



¿De la invisibilidad al empoderamiento de género y la integración de los migrantes? Repercusiones del trabajo doméstico y el cuidado en las mujeres migrantes en Grecia

From invisibility to gender empowerment and migrant integration? Repercussions of live-in domestic work and caregiving on female migrants in Greece

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Resumen: El artículo se centra en el caso de las trabajadoras domésticas inmigrantes (criadas, niñeras y cuidadoras) en Grecia y en el impacto del trabajo doméstico en su integración en la sociedad griega/Grecia. Según los resultados de las entrevistas en profundidad, basadas en las conclusiones del proyecto "Voices of Immigrant Women" (VIW) (Erasmus+ 2020-1-ES01-KA203-082364), las mujeres migrantes están atrapadas en un marco de condiciones laborales invisibles y de explotación y se enfrentan a la discriminación

Abstract: The article focuses on the case of female migrant domestic workers (maids, nannies and caregivers) in Greece and on the impact of domestic work on their integration in Greek society/Greece. According to the results of in-depth interviews, based on the findings of the "Voices of Immigrant Women" (VIW) project (Erasmus+2020-1-ES01-KA203-082364), female migrants are entrapped in a frame of invisible and exploitative working conditions and face discrimination at work. There are multiple cases where an employer treats migrant

en el trabajo. Son múltiples los casos en los que el empleador trata a las trabajadoras domésticas migrantes de forma inhumana, gritando y gesticulando, ejerciendo abusos físicos y verbales, así como contratándolas con contratos falsos o contratos de trabajo que la trabajadora nunca ha leído, lo que las hace vulnerables y susceptibles de sufrir diversas formas de explotación. La situación se agrava aún más por el control que se ejerce sobre la empleada, dificultando su acceso a otras ocupaciones y prolongando así su permanencia en el trabajo doméstico. En este contexto laboral, la mayoría de las mujeres migrantes son indiferentes a la colectividad y a la solidaridad y están aisladas de sus compatriotas y de otros trabajadores. La servidumbre les deja limitadas las oportunidades de empoderamiento para la movilidad social ascendente, siendo escasos los casos en los que la salida del trabajo doméstico ha supuesto un aumento de las oportunidades de las mujeres para convertirse en agentes principales de sus propias vidas y salvaguardarse de la explotación y de los trabajos informales y mal pagados, para vivir en libertad e independencia.

domestic workers inhumanely, by shouting and gesticulating, exercising physical and verbal abuse as well as hiring them with false contracts or labour contracts that the worker has never read, which renders them vulnerable and susceptible to various forms of exploitation. The situation is further burdened by the control exercised over the employee, hindering their access to other occupations and thus prolonging their stay in domestic work. In this working context, most female migrants are indifferent to collectivity and solidarity and are isolated from their compatriots and other workers. Servitude leaves them with limited opportunities of empowerment for upward social mobility, there being only few cases where escape from domestic work has led to an increase of women's opportunities to become the primary agents of their own lives and safeguard themselves from exploitation and informal and low-paid jobs, to live in freedom and independence.

Palabras Clave: Inmigrantes; mujeres trabajadoras; trabajadoras inmigrantes; trabajadoras domésticas; integración social; Grecia

Keywords: immigrants; women workers; migrant workers; domestic workers; social integration; Greece

Introduction: Migration, the feminisation of labor and domestic work in Greece

Greece experienced flows of migrants from neighbouring Balkan countries and the Republics of the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s, as well as from Africa, the Middle East and Asia in early 2010 (Fouskas and Tseverenis 2014). In the late 1980s, Greece was mostly a country that received immigrants, rather than a country from which citizens emigrated. Census statistics prove that, in 1981, there were 180,000 foreigners residing in Greece, amounting to 2% of the total population, 63% of whom were from more developed countries. In the 1991 census, although there were no significant changes in numbers, less than 50% of foreigners were from developed countries. However, in the 2001 census, the number of foreigners had more than quadrupled, including 762,000 individuals residing in Greece without Greek citizenship, 7% of the total population, which at the time was just over 11 million. The most recent census of 2011 (Hellenic Statistical Authority, ELSTAT 2014) registered 912,000 foreigners in Greece, an increase of 150,000 individuals from 2001. Between 2015 and 2017, the incoming refugees were mainly from Syria. The current migration flows are mixed, including migrants, asylum seekers and refugees (Fouskas, 2021a;

Fouskas, 2021b; Sassen, 2021; Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 2021a)¹. As of 31 December 2021, there were 693.517 Third Country Nationals (TCNs) (see Table 1) residing legally in Greece, 59.216 beneficiaries of international protection, 213.016 EU citizens and in total 965.749 legal migrants (Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 2021b).

Table 1:
Residence permits by categories/reason

Category (EU)	Total
Employment	108.037
Other	329.662
Family reunification	252.146
Studies	3.672
Total	693.517

Source: Ministry of Migration and Asylum (2021a).

According to the Asylum Service (Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 2021a), the number of asylum applications by TCNs within the Greek territory over-multiplied between 2013 and 2019: from 4,814 applications in 2013 (a monthly average of 688 applications), to i.e., a 14.3% rise between 2013 and 2014. In 2014, there were 9,431 applications at a monthly average of 786, a rise of 39.8% between 2014 and 2015. In 2015, there were 13,186 applications at a monthly average of 1,099, an increase by 287, 1% between 2013 and 2014. In 2016, there were 51,041 applications at a monthly average of 4,254, an increase of 14.9% between 2016 and 2017. In 2017, there were 58,629 applications at a monthly average of 4,886, marking an increase of 14.2% between 2017 and 2018. In 2018, there were 66,929 applications at a monthly average of 5,580. 2019, there were 77,243 applications at a monthly average of 6,440 applications), an increase of 15.4% between 2018 and 2019. According to the Asylum Service in 2020, the number of asylum applications by TCNs in the Greek territory were 40.502 and in 2021 (until 31 December) 28.320 (see Table 2) (Ministry of Migration and Asylum (2021a). Regarding the recognition of refugee status at 1st and 2nd degree, 2457 were recognized in 2016, 9378 in 2017, 12.797 in 2018, 13.833 in 2019, 26819 in 2020 and 13.781 until 31 December 2021 (Ministry of Migration and Asylum (2021a). According to the National Centre for Social Solidarity (2022), the estimated number of unaccompanied minors amounted to 2,209 (92 % boys), while 8% were under the age of 14. The total number of places in accommodation centres (shelters) are 2,482 and 95 emergency accommodation facilities. Based on the data of the National Centre for Social Solidarity 1.629 children are in Shelters, 302 in Supported Independent Living apartments (SIL), 18 in Relocation facilities, 60 in Emergency accommodation facilities, 172 in Reception and Identification Centres, 28 in Open Accommodation Facilities.

Table 2:
Asylum Applications - 2021 (until 31.12) per gender and age groups

Gender	Age group					Total
	0-13	14-17	18-34	35-64	65+	
Male	2529	3411	12036	3582	47	21605
Female	2136	369	2902	1265	43	6715
Total	4665	3780	14938	4847	90	28320

Source: Ministry of Migration and Asylum (2021a).

¹ Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Bangladesh, Turkey, Iran, Somalia, Albania, Egypt, Congo, see Ministry of Migration and Asylum (2021a).

Feminist scholarship on migration underlines that in the context of globalisation (Parreñas, 2000, 560-581) social constructions of gender and racial stereotypes drive men and women into specific roles and organise their experiences. The presence of women is not a new element, as female migration has always been an important component of international migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2002, 2004; Yeates, 2009; Anderson and Shutes, 2014; Yilmaz and Ledwith, 2017; Land, 2019; Yamane, 2021). The change is based on the economic roles that are undertaken by migrant women during the migration process (Campani, 2000; Parreñas, 2001; Lan, 2006; Monreal Gimeno, Terrón Caro, Cárdenas Rodríguez, 2014). More and more women are migrating alone as heads of households and economically active subjects, while fewer than in the past are migrating as dependents of their husbands. This new development of international migration in relation to the participation of women has been recorded in literature under the term “feminisation of migration” (Castles and Miller, 1998:16). Many women from rural areas migrate autonomously or through family reunification programmes; others, who are unskilled, migrate autonomously and at an increasing rate from urban areas due to poverty or family issues. Those who have secondary or higher education migrate autonomously because they are unable to find jobs commensurate with their qualifications. Others migrate due to political unrest, widespread violence and gender discrimination. Women also migrate following their husbands or families. Family reunification is considered to be the easiest way to legally enter certain countries, due to restrictive migration policies. Independent forms of female migration include those who migrate alone or before their husbands, as both the labour market and the gender division of labour in reception countries offer them more employment opportunities.

The International Labour Office (ILO) (2022) stresses that domestic workers are “those workers who perform work in or for a private household or households”. They provide direct and indirect care services, and as such are key members of the care economy. Their work may include tasks such as household chores (e.g., cleaning, cooking, washing and ironing clothes), taking care of children or elderly or sick members of a family, gardening, guarding the house, driving for the family, and even taking care of household pets (Table 5). A domestic worker may work on a full-time or part-time basis, be employed in a single household or by a service provider, be living in the residence of the employer (live-in) or in her own residence (live-out). Social constructions of gender cannot be considered separate from social constructions of class, race and nationality (Tyner, 1994). Migrant women are employed as domestic workers thus as labour migrants in various countries that continuously demand precarious, low-status/low-wage service workers and domestic work (Tyner, 1994; Anderson, 2000; Glenn, 2010; Fouskas, 2019). International division of labour and the feminisation of migrant wage labour (Tyner, 1994, 594; Parreñas, 2000, 563) based on patriarchy and subordination (Tyner, 1994, 594) as well as class, gendered and racial stereotypes are manifested within the labour recruitment process (Tyner, 1994, 590), helping to channel migrant women of the migration flows into domestic services (Tyner, 1994, 590; Lan, 2003a, 2003b; 2003c; Pyle, 2006; Lorente, 2017; Parreñas and Silvey, 2021). ILO emphasises that at present, domestic workers often face inadequate wages, excessively long working hours, have no guaranteed weekly day of rest and at times are vulnerable to physical, mental and sexual abuse or restrictions on freedom of movement (ILO, 2022).

In Greece, migrant women have become part of a cheap workforce reserve that is continually renewed while the division of labour prompts and entraps migrants into wage labour and low-status/low-wage jobs, distinguishing them by class, gender, race-nationality and means of entrance into the country (Fouskas, et al. 2019a, 2019b). In Greece, female migrants are employed as live-in and/or live-out domestic workers (house cleaning, caregiving) via direct-hire in households of Greek employers or via employment agencies and cleaning companies (cleaning offices and residences) to support themselves and mainly their families back in their homeland (Anderson and Phizacklea, 1997; Lazaridis, 2000; Tastsoglou and Maratou-Alipranti, 2003; Psimmenos, 2007; Triandafyllidou, 2013; Maroukis, 2018). There is still demand in Greek society for domestic servants, particularly for female contract workers, due to deficiencies in the national welfare system, not only from the upper but also from the middle-class due both to the employers' need to shift the burden of house and family care but also as an indication of status quo. Concerning female migrant participation in the main sectors of economic activity (Table 3), 59.4% of female migrants can be found in the household sector followed by accommodation and food service activities at 17.2%, manufacturing at 7.2%, agriculture, forestry and fishing at 3.5%, and wholesale and retail trade at 2.7%. Shadow economy in Greece is estimated at 26.45% of the country's GDP (Deléchat and Medina, 2021). Moreover, the percentage of uninsured workers is among the world's highest (37.3%) and so is the percentage of working irregular immigrants (4.4%) (Schneider and Williams, 2013, 90-96).

Table 3.

Female migrants' participation in the main sectors of economic activity, 2017

Agriculture, forestry and fishing	3.5%
Manufacturing	7.2%
Wholesale and retail trade	2.7%
Accommodation and food service activities	17.2%
Activities of households as employer	59.4%
Total of migrant women employed	5.8%

Source: Kapsalis, 2018.

Methodology

The article attempts to address the following central question: Are there cases of female migrants whose migration path has changed towards upwards social mobility and socioeconomic integration? In the analysis unit in Greece of the case study designed for the "Voices of Immigrant Women" (VIW)² project (2020-1-ES01-KA203-082364, 2020-2022 co-financed by the Erasmus + program of the European Union)³ the main research technique of in-depth interviews was utilized. Ten (10) interviews were conducted with migrant women in Greece (Table 4) in order to understand the impact of women's migration trajectory, social networks and contextual conditions on their integration or marginalisation in host societies.

² <https://viw.pixel-online.org/>

³ The "Voices of Immigrant Women" project (2020-1-ES01-KA203-082364) is co-financed by the Erasmus + program of the European Union. The content of this publication is only responsibility of its authorship and neither the European Commission nor the Spanish Service for the Internationalization of Education (SEPIE) are responsible for the use that may be made of the information disseminated in this publication.

Table 4:
Research sample

No	Country of origin	Age	Entry year in Greece	Family status	Employment	Employment change
1	Congo	29	2012	Single	Professional interpreter for a Service provider in migrant/ refugee accommodation centre	Created her own blog & e-shop, brand of clothes that she designs & sews & works as an entrepreneur
2	Kenya	50	2010	Widowed	Live-in nanny & housekeeper	Founded and runs an NGO to assist refugees/migrants
3	Georgia	50	1995	Widowed	Live-in domestic worker, elderly caregiver, private nurse at hospitals	Live-in domestic worker, elderly caregiver, private nurse at hospitals
4	Philippines	57	1996	Widowed	Live-in domestic worker	Live-out domestic worker
5	Ukraine	56	2000	Widowed	Live-in domestic worker, cleaner, nanny	Live-out service worker, cleaning offices & residences
6	Ukraine	53	1998	Married	Live-in caregiver, elderly caregiver	Live-out caregiver, elderly care
7	Nigeria	52	1999	Married	Live-in domestic worker (nanny, caregiver to older people)	Live-in domestic worker & caregiver for a family with children
8	Albania	54	1996	Married	Live-out domestic worker, cleaner	Live-out domestic worker, cleaner
9	Philippines	55	1997	Married	Live-in domestic worker	Live-out domestic worker
10	Bulgaria	35	2005	Married	Live-out domestic worker (nanny, caregiver to older people, cleaner at a hospital)	Live-out domestic worker (nanny, caregiver to older people, cleaner at a hospital)

Source: "Voices of Immigrant Women" (VIW) project (Erasmus+ 2020-1-ES01-KA203-082364) (2020-2022)

These interviews were conducted in person during the first half of 2021. Applying this technique allowed the researchers to delve into the migrant women's own vision of their migration path and their integration/inclusion process in the country of arrival. It also helped in identifying possible "success stories" of women's integration and inclusion in Greece. The main constraint during the research were the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. In order to minimize these limitations, researchers provided a flexible availability on their part and extended the planned time of the research. Interviewees were given an informed consent⁴ form, which stated that data confidentiality is guaranteed⁵. In the context of ethical issues and anonymity, names or personal details of the participants would not appear in the interview transcript. The methodological design and the information collection instruments have been designed by the University Pablo de Olavide, as the scientific coordinator of the VIW project, and validated by all partners.

⁴ i) Participants have been informed of the procedure and purpose of the study; ii) Participation of the sample and continuation in the research has been voluntary; iii) The investigation has been carried out under the principle of confidentiality of the data provided, ensuring the correct use of the same, iv) The research participants have signed the informed consent.

⁵ All personal data obtained in the study is confidential and will be treated in accordance with Law 4624/2019 on data protection.

Results: Voices of immigrant women in live-in domestic work regarding work conditions, healthcare, community associations and rights

Concerning the reasons for emigrating to Greece, difficult socioeconomic situation and political instability in combination with changes in their family status were quoted most. In many cases, when their husband who was the main provider passed away, they decided that they could not stay in their country because if they did, they and their children would face great difficulties and would have no future prospects. Interviewee 2 (Kenya, 50) revealed:

So, I decided that I cannot go back home because if I went home, life would be hell for us. My children were not going to have any future so I decided to stay with my expired visa and seek asylum again.

Based on the female migrants interviewed, multifaceted administrative procedures need to be followed in order to establish their legal status in Greece. Once they arrive in the country on various short-term visas (e.g., tourist, work contracts), they easily find themselves in a precarious or irregular state with enormous everyday difficulties with their lives and also with employers. What emerged were: i) non-possession of or failure to acquire/renew work and/or residence permits in the country of reception; ii) seeking and relying on third parties for access to work and social protection, iii) inability to obtain registered work and a work permit because of the original informal situation and iv) inability to maintain their legal status due to financial or personal changes. Residence permits are directly associated with the positive evaluation of their application after a lengthy waiting period (in cases of asylum seekers) or with legal stay and employment (for economic migrants) and in both cases with delays due to administrative impediments. Interviewee 3 (Georgia, 50) sees herself as:

I am tired and disheartened. Exhausted. Nothing else. It was worth it, though, because I was able to do a little more, even if it was a small contribution, to help my family. I did as much as I could have done here.

Family reunification has also been used as a mechanism for the union of family members and must be further enhanced by migration policy. Family members, relatives, or an individuals' wider network of friends who had arrived in the country earlier played an important role in the transfer of women to Greece and the majority of the people they know are employed in similar occupations. These individuals are a motivation for a woman either to imitate them or be persuaded to come to Greece. In addition, they mediate between the employer or the employment office in Greece and will also be the people who, either alone or with the candidate employer, will pick them

up from the airport. Interviewee 3 (Georgia, 50) mentioned that an employee of the office helped her to get to the employers' residence. She stated:

A man from the office brought me to the employers' house by taxi. I could not speak Greek fluently, but I could say a few words. When they had asked me at the office, in the beginning, I told them I wanted to work with children, because I love children. and I had decided that. However, there was high demand for the care of the elderly, everyone was asking for grandpa and grandma care, so I did not have a choice.

In addition, people in the family or the wider network of friends in the city are a means of connecting with new employers. In certain cases, female migrants choose to live together, share an apartment, so they can celebrate collectively, maintaining customs and traditions. From the interviews it seems that the church and collective living during their days-off become very important elements in the life of female migrant domestic workers in Greece in terms of collectivity and solidarity.

Work conditions

According to the interviews, female migrants face problems caused by their **working conditions** particularly in live-in domestic work. Only 2/10 cases exercised another type of work as entrepreneurs/cultural mediators or NGO workers. Engaging in atypical, precarious or service occupations identifies female migrants with informal work. This precarity and uncertainty is also visible during the Covid-19 pandemic. For freelance workers their work days and therefore their remunerations were less.

Concerning female migrants interviewed, work for them is limited to those service occupations and sectors that reflect their roles or responsibilities in the household, like cleaning and care-giving as domestic workers. Domestic workers have multiple duties (as maids, maidservants, nannies/babysitters, housekeepers, carers-nurses, caregivers) depending on the employer's demands: household cleaning and chores (e.g., laundry/cooking meals), and/or caregiving/nursing of an older adult, a child (childcare) (see Table 5). Many turned to prayer and found strength in their faith to draw the courage to justify and deal with their current situation, working conditions in servile labour and to boost their hopes for the future. Migrant women spend most of their time in the employer's residence. They leave their place of work as live-in domestic workers for a few hours to run errands (Monday-Friday) (e.g., grocery shopping, walking a dog) but mostly when they have a day off, usually from Saturday afternoon to Sunday to be with friends and compatriots. They spend that day in their shared apartment (boarding house) with 6-11 individuals or even more in suburbs like Kypseli, Koukaki, in Ampelokipi, or in Amerikis Square and elsewhere. They return to the employer's residence on Sunday night to sleep or on Monday very early in the morning. The payment that a female migrant live-in domestic worker receives ranges between 400-1.200 euros a month (differences based on country of origin,

employers); but the average salary is between 500-750 euros a month. Those who provide private care to the elderly are responsible for administering medication, preparing meals and tending to their personal needs as well as keeping them company at home or in hospital as private nurses. Similarly, those who provide childcare are responsible for assisting, accompanying and generally caring for them (see Table 5).

Generally, sooner or later they feel intense physical, emotional and mental exhaustion at the end of the day. Interviewee 9 (Philippines, 55) explained that generally, employers are polite to her, but there are many cases of oppressive or restrictive behaviour towards her. For example, she was not allowed to go out or meet others, the employer kept her passport, and there were delays in her monthly payments. Her tasks were to clean only the employer's house (clean the furniture, floors, rooms, vacuuming, washing the dishes and clothes, cooking, ironing and clean the windows), buy a newspaper for the employer, go to the supermarket, tidy up the kitchen. Occasionally she did not cook. If there was a pet (usually a dog), she would have to tend to its needs (see Table 5). She strived to remain with the same employers for many years in order to build trust. Regarding the behaviour of the employers, she had problems with the children in one residence, who hit her and made a mess on purpose. In another case, when an item of the employer's wife was not found, she was blamed, and she was physically and verbally abused. When the item was found where the employer had placed it, she tried to leave the event behind. In 2017 when the last employer left Greece for another EU country, she moved from live-in to live-out domestic work, cleaning different residences, a job where her responsibilities are limited to basic chores of cleaning and ironing, for 5 hours for 3-4 employers a week, receiving a total of 700 euros a month.

Migrant women disassociate themselves from family and community bonds and relations, thus breaking primary and secondary social and labour solidarity and protection mechanisms. Regarding female migrants, labour is limited to those service occupations and sectors that reflect their roles or responsibilities and restrictions in the household, like cleaning and care giving as domestic workers, as well as the fulfilment of personal and individualized needs. The situation is further aggravated because of racial and gender-based discrimination/violence in the labour market and also by employers. In low-status service occupations, such as domestic work, although seen as a means of survival, the working relationships with employers result in dependence, patronage, exploitation and pseudo relations, informal values and perceptions that generate, tolerate and/or reproduce atypical/casual tactics and attitudes towards welfare, marked by emotionally stressful activities. Female migrants are self-entrapped in areas of economic activity with limited opportunities for socio-economic advancement and develop an inability to leave an employer.

Table 5.*Tasks/duties of a live-in domestic worker regarding house cleaning, child care, caring of the elderly*

House cleaning	Furniture	Child care	Accompanying		Elderly care	Company	
	Floors		Playing/recreation			Walking	
	Rooms		Feeding			Medicines intake	
	Vacuuming		Preparation for transfer from/to school	(depends)		Feeding assistance	(depends)
	Laundry		Preparation for lessons			Help when using toilet/bathroom/WC	
	Dishwashing		Toilet assistance			Help with bathing	
	Windows		Bathing assistance			Help with dressing	
	Cooking		Dressing assistance			Responding to their requests	
	Ironing		Putting to bed			House cleaning	
	Toilet/bathroom/WC		Responding to their requests				
	Pet care (dog walk) (depends)						

Source: "Voices of Immigrant Women" (VIW) project (Erasmus+ 2020-1-ES01-KA203-082364) (2020-2022)

Working conditions in low-status services provide the background for uninsured and precarious work which blocks any access to social benefits or contacts with community and solidarity networks, as female immigrants work in isolation. The situation is further burdened by the control that employers exercise over domestic workers which results in prolonged stay in domestic work, as they are unable to access other occupations. Employers confiscate their documents, constantly monitor them and threaten to denounce them to the Authorities resulting in further exploitation, discipline, consent and subordination, obedience and dependency of the domestic workers and thus the emergence of pseudo-family relationships and pseudo-mothering feelings and roles. Female migrant domestic workers rarely claim work rights as they are in an isolated work space. The need for further training and support of employability was highlighted. According to female migrants interviewed, those individuals from the network of relatives or friends who had come to the country earlier affected their decision to choose Greece as a country destination or to access specific occupations. Many interviewees felt physically and psychologically drained due to their work conditions. Interviewee 3 (Georgia, 50) explained that her work was demanding and difficult, but she felt closer to the person she was giving care to. She felt compassion. Interviewee 3 said:

When a person gets sick, you suffer no matter who you are. Moreover, when you live with this person, they become your family. After all, you are with them

24 hours a day. I do not consider this fatigue, but I feel tired because I miss my home, my homeland. I am a little different; I do not know. Nevertheless, I consider that I am more useful here than I would be there. So, I try to hold on a bit more.

In certain cases, employers have tried to pay her less while threatening to report her to the authorities, and many workers did not know their exact legal residence status. In other cases, employers deceived her by not paying her at all. Interviewee 2 (Kenya, 50) explained:

I worked for some time and it was difficult because these people knew I didn't have proper documents. They decided to take advantage of that. So, I worked the first month. They did not pay me my salary. They said they were going to pay me the second month. They didn't pay me. They said they would pay me the third month. They didn't pay me. (...) I worked 6.5 days a week, 12 hours a day. It was even more than 12 hours. You are there for the children. Also, when they go out, you are there when they come back. You prepare food, everything. You wash their plates and everything. So, you go to sleep around 11.00 12.00 at night. When you pick the children up from school and you take them to play, then that is a break. I stayed only six months. I left because they were just so cunning because they say, oh, we'll pay you when we have money. You won't lose it. They were so good at talking.

Interviewee 2 (Kenya, 50), for a short period, in 2013, she received financial support from an NGO which help her as she was exhausted from working. Later, she found another child care job (nanny and housekeeping) described as a “God given job”. The employers respected and supported her and her son by offering him a job position as well. They offered a five-hour shift and a day-off over the weekend. She opened up about herself and what she had been through and the employers showed understanding. Interviewee 2 stated:

This job helped because I could no longer cope with abusive employers. Some of them were good but especially the women were not; they were abusive. I was getting tired of working in negative environments. (...) I couldn't start my new job immediately because it was only two days to my husband's memorial service. So, I wanted to be with my children. And she said yes, we can give you that. And I told her everything about myself, and my son had just completed high school and enrolled to study Business Administration. She talked with her husband about him and he offered my son a job.

Healthcare

According to the female migrants interviewed, there are problems in accessing **healthcare**, they develop perceptions that cut them off from official health policy and care while they develop perceptions regarding themselves, their health and survival in the market of precarious, low-status/low wage jobs. According to research results, a possible health problem may limit the ability of migrants to maintain a job, since the majority is drawn to such occupations or to ones where there is a high incidence of labour accidents and occupational health hazards. Due to this situation many interviewees lack the protection of national healthcare and insurance and may be unable to meet the cost of hospitalisation and medication. Interviewees, therefore, have no other option but to follow informal, private and individualistic practices which female migrant live-in domestic workers are pushed to and eventually select, even by fundamentally ignoring their healthcare.

Interviewee 5 (Ukraine, 56) never had any difficulty in dealing with cleaning the residences, except in some cases when the place had not been cleaned for a long time. She described herself as a self-motivated person with unlimited strength, focus and determination. In Greece, she felt lucky as she met the “good people”. She worked for many years for specific people, which helped her form relationships with them. Until 2009, Interviewee 5 was under pressure to clean the residences and take care of the employer’s child. The pressure was best described as:

I never permitted myself to get sick; I had to be there for them, I had to work hard, mainly because I had to clean and take care of a child all day long.

As suggested in this research, the main barriers for migrant female domestic workers to access health and healthcare/social care services are summarized in the following points: cost of care, lack of information on access to services such as healthcare, social insurance and the welfare system (e.g. vaccinations/location of services), language difficulties in communicating with health professionals and workers in social work/care, prejudice and stereotypes of health professionals toward these groups, and fear of these groups regarding the operation of public health services. The interviews suggest that a considerable number of migrant female live-in domestic workers may be employed without national health insurance, without any work agreement or are self-employed, without insurance, medical coverage or other labour rights. Thus, migrant female domestic workers become accustomed to not having any rights regarding their work and healthcare. Initially, interviewees did not know what their rights were and how to claim them. However, even when they became more knowledgeable, they preferred to work without national health insurance coverage in order to keep their job and receive higher wages. Migrant female live-in domestic workers, as emerges from the interviews, are pushed to meet their social needs in informal individualistic or private practices, which exist beyond the safety of

formal employment, forming a grid of stability and familiarisation in the informal labour market and living without medical coverage or labour rights.

Concerning their health, as is evident from the interviews, female migrants do not follow any preventive health care practices and turn to pharmaceutical coverage alone, to relatives or informal networks (medical doctors from their country-of-origin friends/acquaintances), for hospitalisation and medical examinations to private doctors and clinics, and to employers. Some interviewees experienced certain stereotypes based on skin colour/racial background. In multiple cases their situation was aggravated by the authoritarian, demanding and ugly behaviour of employers towards them with physical and/or verbal abuse, as well as with the withholding of their documents. Interviewee 4 (Philippines, 54) mentioned that due to the economic crisis and Covid-19 restrictions, she is currently receiving a lower salary, which means she needs to adhere to a strict budget in order to meet her monthly needs and responsibilities (e.g., rent, remittances to the Philippines, bills, supermarket or other expenses). She had to learn to survive in the current economy and the recession since she is in Greece. When she got sick, her employer would call a medical doctor to their residence to examine her and help her with health issues. Now, she occasionally books an appointment and visits a doctor in public hospitals or health units, e.g., a dentist. Some interviewees are self-insured for social security and healthcare. The following were identified from the interviews during the Covid-19 pandemic: i) fewer or irregular payments, ii) days-off reduced thus spending more time in employer's residence, iii) more dependency on employer reluctance to leave an employer, iv) fewer or no Rapid/CPR test administered.

Migrant community associations

Regarding **migrant community association** participation, the socioeconomic crisis has deepened migrants' feelings of isolation and separation from other migrants, has reproduced atomisation and strengthened individualistic behaviours towards others in Greek society, as well as encouraging further dependency on employers and migrant community representatives, leaving them exposed to exploitation, further compromise to employer demands and the formation of a patronage relationship (patron-client relationship) between migrant workers, employers, migrant community and association representatives and lawyers. Due to global demand for domestic work and unskilled manual labour that isolate the migrant worker, along with a waning need for unity and the absence of occupational choices in the origin countries, there are only few cases of workplace resistance and rights claims of migrant workers in the reception societies.

Thus, in most cases, migrants are more likely to comply with the demands of their employers or resign completely from their work rights claims. Interviewee 8

(Albania, 54) explained that she does not participate in any migrant community association of Albanians as she believes they do not help their members. She has been able to solve her own problems and did not want others to interfere. Interviewed Filipina migrants would consult a lawyer recommended by their friends regarding a work-related problem. They would not ask for advice from the Union of Solidarity of Philippine Workers in Greece (KASAPI-HELLAS). Many interviewees prefer religious associations to a migrant community association. Only in few cases did migrant women mention help from community associations, such as Interviewee 1 (Congo, 29) The interviewee was a member of the Congolese Community of Greece who helped her on the opening day of her clothing brand by allowing her use of the association premises for the event. Interviewee 7 (Nigeria, 52) did participate in an association, the Nigerian Women Organisation, but has become despondent and is inactive now. Regarding contact with family networks, those with no family members and relatives in Greece communicate with them via video calls and social media on a regular basis.

Due to deficiencies in monitoring mechanisms and labour inspection, interviewees hesitated to file a complaint for fear of dismissal or being reported to the authorities (for those with unstable/irregular legal status). In cases of abuse (verbal, physical, psychological), payment delays or other mistreatment, migrant female domestic workers are urged to seek alternative means of ensuring survival in Greek society, choosing individual methods of regulating their difficulties and worker rights, far from collectivities and often resigning from them completely. For many years, migrant female domestic workers have attempted to solve their problems alone or with the assistance of contact networks or their employers, which has only led to further isolation. Interviewee 2 (Kenya, 50) also encountered racial discrimination. She recalled a case when she needed to open a bank account and issue a debit cash card. She realized that the woman who was the branch manager was purposefully delaying the procedures. After multiple efforts, and when the manager was on leave, Interviewee 2 (Kenya, 50) revisited the branch and completed all the procedures immediately. Interviewee 2 (Kenya, 50) explained that African women experience adversity from the start of their journey until their arrival in Greece. Some are sexually exploited, abused or deceived. Problems persist after their arrival too:

Some are raped. In the forest. They come carrying their babies but with no husband. Some are deceived that if they are pregnant, they are going to be granted entrance documents in the country they are going. Later they find that they will have no documents even with a baby. The males they're travelling with also take advantage of them. They have many problems when they come here as they do not find what they expected so most of them end up on the street. Also, men and women all are put together in one room. They stay there because they don't know what's next, because they are undocumented and some even have their children with them. Children cannot go to school and

women are more vulnerable. The dangers that women face are more than those of men.

Most of the interviewees with no family in Greece send remittances to their origin country, the amounts directly affected by the changes in the economy and employment.

Success stories of integration: From invisibility to resilience and empowerment?

The interviews revealed two types of changes: The *first* success story is related to economic enhancement based on personal dedication and sacrifice. There were attempts made to seek better income to support their family with remittances and in these particular cases, 6/10 interviewees that moved to live-out domestic work were able to avoid any further dependencies on employers. Female migrant interviewees believe that their goals for advancement and economic sustainability are achieved through hard work. Therefore, they perceived themselves as capable of facing any given situation. The above is related to progress achieved after years in the Greece. On the other hand, interviewee 10 (Bulgaria, 35) mentioned that she had expected to face difficulties. In the beginning, she was unaware of the demands and gave her utmost to productivity. However, once she learned Greek, everything went more smoothly. Her primary goal is to earn money to support her children, and prevent them from facing the same difficulties she has faced. Currently, she is trying to find work as a live-in domestic worker which she knows is more demanding, but will guarantee higher payment. She will sacrifice her time and fixed schedule to earn more.

Similarly, in the case of Interviewee 7 (Nigeria, 52) two significant changes were made to her life: i) financial and ii) awareness of stereotyped treatment. On an economic basis, she achieved greater stability and empowerment. However, her exclusive employment as a domestic worker and a caregiver has led her to entrapment in such jobs, dependency on employers and lineal socioeconomic mobility. Interviewee 3 (Georgia, 50) believed that “this was worth the trip, and that, in the long run, she benefited from the hard work and the difficulties she faced as a domestic helper”.

Interviewee 6 (Ukraine, 53) received overtime payment with full benefits, social insurance contributions and social insurance. Since her arrival in Greece and until 2009, she was entrapped in this specific occupation and worked mainly as a live-in cleaner and nanny. However, after 2016, she opted to work as a cleaning lady, and this formed a radically different reality in her life. This work enabled her to face the adverse consequences of the economic crisis. Therefore, she feels fortunate that she left live-in domestic work, despite still being in the cleaning sector. This has positively

impacted her life and development in Greece. The job opportunity that emerged offered her the chance for “salvation”, i.e., to have a successful outcome to her choice to migrate. The migratory initiative of Interviewee 6 is associated with linear progress in their search for a better income. The difficulties she experienced emphasize the importance of the resilience required to survive in a foreign country. Interviewee 6 stressed the difference between live-out and live-in caregiving. In the latter, she is greatly restricted; she has no personal life or privacy. She has to keep an eye on the elderly all day long and overnight. Now, she feels “free”. When she works for an employer, she does it conscientiously and respectfully. She feels grateful to the Greek employers who employed her and perceive her as part of their family. Her work offers her security and the sense that she is useful and can help her family. She feels that her employers appreciate and stand by her in case of need. She misses her family, but she is content, given that she can help her husband and children. Interviewee 3 (Georgia, 50) was uncertain of her future as she believed she had grown old and would probably have to leave eventually. She was unsure as to how much longer she would be able to work. She mentioned that due to the difficult and demanding tasks, age is a crucial factor; when employers are told her age, they feel reluctant to offer her a job. Her plan for the future is to return to Georgia soon in order to spend as much time as possible with her grandchildren. “I am tired and concerned. Exhausted. Nothing else. It has been worth it, though, as I could make a contribution, albeit a small one, to help my family. I did as much as I was able to do here”, she commented. She feels physically and psychologically drained due to her work conditions. She explains that her work has been demanding and difficult, but also that she felt closer to the person she cared for. She felt compassion.

The greatest difficulty at work is ironing and cooking, as employers have specific demands. Interviewee 8 (Albania, 54) is anxious about whether she will continue to have a job in Greece. Once her children have settled down in regular jobs, she would like to return to Albania because she cannot work as a live-out domestic worker and cleaner much longer, due to age. She is grateful she found a job in Greece, stressing that “good health and work are above all” and is hoping to have saved enough money to be able to retire. She is, however, aware that employment of female Albanians leads to dead-end, low-status occupations characterized by horizontal development or mobility within the occupation itself rather than upward.

The *second* case, such as that of Interviewee 2 (Kenya, 50) shows that when a woman escapes subordination and develops critical consciousness and collective behaviour, she is ultimately led to empowerment as she struggles to change her life. The internal strength that emerged through the experiences of Interviewee 2 (Kenya, 50) was connected to her life purpose, decision-making and goals. She was led to consider herself as able and entitled to make decisions. Such cases are of great concern to social policy and migration policymakers who seek to facilitate integration, investigate the conditions of personal service occupations, combat undeclared work and identify weaknesses in workers' rights and organisations. Interviewee 2 (Kenya,

50) was motivated due to circumstances. She migrated to be united with her husband and live as a family, but had to seek employment as her husband (who worked for a delivery company and in train station cleaning), had passed away earlier in Greece. Interviewee 2 (Kenya, 50) had never dreamed of starting an NGO in a foreign country, particularly in Greece. She also never expected to travel abroad. Although adapting was difficult for her, as soon as she had a semblance of stability, she began cooking for others in need. She explained:

I didn't want to stay. It was a difficult time for me. Then I started it... Small-scale cooking in my small kitchen in my small pot and then taking the food to the streets to feed the needy. Now I have pots and cooking utensils to prepare meals for more than 1000 people.

Interviewee 2 (Kenya, 50) mentioned that many foreigners face difficulties. However, there are Greeks who also face similar difficulties because of the economic crisis. In fact, in the city centre she also helps Greeks who are destitute, e.g., do not have electricity in their homes or need food supplies. She also makes an effort to visit apartments to provide help, for example in the case of the elderly. On her way back from her employers' residence, she sees many individuals from Africa suffering and sleeping on the streets. She feels privileged because although her husband has passed away, she has been able to support her family. She decided to start cooking for those in need and has also provided temporary accommodation to individuals from African countries, e.g., Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana. Interviewee 2 said:

And I thought, I'm privileged because although my husband has passed away, I can still get a job and support my children. There are Africans here, sleeping outside in the cold or heat. So, I decided that every Saturday, when I don't go to work, I would cook in my house and give food to the homeless. I did it for a long time, and I also got some off the street and I put up them in my house.

Interviewee 2 (Kenya, 50) explained that she currently sees many cases, many people who are in need even more than before. She does not only help refugees, but also the unemployed. She continues to provide support to individuals in need despite current challenges connected to the Covid-19 pandemic. The NGO provides English language lessons and all basic needs except shelter. Sometimes she provides people with shelter in her apartment but she also hands out food. Now her team not only teaches English and Greek but mathematics as well.

The initiative of Interviewee 1 (Congo, 29) could act as motivation towards the independence of immigrant women beyond traditional female occupations. In addition, in light of the above, the promotion of labour market integration must initially be oriented towards the recording, recognition and evaluation of skills, the facilitation of

access to the labour market, and entrepreneurship promotion. Regarding the quantitative impact: Such initiatives could facilitate and inform immigrant women, aiming at developing micro-entrepreneurship (start-up companies) through legislation: a) on the issues of entry and residence (visa and residence permit), b) the simplification of the process of setting up small businesses and (c) the possibility of gross financing by banks and government grants (legislation) and also by increasing awareness of the positive role immigrant women can play in their capacity as entrepreneurs which, in turn, can contribute to economic growth for the reception country. Successful encounters can enable and be transformative to participants and programmes.

Such cases can be extended to the field of micro-entrepreneurship both during the creation of new businesses (start-up) and during its development by providing know-how, consulting voluntarily and co-financing for innovative projects with added value. The development of micro-entrepreneurship can provide a way out – also for locals – of unemployment and the social exclusion of vulnerable immigrant women. The developments of the interviewee's choices could encourage and provide adequate support to immigrant/refugee women to maximize their potential and ultimately help them enter the labour market successfully. Such cases could strengthen and develop the immigrant woman's self-confidence, enhancing her professional and personal skills. They could act as a practical example to facilitate immigrant and refugee women's integration into the labour market and society. Such initiatives should be considered due to their motivation, driving forces and emphasis on gender-based differences.

Conclusions

Educational provisions often overlook the socioeconomic outcomes and effects of migrant women on the job market. All women interviewed emphasized that education ensures psychosocial support for both adults and children and the smooth integration into the Greek educational system where a transitional period of preparation of those who will remain in Greece is crucial. Ensuring further vocational training will develop a plan for their integration and empower them towards social and labour market integration. All women interviewed argued that regardless of age, each person faces challenges in learning a new language. Bureaucratic obstacles were mentioned during school enrolment before and during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Interviewees underline the necessity for a) multiple Greek language and culture courses, b) human rights and gender equality education and c) awareness events so local communities can learn about the background of migrants. All women interviewed noted that learning the Greek language is central in accessing social care and social services. They underlined the necessity of attending Greek language classes as it will help them in everyday communications with social services. Due to the existence of

lengthy procedures, legal support is required. According to their experience, interpreters are considered essential in public social services (healthcare, taxation services, municipalities, Unified Social Security Fund etc.).

The majority of interviewees (9/10) believed that migrant community associations do not help female immigrants in work and other matters, and they need to turn to legal advisors for help. Some also stressed that one does not need to become a member of the association after becoming familiar with the procedures or turning to lawyers for legal advice with their employment rights. The majority of women reported that their involvement in the church and religious organisations monopolized their interest. Female migrant domestic workers prefer to spend their spare time in church and Bible study groups rather than joining a union or a community association. In their spare time they contact their family members, do recreational activities, socialize or simply rest.

Due to the work mode and employment, not only is the workforce's life at risk, but also its freedom and potential for progress and social development. Since migrant women are isolated and unable to find social and labour solidarity and assistance, social policy and labour protection measures as well as the active intervention of advocacy associations, trade unions and workers' organisations regarding migrant workers' labour organisation and representation, response and resistance at the workplace, are imperative. Concerning their labour rights, migrants experience intense workplace instability and also in their relationships with fellow migrant workers. This workforce is distinguished by its lack of work rights and trade union representation. More and more migrants are becoming a part of a workforce reserve that is continually renewed and is divided into sectors according to the type of employment.

Initiatives at local level should be taken into consideration based on their effect on aiding adaptation to everyday life. Grassroot actions such as support of Greek language learning programmes and targeted educational programmes in specific groups of immigrants and refugees or refugee women, lead to socioeconomic integration. Migrant groups need more protection under the national legal framework and labour inspection mechanisms so as not to fall victim to exploitation, social exclusion and poverty. Cases of resilience with female migrants leaving live-in domestic work such as that of Interviewee 6 (Ukraine, 53) emphasize that their life changed significantly for the better as soon as they broke free from the instability and dangers of live-in domestic work and caregiving. Another job was found when they could not, for psychological reasons, continue work as a live-in domestic worker. However, not all migrant women can escape such live-in domestic work.

Regarding the "success stories", such initiatives for vulnerable groups are based on the need to follow targeted actions to cover the socioeconomic difficulties

that are present, as they face problems of adaptation and integration into society. These initiatives could create the basis for interventions aiming at the integration (Krummel, 2012; Briones, 2020) of large numbers of individuals or families and could include the provision of psychosocial support services, counselling, support and enhancement of technical training, language learning, facilitating access to local services as well as to the host society, legal support, etc., aiming at the gradual attainment of independence and the ability of the beneficiaries to integrate into the social fabric of the host society.

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