

## **Equal Opportunities on the Threshold of Czech Households (*Rovné šance na prahu českých domácností*)**

**Czech Republic - 2012 – 2014**

### **Migrant Domestic Workers' Rights on the Threshold of Czech Households**

#### **Summary**

The Association for Integration and Migration (SIMI), in cooperation with People In Need, the media agency Oglivy & Mather and the Economics Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, implemented a project to support migrant women working in Czech households, from 2012 to 2014.

The project advocated for equal opportunities for migrant women domestic workers, for improvement in their working conditions and often difficult position in society. The project focused on: migrant women domestic workers in providing direct counselling and workshops; employers in promoting standards for fair working conditions; the general public in raising awareness through a communication campaign; and policy makers in seeking their support to put in place the legal conditions necessary. Research was carried out on the situation and experience of migrant women domestic workers to develop a knowledge base to inform the change needed.

Migrant women domestic workers face various forms of discrimination on grounds of nationality and gender and in relation to their work experiences of unpaid overtime, low wages, and restrictions on personal freedom. Many are undocumented, engaged in unregulated work and lacking knowledge about their working or civil rights.

345 migrant women and 34 men were provided with free legal and social counselling, including instructional courses and access to a website with practical information and contacts. The awareness of the general public, policy makers and employers was enhanced. The project promoted ratification of the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers to create a lasting framework to improve the working conditions of domestic workers and this is now a possibility.

### **Migrant domestic workers increasing but in the shadow**

The Czech Republic (CR) has not ratified the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers. There is no focus on migrant domestic workers, who are predominantly women in the Strategy for Social Inclusion of the CZ or in the Strategy for Equality of Women and Men 2015 – 2020 for the CR. More generally, there is no specific focus on migrant women nor any specific measures planned for this group.

The employment of migrant women as domestic workers is increasing in the CR. This is partly due to the difficulties with work/life balance and care arrangements. This is a result of the institutional framework of the family that reflects traditional gender stereotyped attitudes and practice in the division of household work and care in families, and employment policy that reflects the unavailability of part-time and flexible working arrangements and expensive or unavailable childcare services.<sup>1</sup> This situation results in a heavy double burden for women, who then seek affordable services or assistance with childcare and household work.

<sup>1</sup> Hana Hašková, 'Pracující Matky a Genderové Role ve Výsledcích Mezinárodního Longitudinálního Výzkumu' (Working mothers and gender roles in the results of international longitudinal research), *Gender, Rovné Příležitosti, Výzkum*, 6.1 (2005), 22–27.

However, in employing migrant women as cheap labour, families are reproducing gender inequality both inside the family and globally between groups of women.

Migrant domestic worker form part of the shadow economy due to their undocumented status and due to the unregulated nature of the work.<sup>2</sup> The women face various forms of discrimination. This can be on the grounds of gender or racial or ethnic origin, it can be on the grounds of unregulated work that often includes excessive working hours, low wages, and restrictions in personal freedom.<sup>3</sup>

## **Changing the vulnerable situation of migrant domestic workers**

The Association for Integration and Migration (SIMI), in cooperation with People In Need, the media agency Oglivy & Mather and the Economics Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, implemented a project to support migrant women working in households. The project was supported by the European Social Fund.

The project employs a multidimensional concept of poverty. It takes account of income deprivation, as well as entrapment of migrant women domestic workers, where this work is part of the shadow economy with no formal protection or standards for working conditions. The aim is to enhance quality employment conditions, access to quality supports, and inclusion through better incomes and working conditions for these workers.

The project included a broad range of activities including:

- A unique communication strategy
- Innovation in setting standards in the employment of migrant domestic workers
- Legal and social counselling to migrant women
- Political advocacy to ratify the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers.

## **A bogus agency for domestic workers**

The aim of this unique communications campaign was to show that domestic work is a job like any other and, therefore, is subject to the Labour Code. A bogus 'Foreign Housekeepers Agency' was founded. The aim was to start a public debate about the status of migrant women domestic workers, to critique their unregulated and bad working conditions, and to increase the sensitivity of society and policy makers to this issue,

About 21.000 people visited the webpage of this bogus Agency during a couple of weeks and about 150 registered their interest in the services. Even though the Agency was not real, the information and advertisement provided on the webpage were based on real events. The initiative was successful in provoking critical reactions. Many people criticized that women were being treated in the same way as goods and that they had to be in the house 24/7 and that no written contract was needed. They accused the Agency of human trafficking and contemporary slavery. This proved that at least part of society is not indifferent to the working conditions of migrant women domestic workers.

Several press conferences were held, as well as a final conference for the various stakeholders.

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<sup>2</sup> Petra Ezzeddine and Vilém Semerák, The Situation of Migrant Women on the Czech Market of Domestic Work (Prague: Sdružení pro integraci a migraci, 2014) <[http://www.migrace.com/docs/160208\\_the-situation-of-female-migrants-on-the-czech-paid-domestic-work-market.pdf](http://www.migrace.com/docs/160208_the-situation-of-female-migrants-on-the-czech-paid-domestic-work-market.pdf)>.

<sup>3</sup> Petra Ezzeddine and Vilém Semerák, The Situation of Migrant Women on the Czech Market of Domestic Work (Prague: Sdružení pro integraci a migraci, 2014) <[http://www.migrace.com/docs/160208\\_the-situation-of-female-migrants-on-the-czech-paid-domestic-work-market.pdf](http://www.migrace.com/docs/160208_the-situation-of-female-migrants-on-the-czech-paid-domestic-work-market.pdf)>.

## Ten commandments of a fair employer

The aim of this standard setting initiative was to appeal to the families employing migrant women domestic workers to be fair to their employees. The so called “Ten Commandments of a Fair Employer” were created.

1. Domestic work is work like any other.
2. Ensure that the written contract made with your domestic worker is in a language she understands.
3. Agree on a detailed job description and respect it.
4. Pay the full remuneration on time including overtime and extra work.
5. Respect legal employment.
6. Respect working hours, holidays, sick days and the right to rest.
7. Provide working tools and protective tools and mind workplace safety.
8. Be polite and respectful.
9. If you employ a live-in domestic worker, respect her privacy.
10. Treat your domestic worker the way you would want to be treated by your employer.

A video spot was created to present the ten commandments of a fair employer. See the video spot: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=600TyyKuzfE>

## Empowering migrant women

The project provided individual legal and social counselling for migrant domestic workers as well as workshops for migrant domestic workers and employees of NGOs working with migrant women. Altogether, 345 women and 34 men were supported by this practice. This included migrant women who received free legal and social counselling, and participated in instructional courses and workshops, as well as women and men representing NGOs working with migrant women who participated in a specialised course for NGOs.

This direct work was supported by a special section of the website covering practical information and contacts for migrant domestic workers. The website (<http://www.pracovnicevdomacnosti.cz/en>) of the whole project is divided into three sections: one for the migrant women including important information about their rights and responsibilities; one for the general public including the video spot with the ten commandments as well as research results and other important information; and one for the media focused on the communication campaign including press releases, photos, videos from the conferences as well as information leaflets to download.

Practical information in different languages (English, Russian, Ukrainian) is provided on: residence regulation in the CR including housing and health insurance with important contacts; citizenship including new and updated information on new regulations; employment; entrepreneurship; social benefits; education; and counselling and contacts.

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## Advocating ratification of ILO Convention on Domestic Workers

The potential for lasting change in the conditions of migrant women domestic workers lies in the ratification of the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers. This would have a positive impact on their working conditions through a formalising work relations and introducing control mechanisms.

The project collected the first data on the phenomenon of migrant women domestic workers in the CR to inform policy and public debate. Meetings and presentations for relevant policy-makers were organised. The project and the research results were presented to the Government Council for Equal Opportunities of Women and Men and to the Department for Equality of Women and Men of the Government Administration Office. The project generated interest and discussion both in the Czech society and at a political level. Cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and with the Department for Equal Opportunities

for Women and Men of the Government Office is a positive result of this project. These actions had a positive impact and a process of ratification of the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers is now under preparation.

## In sum

The project opened up debate on the situation of migrant women domestic workers both among the general public and politicians. It promoted new standards for the employment of these women. It provided practical support for 345 women and 34 men.

The potential for sustainability of the project lies in having created the conditions for the potential ratification of the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers. The Association for Integration and Migration is continuing its focus on this process of ratification and on the issues of the rights of migrant women, in areas such as pension and public health insurance.

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## Contact

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## Further information

Website of the project: <http://www.pracovnicevdomacnosti.cz/en>

Association for Integration and Migration (project leader NOG): <http://www.migrace.com/en/>

People in Need (project partner NGO): <https://www.clovekvtisni.cz/en>

Research results: Ezzeddine, P., V. Semerák 2014. *The situation of migrant women on the Czech market of domestic work*. Available at: [http://www.migrace.com/docs/160208\\_the-situation-of-female-migrants-on-the-czech-paid-domestic-work-market.pdf](http://www.migrace.com/docs/160208_the-situation-of-female-migrants-on-the-czech-paid-domestic-work-market.pdf)

Video and photogallery: <http://www.pracovnicevdomacnosti.cz/en/for-media/video-and-photogallery.html>

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