Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The Secretariat

Seminar on Gender-Sensitive Labour Migration Policies

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Opening Speech by

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Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished Participants,

I am pleased to join the previous speakers in welcoming you all to this Seminar on Gender-Sensitive Labour Migration Policies.

It is a great pleasure to see that so many representatives from OSCE participating States, OSCE Partners for Co-operation, International Organizations as well as from the academia and NGOs have come to discuss this important topic and to share your expertise and practical experience.

It is also of special significance to us to be meeting here in Slovenia on an issue related to migration management. It was through the able Chairmanship of Slovenia to the OSCE in 2005 that migration was brought back on the OSCE agenda and enlarged to encompass all the OSCE dimensions. Slovenia was a strong advocate of a comprehensive, cross-dimensional approach to migration management and a promoter of increased regional and international cooperation on this issue. The Slovenian Chairmanship resulted in the Ministerial Decision on Migration and gave the impetus for a subsequent Ministerial Statement on Migration – these two documents form much of the basis for the OSCE work in the area of migration.

The Slovenian Chairmanship also resulted in something very practical and concrete, namely the publication of the **OSCE-IOM-ILO Handbooks on Establishing Effective Labour Migration Policies in Countries of Origin and Destination**. These publications have laid the ground for dialogue and exchange of good practice among our participating States and Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation at a number of regional events. Especially, the discussions held at the launch seminar in Rabat of the Mediterranean edition of the Handbook prompted us to look at the gender aspects of labour migration policies.

Feminisation of migration is a global trend. We can observe differences in speed and intensity between regions and countries, but largely there is an upward trend. In Southern Europe and some other countries, women immigrants outnumber men (especially in Cyprus, Portugal and Malta, but also in France, Poland, Belgium and Italy), while in Eastern Europe men clearly dominate the picture. Migration from Central Asia to Russia shows an increase in the number of female migrants, although the percentage of women is lower than elsewhere and the feminisation process is slower than in other regions.

Female migrants take up both skilled and less-skilled employment in destination countries. They generally work in feminised employment sectors such as domestic services, healthcare and social services, as well as seasonal agricultural and hotel/restaurant work. They are becoming important actors in contributing to economic growth and welfare both in the destination countries and, through their remittances, in their home countries.

However, as many of them work in gender-segregated sectors of the economy - such as domestic and care work or seasonal agricultural work - they are often unprotected by labour legislation and policies related to health and social security. This has placed many of them in very precarious and vulnerable positions as they become easy targets to work related exploitation and rights abuses. Many are also pushed into irregular employment in the informal sector due to the lack of sufficient legal migration channels in their area of employment.

To increase political awareness of these issues among the OSCE participating States, we developed a specific project on **Raising Awareness of the Need for Gender-Sensitive Labour Migration Policies**. To achieve maximum commitment to this important topic, we use the organisation's multi-dimensional character and formed a tripartite cooperation

between my Office, the Gender Section and the Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. This has allowed us to bring together different dimensional competencies in labour migration management, gender mainstreaming and prevention of trafficking in human beings.

Through this project we hope to offer a wide political platform for dialogue and exchange of experience and good practices in order to bring about faster gender mainstreaming in national labour migration policies. This Seminar is our first high-level event and we plan to also bring up the topic at the 17th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum in Athens in May as well as with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

In addition, we are working on a **practical Guide for policy-makers on how to make labour migration policies more gender-sensitive**. We have distributed an Executive Summary of the draft Guide to all of you and we hope that you will give us your feedback on the issues raised in this document during these two days. Your inputs will help us in drafting a relevant, up-to-date publication for your use.

On behalf of the OSCE Secretariat, I would, Minister Svetlik, like to extend our warmest thanks to the Government of Slovenia, for accepting to host this Seminar and for offering us this beautiful venue to meet in. The unwavering support that we have received right from the start of the preparations and throughout from your Government and the staff of the Foreign Ministry has been remarkable. It has been a real pleasure working with you.

I would also like to express my appreciation for the strong support of the former Finnish and the current OSCE Greek Chairmanship given to this project.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Seminar will focus on a number of key issues related to introducing a gender dimension into labour migration policies, namely better protection of female migrant workers in national legal frameworks; gender-sensitive pre-departure and re-integration services; gender mainstreaming in bilateral labour agreements; and identification of gender issues in permanent and temporary labour admission policies.

I encourage you to use these two days actively, to engage in a genuine free flowing dialogue on all these issues. I am looking forward to hearing our distinguished speakers as well as your comments and interventions from the floor. I am looking forward to an interactive and enriching dialogue.

I thank you for your attention.