

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

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Study Visit in Italy November 2007 Report prepared by the INTI Team

The fifth and final study visit, organised within the framework of the project "Integration of Female Migrant Domestic Workers", took place in Bologna on the 13th and 14th of November 2007. A number of meetings with representatives from various levels of government, local and national, were organised by our Italian partners represented by LAI-MOMO and helped the INTI project team to gain insight on the situation of female migrant domestic care workers in Italy. The study visit was once again used by the team members as an opportunity to discuss the progress of the project, examine any remaining administrative issues, and juxtapose viewpoints of the different situations of female migrant domestic workers in each of the five European partner countries.

Over the course of the visit the participants met with the following representatives and Organizations:

- **Giampaolo Spettoli** - Responsible of Migrants' Service Centre - Italian Confederation Workers Trade Unions – CISL, **Alberto Schincaglia** - CISL Secretary, and **Rossano Di Federico** – Responsible for migrant domestic workers' labour contract – CISL,
http://www.cislbologna.it/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=38&Itemid=49
- **Simona Ferlini** - Migrations' Observatory of the Municipality, Province and Prefecture of Bologna,
http://www.pianoperlasalute.it/soggetti_promotori/ctss/
- **Nicola Scalabrini** (President) and **Letizia Lambertini** Mosaico Commission,
<http://www.comune.bologna.it/iperbole/composam>
- **Eros Rilievo** - Madreperla Project,
<http://serdom.comune.modena.it/madreperla.shtml>
- **Andrea Stuppini** - Responsible for the welcoming and social integration politics of the Emilia Romagna Region and **Barbara Burgalassi** - Social Politics - Emilia Romagna Region,
<http://www.emiliaromagnasociale.it/wcm/emiliaromagnasociale/pagine/assesorato.htm>
- **Raul Duranti** Zone Plans - San Pietro in Casale
- Meeting with female migrant domestic workers at San Pietro in Casale

- **Elena Vignocchi** - Project responsible of Futura Life long training centre, <http://www.cfp-futura.it/>

The information that was provided during this final successful study visit gave the team ample evidence of yet another set of effective policies for the integration of female migrant domestic workers significantly lacking within the Italian political and social framework. Generally, it was noted that the situation of migration in Italy is now changing, due to the new draft of law that will be in force in the near future. The issue of migrant domestic workers, known as 'care workers' in Italy, is considered highly important, although there is no structured approach in dealing with it, and very often attention is focused more on families' needs rather than on migrants' needs. As such, a more successful engagement with the phenomenon is expected by the whole society, both at an institutional and at a grass roots level. In particular, during the study visit it was made clear to the team that care workers in Italy are officially invisible to the Italian State, their working conditions are often precarious and their demand due to the inadequate welfare system and the rising aging population is soaring along with their exploitation.

The selection of organizations and persons visited included municipalities, a trade union, project coordinators, other regional and local authorities, as well as a few female migrant domestic workers. Nevertheless the selection did not appear to be as balanced as it had been during all previous study visits, since the decentralized governmental system in Italy allocates the responsibility of the 'integration' of migrants to the municipalities. However, it is worth noting that from the Italian perspective "regional authorities" could count as government authorities. As a result, adequate knowledge about migrant organizations in Italy as well as knowledge related to collective good practices on the part of migrants themselves was not acquired, since migrant organizations were not visited.

Quite importantly, the gender awareness that the previous study visits had introduced and strengthened were further reinforced in this final study visit, especially during the meeting with Raul Duranti Zone Plans where the team was told by a gender mainstreaming expert that in Italy there is currently a special course at a regional level aimed to improve the participation of women both socially and politically. In this context, the different gender mainstreaming processes in each partner country were discussed.

Additionally, the specific approach to gender was evident in our brief interesting meeting with two Moldavian female migrant domestic workers themselves, who, with the help of the translation of an expert working at the region's municipality, explained the precarious and often inhuman conditions of work they are subjected to by their employers. For example, the migrant women described sleeping in the kitchen of their employer's house, being on a 24 hour stand by, and in some cases not having been paid regularly.

However, as previously mentioned, this meeting was not viewed by the team as sufficient means of understanding migrants' views and their collective endeavors to challenge the Italian system. Moreover, the fact that a native social worker spoke for both these women indicated the difficulty regarding the issue of representation, as the care workers themselves hardly had the opportunity to speak. The challenge of bridging this gap was therefore highlighted.

Interestingly, most stakeholders spoke mostly about the needs of the local society rather than the needs of immigrants and especially about the needs of migrant women. For example, regarding the importance of care giving to elderly people of the Italian society, the quantity of relative courses organised by local authorities and NGOs through various educational projects for female migrant domestic care workers, left the team with the impression that the training courses favour the employers rather than the employees. In other words, the meeting with Mosaico Commission for instance, illustrated that while the courses train migrant women to become better care givers, they exclude political empowerment regarding knowledge on political rights, better working conditions or less precarious career prospects. In this light the quality of these courses in terms of providing motives for the employees are uncertain since they are not certified or recognized for purposes of employability and job development. Most likely, female migrant domestic care workers register for these courses only in order to find an employer.

In reference to the above, a major observation by the team through the discussion with the coordinators of the program Madreperla is that the municipality is an intermediary between employer and candidate (in other words the municipality finds employees willing to establish a job agreement which satisfies the needs of the employer). This kind of arrangement, however, seems to completely sidestep the issue of human and labour rights. The team was therefore concerned with questions surrounding the possible intervention of the mediator if the employer and employee agreed on the terms of a job even if the particular job was exploitative. It was made clear that no such intervention was likely, therefore the meaning of integration should not be taken for granted because its interpretations range from context to context. In the aforementioned case regarding Madreperla, integration is understood as “utilizing” female migrant domestic care workers in effective ways.

Another issue which was similarly explored in the other partner countries visited, namely Greece, Germany, Cyprus and Spain, is the common problem of isolation the female migrant domestic care workers are subjected to, principally the result of the heavy emotional dependence between the employee and the employer.

On the other hand, a more positive stance was perceived in relation to trade unions’ assistance of female migrant domestic workers in Italy. In particular the Italian Confederation Workers Trade Unions – CISL, introduced the team to a special category which exists under the sector of ‘Trade & Services’ for the protection of female migrant domestic care workers. It was noted that a domestic worker without legal documentation can still come to seek assistance. Lastly, it is not a necessary condition for migrants to become members of the trade union in order to obtain advice. This forms a contrast to Cyprus, for example, where the team’s meeting with PEO [Pancyprian Federation of Labour] confirmed that migrants are encouraged to become members in order to be offered any assistance.

Additionally, the national domestic labour contract in Italy contains many rights which is directed both to migrant and Italian workers. Specifically, there are rights for maternity leave which lasts a minimum of five months and a maximum of 8 months in certain circumstances, 13th pay, and paid holidays. In contrast, contracts of employment for female migrant domestic workers in Cyprus, for example, violate a number of domestic workers rights.

Finally, the practical difficulties imposed by the quota system and the regularisation procedure for those who already live and work without documents was clear following the announcement of the "Influx Decree". The process to obtain legal documents seems to be so complicated and inflexible that it rather "disciplines" migrants rather than integrating them. For example, even if a migrant care worker has an employer in Italy, she must go to her country of origin in order to obtain the necessary documentation from the Italian embassy or consulate to initiate the process of her legal employment. This issue instigated a discussion amongst the team related to INTI Actions in general and their need to focus on local societies and governments as well, while explaining what migrant integration means as well as why this is important for the receiving societies. This is clearly because a regularization process such as that in Italy, which produces fear, agony, is very bureaucratic and imposes extreme expenses on migrants is more likely to produce further distrust for the system and further marginalization rather than integration.

In Italy, female migrant domestic care workers seem to correspond to the labour market's need for elderly care whereas in Cyprus, they correspond to the need for child care. This comparison enabled the team to reflect critically on the increased need for child care in Cyprus and to realize that National Policies for Social Integration have failed to frame child care as a priority field. The availability of cheap migrant labour makes this problem less visible. Perhaps the need for elderly care labour, as in Italy, will be one of the future social problems in Cyprus.

In conclusion, this final study visit to Italy helped the team realize that withering welfare systems in Europe induce the need for permanent care labour, and thus female migrant domestic care workers must be seen as permanent and not as seasonal workers. Crucially INTI actions must also focus on the need to define "integration" on the basis of human rights otherwise the term might be used to name (and normalize) policies and practices that violate human rights.

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