majority of domestic workers are migrant women. Nationals of developed countries represent a limited portion of this type of workers. They are increasingly abandoning this undervalued sector, and it is unlikely that this trend will reverse.

**Fourthly:** The remittances that the workers send back home means a better health, education and housing for their families.

**And fifthly:** a regular migration status can reduce the social cost of women's migration by allowing them to return to visit their families more often, earn more money and therefore send more remittances, and more confidently plan for their return home.

We can therefore see that the advantages of opening the domestic labour market to women migrant are many. Yet only some countries provide legal entry channels into these fields. How can this be explained?

We know that the opening of legal channels for migration is often linked to assessments of the demand in the countries of destination. However, the sectors and professions covered do not always reflect the real market demand. Domestic work is a clear example of this situation. Why is that? One important reason is that domestic work is largely performed by women and associated in people's minds with the unpaid work performed by mothers and housewives. It is therefore not regarded as real employment and not valued. Second it is often invisible work, carried out in private homes, which are not usually seen as workplaces and for the benefit of private individuals who are not usually considered employers. A last reason is that the needs assessments that I mentioned earlier are not always conducted in a gender-sensitive manner and therefore do not provide a full picture of all sectors especially gender-segregated niches.

I hope that with that I have built a good business case for the opening of more legal migration channels for women migrant domestic workers. I would like if you allow me to take a few more minutes to talk about good and bad practices in this area. What are the elements that we absolutely need to have in such schemes? I use the word "absolutely" because crafting these policies well is of the utmost importance since migrant women domestic workers, particularly in-house workers, are among the world's most vulnerable workers. They face abusive situations that are common to domestic work, but in addition they face challenges linked to their migrant status.

In order to respond to these challenges, the experience of OSCE countries that regulate the entry of migrant domestic and/or care workers, such as Canada or Italy should be documented and further explored. Let us stop for a moment on the Canadian example. The Canadian "Live-in Caregiver Programme" is often cited and rightly so, as a good practice. This programme introduced in 2003 allows legal entry to migrants willing to

work as care workers in private households. It provides a standardized working contract, allows for a change of employer and the possibility to acquire permanent resident status after only 2 years.

Other countries have different approaches such as the establishment of annual quotas for women migrant domestic workers. Italy is an example of this approach. Regularization schemes have also been used by countries like Greece, Italy and Spain. Experience shows that women have largely benefited from these schemes. The conclusion of bilateral agreements is another solution for promoting legal migration while at the same time providing better protection for vulnerable categories of migrant workers.

Whatever the option chosen, certain precautions need to be taken to ensure full protection for the migrant women domestic workers. First, regarding the live-in arrangement: in general it is recognized as a source of increased vulnerability for the employee who is more likely to work overtime and be subject to abuse.

The same is true for the “one-employer” rule or the restriction on changing the type of employment. These prevent migrant women who are skilled and educated from engaging in other, more suitable occupations thereby increasing deskilling which is common among this group of workers. Increasing flexibility in changing employers is also a good way of avoiding situations of protracted exploitation when the choice facing the migrant is either stay with the employer or be deported.

My final recommendation would be to look beyond the schemes and create a protective environment and an environment that is conducive to positive outcomes for both the countries of origin and destination and the women migrant.

A final word to say that IOM commends the OSCE for the “Guide on Gender-sensitive labour Migration Policies” launched today. My Organization is also very much looking forward to work with the OSCE in translating this guide into a training module and organize training workshops for practitioners with the ultimate objective of making migration a safe and empowering experience for women migrant domestic workers.

Thank you for your attention,