

## INCREASING THE CAPACITY OF DOMESTIC WORKERS OF DIFFERENT ORIGINS TO RESPOND TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE THROUGH

31 DECEMBER 2013

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## IMPORTANT POINTS

- **Underreporting of sexual harassment due to illegal migrant status, informal employment status and family reactions.**
- **Low capacity and specialization of the existing services.**
- **Low awareness of the problem.**

### SEXUAL HARASSMENT AGAINST FEMALE MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS

Female migrant domestic workers are more vulnerable than local people and lack the capacity to protect themselves against abusive situations due to the lack of local language skills, the low awareness of the local laws and customs, the inadequate access to appropriate jobs and the limited knowledge of their rights (IOM, 2009; FRA, 2011; OHCHR's Regional Office for Europe, 2010). Many women domestic workers feel that they have no choice but to stay and suffer abuse because fleeing their employer would mean lapsing into irregular status, admitting to the authorities if they are in an irregular situation and/or losing their right to work (FRA, 2011). Several international organizations have raised this issue in their agendas, emphasizing the intersectional nature of the problem and proposing the development of protective mechanisms for female migrant domestic workers as well as capacity-building among civil society to address and monitor the conditions of migrant domestic workers (CEDAW, 2008; IOM, 2010; ILO, 2010).

### THE "COMMUNAID" PROJECT

COMMUNAID is a European project funded by the DAPHNE III Programme (JUST/2011/DAP/AG/3272) and is carried out in five European countries (Greece, Cyprus, Austria, Sweden and Slovenia) with the involvement of experts from the Netherlands. The overall aim of the project is to increase the capacity of female migrant domestic workers to respond to sexual harassment through developing and testing community-based interventions. The project objectives are the following: (a) to describe the problem of sexual harassment against female migrant domestic workers and assess the victims' needs, (b)

to map community resources, allies, interventions and policies addressing sexual harassment against migrant women, (c) to design culturally and linguistically appropriate tools and interventions to address sexual harassment against female migrant domestic workers, (d) to develop a pool of accredited workers and community members who could facilitate community education and long-term community development programs, (e) to raise the awareness of female migrant domestic workers about their rights and improve their competence in responding to sexual harassment in domestic work.



*"It is not an easy topic to study. It happens behind closed doors and is vastly underreported."* Prof. Joannes Chliaoutakis, Project Coordinator

**LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE SEXUAL HARASSMENT AGAINST FEMALE MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS**

A systematic review of the literature (electronic and desk-based) was carried out within the project aiming to investigate the extent to which sexual harassment against female migrant domestic workers is an issue in the current research and policy agenda in Europe. The electronic search was performed between April and August 2013 in five databases; PUBMED, SCOPUS, WEB OF SCIENCE, EBSCO and HEIN-ONLINE. The review included all papers published: a) in English language, b) within January 2003 and August 2013 and c) with abstract available, d) with focus in EU Member States. An additional desk-based search was performed in Greece, Cyprus, Sweden, Austria and Slovenia in 20 peer-reviewed leading scientific journals in the fields of “Law”, “Social Science” and “Health”, issued in native languages. The electronic search identified 136 published studies and the desk-based search retrieved another 26 potentially relevant articles. Upon in-depth

review of these articles, consensus was reached on 12 articles as meeting all inclusion criteria. Based on the analysis, 4 critical issues were identified as follows: a) the working conditions and relations, b) the regulation and access to fundamental rights, c) the cultural norms and public attitudes, d) the system’s support. Gender inequalities are highlighted in literature as a causal factor behind the problem. What is further worthy to mention is the fact that evidence from the region of Europe is scarce. In light of the findings, the need to formalize domestic services is underscored. Introduction of monitoring mechanisms would ensure effective prevention and intervention strategies. Support resources for female migrant domestic workers are needed to facilitate reporting of sexual harassment and effective treatment of victims. Finally, more efforts are required to increase women’s, employers’ and public’s awareness on the problem.

**MAPPING COMMUNITY RESOURCES, ALLIES, INTERVENTIONS AND POLICIES**

A mapping exercise was carried out in each partner country with the following objectives: a) to identify and describe policies, interventions and legislation addressing sexual harassment against female migrant domestic workers, b) to identify governmental and non-governmental organisations/institutions addressing the study topic, c) to identify best practices and key priorities in the management of sexual harassment against female migrant domestic work-

ers, d) to develop a portfolio of community resources and allies for sexually victimized female migrant domestic workers. The portfolio of resources for the participant countries is accessible through the project website.



The “COMMUNAID” project was presented during a workshop on violence against women, organized by LaHeRS at TEI of Crete on the



Kick-off meeting, 7-8 February 2013, Heraklion Crete

**Published evidence from the region of Europe is scarce. More research is needed to gain a better understanding of the problem.**

## INTERVIEWS WITH FEMALE MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS WHO EXPERIENCED SEXUAL HARASSMENT

A qualitative study on sexually victimized female migrant domestic workers is currently in progress in four participant countries (Greece, Austria, Cyprus, Sweden) aiming to describe their experiences of sexual harassment by their male employers and identify their needs in post-victimization support. A semi-structured interview guide is used for the data collection assessing participants' responses on 7 thematic areas. A total of 32 interviews have been currently completed in all the participant countries. Some interesting although initial findings indicate that the male perpetrator is usually the employer himself or a close relative and often an elderly. Harassment usually takes the forms of lustful look, verbal aggression with sexualized content, inappropriate

touching or even rape and almost always coexists with psychological pressure. It usually happens at home or in the car and only when the abuser is alone with the victim. Common barriers of reporting are the fear of job loss, the fear of law complications and deportation due to their illegal regime and their informal employment, the fear of their husband's and the perpetrator's family reaction, the lack of support due to the poor social network. They most often don't speak with anyone and try to find a new job. Alternatively they speak with their partner and close relatives or even try to approach close relatives of the perpetrator. Less often they address to official bodies and NGOs.

## STAKEHOLDERS' VIEWS AND PRACTICES ON THE PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AGAINST FEMALE MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS

A qualitative study was carried out on key stakeholders in four participant countries (Greece, Austria, Cyprus, Sweden) aiming to explore their views, activities and suggestions regarding sexual victimization of female migrant domestic workers and indicate key national priorities. A mapping process with certain inclusion criteria together with a snowball technique were employed in each participant country to identify stakeholders active in the area of prevention and management of sexual harassment against female migrant domestic workers. A sample of approximately 15 stakeholders was selected in each country (governmental/NGOs, national/regional/local). A semi-structured interview guide was used for the data collection, which involved 8 thematic areas and explored issues such as the organization's

involvement in the prevention and management of sexual harassment against female migrant domestic workers, best practices, barriers, challenges and recommendations for an improved response. Some key results indicate that several barriers affect the prevention and management of the problem such as: a) cultural vulnerability, b) gaps in legislation, c) lack of specialized services, d) low awareness of the problem and, e) low institutional capacity .



Consortium meeting, 11-12 July 2013, Limasol, Cyprus

Key barriers in addressing the problem are the cultural vulnerability, the gaps in legislation, the lack of specialized services, the low awareness of the problem and the low institutional capacity.



The COMMUNAID project was presented to high school students of the city of Heraklion Crete on the 25th of April 2013 during the STUDENT-FOR-A-DAY EVENT aiming at their familiarization with the academic activities.

Visit our website at:

[www.teicrete.gr/CommunAid/](http://www.teicrete.gr/CommunAid/)

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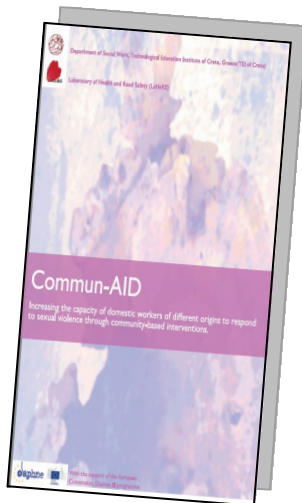
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The project leaflet is available in English, Greek, German, Swedish, Slovenian and is accessible through the project's website.



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## Coming in 2014

- A web intervention tool will be developed to assist sexually victimized female migrant domestic workers deal with their victimization.
- A train-the-trainer intervention will be designed and implemented to educate community members on how to address the problem.
- A regional conference will be held at the end of 2014 in Crete, Greece with international participation.

