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**World Trade Organization**

Economic Research and Statistics Division

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**GENDER-SPECIFIC DIFFERENCES IN GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY:  
EVIDENCE FROM GHANA**

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# Gender-specific differences in geographical mobility: Evidence from Ghana

17/01/2020

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## **Abstract:**

The gains from trade depend on the reallocation of resources, including labour, across firms and sectors. However, workers are unlikely to be fully mobile since there are barriers to sectoral and geographical mobility due to social reasons such as family or existing private and professional networks. If these barriers depend on specific characteristics of workers, such as education, gender or race, this has important implications for inequality. In this note we examine gender-specific differences regarding geographical mobility in Ghana. Using survey data from the 2017 Ghana Living Standard Survey, we find that while men and women are equally likely to migrate, men are much more likely to move for economic reasons. Women on the other hand move predominantly for social reasons such as marriage. This is supported by both indicated reasons for migration and indirect evidence. For instance, men are more likely to be employed, send higher and more frequently remittances, and target regions that offer better employment prospects. These stylized facts suggest that Ghanaian men can more easily adjust to trade shocks than Ghanaian women. While we cannot infer from this evidence what determines the differences in geographical mobility between men and women, we can infer that men are more likely to benefit from a trade-induced expansion of exporting sectors and firms and are less likely to be hurt by a trade-induced contraction of import-competing sectors and firms.

**Key words:** Gender inequality, mobility, gains from trade.

**JEL classification:** J16, J61

## 1. Introduction

The gains from trade depend on the reallocation of resources, including labour, across firms and sectors. According to neoclassical trade theory, trade induces factors of production to move from comparative disadvantage to comparative advantage sectors. Similarly, new-new trade theory predicts that factors of production move from less to more productive firms because of trade liberalization. Workers are therefore assumed to be mobile across sectors and firms. A more implicit assumption of, in particular neoclassical, theory is that workers are also geographically mobile. After all, sectors tend to cluster spatially and, therefore, switching sectors tends to require changing location.

However, workers are unlikely to be fully mobile. Sector- or firm-specific skills and experience make mobility across sectors and firms costly. Similarly, there are barriers to geographical mobility due to social reasons such as family or existing private and professional networks. In addition, financial constraints such as mortgages can prevent workers from moving. In some countries there are also policy barriers to migration. For instance, the Chinese Hukou system links social benefits such as housing support or access to schooling to whether a person is officially registered as a resident of a particular area.

As a result, barriers to sectoral and geographical mobility prevent workers from reaping the gains from trade and impede adjustment to trade liberalization. If these barriers depend on specific characteristics of workers, such as education, gender or race, this has important implications for inequality. In this regard, evidence shows that older, less-educated and female workers face higher barriers when it comes to sectoral mobility (Artuç, Chaudhuri, & McLaren, 2010; Brussevich, 2018; Dix-Carneiro, 2014).

In this note we examine gender-specific differences regarding geographical mobility in Ghana. Evidence suggests an increasing involvement of Ghanaian women in migration due to increased demand for services of women in the care economy. There was an increase in the number of female Ghanaian emigrants, from 260,347 in 2005 to 337,993 in 2015, but a decrease in their overall share from 46.5% to 42.2% over the same period (MGSoG, 2017). Using survey data from the 2017 Ghana Living Standard Survey, we examine whether there are systemic differences between men and women in the likelihood to migrate to other regions of Ghana or out of the country. Additionally, we look at the stated reasons to migrate as well as indirect evidence that can reveal the cause of the migration such as the employment status or the amount and frequency of remittances.

We find that while men and women are equally likely to migrate, men are much more likely to move for economic reasons. Women on the other hand move predominantly for social reasons such as marriage. This is supported by both indicated reasons for migration and indirect evidence. For instance, men are more likely to be employed, send higher and more frequently remittances, and target regions that offer better employment prospects.

These stylized facts suggest that Ghanaian men can more easily adjust to trade shocks than Ghanaian women. While we cannot infer from this evidence what determines the differences in geographical mobility between men and women, we can infer that men are more likely to benefit from a trade-induced expansion of exporting sectors and firms and are less likely to be hurt by a trade-induced contraction of import-competing sectors and firms.

In terms of literature our paper relates to research looking into migration more generally and gender-specific differences in migration patterns more specifically, especially in the context of Africa. Earlier work has found that migration is widespread in Africa and that more men than women migrate. As reasons men state more often employment while women state more often family-related reasons (FAO, 2017). However, there is some heterogeneity within Africa with evidence from Senegal supporting the aggregate findings but evidence from South Africa suggesting that there are no gender-specific differences in migration patterns (Chort et al., 2017; von Fintel and Moses, 2018). In the context of Ghana, research highlights that gender is central to patterns and impacts of migration but does not provide an analysis of gender-specific migration flows (Awumbila, 2015). We contribute to this literature by filling this gap and providing evidence on gender-specific migration patterns in Ghana.

This note proceeds as follows. Section 2 shortly describes the underlying data, the seventh round of the Ghana Living Standards Survey, and highlights important limitations. Section 3 presents the descriptive analysis regarding gender-specific differences in geographical mobility. Section 4 concludes.

## 2. Data

The analysis is based on the seventh round of the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS7) conducted in 2016/17. The GLSS has been conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service since 1987 in order to monitor the living conditions and well-being of Ghanaian households and individuals within these households. It allows for analyses based on the following groupings: urban/rural, locality, region, and socioeconomic status, including gender.

The GLSS applies a two-stage sampling procedure where the first stage involves the selection of the enumeration areas (EAs) based on the 2010 Population and Housing Census, with a probability proportional to size (number of households). The second stage involves the selection of a fixed number of 15 households by systematic sampling method within each of the selected EAs.

Considering the long period between the GLSS7 and the 2010 Population and Housing Census, the two-stage sampling procedure would not produce a self-weighting sample (where the probability of inclusion of each household is equal) because the number of households in an EA is likely to have changed between the survey and the census. This could affect the selection of the EAs with probability proportional to their true sizes. To address this sampling issue, the GLSS has computed weights reflecting differential probabilities of selection of households in different EAs (Ghana Statistical Service, 2018).

The number of primary sampling units and households in the GLSS7 is 1000 (438 in rural areas and 562 in urban areas) and 15000 (8430 in rural areas and 6570 in the urban areas) respectively. Overall, the response rate for the survey was 93.4 percent, translating into 14,009 households and 59864 individuals. Males represent 48.4% of the sample while females represent 51.6%.

Regarding migration, GLSS7 captures a variety of information. This includes the destination of the migrant both within and outside of Ghana, the reason for migration, the employment status, the amount and frequency of remittances as well as its recipients. For GLSS7 13 862 households answered the questions on migration which represents about 99.0% of the sample. Of these households, 1 488 reported to have at least one migrant as relative with the total number of migrants being equal to 2 621 of which 1331 are male and 1290 are female.

It is not clear why the other households didn't complete the section on migration. Thus, one needs to interpret some of the statistics in the next section with care as the likelihood to complete the section might be correlated with having a migrant in the household.

Another important caveat is that the information is given by the individual who fills the survey rather than the actual migrant. This can introduce a bias for several reasons. For instance, migrants might misreport their employment status to avoid relatives at home to place excessive financial demands on them. Alternatively, they might misreport their employment status in order to fulfil the expectations of their relatives. However, given the magnitude of the differences we observe, we are confident that they are not driven by such potential misreporting.

### 3. Descriptive analysis

This section provides descriptive evidence that women in Ghana are less likely to move as a result of labour market shocks. It relies on differences in mobility patterns, responses to questions about reasons for migrating, and employment and remittance patterns of migrants.

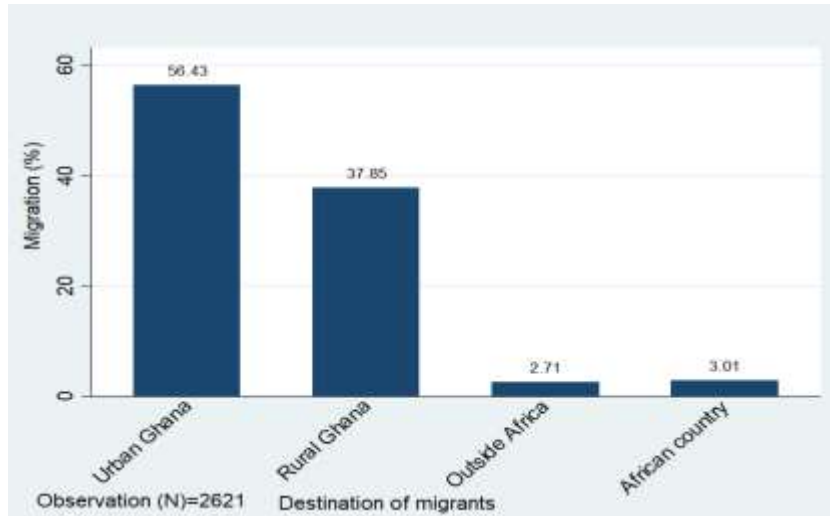
#### 3.1. Differences in migration patterns of men and women: Indirect evidence on reasons for migration

Migration is not a very typical phenomenon in Ghana. Only 10.6% of the sampled households report to have a migrant relative who account for about 4% of individuals in the sample. The likelihood to migrate does not differ markedly between men and women. As we can see from Figure 2, the share of women in migrants corresponds broadly to their share in their sample (49.2% vs 51.6%). Thus, from the plain likelihood to migrate we cannot infer any meaningful differences between men and women regarding their spatial mobility as a response to trade shocks.

Next, we examine differences in the destination of migrants. Figure 1 shows that the large majority of Ghanaians, 94%, migrates domestically. International migrants constitute about 5.7%, which seems small but is almost twice the global average of 3.3% according to data from the United Nations Population Division for 2015. A second feature we observe is that urban areas are the preferred destination of Ghanaian migrants, accounting for 56% of all migration inflows. Ghana is thus no

exception to the global trend of urbanization which is particularly strong in developing countries. Asia and Africa alone are estimated to contribute 90% to the growth in the world's urban population by 2050 (United Nations, 2018).

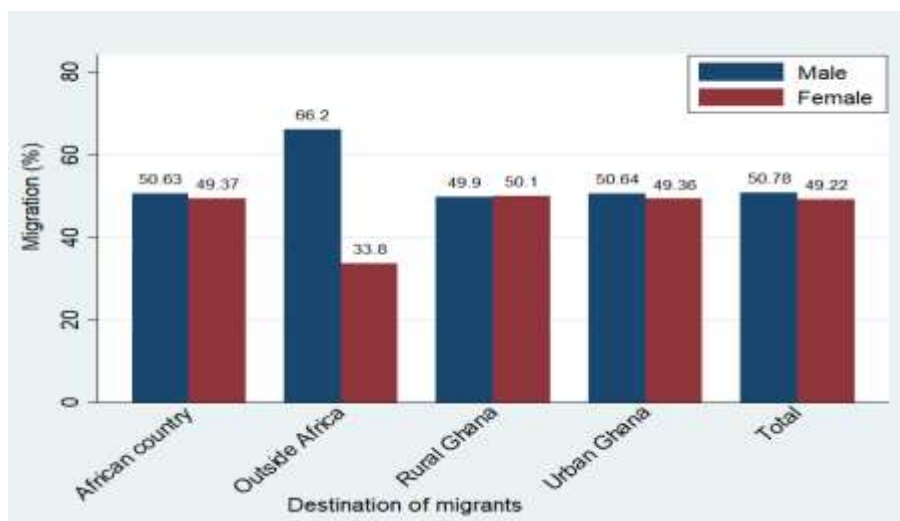
Figure 1: Migrants in Ghana migrate predominantly domestically



Source: Author's computation based on GLSS7 data

Differentiating the data on the destination of migrants by gender shows that the migration patterns of men and women are fairly similar with one central exception: men are significantly more likely to migrate to Western countries than women. We can see from Figure 2 that men make up about two thirds of all migrants in Western countries. This is a first indication that men's migration decisions are more driven by economic considerations than women's decisions given that economic opportunities tend to be better in Western countries.

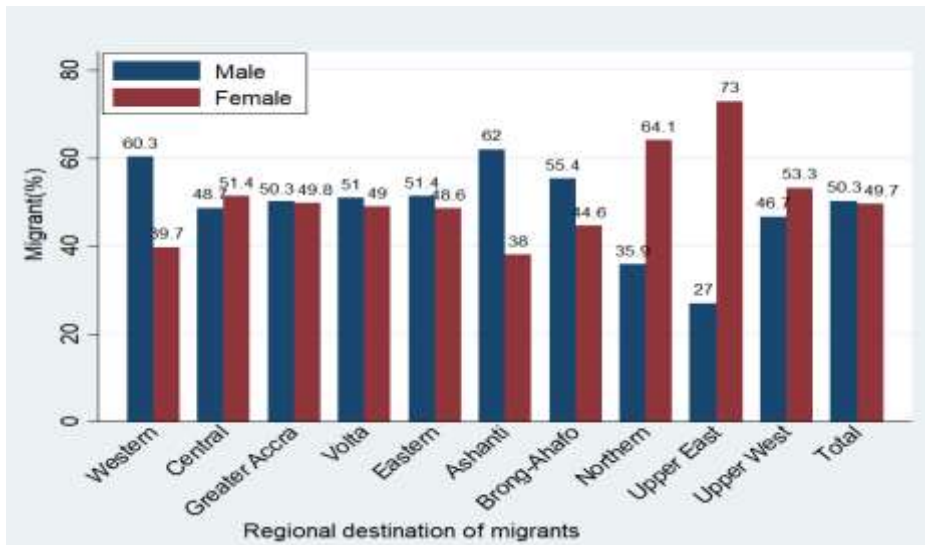
Figure 2: Men are more likely to migrate to Western countries



Source: Author's computation based on GLSS7 data

The conclusion that men are more driven by economic opportunities than women when migrating is supported by the internal distribution of migrants. Women and men account for similar shares of migrants for most regions as illustrated in Figure 3. However, there are systematic differences for some regions. In particular, men are more likely to move to Western Ghana, Ashanti, or Brong-Ahafo, all important centres of economic activity. Women on the other hand are more likely to move to the more rural and agricultural regions (Northern , Upper East and Upper West) in the northern part of Ghana suggesting that the driver of their migration is not necessarily related to labour market opportunities.

Figure 3: Within Ghana women are less likely to move to economically vibrant regions

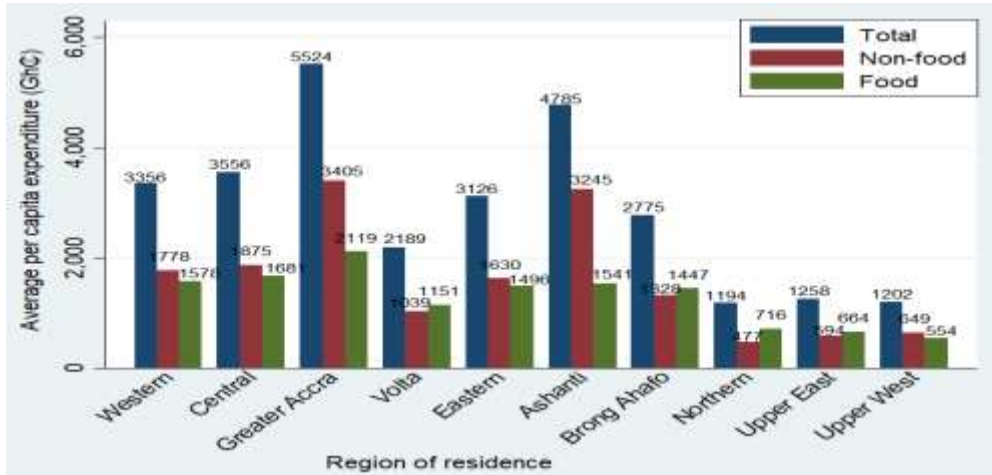


Source: Authors' computation based on GLSS7 data

We can see the differences between these regions in Figure 4. Expenditure, a proxy for income, is highest in the Greater Accra region and the Ashanti region, the latter being a region preferred by male migrants. In contrast, expenditure is relatively low in the three northern regions (Northern , Upper East and Upper West ), which are the three regions that host larger shares of female migrants.



Figure 4: Expenditure is particularly low in Northern regions which host many female migrants

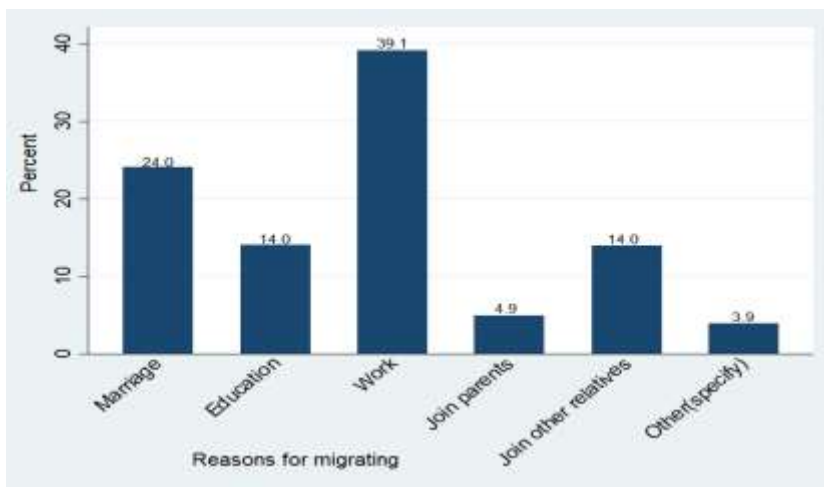


Source: Authors' computation based on GLSS7 data

### 3.2. Direct evidence on reasons for migration

The GLSS includes not only data on migration patterns and outcomes but also explicitly includes a question on why the migrant decided to move. The results in Figure 5 indicate that work or search for greener pasture is the major reason why people migrate in Ghana. The percentage of people who migrate for economic reasons, i.e. work or education, is significantly larger than the percentage of those who migrate for social reasons, that is either to marry or to join their relatives.

Figure 5: Economic reasons are the primary motive for migration



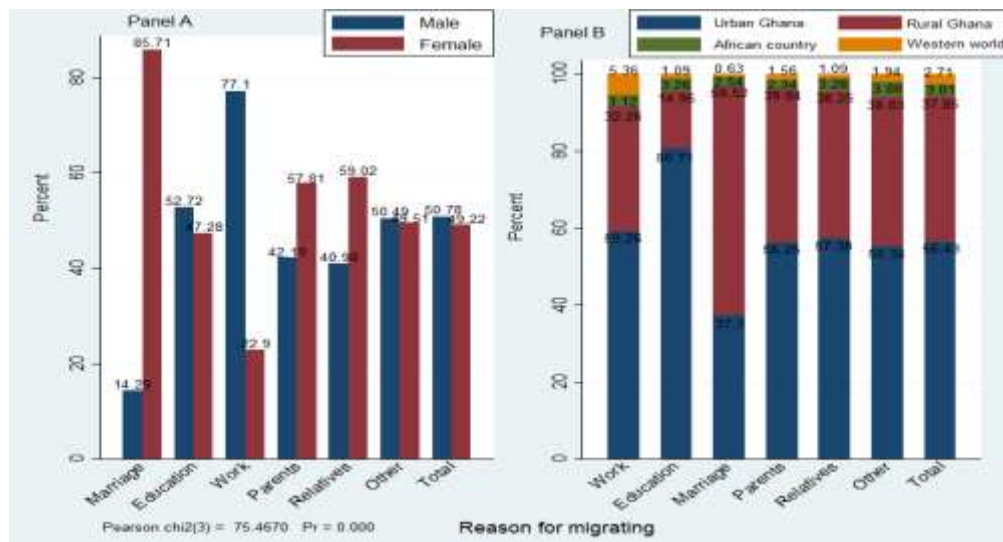
Source: Author's computation based on GLSS7 data

However, further disaggregation of the reasons for migration based on the gender of the migrants reveals once again stark differences between men and women and supports our conclusions from the previous subsection. Panel A of Figure 6 illustrates that males migrate predominantly for

economic reasons whereas females are more likely to migrate for social reasons. While males constitute greater proportion of migrants whose objective is to look for either work or pursue education, more females than males migrate to either marry, visit parents or join relatives.

Panel B of Figure 6 further supports the conclusions we drew from the previous subsection regarding why migrants choose different destinations. Migrants moving to Western countries or urban Ghana, the destinations where men account for the majority, attract predominantly migrants that move for economic reasons such as work or education. In contrast, rural regions, that attract relatively more women, are the destination of migrants that move for social reasons, and in particular marriage.

Figure 6: The motives for migration differ significantly between men and women



Source: Author's computation based on GLSS7 data

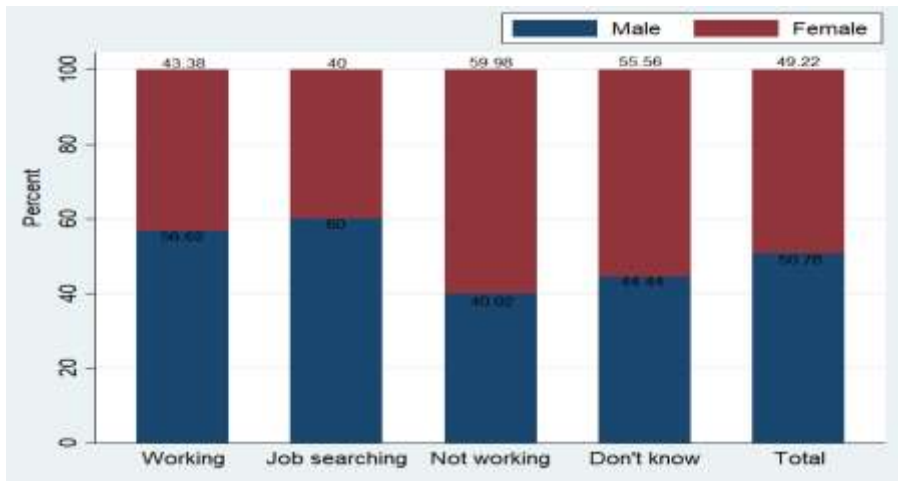
### 3.3. Differences in migration outcomes of men and women: Further indirect evidence on reasons for migration

In the last descriptive section we look at different outcomes of migration that can inform us on the reasons for migration and how they differ by gender. We look in particular at the employment status and remittances, a proxy for income, by migrants. Being employed and able to pay high and regular remittances could be indicative of having migrated for predominantly economic reasons and thus provide further evidence on potential differences between male and female migrants.

As mentioned before it is important to keep in mind that this data is based on answers given by the migrants' families, not by the migrants themselves. This can potentially bias the data. For instance, employment conditions of the migrants may or may not be accurate especially if the migrants do not want relatives back home to know that they work in order not to put too high economic demands on them. It could also be that as of the time of the survey, the respondent provided responses based on information that they had about the migrant a couple months prior to survey. However, they were unaware of any changes about the employment status of the migrant as of the time of survey.

With this in mind, Figure 7 shows us in line with our previous evidence that male migrants are more likely to work or look for work. Men account for about 56% to 60% of this group. Women, on the other hand, make up about 60% of the group that is explicitly not working, which means that they also do not look for a job. This is further evidence that while men and women are equally likely to migrate, men are more likely to move for economic reasons such as trade shocks and thus more likely to reap the gains from trade.

*Figure 7: Men are more likely to work or look for work after migrating*

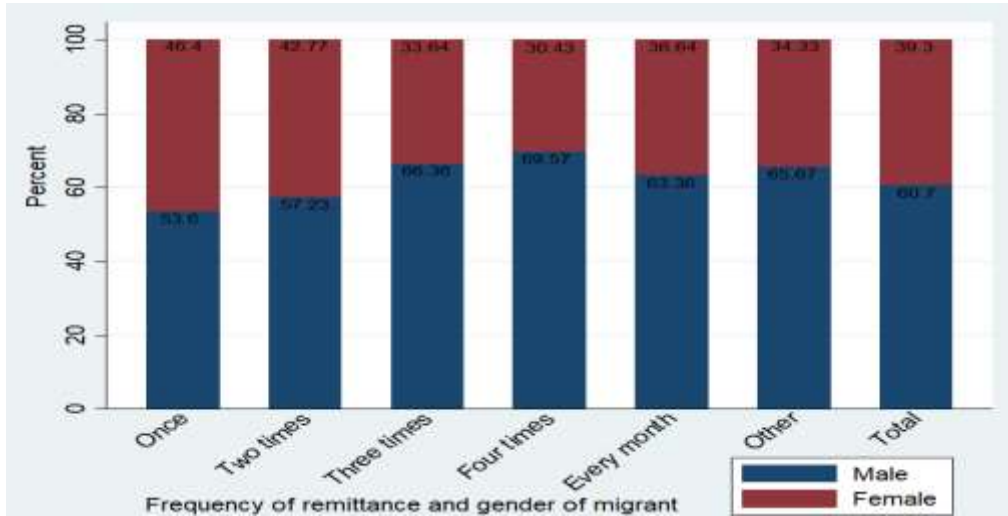


*Source: Authors' computations based on GLSS7 data*

*Author's computation based on GLSS7 data*

Closely related to the employment status is the amount and frequency of remittances. Accordingly, Figure 8 shows that men account for 61% of remittances sent which suggests that male migrants have higher incomes. Some studies have shown that although male migrants send higher remittances to their relatives compared to their female counterparts, females' remittances are more frequent than those of males. In the GLSS7, recipient households were asked to indicate the number times that they had received remittances from the relatives who migrated in the past twelve months. The results in Figure 8 contradict the observation in the literature as males send remittances more frequently than females.

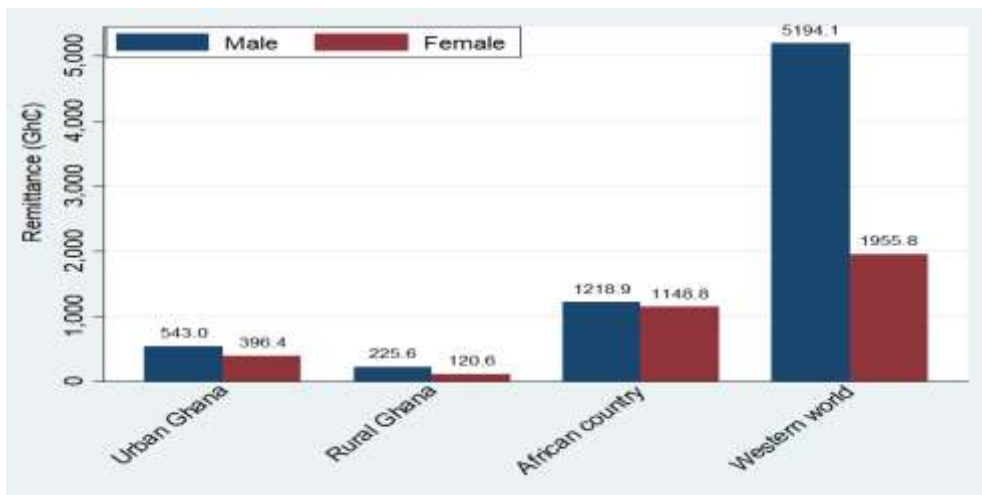
Figure 8: Men send remittances more frequently



Source: Authors' computation based on GLSS7 data

The data also shows that the remittances sent by men tend to be higher as can be seen from figure 9. While there is quite some variation in the level of remittances across migration destinations with migrants in Western countries sending by far the highest remittances, men consistently transfer higher average remittances. In Western countries the average remittance amount of male migrants is nearly three times that of females. In sum, male migrants send remittances more frequently and higher amounts. This supports our conclusions from the previous subsections that men are more likely to move for economic reasons and thus respond better to trade shocks than women.

Figure 9: Men tend to send higher remittances



Source: Authors' computation based on GLSS7 data

#### 4. Conclusion

In this note, we have shown gender-specific differences in geographical mobility using survey data from Ghana. In particular, we have provided both direct and indirect evidence that men's migration decisions are more likely to be driven by economic motives such as work or education, while women's migration decisions are more likely to be driven by social motives such as marriage or family reunion.

Differences in geographical mobility are important when it comes to adjustment to region-specific shocks such as those induced by trade. As import competition and export opportunities tend to fall on a subset of industries only and as industries cluster regionally, an efficient response to a trade shock might imply moving across regions. If women are less likely to do so, their gains from trade are likely to be smaller than the gains accruing to men.

While this note provides useful and suggestive stylized facts, future research should estimate more rigorously if there are indeed differences between men and women regarding spatial adjustments to trade shocks. It would also be useful to complement this evidence from Ghana with analyses from other countries to exclude the possibility that our findings are driven by country-specific characteristics.

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