

Female Immigrants in Cyprus – profile, obstacles, needs, aspirations

Dr Despina Charalambidou-Solomi (EKIF President)

Chrystalla Maouri (EKIF Vice President)

Dr Natasa Economidou- Stavrou (EKIF Treasurer)

Abstract

This paper draws on the findings of a research project by the Cyprus Research Centre (EKIF)¹ which aimed at, through the views of migrant women living and working on the island of Cyprus, sketching the profile of the economic female immigrant, identifying the drawbacks in her social and work environment and highlighting her needs for personal and professional development in order to meet her aspirations. The data was collected through the use of an anonymous, bilingual questionnaire (Greek and English) made up of closed and open-ended questions which can be classified into five thematic categories: personal details, work conditions, human/legal rights, personal and professional development and socialization. Three thousand questionnaires were distributed to female immigrants of various backgrounds on a national basis and 1702 responses were received. Collected data was analysed using SPSS. For the first time such a large female immigrant population becomes the subject of a research survey. The outcome is interesting and poses the need for further research in all thematic categories. It also contributes to the ongoing debates relating to immigration: discrimination, integration, multiculturalism and education. Female immigrants, one of the most vulnerable social groups, surprise us with their educational standard, their interests/hobbies, their aspirations and eagerness in acquiring further educational qualifications and desire to be accepted in their social milieu. These women are part of our social landscape and their views will, hopefully, contribute to the debate at an academic, research and policy level.

Introduction

Migration is a massive issue today in our increasingly globalising world. It has become over the last decades a complex and diversified phenomenon (Anthias, 2008).²

Cyprus has been transformed in the last thirty years from a country of emigration into a country of hosting immigrants. However, Cyprus has a long history in hosting refugees escaping war and disaster. For instance, it harboured thousands of Armenians and the Asia Minor Greeks fleeing brutal

¹ The findings of the research study of EKIF entitled *Μετανάστες: οι γνωστές-άγνωστες της κυπριακής κοινωνίας* (2010), were publicly presented on 1 June 2010. The study was funded by the Ombudsman's Office through the EU PROGRESS Programme (2007-2013), the National Machinery for Women's Rights (MJPO), the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Employment and Social Security.

² Anthias, Floya (2008). "European Migration: a Sourcebook" *The Cyprus Review*, vol 20(2), pp 197-201, Lefkosia.

attack in the early twentieth century, Jews on their way to Palestine and thousands of Lebanese fleeing from their country because of the atrocities of civil war (Philippou, 2007).³

In the 1990's and first decade of 21st century, the island of Cyprus hosted thousands of economic migrants and political refugees. This has been the result of the following factors: the dwindling of the agricultural sector, the island's economy becoming more dependent on tourism, services and banking, Cyprus becoming a Member of the EU (2004) and joining the euro zone (2008);⁴ increasing numbers of indigenous women joining the labour market. Other external factors were geopolitical regional changes (collapse of Beirut as centre of the Middle East, the collapse of the regimes of eastern Europe and the Gulf war).⁵

Cyprus ranks third in percentage of receiving immigrants among EU Member States: Luxemburg 44%, Latvia 18% , Cyprus and Estonia 16% . The percentage of foreigners in the EU (27) is estimated around 6.4% i.e. 31.9 million.⁶ Another interesting point to be noted in Cyprus, as in other countries, is that immigration population is increasingly becoming feminised (Anthias & Lazaridis, 2000)⁷.

According to the data of the Civil Registry and Migration Department of the Republic of Cyprus, in April 2010, 85,661 women and 68,881 men resided in Cyprus, with a valid residence permit. The largest numerical groups of foreign women with a valid residence permit, during 1990-2007, originated from Greece (10135), the Philippines (9646), Sri Lanka (9131), the United Kingdom (6340), Bulgaria (5187), the Russian Federation (4739), Romania (3160), Vietnam (3094) and Ukraine (2791).⁸

As a result of globalisation, EU membership and migration, the Cypriot society is faced with new challenges: problems of racism, discrimination, multiculturalism, integration of migrants and combating illegal immigration on top of the unresolved Cyprus problem, occupation of 40% of the

³ Philippou, Nicos (2008). "Migrants, Social Space and Visibility" *The Cyprus Review*, vol 20(2), pp 189-193, Lefkosia.

⁴ PIO (2009). *The Republic of Cyprus: an Overview*, PIO: Lefkosia, 2009.

⁵ Trimikliniotis, Nicos (2008). "Rethinking migration, Discrimination and Multiculturalism in a Post-tourist Society," *The Cyprus Review*, vol. 20 (2), pp 13-16, Lefkosia.

⁶ Eurostat Statistics in Focus, 45/2010. "Foreigners in the EU are diverse and largely younger than nationals of the EU Member States," *News Release*, dated 07/09/2010.

⁷ Anthias, Floya and Lazaridis, Gabriella, eds (2000). *Gender and Migration in Southern Europe: women on the move*, Oxford: Berg.

⁸ Data was obtained from the Civil Registry and Migration Department of the Republic of Cyprus prior to designing the questionnaire in July 2008 and in April 2010 before presenting the results of the project in public in June 2010. For current statistical data on asylum seekers, immigration of third country nationals and citizens of EU Member States, see a publication by the Interior Ministry entitled *Μετανάστευση και Άσυλο στην Κυπριακή Δημοκρατία* (November 2010).

territory of the Cyprus Republic by Turkish forces since 1974 and the change of the demographic character of the occupied territory by settlement of illegal immigrants from Turkey.⁹

Methodology

Bearing in mind all these challenges, the Cyprus Gender Research Centre (EKIF), an NGO set up to promote equality of sexes and women's issues, decided to offer a platform and voice to the female immigrant population who live and work on the island of Cyprus by contacting a survey on a pancyprian basis.

For the purpose of this research, an anonymous, bilingual (Greek/English) questionnaire was designed which included a total of 41 questions, open and closed type, addressing the following thematic parameters: social profile, employment, legal/human rights, education and professional development and integration.¹⁰

The aim of the research was to record the views of female immigrants who reside in Cyprus on issues of work, information available, educational and training opportunities, obstacles and problems they might be facing in their work and social milieu.¹¹ Another important parameter was the sketching of their social profile (country of origin, family situation, education background). The research was carried out between January-December 2009.

The questionnaire was distributed to 3000 immigrant women in all districts of the island: 1250 in Nicosia, 700 in Limassol, 600 in Larnaca, 150 in the free areas of Famagusta and 300 in Paphos. The questionnaires (1702) were completed and returned at the response rate of 56.7%. The return rate per urban area was: Nicosia 750 (44%), Limassol 318 (19%), Larnaca 386 (22%), Famagusta 80 (5%) and Paphos 168 (10%).

The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) was used for the statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, quantities and averages) and inferential statistics (Chi-square test, for case inspection) were applied to the research data. According to the size of the sample, the maximum statistical error is ± 2.38 .

⁹ The academic literature written on migration in Southern Europe focused mainly on the larger countries like Italy, Spain, Greece and Portugal; Cyprus has recently become the object of international studies as the South Eastern border of the EU, see Mainwaring, Cetta (2008). "On the Edge of Exclusion: the Changing Nature of Migration in Cyprus and Malta," *The Cyprus Review*, 20 (2), pp 19-49.

¹⁰ See also the studies by Παπαταξιάρχης, Ε., Τόπαλη, Π. και Αθανασοπούλου, Α. (2009). *Κόσμοι της Οικιακής Εργασίας*, Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Αλεξάνδρεια; Βασιλικού, Κατερίνα (2007). *Γυναικεία Μετανάστευση και Ανθρώπινα Δικαιώματα*, Αθήνα: Ακαδημία Αθηνών; Epsin, Olivia M. (1999). *Women Crossing Boundaries: a psychology of immigration and transformations of sexuality*, New York: Routledge and Rollins, Judith (1985). *Between Women: domestics and their employers*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

¹¹ For a Marxist-feminist point of view of the exploitation of migrant women, see Agathangelou, A.M. (2004). *The Global Political Economy of Sex: Desire, Violence, and Insecurity in Mediterranean Nation States*, London: Macmillan/ Palgrave.

Research Findings

Demographic Data

The distribution of our sample, in terms of age, ranged from the under 18 year olds to the over sixty six years of age. The majority of our respondents (93%) ranged from 18-55 years old with 37% being in the category 26-35 years of age. In terms of education, 32% of immigrant women were secondary school graduates while 26% were university graduates and 4% declared post graduate studies. Only 8% have not graduated from elementary school. The majority of the female immigrants in the survey (63%) were either married (50%), divorced (7%) or widowed (6%) and only 36% were single. More than half of the women of our sample (58%) stated that they have children.

It is important to note the religious composition of our sample. The overwhelming majority of the participants were of the Christian faith (90%) with only 5% being Buddhist and only 3% being Muslim.

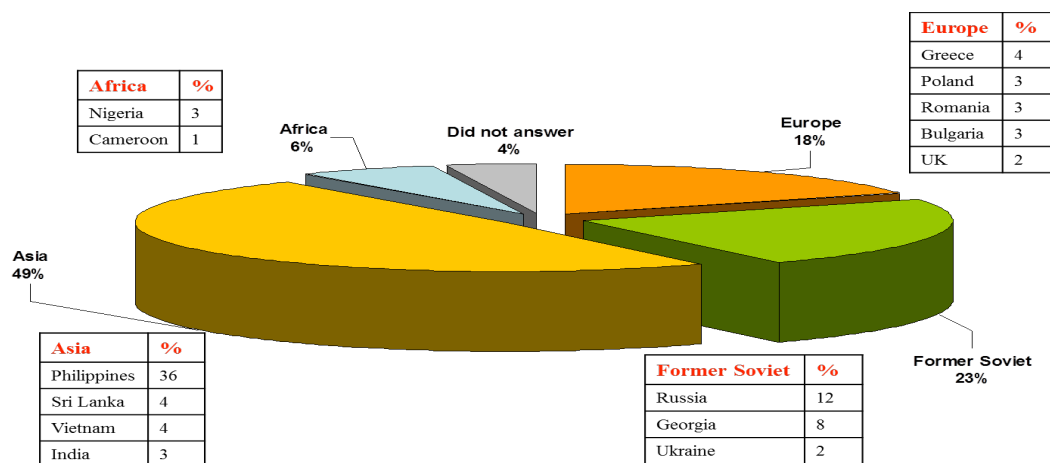


Diagram 1: Country of Origin of Immigrant Women in Cyprus

As seen in Diagram 1, the majority of our participants are third-country nationals coming from Asia with 49%, followed by women from the former Soviet Union countries (23%) such as Russia and Ukraine. It is interesting to note that, while travel by citizens of other EU Member States in the European Union is not restricted, immigrant women from other EU countries comprise only 18% of our sample population. The lowest percentage (6%) of immigrants in our sample stated countries in Africa as the country of origin.

Knowledge of Greek as a foreign language fluctuates at relatively low levels with an average of 2.63. The majority of women report no or basic knowledge of the Greek language. Coincidentally, younger women report better knowledge of the Greek language rating their language skills from “good” to “very good”. In contrast, the average reported knowledge of English as a foreign language is 3.16, with 72% of the immigrant women in the study rating their knowledge of English from “good” to “excellent”. Only 12% of the women admit to no knowledge of the English language. Further statistical analysis revealed that female immigrants who have completed post graduate studies have better knowledge of the English language with an average of 3.97.

The average residence of the female immigrants in Cyprus is 5.33% years. Only 30% reported that they have been in Cyprus for more than seven years. This sub-group tends to be older (over 65 years old) and be married to Cypriots.

Employment Data

The main reason reported for migration by our sample is seeking employment (77%) while a smaller percentage states the unification with a family member (11%) as the reason for coming to the island. A smaller number (5%) state that they come in search of a spouse.¹² Only 5% of our respondents report that they are asylum seekers or political refugees¹³. It is important to note that the percentage of women seeking employment rises to 80% for the women in the 26-45 year old category which is primarily the most productive age. The overwhelming majority of the female immigrants stated that they are working mostly in full time employment (87%) while of those working, 70% declared that they are having a single employer. Women who are college educated tend to have at least more than one employer.

Immigrant women are mainly working as domestic workers (54%)¹⁴, followed by women employed in sales (14%) and in nursing (6%). Most of the occupations the immigrant women can secure in Cyprus are low level positions such as waitressing, hairdressing and cooking. Minor exceptions exist for women having higher education qualifications.

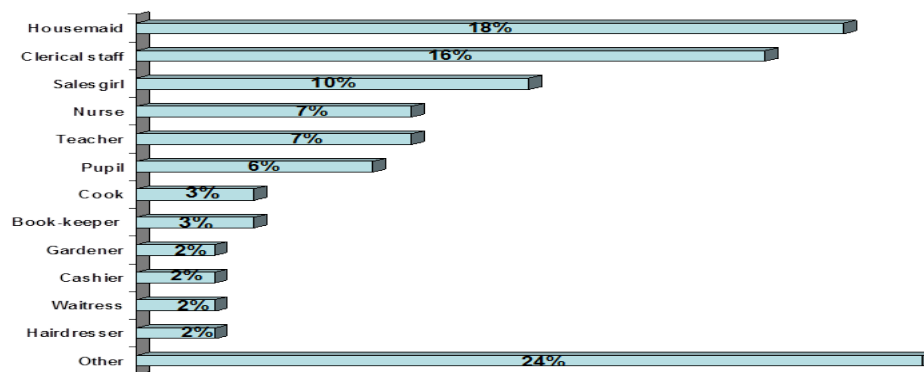


Diagram 2: Occupation prior to Arrival in Cyprus

Prior to their arrival to Cyprus these women were also employed in similar low level positions. The main difference lies in the percentages of domestic workers: only 18% were employed as domestic workers prior to their arrival in Cyprus while most skilled workers held jobs commensurate with their qualifications such as clerical staff, teachers, nurses and book-keepers.

The salaries immigrant women receive are very low with an average of 599 euro per month. The majority of our participants (51%) received 200-500 euro. Monthly salaries exceeding 1100 Euro are secured by only 9% of women. It is interesting to note that 3% of our sample reported compensation less than 200 euro, while only 2% reported wages over 2000 euro.

¹² See also the article by Fulas-Souroulla, Michaella (2008). "Marriage and Migration: Representations and Attitudes of Greek Cypriots towards Inter-societal Marriage," *The Cyprus Review*, vol. 20(2), pp 117-143.

¹³ Numbers of applications for asylum were reduced in 2010 according to the statistical data provided by the Ministry of Interior in November 2010, see publication entitled *Μετανάστευση και Άσυλο στην Κυπριακή Δημοκρατία*.

¹⁴ See the study by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (2008). *Integration of Female Migrant Domestic Workers: Strategies for Employment and Civic Participation*, Nicosia: University of Nicosia Press and Agathangelou, Anna M. (2004) cited in 11 above.

Diagram 3 indicates the reason why a section of immigrant women residing in Cyprus are not working. Out of 106 immigrant women not currently employed 17% mentioned retirement as the main reason for not working. Other problems include difficulties in securing employment, insufficient knowledge of the Greek language (language of host country) and adequate qualifications as well as family obligations.

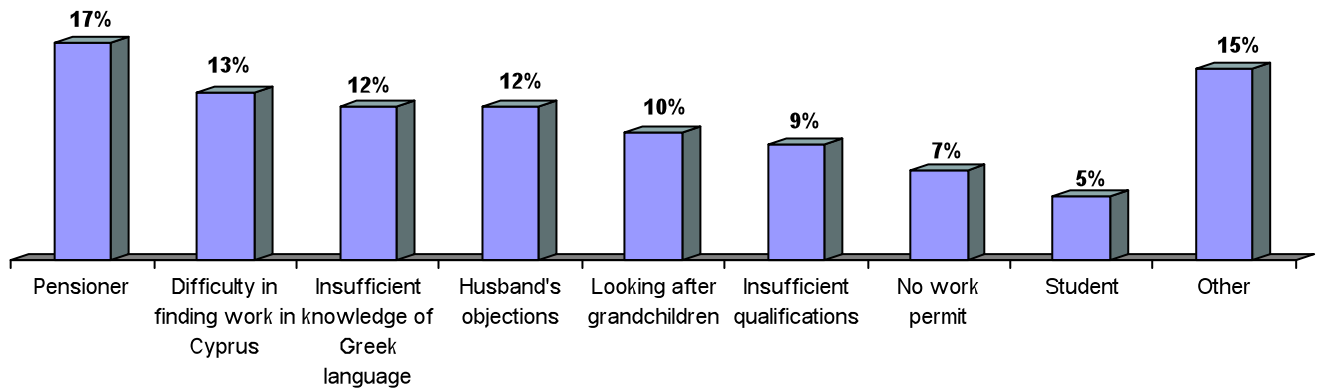


Diagram 3: Reasons for not Working

Human and Legal Rights

Following the accession of Cyprus into the European Union in 2004, citizens of EU Member States are free to reside and work in the Cyprus Republic. The process of granting work permits to third country nationals is based on the Aliens and Immigration Law 1972-2007 which incorporates the EU Directives 2005/71/EC, 2004/38/EC, 2004/114/EC, 2003/109/EC and 2003/86/EC as well as decisions taken by the Council of Ministers on migration issues. The first law relating to immigration issues was passed during the British Rule in 1952 (5). The current Law is based on Article 32 of the Constitution of the Cyprus Republic.¹⁵

As regards issues relating to asylum and refugees, Cyprus has incorporated into national legislation the following EU Directives: 343/2003/EC, 2725/2000, 2005/85/EC, 2004/83/EC, 2003/9/EC and 2001/55/EC.¹⁶

The Office of the Commissioner of Administration (Ombudsman) was established in 1991 (Law 3/1991 and its amendments in 2007, 1994, 1995, 2000 and in 2004). By Law 42(I)/2004 two independent authorities came under the auspices of the Commissioner of Administration: the Equality Authority and the Authority against Racism and Discrimination following integration of EU Directives into national Law: 2000/43/EC and 2000/78/EC based on national Law 42(I)/2004.¹⁷

¹⁵ See the document issued by the Ministry of Interior (November 2010), cited in 8 above.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ See the annual relevant reports published by the Office of the Commissioner of Administration and the two Authorities.

Despite the measures outlined above taken by the Republic of Cyprus and incorporated EU policies and directives, the 1702 immigrant women, who participated in the research study, claim that they are facing serious problems and discrimination as regards employment, human rights, dignity and acceptance by their social milieu. It is evident that the human rights of immigrants in worldwide and in Cyprus will be safeguarded once the population of the receiving country recognises that migrants are first and foremost human beings with human rights.¹⁸

The main problems faced by immigrant women in Cyprus are revealed in Diagram 4.

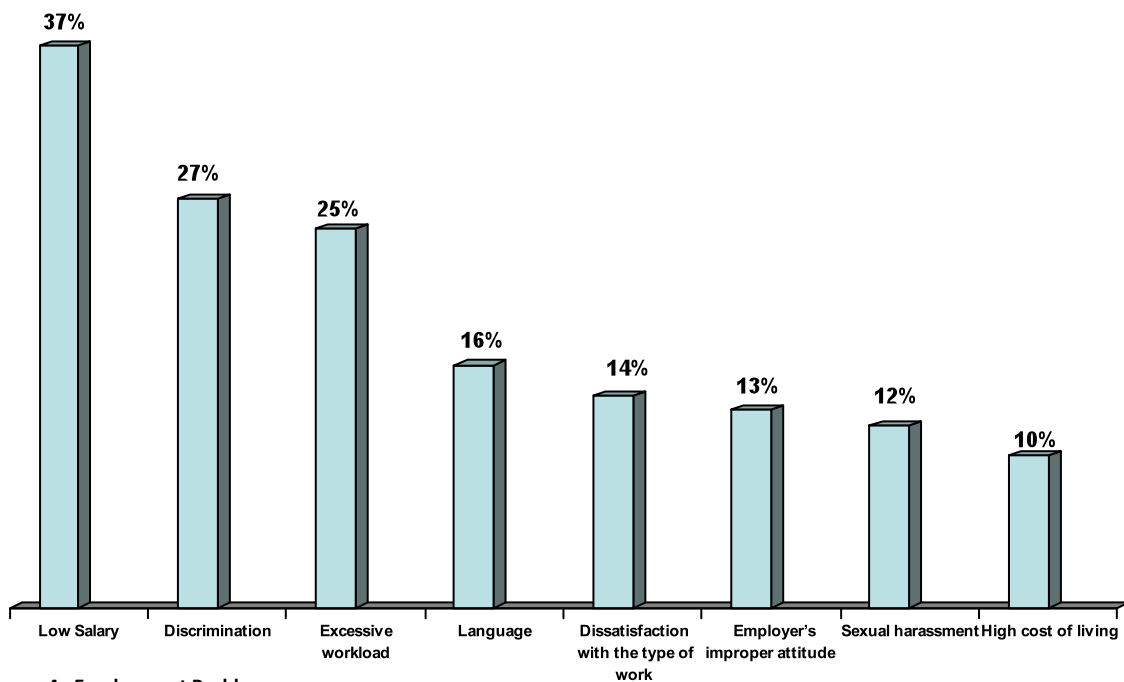


Diagram 4: Employment Problems

A large proportion (37%) of the respondents state that their worse problem is low salary. Further statistical analysis shows that 70% of the respondents, who have a monthly wage less than 500 euro, mainly came from Asian and African countries (a percentage of 52% and 27% respectively).¹⁹ Within the employment field are other related problems, such as excessive work load (25%), dissatisfaction with the type of work (14%) and employer's inappropriate attitude (13%).

Problems that touch upon the personality and dignity of the female immigrants are also recorded in the responses, such as adverse discrimination (27%) and sexual harassment (12%). Adverse discrimination problems are strongly felt by female immigrants from Europe and the former Soviet Union countries, with 30% and 33% respectively. Other problems recorded are language problems (16%) and the high cost of living in Cyprus (10%).

¹⁸ See *State of World Population 2006: A Passage to Hope – Women and international Migration*, UNFPA (2006) and European Commission (2009). *An Opportunity and a Challenge: Migration in the European Union*, Luxembourg.

¹⁹ On the issue of employer and employee being both female and the issue of the employee being traditionally of lower class and darker colour in domestic labour, see Rollins (1985) cited in 10 above.

Although many of the aforementioned problems violate a person’s legal rights, immigrant women’s knowledge as regards their legal rights appears to be very limited, as around one in two (47%) state that they are not aware of them. Further statistical analysis shows that the percentage of ignorance is particularly high (75%) between the ages of under 18 and over 56. Undoubtedly, the overwhelming majority of the female immigrants (92%) would like to have the possibility of becoming aware of their legal rights and welcome the possibility of having the legislation that concerns them translated into their mother tongue and made available to them free of charge.

Knowing where to turn to or which authority to address in cases they fall victims of serious offenses at their expense, such as sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, physical abuse, professional exploitation, unequal pay and unequal treatment, is another area in which female immigrants demonstrate ignorance.²⁰ The degree of ignorance of these women as regards the aforementioned cases ranges from over 50% to 70% as depicted in Diagram 5.

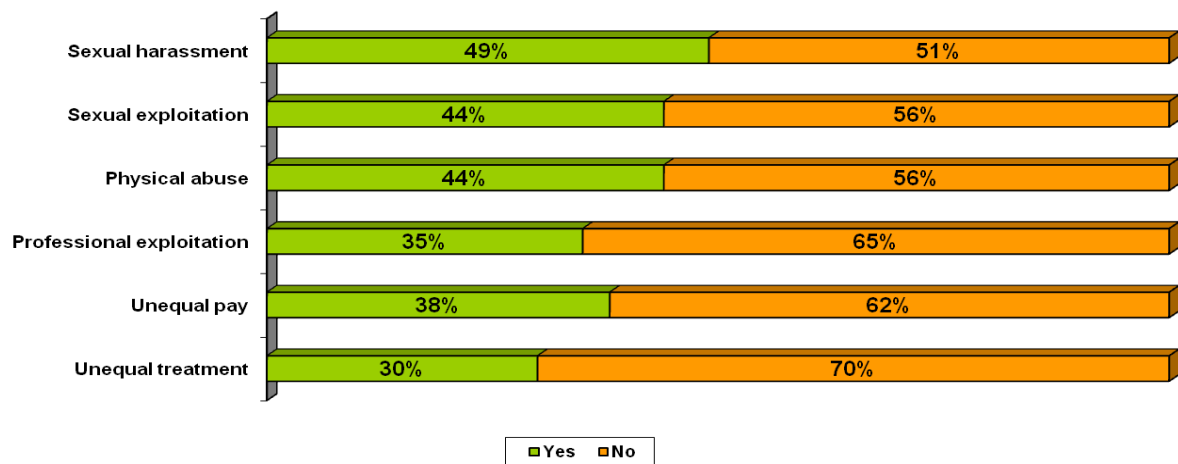


Diagram 5: Seeking Legal Help

As regards to the unpleasant situation of falling victim to sexual harassment or sexual exploitation, one in two female immigrants (51%) states ignorance as to where to turn to for help. Out of those who do know where to turn to, the overwhelming majority (85%) states that they would go to the police. Much smaller percentages would go to the Immigration Service, the Social Insurance Department, ministries or advocates.

As regards physical abuse, 56% of the sample state ignorance, whereas 44% are aware as who to address. Out of those who stated the Competent Authority they would complain to, 72% would have recourse to the Police and 10% to the Immigration Service. Smaller percentages also mention the Social Insurance Department, ministries and various other bodies, among which was the Court, advocates, associations against violence, the Church etc.

In the case of professional exploitation, it appears that the female immigrants are even less informed, with 65% stating ignorance and only 35% know who to address in the event they fall

²⁰ See a recent government publication: PIO (2010). *Action Plan Against Trafficking in Human Beings 2010-2012*, Lefkosia, based on the Law 87(I)/2007 Combating Trafficking and Exploitation of Human Beings and Victim Protection Law of 2007.

victims of professional exploitation. Out of those who are aware who to address, 32% state the Social Insurance Department, 26% various ministries, 16% the Police and 9% the Immigration Service. In isolated cases, the Courts and advocates, associations against violence, the Church etc were mentioned.

Seven out of ten female immigrants of the sample (70%) state that they do not know who to address in the event they fall victim to unequal treatment, whereas the remaining 30% state, at around the same percentages (24%, 21% and 20% respectively), that they would address themselves to the ministries, the Immigration Service and the Police. Smaller percentages mention the Social Insurance Department (12%) and the Office of the Ombudsman (2%)²¹, whereas in isolated cases, they refer to Courts and advocates and NGOs against violence as in instances cited earlier.

Moving from “what if” to real life situations, the female immigrants state at what degree they have experienced undesirable situations in Cyprus, such as sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, social exclusion, belittlement, physical abuse or racist behaviour (Diagram 6).

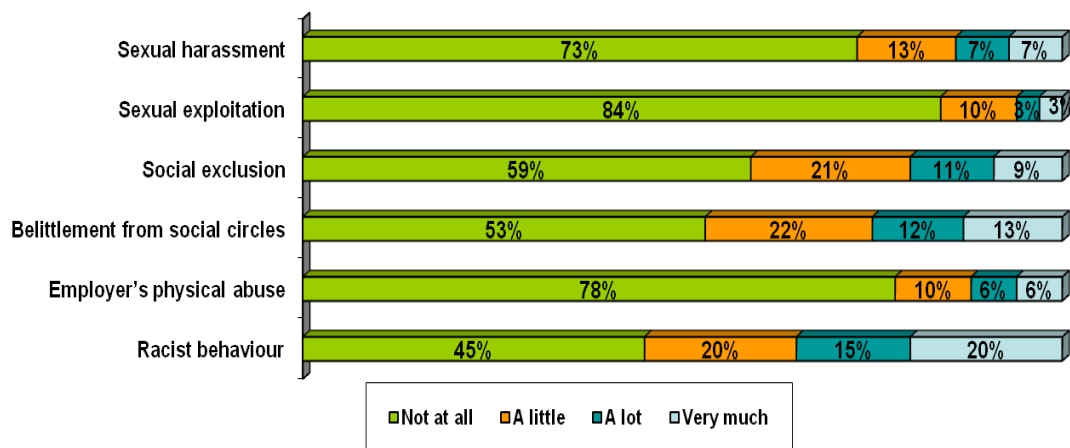


Diagram 6: Undesirable Situations

The analysis of data reveals that immigrant women in Cyprus experience a greater frequency of racist behaviour, belittlement by social circles or social exclusion, with percentages of 35%, 25% and 20% respectively. In fact, a percentage of 20% of the sample states that it has experienced racist behaviour to an extent of “very much so.” A smaller number appears to have experienced sexual harassment, sexual exploitation or physical abuse by their employee, at a percentage of 14%, 6% and 12% respectively. Despite this, it cannot be ignored that a percentage of 7%, 3% and 6% respectively, state that they have experienced these situations to an extent of “very much so.”

²¹ In the 2009 Annual Report of the Authority against Racism and Discrimination, it is stated that 19% of the cases filed were by third country nationals and 32% by citizens of EU Member States (page 32); 76% of the cases filed concerned discrimination issues on the basis of ethnicity/race (page 34). In the 2009 Annual Report of the Cyprus Equality Authority, it refers that the highest percentage of those who submit complaints are the EU citizens 15% and second are the third country nationals 5% (page 20); 71% of the cases referred to employment issues (page 21). Complaints submitted for discrimination on the grounds of sex, 82% constituted complaints of discrimination against women (page 22).

It is important to highlight the fact that 63 female immigrants, with percentage equal to 4%, state that they have been raped by their employer. Further statistical analysis showed that those 63 female immigrants are, in their majority, aged between 18-35 years old, unmarried and originate from countries such as Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Sri Lanka and China. In addition, half of them (31) work as housemaids, while 25% of them are sales girls.

It becomes evident from the findings of this study that there is a great need, as pointed out by the female immigrants working in Cyprus, for information to be made available to female immigrants upon arrival in Cyprus on the issues depicted in Diagram 7.

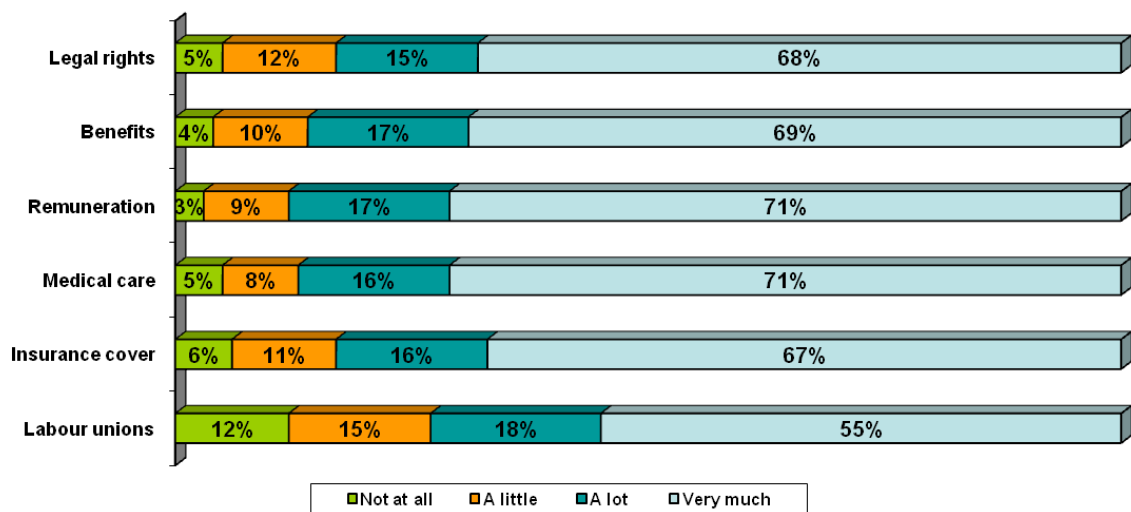


Diagram 7: Needs for Information

Evidently, the need for information²² is great on all issues depicted in Diagram 7 with percentages being in the bracket of “very much so,” fluctuating from 55% (labour unions) to 71% (medical care and remuneration).

As regards their current sources of information on their rights, it appears that their main source of information is their fellow nationals (83%). A significant percentage also receives information from the Authorities of the Republic of Cyprus (60%), the Embassy or Consulate of their country (60%), their employers (62%) and from their Cypriot friends (58%). The unions constitute the least source of information (27%).

They also lack information as regards their children's rights for access to education in Cyprus, as only one in three female immigrants (34%) answered in the positive, whereas the majority stated ignorance (66%).

²² The Ministry of Interior issued its 2010-2012 Action Plan for the Integration of Legal Immigrants in Cyprus. The plan consists of eight priority pillars. The first one is entitled "Information-Services-Transparency."

Education and Professional Training

Nearly eight in ten female immigrants have never attended educational classes in Cyprus.²³ Of those in our sample who attended some educational or vocational classes 76% stated that they had paid fees. Further statistical analysis showed that the majority of those who participated in vocational classes are under 18 years of age²⁴.

The overwhelming majority of immigrant women expressed, as shown in Diagram 8, interest in attending classes to receive training in computers, the Greek language, learn a foreign language and to become acquainted with the history of Cyprus. According to further statistical analysis, the interest in education is reduced as the age of the respondents rises.

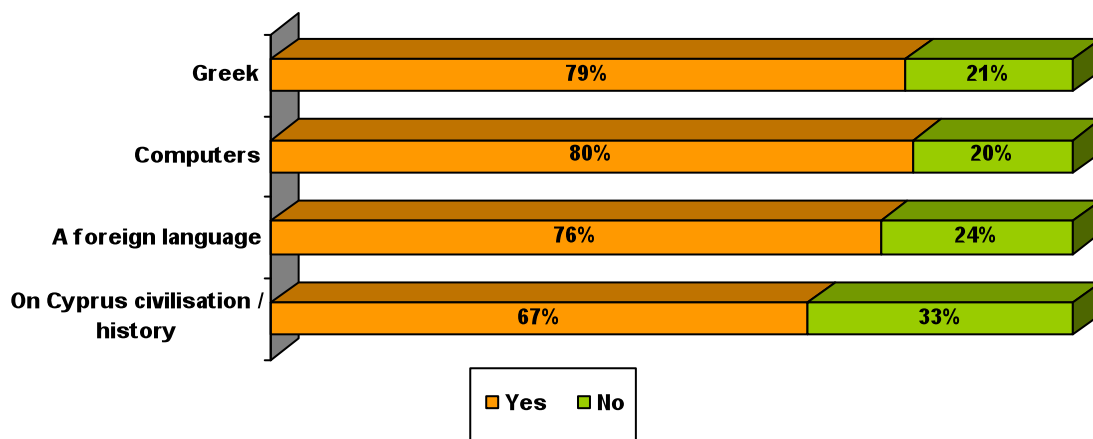


Diagram 8: Educational Interests

In addition, the majority of female workers expressed a desire to improve their professional skills and they would readily enroll in relevant training classes to improve their skills in cooking, sales, driving, child care and the hospitality industry. The reasons for pursuing further training are summarized in Diagram 9 and are mostly to improve their economic position and to promote their career. It is interesting to note that 41% of the participants, rate personal satisfaction as an important reason for seeking further training.

²³ Ibid. The third priority pillar consists of "Education and Learning of the Greek Language".

²⁴ As regards migration and education, see Ρήγα, Αναστασία-Βαλεντίνη ed (2007). *Οικονομικές Μετανάστριες στην Ελλάδα: Διαπολιτισμικότητα και Εκπαίδευση*, Athens: Gutenberg; Polis Citizenship Association (2009). *Proceedings of International Conference Citizenship Multiculturalism Cosmopolitanism*, University of Cyprus, 3-4 November 2007, vols 1&2, Nicosia; Βερνίκος, Ν. & Δασκαλοπούλου, Σ. (2002). *Πολυπολιτισμικότητα: Οι διαστάσεις της πολιτισμικής ταυτότητας*, Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Κριτική; Harding Sandra (1991). *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? – Thinking from Women's Lives*, New York: Cornell University Press; Harvard Business Review (1990/2001). *Managing Diversity*, HSB Press.

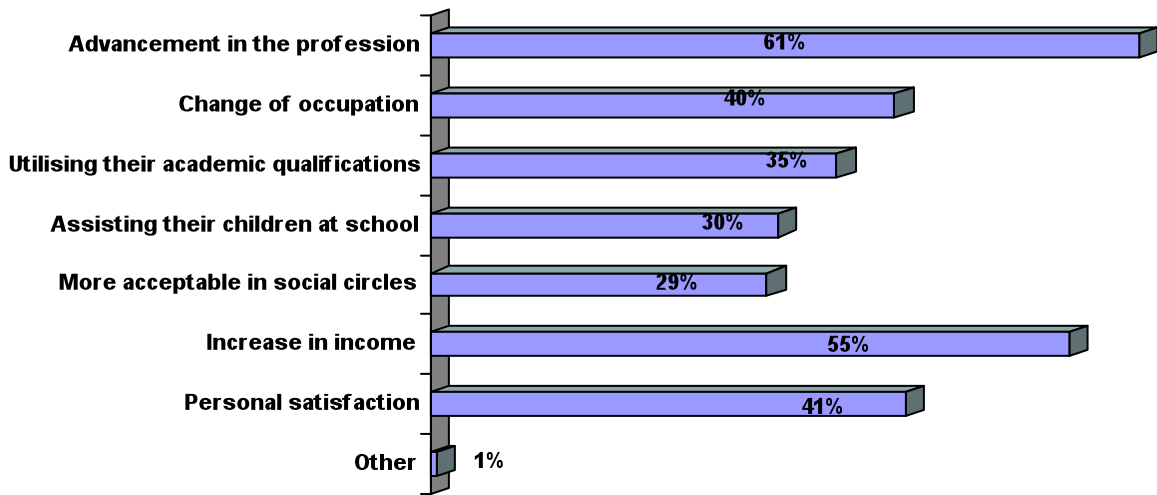


Diagram 9: Reasons for Seeking Training

The main reasons for not attending educational classes are lack of time (64%) and lack of funds (59%) and information on availability of classes offered (49%).

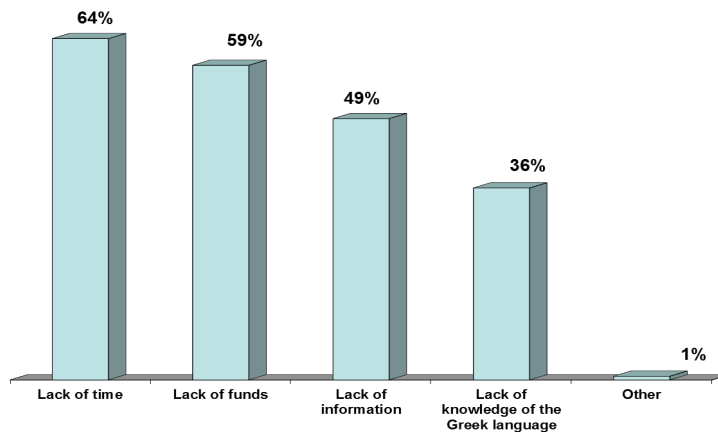


Diagram 10: Reasons for not Attending Educational Classes

A smaller, but significant percentage (36%) indicated insufficient knowledge of the Greek language. A very small percentage indeed (1% i.e. 11 persons) expressed additional reasons, of which the most significant was prohibition on the part of the employer (0.5%).

Another significant finding was the claim by the respondents that they were not aware of the existence of specific educational institutions that offer classes and training free of charge or at very low fees such as the University of Cyprus (74%), the Open University (74%), the Productivity Centre (85%), the Educational Centres (Επιμορφωτικά Κέντρα) (69%) and the State Institutes of Education (81%) as well as afternoon/evening classes at the technical schools (75%) and the Apprenticeship Scheme (86%).

Socialisation-Integration

The immigrant women's degree of socialisation and adjustment to Cypriot daily life was the final area investigated in this study. Findings reveal that a 90% of the female immigrants have developed, to some extent, social relations with Cypriots. Out of those however, one in two (48%) has developed relations to a low degree and 10% state that social relations with the local element are practically non-existent.

The same picture is painted in relation to Cypriot cuisine, with one in two female immigrants (48%) stating that she likes it "a lot" or "very much" and only 7% stating complete dislike. Adjustment to Cypriot / Greek music appears to be even more difficult, with 13% stating complete dislike. It is worth, however, noting that 25% of the participants state that they like it "very much". Further statistical analysis has shown that Cypriot cuisine and Greek / Cypriot music are particularly liked by young girls under the age of 18, and women over 56. More negative to Greek/ Cypriot music appears to be the housemaids, with their negative answers reaching a percentage of over 70%. The majority of the sales girls, however, who completed the questionnaire, seem to enjoy Greek/ Cypriot Music.

More than half of the respondents (56%) express the wish to be given the opportunity to develop a talent or interest they possess. Out of those, most of them are young (77%) and single (65%). Interests that stand out are primarily, dancing and singing and, to a lesser degree, cooking, music, theatre and painting. A small percentage is also interested in sports, writing, sewing, driving and computers. Evidently, in order to develop their talents and interests, female immigrants are interested in participating in corresponding clubs or associations. Dancing and excursion clubs and choirs attract the greatest interest, whereas a smaller percentage shows an interest in participating in theatrical groups.

The findings of the study also reveal that female immigrants are very positively disposed towards the suggested establishment of Multicultural Centres, offering events in their mother tongue and Immigrants' Advice Bureaux offering information in their mother tongue. In their overwhelming majority (97%), they consider the establishment of such centres useful, with a particularly high percentage (51% and 54% respectively) considering such centres as "extremely useful".

Conclusions

The findings of the EKIF research study, based on the views of 1702 immigrant women, has revealed the need for further research, both qualitative and quantitative, in all five thematic axes.

Indeed, the area of immigration itself as regards Cyprus is under-researched. It does not examine in depth sectionally immigrant categories i.e. EU citizens, third country nationals and asylum seekers or from the gender perspective. There are a few exceptions. The outcomes of this study underpin the need for serious research on locating Cyprus in its wider global and regional context relating immigration to issues of discrimination, integration, exploitation, multiculturalism and education.

According to their responses, immigrant women in Cyprus, often become victims of racial discrimination, physical abuse and sexual harassment and exploitation. These views are in accord with data from other studies worldwide, in Southern Europe and Greece.

Immigrant women emerge, on the whole, as educated and talented, having the courage to seek work abroad in order to help financially their loved ones left behind in their country of origin. Thus they take on the role of the family bread winner, not a stereotypical role in countries of origin in Asia, Africa and Middle East.

In the host country, the majority of women accept to work in sectors of menial jobs or entertainment in which their academic and professional qualifications gained in their country of origin are of no avail. It is a positive development that they demonstrate an interest in improving their skills for professional development, enhancing communication in the language of the host country and becoming acquainted with new technologies.

They also express their readiness to cultivate their talents and interests and learn about the history and civilisation of the receiving country. This parameter presents us with an interesting and unexpected side of immigrant women, which is not associated with the stereotype of the female servant of poor origins and colour complexion. Another line for in-depth research seems to be the relation of the female employer versus the female employee.

The most hopeful outcome as regards integration is the high degree of receptivity young immigrant women demonstrate of the culture of the host country enjoying its cuisine and music. Young women show greater interest in cultivating their hobbies than older women. Evidently, they have already seized the available opportunities for personal and professional development offered in Cyprus.

In order to avoid phenomena of racism and xenophobia, the state and society should facilitate the learning of the Greek language by adult immigrants and their children; the participation of the immigrant population in lifelong learning and (re)training. Immigrants should also be offered the opportunity to mix with the indigenous population in meaningful cultural and athletic activities through clubs and associations that promote coexistence and co-operation.

Finally, as immigrants (men and women) form, nowadays, part of the fabric of Cypriot society, their problems, needs, desires and dreams should be addressed at an academic, research and policy level in order to avert undesirable situations by enforcing the right policies and measures.
