



INTI Preparatory
Actions 2005

“Integration of Female Migrant Domestic Workers: Strategies for Employment and Civic Participation”

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

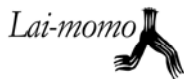
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UNESCO AMPHITHEATRE
University of Nicosia

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**Closing International Conference of the Project: "Integration of Female
Migrant Domestic Workers: Strategies for Employment and Civic
Participation"**

UNESCO AMPHITHEATRE
University of Nicosia, Cyprus

On February 28th, 2008, the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) in cooperation with the University of Nicosia (Intercollege), organized the closing International Conference for the Project: "Integration of Female Migrant Domestic Workers: Strategies for Employment and Civic Participation", funded by the European Commission, INTI Preparatory Actions 2005.

During the conference the need for the development of an integration model that responds to the particular needs of female migrant domestic workers in Europe, was addressed and explored through the active participation of NGO representatives, policy makers from both a local and an EU level, public authorities, representatives of international and local migrant organizations, experts in the field of migration and gender studies, as well as representatives from the five partner European countries: Cyprus, Spain, Italy, Greece and Germany.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Nicos Peristianis, Chairperson of MIGS and President of the Council of the University of Nicosia, gave a brief overview of the project outlining its main aim and objectives and highlighting the problematic situation of female migrant domestic workers in Cyprus. Following this introduction, Mr. Vincent Catot *EC Representative-JLS, INTI/Community Actions-Integration* talked about the European Fund for the Integration of Third-country nationals and the new funding opportunities for specific projects as these relate to the integration of third country nationals.

The event was divided into three plenary sessions. During the first session Dr. Maria Kontos¹ gave an overview of the project *FeMiPoI* that aims to analyze the impact of

¹ Dr. Maria Kontos, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Social Research at the J.W. Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main, Coordinator of the EU project "Integration of Female Immigrants in

integration policies on the position of migrant women within EU countries over the last decade, and on this basis formulate recommendations for appropriate policy that fosters their integration and produces greater social cohesion. A crucial issue she raised was that of the meaning of the work place and working conditions for integration processes, particularly with regard to the care of children. The need to professionalize the care sector was highlighted and emphasized.

This session continued with a presentation of the research results of the project, which aimed to map the situation of Female Migrant Domestic Workers in all countries involved and a number of policy recommendations were presented by each partner country representative.

Mone Spindler representing the German team² indicated that migrant women arriving in Germany to work as domestic or care workers are not supported by any political strategy for integration. She highlighted the fact that the regulation measures that had been adopted by the German Government were unsuccessful as they failed to take into account the needs of the employees as well as employers Ms Tatiana Di Federico representing the Italian team³ similarly emphasized that the majority of domestic workers who are employed in care sector rely on an informal and irregular regime because of the inability of the welfare system to respond with economic resources or public structures to the needs of families, and because of the current immigration law, "Bossi Fini Law", which imposes strict regulations for migrant workers.

With regards to the Cypriot context, MIGS Research Associate, Margarita Zervidou, gave a general overview of the situation in Cyprus. She explained that migration policy in Cyprus is based on the "guest workers system" meaning that the government considers migrant populations as temporary. She highlighted that there is no state policy for the integration of migrants in general, much less a state policy for the integration of female migrant domestic workers. Following her speech, Mr.

Labour market and Society; Policy Assessment and Policy Recommendations" (FeMiPol), 6th Framework Program, (2006-2008), and Lecturer at the J.W. GoetheUniversity, Frankfurt/Main

² ISIS - Institute Fur Soziale Infrastruktur, Germany

³ Lai Momo Cooperative, Italy

Dimitris Parsanoglou researcher of ANTIGONE⁴ outlined the informality of domestic labour which is a growing phenomenon in Greece, in addition to the work overload and exploitation that most domestic workers are subjected to. Finally, in relation to the Spanish context, Esther Olivier⁵ mentioned that the main characteristics of the migration regime including the fact that employment contracts may be either oral or written, there is no insurance against unemployment, and that in many cases female migrant domestic workers have academic qualifications that are not recognized by the Spanish authorities.

Overall, the research findings in all the partner countries demonstrated that there is a general lack of control mechanisms as well as a legislative framework regulating the working conditions of female migrant domestic workers. This significant policy gap makes it difficult, if not impossible, for female migrant domestic works to access civic participation rights.

The second plenary session presentations were given by keynote speakers representing migrant organizations. These included Charito Basa, Chairperson of the Filipino Women's Council, Migrant Organization in Rome, Fe Jusay, Coordinator of the Women's Programme of the Commission for Filipino Migrant Workers (CFMW) and Mercedita Canillas representative of KASAPI- HELLAS Organization of Filipino Migrants in Greece.

Ms. Basa focused on the first research study undertaken by the Filipino Women's Council, entitled 'Me, Us and Them: Realities and Illusions of Filipina Domestic Workers'. The research, which was conducted using focus group discussions with domestic workers and interviews with employers, aimed at investigating the multifaceted contribution of Filipina domestic workers to Italian families and society, understanding why these women decided to leave their families in the Philippines, and suggesting strategies to address the problems identified in the research.

Ms. Jusay on the other hand, focused her speech on the growing demand for migrant domestic work in private EU households, pointing out that by employing migrant domestic workers, EU women are able to participate in the labor market. Ironically,

⁴ ANTIGONE -Information and Documentation Centre on racism, ecology, peace and non violence, Greece

⁵ CREA - University of Barcelona, Spain

she emphasized the invisible status of these migrant women, despite their significant contribution to the productive economy, since they are restricted to the private sphere of the home which is exempt from protection laws on working conditions.

Ms. Cannillas discussed the current situation of migrants in Greece, and presented KASAPI's activities as examples of best practice to overcome the lack of empowerment often experienced by migrants due to lack of unity amongst them.

Finally, Mr. Doros Polykarpou representing KISA-*Action for Equality, Support, Antiracism* concluded the session by offering a discussion on the contradiction inherent in integrating female migrant domestic workers in Cyprus. He emphasized the necessity for the integration of migrants in Cypriot society and how the governments has hitherto ignored its obligations and commitments in this respect. It was highlighted that these women are subjected to multiple forms of discrimination.

In the third and last plenary session the conclusions and recommendation strategies resulting from the project were presented and discussed among the participants, following four workshops which were moderated by team members and enriched by the views of the conference participants. The workshops focused on civic participation, employment issues, feminization of migration, and issues of representation.

Following the workshops, Dr. Nicos Trimikliniotis⁶ discussed the non-existent integration policy for domestic workers in Cyprus. More specifically, he presented what he considers to be the key characteristics of the Cyprus immigration-integration conundrum, the failure of the Cyprus immigration/integration model and how EU accession has had contradictory effects. He focused particularly on the question of female migration in Cyprus drawing on the findings of the aforementioned project, FeMiPol, and finally, sketched out what he considers to be the pointers of a future policy and an anti-racist, anti-sexist politics for the movements.

⁶ Assistant Professor, Director of Centre of the Study of Migration, Inter-ethnic and Labour Relations Scientific Director of Cyprus National Focal Point (RAXEN) and FEMIPOL, University of Nicosia

Josie Christodoulou, the Project Coordinator then proceeded to briefly explain the policy recommendations on an EU level as suggested by the project team, which were focused on gendering migration and integration policy. An issue which aroused the audience's interest was the absence on any reference to female migrants as a distinct category of labour migrants. Thus, a major recommendation was that gender mainstreaming should be integrated in all migration policies in an inclusive way based on the special needs of migrant women without perpetuating gender stereotypes that other gender equality policies are trying to combat. Other recommendations made included the following: the urgency of addressing the precarious legality of female migrant domestic workers' residence and employment status; the need to institutionalize job security and workers' rights for female migrant domestic workers and combat those conditions of employment that undermine the legally binding nature and implementation of workers' rights; the prerequisite of introducing language and orientation courses for female migrant domestic workers which should include Human Rights and Labour Rights courses, Civic Participation courses, Migrant orientation courses and Gender courses.

Finally, the conference came to a close with the screening of the German documentary entitled 'Domestic Workers: In foreign Daily Life' directed by Petra Valentin and subtitled especially for this event. The film addressed the experiences and feelings of German, Filipino, Polish and Peruvian migrant women, and looked at their personal development, the decisions they have had to make, their self-confidence, vulnerability, sense of humour and the pain of leaving their families.

Report of Workshop Issues of representation: "Reveiling" or "distorting" the face?

Facilitators: Mone Spindler (ISIS) & Llanquiray Painemal (Respect Berlin)

Rapporteur: Mone Spindler

After a short introduction round the workshop facilitators gave examples for why modes of representation seem key issues in the development and realization of political strategies for the improvement of the situation of female migrant domestic workers: The question "How are female migrant domestic workers represented in the debate?" already contains a contentious representation and leads directly into the difficult issue of representation. In this question it is talked of female migrant domestic workers, whereas the experience of the self-organisation Respect Berlin is that most of the women do not see themselves as female migrant domestic workers but e.g. as a Ukrainian teacher in Berlin, temporarily trying to bridge her first time in Germany with cleaning jobs. However, self-organisations of Philippina women report that the women very well perceive themselves as female migrant domestic workers.

This example points to possible conflicts between the self-representation and the representation by others, bearing the danger that the actors' perspectives and their political claims are misrepresented in the discussion. But although it is of course the actors' perspectives that should count – which is far too often not the case, also in our project – it is important to stress that still there is not one "true" representation, no one "true" face which can be revealed or distorted as questioned in the title of our workshop. The actors' self-representations can differ for example across and within communities and there is the danger of misrepresenting the heterogeneity of perspectives and claims. But still there seems to be the need for representation if you want to act politically.

In order to visualise these rather abstract issues of representation these reflections were discussed based on the following visual representations of female migrant domestic workers from four political and commercial campaigns:



Based on these four images it was discussed how to deal with the named problems of representation. It was first asked who speaks in which languages in the debate and who therefore decides upon modes of representation. Second advantages & disadvantages of the particular suggested representations were strongly discussed.

Third the group started to negotiate which representations might be strategically and temporarily helpful to achieve a certain political aim. The workshop did not aim at coming to an agreement on these issues but rather contributed to raising awareness on the difficulties of representation and the need for discussion.

Report of Workshop

Employment Issues

Facilitators: Nassos Theodorides (ANTIGONE] & Dimitris Parsaniglou (ANTIGONE)

Rapporteur: Lorena Jimenez Lopez

Brief Overview

Issues

Domestic Workers labour must be recognized as work

Lack of Monitoring Agency/Welfare Agency to guarantee basic standards in workplace

Importance of Workers Rights

(Remittances were excluded from discussion)

Suggestions

Focused Primarily on Care givers

A conceptual solution would be to have a socially managed welfare agency that guarantees worker's rights, adherence to their schedules, and is subsidized by the government. If the Domestic Work sector is a public good – then the government should subsidize part of Female Migrant Domestic Worker's salary via taxation to help middle class families receive this assistance and provide an adequate level of salary for workers, an agency (whether government run, cooperative etc..) would monitor this sector and provide part time workers to fill in the days when the Female Migrant Domestic Worker's who is caring for elderly/child/disabled is off work. In this manner, care of the elderly etc... would not need to be institutionalized but remain in the home, Female Migrant Domestic Worker's would work adequate schedules and have time for rest and recreation, and agency organized shifts would eradicate the black market of domestic work

Requirements of an Agency to Monitor Domestic Work sector

Whether a cooperative, trade union or migrant organization it is necessary to ensure a single body guarantees this vulnerable groups rights. An agency that monitors Female Migrant Domestic Worker's workplace conditions, provide a means of complaining against an employer/changing employer (dependency), integrates all the stakeholders involved in this sector – (concept of Social Partnership)

Agency should have

1. the flexibility of a migrant organization with a widespread network of contacts, informality and channels of communication.
2. the rigidity and structure of a trade union to monitor, provide service to this sector efficiently
3. the capability to be effectively enforced

It is necessary for a genuine system of monitoring to be implemented for Female Migrant Domestic Worker's. It should meld the support of NGO's, support mechanisms in case of rights violations, a social movement to ameliorate the racism/discrimination which lead to violations of Female Migrant Domestic Worker's rights and increase public awareness, trade union support, advocacy service and state recognition.

Report of Workshop

Civic Participation: What does it mean

Moderators: Esther Oliver (CREA-Spain) and Itxaso Tellado (CREA- Spain)

In the "*Civic participation: what does it mean?*" workshop several issues were discussed and raised regarding civic participation with regards to the conference and project central topic "integration of female migrant domestic workers: strategies for employment and civic participation".

1. Regarding how organizations may raise awareness to the public, and how this participation is more effective, the group discussed the idea of building egalitarian dialog. This egalitarian dialog it was found to be necessary to include people from different countries and cultures that usually are not included. In addition, on egalitarian dialog it was stated that is important to value the arguments given in the dialog and not the position or role of the person speaking.

2. To the question: Which kind of participation can we promote for their civic and public participation. The answer was that education is very important and it can empower female migrant domestic workers to speak up and be active in conferences and academic fields. Therefore it is necessary to create the conditions to include them in the decision-making process.

4. The group suggested to promote self-organization of those groups traditionally excluded in order to reach recognition. For example, in Greece, Cyprus and Spain women self-organize to discuss opportunities for domestic workers.

5. The group argued that training of trainers is very important to promote anti-racist education. They suggested that it is necessary to train teachers early on so the public awareness can be increased and work from early on with children.

6. It was suggested the need to promote language opportunities to provide active participation in the country of reception.

7. Another idea was that we should build up in human rights issues to guarantee that a country is respecting the rights of domestic workers even if they are in that country temporarily.

8. The group shared the need to guarantee access to social life facilitating access to training programs like computer courses education. This way they can express themselves. We should work to give them voice.

9. The group stated the need to create support structures, effective structures to respond to risk and / or vulnerability situations that these women suffer. As a mean for later participation.

10. Finally the group reflected on the importance to work with men, migrant and not, on prevention of abusive situations.

Report of Workshop

Feminisation of Migration

Facilitators: Josie Chrostodoulou (MIGS) & Tatiana Di Frederico (Lai Momo)

Rapporteur: Hala Barbara

It could be argued that nowadays working in the destination / host country is a leading experience towards empowerment of female workers. Although in the past migrant women they just followed their partners, today they migrate themselves. According to international statistics it is estimated that around 50% of migrants are women.

The participants of this working group were mostly Filipino migrant women. As they explained the reason why women are migrating alone today, especially Filipino women, is because they tend to take risks. However, generally women are migrating because they are forced to leave and escape from troubled countries.

In the countries of origin their wages are very low and men are not capable to support their family needs. It was also stressed that it is easier for a woman to find a job in destination countries because of the demand in of domestic work. Further, although many migrant women hold a university degree the recruitment policy in their countries pose an age limit which is an obstacle for them to secure employment. Another obstacle that appears is the high unemployment rate because of the high number of population in the sending countries.

As it was earlier mentioned although migration process could be a process of empowerment for migrant women however they are still invisible and marginalized in the host societies which lead to the disempowerment of migrant women. Because of the type of employment in the care sector most migrant women are unaware of their rights.

A question was also raised with regards to the role within family life in the sending countries. Because of the increasing numbers of migration flows it was expected that families are separating in the sending countries. Although the children of migrant women are staying back home with their fathers, the families roles does not change.

According to the migrant women participated at the workshop local domestic workers or a female member of the family takes care of the children. However, the families or relatives in the sending countries they think of migrant women as heroes and that they will make a fortune to send back to their families and they often state that without migration families in the sending countries will not survive.

Furthermore, migrant women have a specific plan when deciding to migrate. That is to migrate and work abroad on a temporary basis, to save some money and go back home. However, their plans are changing during the migration process. For example they cannot save enough money to send back to their families so they stay until they save enough money. It was also discussed that the phenomenon is different within different communities, for instance, women from Peru migrate along with their children to save them from being victims of domestic violence in their domestic countries.

The suggestions of the team are the following:

- There is an urge need to set policies for integration in destination countries, once these workers choose not to return in their countries.
- The integration strategies should take a holistic approach not only social or political one.

The needs of migrant women are:

- _ Raising awareness on saving and investment.
- _ Raising awareness on the future in general.
- _ Ability and capability to make plans.
- _ Self empowerment.
- _ To be organised.
- _ To make alliances with NGOs and Trade Unions.