Seminar: Gender and Migration during COVID19

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Day three:
"Gender and Communities during the pandemic: Alternative bottom up Welfare Models and Social Dynamics"

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

Today's Seminar Program

18.00-18.10: Welcome and update from previous day

18.10-18.40: Presentation

18.40-19.00: Questions, Discussion.

19.00-19.15: Break

19.15-19.45 Interactive session

19.45-20.00: Closing remarks, comments.

Update from previous day

Across the world the pandemic has had a deep impact on gender and migration.

This was not only because of rising physical vulnerability to the virus but also because of the multiplication of borders that have been erected as part of the policy responses to the pandemic, including

- migration controls, lock downs, restrictions of movement to contain the spread of COVID-19

-the rise of xenophobic, sexist and racist policies exasperated by the pandemic.

Update from previous day

Types of gendered vulnerabilities that were exasperated during COVID-19

1. Migrant women, men, LGBTQ+ migrants and asylum seekers living in camps.

2. Migrant women, men and LGBTQ+ who are working in informal sectors, are precarious and lack access to welfare.

3. Migrant women, men and LGBTQ+ whose without asylum or residence permits.

4. Migrant women (mostly) working in care, domestic, health and sex work.

5. Migrant women and LGBTQ+ asylum seekers whose lives were threatened because of gendered persecution in the country of origin.

6. Migrant women and LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and migrants who are survivors of gender based violence and trafficking.

EU responses to COVID-19

EU formal responses to migration issues during the pandemic focus on

(1) Integration

-legal: deal with residence permit and asylum decision delays

-labour: deal with migrant unemployment and precarity.

-educational: improve access to education and skills acquisition during lock downs

(2) Migrant Community Outreach (COVID-19 and vaccination)

-Develop information campaigns translated in different languages

-Use community keypersons to promote awareness of the dangers of COVIS-19

EU responses to COVID-19

(3) Expressing concerns about detention centres and camps.

"Detention centres and camps have also been cause for serious concern, as residents report **little opportunity for social distancing and not enough protective equipment to go round**" (EC, 2021)

However, nothing concrete is done to avoid

(1) Unlawful pushbacks

(2) Prolonged Detention

(3) Legal, economic and social precarity

(4) Transnational migrant networks and families

The governance of im/mobility

European policies are based since the beginning of COVID-19 on what Dobusch and Kreissl (2020) call «the governance of im/mobility». Policies against COVID-19 reinforced existing borders: different rules on who can and who cannot work, who can and cannot move increased inequalities of class, gender and migration.

Being stranded in reception and detention centres

Being confined in precarious jobs, unemployment or informal work.

Staying at home and working from home: huge inequalities in terms of educational level and type of occupation on who could work from home. For example essential workers –large part of which are migrant women- couldn't work from home. But, also class inequalities reflected in housing conditions and overcrowding.

Governance of im/mobility has severe impacts on everyday borders

-Multiple forms of gender inequalities emerge in this context.

For example, Dobusch and Kreissl discuss how migrant care workers from Eastern Europe in Austria normally follow patterns of circular migration, but in their case travel restrictions forced them to stay longer in the country of destination, work harder without extra payment and social protections in the homes of affluent Austrians, while others who went back home faced severe difficulties returning back to the countries of destination to their jobs. Unequal access to social protections amongst citizens and migrants exasperated their living conditions once they reached the countries of destination as they became completely dependent on employers.

Another study entitled "Everyday Bordering in the UK" aims to understand how immigration legislation – including COVID-19 travel restrictions – has impacted social care practitioners and the migrant families they support. See here https://everydaybordering-familiesandsocialcare.group.shef.ac.uk/   The project notes how transnational families become torn because of COVID-19 measures impact on the ability to engage in transnational care without being able to travel.

Pro-migrant movements and protest

S. Zajaka , K. Stjepandićb , and E.Steinhilper found studied pro-migrant mobilization in Germany and found changes in response to the pandemic. The public's attention is focused on COVID-19 and migration issues are no longer considered as important.

(1) new online tactics of on-and offline activism, for example sea rescue projects, awareness raising about the camps combined with "leave no one behind" inclusive slogans.

(2) more intersectional activism bridging linking migration-related issues to other forms of marginalization during the crisis .

Protest against racist policies

During protests in June 2020, members of anti-racist groups residents from migrant camps, marched protested in Athens with banners proclaiming "No refugee homeless, persecuted, jailed" and chanting slogans against evictions of refugees from temporary accommodation in apartments. Refugees used to be able to keep their accommodation for up to six months after receiving protected status. More than 11,000 refugees who have been living in reception facilities for asylum seekers are to be evicted.

"Government officials have repeatedly said Greece must become a less attractive destination for asylum seekers…The continued presence of more than 36,000 refugees and asylum seekers on the islands -- over five times the intended capacity of shelters there -- has caused major friction with local communities who are demanding their immediate removal".

https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/25521/promigrant-protests-in-athens-as-greece-extends-lockdown

Migrant Movements during COVID-19

For some scholars **migration can be conceived as a social movement**. People in postcolonial societies flee oppressive living conditions because of political or economic strains to demand better living conditions, better work and safety. This approach that has its origins in Marxist theorising is often named **the autonomy of migration.**

What happened to migration as a social movement during COVID-19?

It was a disaster for migrant movements as many migrants were stranded at the borders without recourse to any type of support. Lock downs forced many of them to be stray immobile inside territories in which their lives where in danger, on the borders or in transit, for example in the US-Mexico border.

Amnesty International (2020) "Americas: release migrants and asylum-seekers from detention during covid-19 pandemic" https://www.amnesty.org/en/petition/release-migrants-and-asylum-seekers-from-detention-during-covid-19/

Fire in Moria

Was this an accident or an act of defiance against forced immobility?

Greek Migration Minister Notis Mitarachi said the "incidents in Moria began with the asylum seekers because of the quarantine imposed". Some of the 35 people who had tested positive for Covid-19 had reportedly refused to move into isolation with their families.

Mr Mitarachi did not say, however, that the fires were a deliberate act of arson aimed at destroying the camp.

Michalis Fratzeskos, deputy mayor for civil protection, told ERT the blaze was "premeditated". Migrant tents had been empty, he said, and arsonists had "taken advantage of strong winds".

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-54082201

Fire in Moria

Four Afghan asylum seekers have been sentenced to 10 years in prison in Greece for their part in a fire that destroyed the Moria migrant camp in 2020.

The men, charged with arson with risk to human life over the fire on the island of Lesbos last September, were found guilty after a court rejected a request by lawyers for three of them to be tried by a juvenile court because they were under 18 at the time.

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/13/moria-fire-greek-court-jails-four-afghan-asylum-seekers-for-10-years

Exercise: What can we learn from the Black Lives Matter movement about bottom-up responses to racism during the pandemic?

-racism declared a public health crisis

-community police review board & police oversight

-defund or abolish the police including for gender based violence

-removal, resignation, or campaign termination of racist public officials

-racial economic justice based on intersectional criteria

-black organizer & black leadership training and reclaiming public history

-survival funds Covid Support Fund, with particular emphasis on LGBTQIA, disabled, and migrants.

Exercise: What can we learn from the metoo movement in Greece about feminism during the pandemic?

-Enormous awareness raising across class, gender, ethnic and racial lines in different sectors

-On-line but also through the mainstream media.

- Making terms such as sexual harassment or genocide has had an enormous impact across intersectional divides.

-Previously, gender-based violence was not an issue in public debates in Greece, apart from some feminist circles.

How can these two movements can help us form intersectional responses to gender and migration during the pandemic? What can we learn about intersectional practices and inclusion through these two movements?