

EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



Trafficking in domestic work in Greece: a demand-side approach

Domestic work is in great demand among Greek households. Migrant workers, in particular migrant women, have filled this need for several decades, often under very exploitative terms. Little is known, however, about the extent to which human traffickers have also profited from this widespread need.

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Introduction

Domestic work, both live-in and live-out, is prevalent within Greece's migrant population, in particular migrant women. It is estimated that one in two migrant women in Greece currently works in care and domestic services and that Greece has among the highest shares of migrants working in the domestic services sector in Europe. The entry of Greek women into the formal labour market, the lack of adequate welfare policies, gender stereotypes, and the preference for higher status employment are only some of the converging factors behind this widespread need for external household assistance.

Despite the existence of a flexible regulatory framework, the provision of domestic services in Greece in recent years has developed primarily as a hidden economy. A 2015 study by the GSEE Labour Institute classified domestic work as one of those sectors where undeclared work is 'overwhelming'. In their majority, domestic workers live and work in the country on an irregular status and provide their services in an informal context that often lies beyond the protective scope of the law. Live-in domestic workers are a particularly vulnerable group as they work out of the public eye and are therefore more susceptible to abuse.

Within this broader context, trafficking of human beings (THB) for exploitation in the domestic work sector is a rather marginalised topic even as a policy concern. Official police data suggests that THB is an extremely rare phenomenon, with only one case documented since 2002 when THB was first penalised in Greece. For a country considered one of Europe's four main trafficking hubs, the official figures come as a surprise. At the same time, even though labour trafficking has become of growing public concern, our research findings suggest that contrary to other groups of migrant workers that are in an abusive situation, exploitation and THB in the domestic services sector does not seem to be a policy priority. To date, government initiatives to curb demand for the household and care work provided in the context of trafficking are very limited.

Challenges, however, in identifying the victims and addressing deep-rooted social norms do not exonerate the government from its obligations to protect and raise awareness of this vulnerable group of workers.

Evidence and Analysis

Evidence about trafficking of domestic workers in Greece, or labour trafficking in general, is scant. Official police data suggests that over the past 15 years, only one case of THB in domestic work has been formally identified. It involved the rather atypical situation of the trafficking of an African woman to work as a domestic servant in a diplomatic household, where she was subjected to abusive living and working conditions.

In the context of our research, some of the national stakeholders interviewed, albeit not all, were able to refer to sporadic cases in which they had encountered or heard what in their view entailed elements of THB. One such suspected case concerned the trafficking of a Balkan woman who worked as a live-in domestic worker in a private household, where she was exposed to exploitative conditions until she ran away. Two other cases described to us involved elements of trans-national trafficking of African women who had been previously exploited as domestic workers in a Middle Eastern country; they had travelled to Greece under obscure circumstances, but there was little information about the kind of exploitation the suspected victims might be facing now. Notably, even though the number of definite cases identified was very small, there was a shared suspicion among most stakeholders that THB in domestic work in the country was most likely of a much larger scale than is currently known.

THB in domestic work in Greece is also under-explored in terms of human rights research. While the situation and experience of migrant women working in the domestic services sector has attracted some scholarly attention, there have been hardly any reports on the topic of trafficking itself. One of the first studies focusing on the issue of labour trafficking was carried out in 2011 by the CCME Re-integration Centre for Migrant Workers. In their analysis, the researchers identified three suspected cases of THB in domestic work: an Ethiopian girl exploited by a Pakistani family for whom she had been working prior to her travel to Greece; a Chechen woman exploited in a private household; and, an Ethiopian girl recruited by a hotel keeper on a Greek island.

Accounts of THB crime are also sporadically reported by the media. An example is the dismantling in 2009 of a Moldovan network transferring women from Moldova to work as domestic workers in Greece and the exposure in 2013 of a seven-member Bulgarian criminal gang systematically transferring Bulgarian women to work as personal caretakers of elderly people. Little is known, however, about the outcome of these cases.

The actual experience of migrant domestic workers in Greece, as shared by the Filipino association KASAPI and African women's associations interviewed for this study, however, describes a very different and informative picture that suggests trafficking of migrant domestic workers in Greece is happening at a larger scale.

Women from Africa—in particular Uganda, Sierra Leone, Ghana, South Africa, Ethiopia, and Kenya—but also women, and to a lesser extent men, from the Philippines have been recruited as domestic workers in Greece for at least three decades. In their majority, they end up in middle- and upper-class family households where they work as live-in domestic workers.

The forms of recruitment vary but typically involve private employment agencies based both in the country of origin and destination. Migrant women from Africa typically enter the country irregularly where they are instructed to contact a local agent and apply for asylum. A common form of deception concerns their promised income: in practice, this amounts to around fifty euros per month. Filipino nationals, on the other hand, most commonly enter the country legally on valid

visas, albeit unrelated to the actual work they will perform. A common form of recruitment is as high-ranking staff of offshore companies. African women most often end up in middle-class family households, while Filipinos in middle- and upper-class homes.

Exploitation is not uncommon and can take various forms: undeclared work, in particular among African women, long working hours, low wages or no payment, lack of rest days or holidays, lack of social insurance, as well as verbal abuse and confiscation of travel documents by the employer. Over the past few years, the ongoing economic crisis appears to have further aggravated working conditions by exacerbating undeclared work and lowering remuneration despite heavier workloads.

In most cases, the victims plan their escape by themselves, without reporting their abuse to the authorities. Often, victims end up in a similar situation, thus leading to a cycle of re-trafficking.

When it comes to disentangling the factors that have contributed to the exploitation of migrant women, including potential victims of THB as domestic workers in Greek households, our findings point to two key elements: first, existing gaps in the labour rights regime regulating migrant domestic work in Greece which, in practice, have impaired their protection; and second, a broader social context of unawareness or ignorance and discrimination that has sustained, if not reinforced, the exploitation of migrant labour in the country.

In particular, domestic workers are currently subject to a regulatory framework that grants them **little protection in terms of labour rights**. Contrary to other occupations, there is no collective agreement on domestic work in Greece. Instead, domestic work is subject to the general principle of contractual freedom governing salaried employment. Because of these specific circumstances under which domestic work—and in particular live-in domestic work—is provided, many of the fundamental rules framing this freedom in other occupations (e.g. upper working limits, minimum wages, rest days) are not applicable by exception. In practice, this flexible framework has placed migrant domestic workers in particularly disadvantageous bargaining positions. Also, by leaving critical matters unregulated, many of the abusive situations to which migrant domestic workers are exposed, such as low wages or working excessively long hours, lack a firm footing within the law.

Additionally, the labour inspectorates do not have authority to conduct on-site visits in private homes. Seen in its entirety, the overall arrangement has essentially left migrant domestic workers at the periphery of labour rights protection.

Greece's rather ineffective migration scheme is linked to the above. Although Greece's migration scheme offers legal channels for migrant domestic workers to enter the country and assume employment lawfully, in practice the existing mechanism is cumbersome and inefficient. To begin with, the existing procedure to recruit migrant domestic workers from abroad is highly bureaucratic and deters potential employers from registering their demand with the competent authorities. By way of illustration, in 2014, only eight work permits for domestic workers were approved for the whole of Greece. Conditions for maintaining a valid work permit are also quite stringent and, controversially, require a minimum number of social insurance days to have been paid by the employer. Domestic workers are negatively affected by this requirement given the informal manner in which they normally provide their services. In practice, in their overwhelming majority, migrant domestic workers live and work in Greece on an **undocumented status**. The absence of legal residence is in turn associated with inferior working conditions; the employee's expectations are lower, while fear of deportation discourages victims from reporting situations of abuse, thus cultivating a sense of impunity among employers.

Discriminatory attitudes and practices towards migrant domestic workers also play a major role in their susceptibility to exploitative working conditions. Studies on migrant women in Greece have documented how social prejudices and stereotypes often limit the job opportunities of specific nationalities to specific occupational sectors such as domestic work, independent of their actual skills, and shape work relations of patronage. Our research findings further suggest that stereotyping and negative attitudes towards migrant domestic workers have arguably further blurred the line between morally acceptable and unacceptable practices. Several interviewees criticised how it has become almost socially acceptable in Greece to hire a migrant domestic

worker, not insure her, pay her very little, ask her to work very hard, not inform her of her rights, and even talk with ease about it to one's social circles.

Linked to this is also a **general lack of awareness and sensitisation** about the situation of migrant domestic workers and the criminal side thereof that appears to affect all involved actors. Our research suggests that migrant domestic workers are themselves often unaware of their rights and are therefore particularly vulnerable to exploitation. The lack of adequate training also seems to influence the vigilance displayed by judges, labour inspectorates, and law enforcement officials. Several interviewees pointed out that even widely-known situations of labour exploitation, for instance in agriculture, lack careful monitoring in Greece. What does seem to be of value, however, is early and adequate education of society at large, from the school level, to combat discriminatory behaviours and shape positive social attitudes. For many interviewees, sensitising the public that there is a continuum of exploitation, including situation of THB, could achieve faster and better results compared to criminal prosecution and permeate even the most inviolable contexts, like private households.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Giving migrant domestic workers a voice and empowering those in a situation of exploitation while punishing the offenders is central for ensuring protection of THB victims. An effective policy to combat THB in domestic work, however, also requires a more comprehensive and nuanced approach aimed at discouraging the use of services that are a product of trafficking and countering demand for the cheap and exploitable services that potential victims offer. This requires structural changes in Greece's policy approach towards migrant workers in order to safeguard their labour rights as well as addressing prevalent social perceptions about domestic work as low-pay and low-status labour.

Recommendations

A. Migration policies

Despite a series of recent reforms, Greece's migration system remains stringent and bureaucratically strenuous. In practice, demand for domestic services is filled in an informal manner while the legal channels currently in place are under used.

Short-term objectives

- ✓ Greece should simplify the entry procedure for migrant domestic workers and regularise their stay in Greece as the risk of exploitation and trafficking grows as the numbers of migrant domestic workers living in the country rises.

Long-term objectives:

- ✓ Greece should consider the adoption of **bilateral agreements** with main countries of origin of domestic workers to facilitate their exit from an abusive situation. Filipino domestic workers, for instance, reported that they were unable to retire even after many years of work due to the absence of bilateral social security agreements.

B. Labour rights protection

The law on domestic labour in Greece, in particular live-in domestic work, is currently applied in a manner that disproportionately disadvantages migrant domestic workers and renders them vulnerable to exploitation by both employers and criminal elements.

Short Term Objectives

- ✓ In view of the particular circumstances under which domestic work is provided and the inability to conduct on-site visits in private homes, the **Labour Inspectorate** should display more vigilance, especially when receiving complaints by domestic migrant workers.

Long Term Objectives

- ✓ The existing **regulatory framework on domestic work** leaves critical issues unregulated. The authorities should consider revising the regulations and set some minimum requirements, including minimum wage requirements and rest days.
- ✓ Greece should offer **financial incentives** to potential employers to hire domestic workers on a legal basis and render their employment more attractive compared to unregistered labour. Reducing the black economy will increase State revenues (e.g. taxes, social contributions).

C. Trafficking Responses

Greece's trafficking framework is current with the letter of international developments, but implementation remains limited. To date, only one case involving labour trafficking has been identified in the domestic work sector and no conviction has ever been made.

Short Term objectives

- ✓ Greece should invest further in education initiatives, information **and awareness-raising campaigns on labour exploitation** and in particular in the domestic services sector in order to discourage situations of exploitation. It should implement measures aimed at alerting the public to both signs of human trafficking and the criminal dimension using the services provided by potential victims. TV spots, social media, and online distribution of the material cost little and can reach a large audience.

Long Term Objectives

- ✓ There are currently wide disparities among the different stakeholders concerning the identification of victims of labour trafficking. Greece should consider **organising joint trainings** between non-governmental and governmental actors or issue guidelines to that purpose.
- ✓ Greece should invest further in the **training of front-line officials** to better recognise possible potential cases. Early detection can stop the channelling of victims into the Greek (informal) labour market.
- ✓ To effectively address demand, one needs to give the victim sufficient reasons to come forward. Offering the necessary social support is thus crucial. Greece should invest in the protection and reintegration of victims of labour trafficking. State-run shelters with specialised counselling and support are lacking from Greece's anti-trafficking policy approach, and relevant non-governmental initiatives are very limited.

Research Parameters

This national study is part of the DemandAT country studies on trafficking in human beings (THB) in the domestic work sector conducted in seven European countries: Belgium, France, Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Netherlands, and UK.

The key objectives of the research were to i) investigate types of situations in domestic work that may involve extreme forms of exploitation and trafficking, ii) examine the motivations and factors driving and shaping the demand as well as iii) examine the gaps in legislations and policies.

The case study has been based on both a desk research and interviews. The desk research consisted first of an analysis of existing literature (reports, case-law analysis and academic articles) on THB in labour exploitation and domestic work. Secondly, national legislation and related policies have been examined. In addition, the relevant case law, on labour exploitation in general as well as specifically on THB for domestic work, has been studied. The desk study has been complemented with 16 qualitative interviews with important stakeholders. The interviewees are representatives of the government authorities, private stakeholders and NGOs, international

organisations and independent experts as well as migrant associations

Our research focused on the period 2002-2015, when labour trafficking in Greece, including domestic work, became a self-standing crime.

Key reference

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Project Identity

PROJECT NAME	Addressing demand in anti-trafficking efforts and policies (DemandAT)
COORDINATOR	Albert Kraller, International Centre for Migration Policy Development Vienna, Austria
CONSORTIUM	International Centre for Migration Policy Development Vienna, Austria University of Bremen – Arbeitsbereich Interkulturelle Bildung Bremen, Germany University of Edinburgh – School of Social and Political Science Edinburgh, United Kingdom La Strada International Association Amsterdam, the Netherlands Lund University – Department of Social Anthropology Lund, Sweden University of Durham – Department of Geography Durham, United Kingdom European University Institute – Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies Florence, Italy Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces Geneva, Switzerland La Strada Czech Republic - Czech Republic Prague – Czech Republic
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WEBSITE	www.demandat.eu
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FURTHER READING	Angeli, D. (2016a) Policy Brief: Trafficking and exploitation in domestic work in Cyprus. DemandAT Policy Brief, Vienna: ICMPD. Angeli, D. (2016b) Policy Brief: Trafficking in domestic work in Greece: a demand-side approach. DemandAT Policy Brief, Vienna: ICMPD. de Volder (2016) Policy Brief: Trafficking in human beings in the domestic work sector in the Netherlands: a hidden phenomenon. DemandAT Policy Brief, Vienna: ICMPD. Levy, F. (2016) Policy Brief: La traite des êtres humains dans le travail domestique

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