



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

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Study Visit in Berlin 13- 14 February 2007 Report prepared by the INTI Team

The second study visit in Germany was successfully concluded in February, 2007. A number of meetings with key governmental officials and civil society representatives helped the INTI project team gain insight on the situation of female migrant domestic workers in Germany. In addition, the study visit was used by the team as an opportunity to discuss the progress of the project, examine administrative issues and, emphasize comparative viewpoints of the different situations of female migrant domestic workers in each of the four European partner countries.

Over the course of these two days the participants met with representatives of:

- Elke Pohl, Referent of the Berlin Senate's Commissioner for Integration and Migration <http://www.berlin.de/lb/intmig/>
- Emilija Mitrovic, United Services Union; Vereinigte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft ver.di <http://besondere-dienste.hamburg.verdi.de/ansprechpartner>
- Hans-Joachim von Kondratowitz, German Centre for Gerontology, Berlin: <http://www.dza.de/>
- Juliane Karakayali (PhD student, Berlin)
- Zagaz, Feminist group, Fighting for Rights, Access, Legalisation and Against Racism and Illegalisation, Berlin.
- Margit Gottstein, Federal Government's Commissioner for Migration, Refugees, and Integration, Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration, www.integrationsbeauftragte.de
- Ulla Jelpke, Member of the Bundestag for the parliamentary group THE LEFT: DIE LINKE, <http://www.bundestag.de/mdb/bio/J/jelpku0.html>
- Elisabeth Faber, Federal Syndicate for Service Providers for Households and Families: BAG Dienstleistungsunternehmen Haushalt und Familie, Giessen, <http://www.bag-haushalt-familie.de/frameset.html>
- Helen Schwenken, University of Kassel: <http://www.uni-kassel.de/fb5/globalization/html/mitarb.htm#4>
- Respect Network Berlin, <http://www.respect-netz.de/pages/frame.htm>

The selection of organizations for this study visit was quite balanced, with both NGOs and governmental departments, giving the project team the possibility to discern contradictions about how each stakeholder perceives the issues of employment and civic participation for female migrant domestic workers.

In this respect, the dialogues with migrant women, during the meetings with NGOs such as the Zagaz and the Respect Network Berlin, were especially valued by the project team, as the women thoroughly described the specific obstacles they face in achieving social participation through trade unions. Most importantly, through these meetings, the team had the opportunity to hear the voices of migrant women themselves.

During the study visit, the team looked forward to learning about the migration policies in Germany, the general situation of female migrant domestic workers, the types of actions that are being carried out by German entities and NGOs to support female migrant domestic workers, and finally the significant points of contrast between the German situation and the situation in the other partner countries, namely Cyprus, Italy, Spain and Greece.

The framework of the German migration model is quite complex and problematic particularly in relation to undocumented migration, as it was learned that the majority of female migrant domestic workers are, in fact, undocumented. This however, makes them especially vulnerable to marginalisation and therefore to exploitation.

According to the representative of the Berlin Senate's Commissioner for Integration and Migration in Germany and Berlin, Berlin is a city of a population of 3.5 million and has a high unemployment rate which has reached 17% for nationals and 40% for migrants. This of course excludes the undocumented migrants which seem to reach high numbers but no official statistics exist.

As mentioned above, in Germany the majority of female migrant domestic workers are undocumented. Domestic work is thus not officially considered as part of the labour force, even though it constitutes a large sector of it; hence the contradictory situation female migrant domestic workers find themselves in, who live and work in Germany yet are not documented statistically.

Research shows that in Spring 2000 7,6% of all private households in Germany employed domestic workers, which equals 2, 9 million employments.

The United Services Union mentioned that those who work as domestic workers [and in the sex industry] are not documented, have no contracts of employment that protect them, do not pay social security, and have no health insurance to speak of. The United Services Union also explained that due to the fact that for the last 30 years German women have quite successfully fought for gender equality and equal employment opportunities, there are now new discussions on the reconciliation of family and professional life, but the role of men is still excluded from these debates. Due to the above, there is demand for domestic work and, as was observed during the study visit in Greece¹, female migrant domestic workers have to a great extent replaced unpaid formal work in the household. However, this had not changed the nature of traditional gender roles in Germany but rather has served to reinforce and perpetuate them.

Moreover, according to the Italian and Spanish project partners, the German migration model differs from their countries in that the German government does not offer undocumented female migrant domestic workers any prospect for legalisation. This situation further highlights the barriers to female migrant domestic workers' political representation. It was also noted that in Germany there is no strong civil society or other means to support female migrant domestic workers by exerting pressure on the government to undertake measures for the drafting of new legislation and policies addressing this group.

¹ Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies http://www.medinstgenderstudies.org/wp/?attachment_id=208

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As such, there is little interest on the part of trade unions to directly represent female migrant domestic workers; they are simply not their focus and this is largely due to the structure of these organisations. Trade unions are primarily funded by their workers, funds which migrant domestic workers cannot provide them with. Consequently, this marginalisation results in this target group's vulnerability to exploitation.

The team was furthermore informed, albeit in rather general terms, about the complicated situation of migration in Germany and the proposal of the National Plan for Integration. The National Plan is coordinated by the Federal Government's Commission for Migration, Refugees and Integration and divided into ten working groups through which each governmental authority is responsible for specific actions. The National Plan for Integration is the result of a collective work from the state, federations, civil society, trade unions, and migrants themselves. The representative from the Commission for Migration, Refugees and Integration stated that the National Plan was drafted in such a way so as to include gender mainstreaming and thus make it gender specific. It should be noted that in contrast, for example, to the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion in Cyprus, the German National Plan includes migrant women as a distinct group whereas in the Cyprus NAP migrant women are all but absent. However, the themes related to migrant women currently covered in the National Plan are limited to forced marriage, domestic violence, and social issues, such as education and counseling, and does not cover any issues of employment and civic participation. Unfortunately, the representative from the Commission could not elaborate further or answer any questions related to female migrant domestic workers since the working groups related to migrant women are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice.

Significantly, even though the National Plan for Integration in Germany has a gender focus, this does not include female migrant domestic workers in particular, hence the social invisibility and thereby non-accountability of these women. It is worth noting that the representative of the Federal Government's Commissioner for Migration, Refugees, and Integration, reported that illegal migration is not at all covered in the National Plan for Integration, thereby effectively excluding the majority of female migrant domestic workers in Germany.

Overall, the information provided on our specific target group fell short of the expectations of the team, as it seemed that many governmental departments displayed little or no awareness regarding the existence of female migrant domestic workers in Germany. The team thus found it challenging at times to focus their questions on the project's main issue.

Similarly to Greece, migrant women living and working in Germany did not come up as a subject of discussion during the meetings until the participants posed the necessary specific questions related to this group. This constitutes an important finding in itself as it points to the German authorities' lack of specific concern for female migrant domestic workers, despite their increasing numbers. In other words, governmental departments in Germany have no policies or strategies in relation to female migrant domestic workers, which in turn exacerbates the problem of lack of proper information in the form of statistics available for this group and the exploitative situations they are thus particularly vulnerable to.

The diversity of the meetings, the information obtained in relation to the situation of migrant women in Germany, can be used as a comparative tool with other partner countries, to juxtapose issues of integration and possibilities for policies and strategies. This can in turn be used to acknowledge the employment and living conditions of female migrant domestic workers and aim towards specific policies and strategies for their civic participation.

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In addition, through this study visit it became clearer to the team that civil society can give responses to migrant women's needs, legal or illegal, through the organization of actions and initiatives from the migrant women's movement and from other social movements.

To sum up, the study visit in Germany provided the project team with a lot of food for thought and valuable information on the issue of migration in general. The invisibility of female migrant domestic workers was one of the main conclusions drawn by the team in relation to the issue of migration in Germany; an issue that will be highlighted in the following activities of the project with an aim to effectively address it.

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