

Seminar: Gender and Migration during COVID19

NELLI KAMBOURI

Iceland
Liechtenstein
Norway grants

ProGender

A Digital Hub on Gender,
the COVID-19 Crisis and its Aftermath

The project is implemented by:



Day one:

**“Gendered approaches and
Transnational Perspectives
of Gender and Migration”**

18.00-20.00 (Greece)
/ 17.00-19.00 (Norway)
/ 15.00-17.00 (Iceland)

Today's Seminar Program

18.00-18.15: Welcome and presentation of participants

18.15-18.40: Presentation

18.40-19.00: Discussion-Questions

19.00-19.15: Break

19.15-19.45 Interactive session

19.45-20.00: Closing questions and remarks

Gender perspectives of migration

Since the 1970s the dominant perspectives of migration and migrant movements have raised many challenges to the assumption that moving across borders is mainly a male endeavour and women just follow the decisions of men in their families. Gender perspectives have pointed out to the importance of adding intersectional categories in the study of migration, mainly class, ethnicity, race, and sexuality, which go far beyond a simple gesture of “adding women and stir”.

Thus emphasis has been placed on:

1. Migration, domestic and care work: transnational families and transnational care chains.
2. Diasporic communities

and more recently

1. Migrant Masculinities and femininities, which are transformed during migration movements
2. -Border controls based on sexuality
3. -LGBTQ migrants and border crossings.

In all these, gender studies have challenged the ethnocentrism of research, emphasising that migrant lives are transnational and gender identities are hybrid in migration. (see bibliography)

UN Women (2021)

According to a report on migrant women workers across the world:

1. Loss of livelihoods: “Women migrant workers are reported to be losing their jobs in large numbers in some sectors. Because they tend to work in the informal economy in precarious conditions without formal employment contracts and limited coverage by labour laws, employers can more readily end their employment in response to the economic decline caused by the COVID-19 pandemic” (p. 2)
2. Care and Domestic Workers: increased workload, increased exposure to the virus, increased unpaid care work at home.
3. Limited Freedom of Movement: inability to travel to the home place, or mass forced movements of migrants towards their homeplaces, as for example in India.
4. Lack of access to social protection: because they are working in informal sectors, migrant women do not have access to funds COVID-19 or social protection.
5. Increase risk of gender-based violence: domestic violence mostly because of lockdowns, but also sexual harassment, and trafficking

Measures to protect migrant women's human rights (UN Women 2021)

UN WOMEN

“Women migrant workers, irrespective of their migration status, **should enjoy their full human rights during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond**, in compliance with international law. This means ensuring access to essential services, such as health, police, justice and social services, for all migrant women and sexual and gender minorities, including victims and survivors of gender-based violence”.

GOVERNMENT OF PORTUGAL

The government of Portugal decided in March 2020 that all migrants with open applications for residence permits or asylum will be given regularized migration status, with full access to essential services during the coronavirus outbreak.

What do you think of these measures and proposals?

World Bank (2020)

The question of remittances is of central importance for world economies.

-There was a sharp drop in remittances since the start of the pandemic, which impacted on places of origin as well.

Why are they important? “Migrant remittances provide an economic lifeline to poor households in many countries; a reduction in remittance flows could increase poverty and reduce households’ access to much-needed health services” (p. viii)

For migrant women especially migrant remittances are very significant because of the global care chains. Women who take care of the elderly and children in countries of emigration have often left children and elderly back home, which depend on those remittances. Broken care chains across the world.

What do you think of the economic and care interdependence amongst nations. Should migrant receiving countries consider migration from the perspective of remittances?

What is the emphasis on these accounts of the gender impact of COVID-19

- Exclusive focus on **migrant women** as essential workers and carers, as well as victims of gender based violence
- Transnational migrant networks and families** are mentioned but not usually considered in policy recommendations.
- LGBTQ+ issues in migration are not taken into consideration.
- Broader intersectionality issues are mentioned only sporadically; how do ethnicity, race, age, social class, migrant status, religion, and sexuality influence the gendered impact of COVID-19 on migration?
- Issues like precarious housing, employment and legal status in the context of the pandemic are also discussed but not analysed

The role of states in integration?

But international organizations rarely mention the role of states.

The gendered impacts of COVID 19 reinforce existing inequalities of class, ethnicity, race and migrant status. In countries in which measures for economic, social and political integration are weak and ineffective, migrants remain in limbo for prolonged periods of time, having to stay for longer periods in camps awaiting for asylum procedures or being obliged to renew their residence permits frequently because of strict regulations (legal precarity), having no access to welfare because they are working in informal sectors (socioeconomic precarity) and no political representation including the right to vote (political precarity).

Gender also plays an important role : women and LGBTQ+ are often more vulnerable to socioeconomic precarity and are often lack social protections, while they are also more vulnerable to gender based violence.

Intersectional perspectives of the pandemic

-An exclusive focus on the differential impacts on the pandemic on men and women reinforces a **gender binary** that may be misleading.

As Hankivsky and Kapilashrami (2020) argue:

1. we need a more “sophisticated analysis that captures “experiences of different groups of women, men and gender diverse people”
2. we also need to take into consideration “gender roles, patriarchal norms and relations” that “are reinforced or disrupted throughout the outbreak and its responses”.
3. gender must be recognized as an intersecting component of wider structural inequalities.

Intersectional perspectives of the pandemic

Lynn-Ee Ho & Maddrell (2021) argue that we need to address the **new gendered geographies** that are emerging because of COVID-19 both globally and within countries. These geographies will map vulnerability, disease, loss, death and bereavement. These experiences “reconfigure individual and collective emotional-affective landscapes” fear, uncertainty and insecurity. (p. 3)

-These geographies reflect global and local social intersectional inequalities of employment and access to health. They also reflect cultural inequalities, racism and minority hatred and stigmatization.

-For example the death and disease rates of racial, ethnic and migrant groups are higher than the rest of the population in many countries. This reflects unequal access to health protections and information, but also precarious employment, higher risks of unemployment and lack of social protection and housing during COVID-19 in these groups.

Activities

In two groups (depending on the number of people). Watch these two videos

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpJasUWteu8&t=123s>

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response#video>

1. What do these videos tell us about the gender and migration during the pandemic?
2. What are the narratives of these videos?
3. What is their perception of migrant people – men, women, LGBTQ+?
4. Who is the narrator?
5. How migrants are portrayed in each one of them? (observe both images and texts)
6. Who takes responsibility?

Conclusions

Migrant women, LGBTQ+ and men have many problems, they are not the problem. They might be victims for certain periods of times, but they are not always victims.

Migrants, especially migrant women, are holding society together during this pandemic: their care work is essential and valuable for us all. See for example the UK to understand what labour shortages can do when migrants are forced to leave because of racist regimes. Yet, they are often forced to live in precarity and work in informal sectors without access to decent working conditions and welfare.

There are those who argue that keeping migrants in a legal and socioeconomic limbo, or in a precarious employment status in the informal sector is what constitutes them in the first place vulnerable to socioeconomic hardship, gender based violence and abuse