

Seminar Report

Gender Mainstreaming in Migration Policy and Practice 21 June 2010, Journalists House, Nicosia

The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) in cooperation with the Commissioner of Administration in Cyprus, organised a seminar entitled “Gender Mainstreaming in Migration Policies and Practice”, which took place on 21st June 2010, at the Journalists House, in Nicosia, Cyprus. The seminar was organized within the framework of the [PROGRESS Programme](#) of the European Commission, which is established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in employment, social affairs and equal opportunities, as set out in the [Social Agenda](#).

The aim of the seminar was to expose and explore issues affecting migrant women in the European Union and Cyprus, and to create a platform for discussion between migrant women, NGOs and policy makers for successfully mainstreaming gender in migration and integration policies in Cyprus.

The seminar hosted guest speakers with expertise on the issues of gender and migration coming from diverse backgrounds including Nelli Kambouri, Research Fellow of the Centre for Gender Studies at Panteion University; Simon Tonelli, Head of Migration Division of the Council of Europe; Sylvia Ekra-Lopez, Gender Officer at the International Organization for Migration Headquarters in Geneva; and Maro Michaelides, Secretary of the Committee of Experts for the Integration of Migrants in Cyprus. Ms. Iliana Nicolaou, Commissioner for Administration, opened the seminar.

In her opening address, Ms. Nicolaou expressed the need to explore and analyse the field of accumulated barriers faced by migrant women, such as gender-based discrimination, racism, exclusion and inequalities in public life. ‘Despite the dominant presence of women in migration, until recently their role has been entirely neglected. Hence, there is an urgent need to develop a true gendered understanding of the causes, processes and consequences of migration. Women consist half of the migrant workers population in the EU and sometimes dominate certain migration waves.’ stressed Ms. Nicolaou.

Key note speaker, Nelli Kambouri, in her presentation entitled “Gender and Migration in South Europe: Policies, Strategies, Problematizations”, highlighted the gender issues and concerns related to migration through an analysis of migration policies and strategies in Southern Europe. Within the European policy framework Ms Kambouri stressed the dichotomy between legal and illegal migration pursued in both national and EU legislations. She also emphasized the gender neutral approach and language in all EU texts and the lack of any EU policies for migrant women’s rights. This results not only in silencing issues of gender and women’s rights but also reinforces negative stereotypes about migrant women. In policy documents where women are mentioned, it is usually within the framework of ‘vulnerable groups’ and they are not addressed as autonomous agents.

Simon Tonelli, Head of Migration Division of the Council of Europe, outlined several issues in relation to female migration and migrant women that are currently the focus of the Council of Europe. These issues include gender mainstreaming, integration of migrant women, violence-including domestic violence,

trafficking, domestic work, and migrant women as agents for development. In addition, Mr. Tonelli referred to the role of the European Social Charter, in which there is no explicit reference to migrant women, but it does guarantee rights on the equal treatment and opportunities for women and men in employment. He also referred to the role of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), which is an independent body of the Council of Europe which integrates gender perspective in its work and migrant women have been identified as a vulnerable group in the context of racism, discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance.

Sylvia Ekra-Lopez, representing the International Organization for Migration in Geneva, pointed out that, on a global level, the number of female international migrants is today nearly equal to the number of male migrants. However, the concept of feminisation of migration is a term that is widely used and sometimes wrongly used as women already made up almost half the numbers migrating over five decades ago. What has changed, in past decades is the change in migration patterns whereby more and more women are migrating independently, and as main income-earners. Although present in all types of migrant categories, the majority of migrant women are found in family reunification, labour and irregular flows. Ekra-Lopez pointed out that women are present in all migration categories but emphasized that in each category, migrant women tend to face more obstacles and sources of discrimination than the average male migrant due to the modes of entry open to them and the types of jobs they perform. Foreign and women status frequently combine with race and ethnicity issues to make many migrant women “triple disadvantaged” and most likely to find employment in marginal, unregulated, and poorly paid jobs. Another issue that Ekra-Lopez addressed was the multi-factored vulnerability of migrant women to violence including domestic violence and FGM primarily due to their status as women, reflecting gender inequalities both in origin and destination societies, as well as their status as foreigners. She emphasized that both migration and integration are gendered processes and that migration policies must offer equal opportunities to both women and men to reduce women’s vulnerability and to optimize the positive development impact of migration in communities of origin. To this end, a legal status and employment are essential but not sufficient. She also stressed that migrant women need to be empowered in order for migration and integration to be successful and positive experiences.

In her presentation, Maro Michaelides, Secretary, Committee of Experts for the Integration of Migrants, stated that the integration of migrants in receiving countries like Cyprus, as one of the biggest challenges and priorities of Member States of the European Union. She continued to give an overview of the Cyprus government’s integration strategy, which is focused on adopting and harmonizing national legislation and policy measures with European Directives and guidelines as well as international/European conventions. She pointed out that following a decision by the Council of Ministers, a Committee of Experts was established chaired by the Ministry of Interior that recently drafted a National Action Plan for the Integration of Migrants for the period 2010-2012, which consists of eight priority areas including information and service provision, labour inclusion, education, health, civic participation, among others. Within this framework, she stressed the importance of developing concrete measures aimed at addressing the specific needs of migrant women including provision childcare services, flexible working timetables, friendlier working conditions, and political and cultural participation and representation in public life.

In the discussion that followed, audience members emphasized the need for policy mechanisms to be established to allow for undocumented migrant women to regain legal status. Current policy on integration does not foresee such mechanisms despite estimates of over 30,000 undocumented migrant

workers in Cyprus. Another issue that was raised was the limited duration and inflexibility of employment contracts for migrant workers (currently fixed to a four year period) that weaken any efforts and longer-term integration of migrant workers in society.

Over 45 participants attended the event including MPs, representatives of NGOs, government departments and agencies, and other relevant stakeholders, who stressed the significance of the seminar as a useful tool for further policy formulation, precisely because it opened the space for identification of challenges and opportunities ahead.