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“ I THOUGHT I WAS APPLYING
AS A CARE GIVER ”

Combating Trafficking in Women for Labour
Exploitation in Domestic Work in Greece



TRAFFICKING FOR LABOUR EXPLOITATION IN DOMESTIC WORK IN GREECE

Domestic work is one of the main employment sectors for female migrants in Greece. The actual number of migrant domestic workers is a matter of debate since a lot of this activity continues to take place in the “grey economy”. Yet it’s estimated that migrant domestic workers in Greece account for more than 68.000 persons and originate from different states, most notably Albania, the Philippines, Bulgaria, Moldova, Ukraine, Romania, as well as different African states. Although migrant organizations have been reporting and protesting against gross violations of labour and human rights of migrant domestic workers in Greece for decades, it continues to be a phenomenon that has been silenced from public debate, policy making and academic discussion.

This project addresses the issue of trafficking in women for the purpose of forced labour and labour exploitation with a particular focus on migrant domestic workers.

OUR OBJECTIVES

- To undertake policy analysis and fieldwork on the Greek case study
- To map the phenomenon of trafficking for domestic work in Greece
- To identify recent legal and policy changes and challenges for future policies against trafficking for domestic work at the European, national and local levels

RESEARCH

In the framework of the project “Combating Trafficking in Women for Labour Exploitation in Domestic Work” (HOME/2012/ISEC/AG/TH/B/4000003900) the phenomenon of trafficking for labour exploitation was analysed in four countries: Cyprus, Greece, Lithuania and Spain

The Centre for Gender Studies (CGS) of Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences undertook fieldwork on the Greek case, which included analysis of the general anti-trafficking legal and policy framework, addressing the specific challenges that arise in the field of domestic work, documenting the perspectives and activities of migrant organizations, labour unions, feminist groups and NGOs and documenting cases of trafficking for labour exploitation in Greece. The research included both desk top research and fieldwork, including interviews with policy makers, representatives of migrant organizations and domestic workers.

PANTEION UNIVERSITY OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCES

(www.panteion.gr), which is located in Athens – Greece, has a long history of research and

teaching in social and political sciences, including substantive research projects in FP6, FP7 and HORIZON 2020. Today it consists of nine academic departments, employs approximately 250 members of academic staff and 21,000 (undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD) students.

THE CENTRE FOR GENDER STUDIES

(<http://www.genderstudies-panteion.gr/en/>) was created under the interdepartmental programme on “Gender and Equality Studies in Political and Social Sciences” (<http://www.genderpanteion.gr/gr/index.php>). In 2003 in order to cover teaching and research needs in the fields of gender in social policy and policy analysis of gender equality at the international, European, national and local levels, it became one of the research units of the Department of Social Policy. The Centre for Gender Studies has coordinated two FP7 research projects: MIG@NET on “Transnational Digital Networks, Migration and Gender” (<http://www.mignetproject.eu/>) during the period 2010-2013; and GeMIC “Gender, Migration and Intercultural Interactions in the Mediterranean and South East Europe: An Interdisciplinary Perspective” (<http://www.gemic.eu/>) during the period 2008-2011.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Live-in and live out domestic work:

There are significant differences between live-in and live-out domestic workers. Live-out domestic workers usually have multiple employers and although their work is largely precarious (without official contracts, specific timetables and payment) and depends mostly on informal bargaining, agreements and arrangements between employers and employees, it tends to offer migrant women a sense of autonomy and

control over their lives. On the contrary, the live-in domestic sector in Greece, which is equally precarious in terms of payment, working hours, tasks and rights, scarcely offers opportunities for autonomous employment and independent work. Live-in domestic workers tend to experience much more pressure to work overtime without extra payment, to offer additional services than the ones originally agreed and accept degrading living and working conditions in order to secure their survival and basic income. Most of the cases of trafficking concern migrant domestics who work as live-ins.

Silencing trafficking for domestic work:

In public discourse and policy making, trafficking has been linked mainly to foreign affairs and national security rather than to forced labour. The framing of trafficking as a national security issue has led to an overwhelming emphasis on criminality and prostitution rather than on domestic work. As a result, trafficking for domestic work has been silenced for many decades and the migrant domestic workers who had been trafficked to Greece during the decades of the 1990s and 2000s were neither documented nor protected. Recently cases of trafficking for labour exploitation were brought to justice, but they were linked to agricultural work and to beggary.

A real phenomenon:

There are several reports of migrant women who have been trafficked to Greece to work as domestic workers and stories of employers and employment agencies for domestic workers that withhold payments, personal and travelling documents, as well as acting violently and denying food to the victims. Although several NGOs and women's migrant groups' representatives have received such complaints and were willing to take the cases to court, the victims felt threatened and refused to collaborate with the authorities and testify against the perpetrators.

Non-identification of victims:

The levels of non-identification of domestic workers who fall victims of trafficking are very high precisely because of the absence of regulatory mechanisms. Employers and trafficking networks put pressure and exercise violence on migrant women who are de facto illegal and are forced to work without rights and recognition. The threat of deportation -much more than direct force- plays a crucial role in forcing domestic workers, especially live-ins, to accept their conditions of servitude.

At the border:

One of the main problems with Greek anti-trafficking policies is the lack of effective procedures and mechanisms for the identification of potential trafficking victims at the Greek borders. Since Greece is a transit, as well as destination country, this initial identification may prove to be crucial. Independently of the official legislation and formal commitment to anti-trafficking principles, border protection prevails over the human rights of trafficking victims. Moreover the indicators used in order to identify victims of trafficking for labour exploitation vary among different services and agencies. Closer collaboration between migrant organizations, labour unions, NGOs and government agencies is still lacking.

Trafficking as a labour issue:

Domestic work has not been but partially addressed as a specific labour issue in national legislation. Domestic work has been regulated mainly within the National General Collective Agreements. An issue that seriously hinders the effective protection of domestic workers is the family asylum, according to which the home is exempted from inspections by the Labour Inspectorate Body or the Social Insurance Institute or the Trade Unions. So, even if a

domestic worker goes to court against her/his employers under general labour legislation as far as the definition of labour rights and exploitation are concerned, effective and direct control of working conditions is not possible. This is not only because trafficking for labour exploitation is not legally defined as a violation of the labour legislation, but as an autonomous criminal act that goes under the Penal Code, but also because of the “private” character of the specific work.

Economic crisis and domestic work:

The economic crisis has reduced demand for domestic work, but it continues to be one of the main employment sectors for migrants, especially migrant women. Although there was a sharp decrease in demand for cleaners because of rising unemployment and drop of income, the demand for care services for the elderly and children continued and in some cases has risen. This is a direct result of the austerity measures that undermined public care structures at the national and local level. Thus trafficking of migrants for domestic work continues to be an important issue for Greece, which needs to be brought into the forefront of public debate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Greece should:

- Ratify the ILO Convention 189 on domestic work.
- Support migrant women’s associations and labour rights groups in order to put pressure on employers to respect labour legislation, to raise awareness of trafficking for domestic work and empower migrant domestic workers.
- Establish effective mechanisms for the identification of trafficking victims for domestic work at the Greek borders, including information campaigns for migrant women, administrative and police personnel, training of personnel, and providing access to migrant women’s and feminist NGOs to border monitoring processes.
- Establish common identification criteria for different government authorities and NGOs dealing with anti-trafficking and protection of victims, which will include trafficking for labour exploitation and domestic work in particular.
- Promote cooperation between anti-trafficking authorities, including police, judicial authorities, and migrant women’s organizations in order to promote mutually beneficial framework for the combating of labour violations in domestic work and care.
- Enforce stricter controls of employment agencies and encourage the creation of common employment agencies run by migrant and Greek domestic workers.
- Promote and encourage public debate on trafficking for labour exploitation and challenge the culture that silences human and labour rights violations in the “private” domestic sphere.

COORDINATORS

UNIVERSITY OF NICOSIA

PARTNERS



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With the financial support of the Prevention of and Fight against Crime Programme of the European Union

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