

FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS IN GREECE

"What can I say? I have to live, don't I? My children have to have bread and education. This is the only reason why I work 10-16 hours a day, almost everyday. I hope that one day I will have a better life. I thank God for having a roof over my head" These are the words of an Albanian immigrant [December 1999].

Migration is not new to the late twentieth century. Colonialism had propelled movements of free and unfree people across the world. Between 1810 and 1921 for example 34 million Europeans emigrated to the US alone. Greece started receiving significant numbers of migrants in the late 1970s and soon became known as "the new immigration country". This situation was dictated by geographic, economic and social-demographic factors. The country had historically been "sender" rather than "receiver" of migrants. Thus it was totally unprepared in terms of experience or social infrastructure to deal with new wave of immigration.

These new migration trends have given rise to more distinct forms of racism in society, shaped by past and present realities. In the labour market immigrants are legally differentiated, socially discriminated against, and economically exploited with illegal status facilitating labour market ghettoization.

An important characteristic of immigration has been its high female component. Unlike earlier migration waves, rising numbers of women migrate independently and not as associational migrants. The contemporary global trend is toward a "feminization of migration". The nationalities in which women are nearly absent are the Pakistani, the Bangladeshi, the Indian, the Syrian and the Egyptian. Among the major source countries of female migration to Greece is from the Philippines, the Ukraine and Moldova.

The reasons for this change in the case of Greece include a) The expansion in the educational system and increased labour force participation of Greek women, coupled with an increased "reverse" transfer of tasks from the state to the household, such as services to the young and the elderly, results in increased opportunity for migrant women b) the application of new technologies and the great change in service economies provides increased opportunities for both native and immigrant women c) the generally slow economic development in the less developed and ex-socialist countries with persisting and deeply rooted structural poverty with gender dimensions, accelerates labour migration and contributes to its feminization.

Due to the great extent of illegal migration and residence, official statistics in Greece provide limited

or even contradictory information about the resident immigration population. According to latest official data and estimates, Greece with a total population of 10,900 [ten point nine million] people, is estimated to have 110.0000-1200.000 [one point one million to one point two million] immigrants, representing 10,3% of the population. Regardless of whether these are immigrant stocks or represent complex flow patterns, Greece still has the highest proportion of immigrants among Southern European countries and possibly the highest in the EU as well.

LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Perhaps the most important "pull" factor for migration into Greece pertains to the legal and government policy framework itself which also paves the ground for the social conditions of migrant labour. In Greece the legal and policy focus has been mostly on curtailing the flow of illegal immigrants rather than regularizing the status of individuals who are already living in the country illegally. On the one hand, it involves hostility and suspicion, on the other, "laissez-faire" policies or some integration attempts. According to others the Greek state's response to migration has been, until very recently a "non-policy" allowing large numbers of immigrants to enter clandestinely yet refusing to grant them any kind of legal or citizenship rights, thereby constructing them as "non persons".

Law 1975/1991 on foreigners criminalizing illegal entry and work without a permit and providing for immediate deportation of illegal immigrants by police and border authorities had replaced the much older law 4310/1929.

In 1998 and 2000 two legalizations Drives [1975/1991, 2646/2000] prepared the way to the new immigration law of 2001 [2910]. This law was more liberal than previous ones. It contained some improvements, including permission for trafficking victims to remain in Greece pending criminal proceedings against traffickers, access to education and health care for undocumented migrant children, the right to challenge immigration detention before an administrative court and a time limit of three months for the detention of migrants who cannot be returned to their home countries. Illegal foreign workers were given the opportunity to apply for regularization within a certain period of time, but only after having paid expensive fees, which in the case of minors were exceedingly high. In general, foreign workers may come to Greece for work, only on the condition of prior approval that specifies the employer, the type of work to be undertaken and the location of employment. This approval is given only if a vacancy cannot be filled by Greeks, citizens of the EU, ethnic Greek foreigners or recognized refugees with work permits.

The last aliens' law 3386/2005 introduces some important innovations. For the first time the strategy of "social incorporation" of the migrants was made law. The new law embodies the principles of the "equal treatment in employment", "the respect of fundamental rights", and "the support of family re-union". It also protects the victim's female migrants from trafficking and family violence.

WOMEN'S CITIZENSHIP IN SOCIETY

The concept of citizenship is broadly defined to include, in addition to legal rights and narrowly defined political rights, civic, social and economic entitlements. It is according to this broader definition that feminist theorists have persuasively argued that even native -born women's citizenship in contemporary societies is limited, ambiguous and dualistic, that is that citizenship is deeply gendered. Although feminist theorists have made significant contributions in terms of how to make citizenship more inclusive for women, migrant women have largely been left out of this discourse.

Research on migrant women's employment globally indicates that migrant women are exploited and discriminated against in gender -specific ways. They are placed at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy, where they earn less than migrant men do in the gender segregated labour market and suffer far higher unemployment rates when compared with women in general. When they accompany a male family member they are relegated to a legally dependent status upon him. Regardless of whether they are independent migrants or accompany a spouse, migrant women often face a lack of legal recognition of their credentials, underemployment, deskilling and loss of career. Racialized migrant women suffer from both racial and gender disadvantage in the labour market. These disadvantages intersect to create specific problems that both restrict access to the labour market and maintain segregation and discrimination within it. Regardless of whether migrant women are in possession of a work permit or not, they are always peripheral and outsiders, with various degrees of externality depending on their legal status and their race and ethnicity.

Moreover, in the EU specifically, there is a whole hierarchy of citizenship entitlements for migrant women, depending on entry and legal status [permanent, legal temporary and undocumented] with some categories of women enjoying certain rights and others none by virtue of being undocumented and consequently, illegal residents. Even when they are documented, their social-economic position varies also by ethnic/ racial group and country of residence, since stereotypes and discriminatory practices vary across ethnic communities and in different countries.

There is a great range of diversity in the EU, both in terms of citizenship models and their openness to migrants, but also in terms of the nature of labour markets and the employment positioning of various categories of migrant women. In addition, divergent

realities may exist at different levels. In terms of overall citizenship rights and entitlements "it is hard to sustain the notion that a postnational citizenship for migrants has become a reality in the European Union". In terms of citizenship as practice, in the economic sphere specifically, despite the fact that immigrant women participate in the European economies and are never "out" of economic activity, their labour does not always count as economic activity. Hence they are often considered as being "outside the labour market" and thus peripheral. In conclusion, as result of exclusion from the civil, social, political and economic arenas, migrant women derive few of the benefits of such citizenship in the European Union.

Given this framework of extremely limited citizenship then, the experiences and position of migrant women in the Greek labour market - that is the practice of citizenship arrested by mechanisms of social exclusion and discrimination on various levels, comes as no surprise.

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

It is interesting to present the findings of an observational study on the lives, family situation, work and community experiences of migrant women in Greece, which took place in 2005 [09.12.05-20.12.05].

According to the census of 2001 the total number of migrant people is 762.191 [seven hundred and sixty two hundred thousand, one hundred and ninety one] persons.

Of these, 45,5% [346.639] [three hundred and forty six hundred thousand, six hundred and thirty nine] are women. For the study, six hundred twelve [612] women were interviewed all over Greece. Large scale female migration started after 1995 and gained momentum between the years 1995-1998 [40%]. The majority [67%] come from neighbouring Albania, 11% from others Balkan countries, 16% from the former Soviet Union while only 5% from African and Asian countries. Their motivations range from supporting their families financially at home or in Greece [38%] and to reunifying their families [24%].

The age of the women ranged from twenty five to forty-four years old and the majority of them [52%] were married and had children. 43% of the migrant women had lived in Greece for the last decade, 40% more than a decade and 16% for the last five years.

The majority [82%] are concentrated in the Greater Athens conurbation, because it is easier to find a job in services and also to escape police controls in a city. Unlike migrant men, hardly any women are employed in agriculture and construction, so a smaller percentage has settled in rural areas [18%].

The majority of the women interviewed have had formal education having completed at least twelve years of education, and 8,8% of women reported having attended higher education.

Migrant women in Greece are mainly employed in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in the traditional sectors of the Greek economy [catering, tourism, manufacturing industry, merchant navy], while domestic service [domestic or personal care work] is a major employment sector for migrant women [48,5%]. A large number of small family businesses in the country, a large underground economy and inadequate labour market inspections create an environment conducive to the development of a cheap labour supply, according to gender, age and ethnicity. In these conditions many of the female migrants face temporary employment and experience job insecurity.

One third [32%] of the women interviewed reported having free time to relax or entertain, 44% have very

little free time and 24% don't have any free time at all. The effort of obtaining the income necessary to meet their basic needs of food and shelter and help their family back home, influences the amount of free time the women have.

Further, problems at work, especially harsh working conditions, language problems and legal encounters with police for lack of work permits, were some of the concerns the women mentioned.

Although the women interviewed rarely encountered interpersonal problems with their employers, they were however financially exploited. In addition, there was no formal resource for complaints. They were forced to work long hours, oftentimes in tedious kinds of work, and they were usually underpaid. Sexual exploitation represents one of the harshest consequences of economic and legal vulnerability for migrant women without any resource for complaint other than their own sense of justice. The East European women involved in the study typically worked in house cleaning and providing personal care while the women from African or Asian countries had more diverse fields of employment often involving small entrepreneurial enterprises. Compared to East-Europeans, the African migrant women seemed to have a more difficult time in both obtaining and retaining employment in housework. On the other hand studies about Greece specifically indicate that Albanian women are the least trusted East-European women especially with regard to baby-sitting, as a result of allegations of infant smuggling organized by the Albanian mafia and a general public perception of the Albanian immigrant as criminal.

The Greek labour market is highly segmented and the migrant labour force is wholly complementary to the native one, rather than standing in an antagonistic relationship to it. Immigrants without work permits can expect to find employment at about half the market rates for Greeks. They have no social security coverage and stand under the constant threat of deportation by demanding employers even in areas of high unemployment. These immigrants usually work in seasonal jobs [construction, tourism and agriculture]. A large number of small firms across all sectors also depend on foreign labour.

Another important issue to examine is the level of discrimination women face not only in their place of employment but within the larger society, as this has a major impact on the woman's ability to work, economic and personal security, health and well-being. Several women encountered problems on the streets and in their neighborhoods in terms of name-calling and overt discrimination.

The migrants' reactions to racism against them encompass a wide spectrum ranging from fear, to defensive strategies, passive resistance, verbal confrontation, reverse hostility and so forth, depending on their education, level of understanding and political awareness and intensity of their experiences. In the face of obstacles and oppressive circumstances, the range of migrant women's reactions demonstrates their human agency and struggle to gain a measure of empowerment. Migrant women especially from Eastern Europe may be worse-off in the provincial towns because wages are lower, work is more precarious and they often stand out as "different" among fairly homogeneous populations, which renders them more exposed and thus vulnerable to racist incidents. At the same time, lower populations overall, the closeness of living in the smaller community and the slower pace of life may bring migrant workers more in personal contact with local people, having thus the potential of undermining the impersonal stereotype. In areas where the ratio of migrant numbers to local populations is low, migrants may be construed as less of a threat. Common language, a common cultural past or a common language of a close, personal relationship have demonstrated the potential of abolishing racist barriers and serving as bridges between Greeks and migrant workers, facilitating social and economic integration of the latter into the Greek society.

According to the literature review, personal, vernacular, pre-capitalist relations in the labour market between employer and employee are frequent. Even with the most recent measures it is estimated that the overwhelming majority of immigrants remain illegal. Not being able to rely on any institutional and legal support mechanism the worker becomes personally dependent on the employer or the person who provides access to an employer. In addition, even for migrant workers with a permit, work relations with the employer resemble pre-capitalist times when the latter had a significant say in the worker's personal space.

Intra-ethnic networks formal and informal exist and provide assistance to new-comers and unemployed, albeit at a cost sometimes. Intra-ethnic relations are not always harmonious though. Some East-Europeans reported problems they faced in employment situations from their own group. Illegal immigrants are easy to push to the social margins because they cannot turn to social services, like the police, for assistance. On the one hand pressured or black-mailed by their own compatriots to engage in illegal activity, on the other hand unable and possibly unwilling to tell on their compatriots and report these pressures to the police, some immigrants may

resort to illegal activities in order to survive. Being cut off from a social network and the moral control of their family, this totally "flexible" character of employment contributes to increased crime. Conditions of illegality and alienation provide the context in which migrants proceed in committing offences. Looking at the proportions of the immigrant prison population alone, which in Greece stands roughly at 50% offers an inadequate explanation, as there are highly discriminatory reasons why immigrants are imprisoned including inadequate legal representation, automatic pre-trial detention and even imprisonment beyond the actual sentence length. Although there is some evidence to suggest that immigrants have contributed to certain specific petty crimes, generally the native population seems to be more involved with serious crime, with a notable exception the behaviour of foreign and indigenous mafia.

CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the experiences of the migrant women involved in the study, women of all ages, races and nationalities, some with a legal status, some undocumented residents and workers, it is clear that the modern Greek state hardly enables them and their families to live and work with dignity.

Despite the difficulties they face, the half of the migrant women interviewed expressed the wish to settle permanently in the country.

An increasing number of legal female migrants are attaining economic and social integration. They manage to earn a regular income and try, alone or with other members of their families, to have a normal life. This is also indicated by the increasing number of births by foreign-born women in the state maternity homes and by the children of foreign-born parents who enroll in Greek schools.

The women are like "migratory birds". They accept the positive and the negative aspects of the migration process and they have the ability to be incorporated in the given society.

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