

## **BENONI DECLARATION ADOPTED BY THE SOUTHERN AFRICA MIGRATION NETWORK (SAMIN)**

**Date:** 27–30 June 2024

**Location:** Lumko Institute, Benoni, Gauteng Province, South Africa

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### **Declaration on the Protection and Empowerment of Migrant Women in Southern Africa**

#### **Preamble**

**We, migrant and refugee women attending the SAMIN's Women Migrants Summit are:**

- **DEEPLY CONCERNED** about the prevalence of gender-based violence and exploitation against women and girls in migration contexts. Migrant women, including asylum seekers, refugee and stateless women, and women working as domestic and farm workers are particularly vulnerable to violence, exploitation, and abuse. According to the UN, “one in five women in relationships have experienced physical violence by a partner”. It is crucial to recognize their significant challenges.
- **Having listened** to personal testimonies during the two-day summit, it is evident that we still face harsh living and working conditions, limited legal protections, and social isolation, which expose us to physical and psychological abuse.
- **Additionally, the lack** of access to essential services like healthcare, education, and safe housing exacerbates women migrant vulnerabilities, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive and gender-responsive policies to ensure our protection and empowerment.
- **It is especially concerning** that women are still used as weapons of war, facing daily threats of rape and murder, as seen in conflicts like the DRC. As conflict intensifies, violations against women and children, including sexual violence, child recruitment,

and abductions, increase. Unsafe conditions expose women and girls to abuse in the camp setting as well as the urban context.

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### **Recognitions and Affirmations**

- **RECOGNIZE** the critical role of migrant women, including asylum seekers, refugees and stateless women, in sustaining communities and economies. Studies show that migrant workers may raise the income per capita in South Africa by up to 5%, according to the OECD.
- **ATTEST** to the pivotal role of engaging men and adolescents as agents of change in cultivating inclusive and supportive environments for migrant women, including asylum seekers, refugees and stateless women.
- **AFFIRM** the right of migrant women, including asylum seekers, refugees and stateless women, to fair and equitable treatment, access to justice, and legal documentation; and we **ADVOCATE** for the removal of barriers that prevent them from adequately exercising these rights.
- **CALL** for improved access to essential health care, education, and social services for women migrants, ensuring that these services are inclusive and responsive to their specific needs.
- **CALL** for the establishment of community-based initiatives and solidarity networks to foster integration and mutual support among migrant and host communities.
- **ACKNOWLEDGE** the importance of data collection and research in informing policy and advocacy efforts and **CALL FOR COMMITMENT** to invest in these areas to better understand and address the challenges faced by women migrants.
- **ACKNOWLEDGE** the critical need to address Misinformation, Disinformation, and Hate Speech against refugee and migrant women. We emphasize the importance of implementing initiatives such as digital engagement and school campaigns, that reflect innovative efforts.

- **COMMIT** to work collaboratively with governments, civil society organizations, international agencies, religious leaders, and other stakeholders to create inclusive environments for women migrants and to advocate for their rights and well-being.
  - **PLEDGE** to work with regional partners to address the challenges faced by migrant women, including asylum seekers, refugees and stateless women, across the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region and beyond, to promote coordinated efforts to protect and empower them.
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### Call to Action

**We are calling upon the SADC Heads of State and Government, civil society, international agencies, and other stakeholders to:**

1. **Develop and implement** gender-responsive, rights-based migration policies that uphold the human rights of all migrants, **particularly** those of women and girls.
2. **Take immediate action** to protect and support survivors of gender-based violence and exploitation, including through the establishment of safe houses and support services.
3. **Provide skills training, vocational education, and income-generating opportunities** to enhance the economic empowerment and livelihoods of women migrants.
4. **Ensure the right of women migrants to access justice, fair treatment, and legal documentation**, and call for removing barriers that prevent them from exercising these rights.
5. **Establish stringent measures** to ensure that perpetrators of gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual violence during conflicts are held accountable and must face severe punishment to serve as a deterrent and to uphold justice for victims. This includes, thorough investigations and fair trials, recognizing these acts as crimes against humanity and war crimes. There are a handful of international legal frameworks that serve to protect women from GBV that may be referenced.
6. **Invest in data collection and research** to inform policy and advocacy efforts and commit to investing in these areas to understand better and address the challenges

faced by migrant women, including asylum seekers, refugees and stateless women. This would result in improved access to essential health care, education, and social services for women migrants living in refugee camps, ensuring that these services are inclusive and responsive to their specific needs.

7. **Establish community-based initiatives and solidarity networks** to foster integration and mutual support among migrant and host communities. We call on SADC Governments to ensure that their legal regime for refugee protection is in line with international instruments and take into account humanitarian challenges related to mixed flows of asylum seekers, and migrants, including language accessibility services. According to the National Institute of Health, language barriers are one of the top factors contributing to migrants' lack of access to quality healthcare.
8. **Invest in data collection and research** to inform policy and advocacy efforts and commit to investing in these areas to better understand and address the challenges faced by migrant women, including asylum seekers, refugees and stateless women.
9. **For countries to consider or accede** to international and regional instruments on statelessness and related refugee matters. For such conventions to be domesticated and thereby provide due process for migrant women, including asylum seekers, refugees and stateless women.
10. **Urge media organizations** to recognize their powerful role in shaping public perception. It is crucial for the media to promote accurate narratives about migrants and actively counter negative stereotypes through dedicated media campaigns and public education initiatives. To work collaboratively with governments, civil society organizations, international agencies, religious leaders, and other stakeholders to create inclusive environments for migrant women, including asylum seekers, refugees and stateless women, and to advocate for their rights and well-being.
11. **Uphold commitments** to work with regional partners to address the challenges faced by migrant women, including asylum seekers, refugees and stateless women, across the SADC region and to promote coordinated efforts to protect and empower them.

12. **Fostering an increase in durable solutions** through increased resettlement and complementary pathways opportunities such as family reunification, education and labour pathways, community sponsorship and humanitarian corridor programmes.
  13. **Enabling conditions for the return to the country of origin** through voluntary repatriation programmes and consideration of lifting of restrictive reservations to refugee and migrant conventions that hinder prospects of local integration.
  14. **Access to mental health services** is imperative as migrant women are likely to have experienced several traumatic events in their lifetime, including GBV, exploitation, lack of access to health care, and time spent living in inhumane conditions.
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### **Acknowledgement of Limitations and Challenges**

It goes without saying that many of the goals in our declaration are lofty and will not be met without significant effort over a considerable period. The process of enacting the change we have deemed necessary in order to protect and empower migrant women, including asylum seekers, refugee and stateless women, will likely not proceed without significant challenges met along the way. However, our team of dedicated and passionate individuals are well aware of the difficulties involved with completing the tasks we have outlined.

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