



INTEGRATION OF FEMALE MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS: STRATEGIES FOR EMPLOYMENT AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

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Study Visit in Athens 13- 14 December 2006 **Report prepared by the INTI Team**

The first study visit in Greece was successfully concluded in December 14, 2006. The meetings with a variety of key people coming both governmental officials and civil society representatives helped the INTI team to get a general overview of the situation of female migrant domestic workers in Greece. The team also used this opportunity to meet and discuss the progress of the project and other administrative issues as well as issues in relation to the research currently take place in all partner countries.

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

- General Labour Confederation of Greece – Migrant Workers Secretariat (<http://www.gsee.gr/>).
- Ministry of Interior – Department of Residence Permits (<http://www.ypes.gr/>)
- Ministry of Interior – Department of Social Integration (<http://www.ypes.gr/>)
- General Secretariat for Gender Equality (affiliated to the Ministry of the Interior) (<http://www.isotita.gr/>)
- Pan-Hellenic Network of Migrant Women (<http://www.migrant.gr/>)
- Hellenic Migration Policy Institute (<http://www.imepo.gr/>)
- Centre of Gender Studies and Research (Diotima) (<http://www.genderissues.org.gr/>)
- KASAPI (Philippino community)
- Representatives of the European Network of Women (NGO) (<http://www.enow.gr/index.asp>) and
- Athens Feminist Centre & Global March for Women.

The basic observation of the study visit was that in Greece, similar to other Member States, female migrant domestic workers have, to a great extent, replaced unpaid formal work in the house. However this has not changed the nature of traditional gender roles but rather serves to reinforce and perpetuate them.

During the Study Visit the team was informed about the legal, social, cultural and economic aspects of the life of migrants, and of female migrant women and female domestic workers from non-EU countries in particular. During all the meetings we were given a short description of the migratory model currently followed in Greece. Migrant women did not come up as a subject of discussion during the meetings issue until the participants posed the necessary gender specific questions mostly to governmental officials

The conditions of employment for migrant domestic work in Greece, as the General Labour Confederation of Greece [L.C.G] explained, are very difficult. Participants were informed about the 1963 Migration Law and specifically about social insurance stamps. In order for a migrant to be a legal resident of Greece the only condition is that s/he [or the employer] pays social insurance contributions [stamps]. However in the case of female migrant domestic workers that are 'hidden' in the homes of their employers, the state cannot easily verify their legality since it cannot enter private homes. Female migrant workers in Greece are mostly Albanians and, in fewer numbers, Filipino, Bulgarians and Africans. According to most of the NGOs and government offices that the team visited, Albanian women are least likely to reside in the homes of their employers as most of them migrate to Greece with their families. Furthermore, most Albanians work in many different houses during the week and pay the social security contributions on their own. In contrast, Filipino and African women almost always reside in the house of their employer rendering them 'invisible' and more vulnerable to exploitation since the government does not have access to private homes.

It was interestingly noted that Filipino and African domestic workers are preferred by wealthy employers because they speak English, thus their children may be taught English as a second language.

As mentioned above, none of the organisations visited spoke specifically about migrant women until participants posed the necessary questions. The perspective offered by the government institutions was very different from that transmitted by NGOs and migrant women themselves. The latter gave us information on their everyday lives and the difficulties they face in terms of their civic participation, employment opportunities and integration in Greece. We not only received first-hand information, but also deep reflective comments - an example of the capacity of women as subjects to undertake social change. These women are organizing, with very limited resources, social solidarity movements that go beyond their particular claims, but are oriented to the improvement of all women.

On the other hand, the governmental institutions we visited referred to a general lack of interest on behalf of migrants in Greece with regard to political representation as well as democratic deficits in existing migrant representative structures. A common problem, as described by public officials, is that migrant communities are divided and their leadership is not widely recognised and accepted by the members of these communities. Government agencies claim that it is thus impossible to promote social dialogue with migrant communities and, for this reason, efforts to foster civic participation and expanding employment opportunities for migrants is too difficult.

The representatives of the General Labour Confederation as well as of the Hellenic Migration Policy Institute argued for the establishment of a single democratic representative body for migrants in Greece. Our meeting with the Pan-Hellenic Network of Migrant Women seemed to illustrate that the wish for one representative body is built on the theoretical, somehow undemocratic assumption that all migrants share common interests, disregarding the diversity and heterogeneity of migrant populations. Further, according to a Greek NGO, public discussions on migrants in Greece focused mostly on men and it was noted by the participants that the gender dimension in the Greek migration model is absent. It was also observed that governmental institutions want for a human rights-oriented approach in managing the migratory phenomenon and particularly lack gender mainstreaming analysis in

their programmes. Their main interest seemed to advertise their activities and minimize the extent of migrants' problems.

The promotion of civic participation is also hindered by the fact that migrant women do not have the time or the funds to attend Greek language courses. There are a few state-funded schools offering such courses for free but demand is so high that it may take years for an immigrant to be able to enroll. The representative of the General Labour Confederation mentioned that, currently, there are not enough courses offered for immigrants to gain the necessary competencies. Moreover, the delay in issuing residence permits – migrants have to wait 5-12 months for their documents – causes a number of problems for migrants as we learned from one of the representatives of the Pan-Hellenic Network of Migrant women. As long as they do only have a preliminary certificate, they are not allowed to attend courses.

As far as mixed marriages are concerned, during the visit we were informed that migrant women married to Greek citizens can only renew their visa permit if the [Greek] husband signs a declaration form that their marriage is harmonious. The Pan-Hellenic Network of Migrant Women informed us, however, that it was evident in many cases of mixed marriage that migrant women married to Greek men are victims of physical abuse and the specific procedure mentioned above eliminates the choices of these women to escape such relationships.

To sum up, the study visit in Greece provided the participants with a wealth of knowledge on the situation of female migrant domestic workers and can be said to have been successfully. Participants had the opportunity to exchange experiences and practices with many Greek governmental institutions and NGOs on the issue of the female migrant integration, and of female migrant domestic workers in particular.

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