

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS INTO OUR SOCIETIES

European Women's Association¹ - Berlin, 10 October 2008

Over half of all international migrants in the world today are women (UN statistics, 2005). However, the European Union and the national governments have never taken their specific needs and input into account. Female migrants send a larger proportion of their earnings to their home country every year than their male COUNTERPARTS, and their work is essential in sectors of the economy with shortage of labour, including sectors dealing with care services for dependent persons, domestic work and care/nursing homes.

Putting female migration synonymous with family reunification is now somewhat outdated. More and more female migrants are arriving alone, not only to improve their (increasingly good) qualifications, to help their family and in the hope of improving their lives, but also to escape from family, cultural and religious traditions which keep women in a state of subordination and dependence.

Female migrants face multiple discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnic and religious considerations, and sometimes, disability, either in society in general or within their own communities, where they are subject to pressure from their families and to the dictates of tradition.

Their prospects of integration are determined by their knowledge of the language of the host country and their participation in the economy, which is an essential prerequisite for their independence.

Women play an important role in the integration of migrants by providing stability for their families, maintaining contact with schools and social services and, more generally, establishing social contacts in the host country, initially with neighbours and colleagues.

Women are also, increasingly, setting up associations, which, while originally introduced to compensate for the absence of immigrant reception policies on the part of the host countries, have become rallying points to help new arrivals to solve problems and integrate into the host society.

For all the above reasons, the EWA supports Resolution 1478 and Recommendation 1732 of the Council of Europe of 24 January 2006 on the integration of immigrant women in Europe, but also the European Parliament's resolution P6_TA(2006)0437 on women's immigration, and call on the EU and the Member States, which have an even greater interest in the integration of third country nationals, to be guided by those texts.

¹ The European Women's Association (EWA) is the umbrella organisation of the EPP Women and the European Union of Women (EUW).

The EWA recommends, in particular:

A. The protection of immigrant women's basic rights

- in the context of family reunification: by granting immigrants legal status independent of that of their spouses (after a certain period of cohabitation to ensure the legislation relating to immigration is not circumvented, or in circumstances where it is impossible for the marriage to be maintained) and the granting of individual working permits;
- by including in national law and implementing (though it may not infringe international private law) any provision in accordance with the European Charter of Fundamental Rights or the European Convention on Human Rights, particularly in the context of marriage, divorce, child custody, maintenance payments or inheritance;
- by the protection of female immigrants who have been the victim of physical violence (such as genital mutilation) or psychological violence (including forced or arranged marriages), or who have been the victims of workplace abuse of the kind specifically encountered by female immigrants that are irregular under the law, or victims of trafficking for sexual purposes;
- by the provision of systematic information on the rights and duties of immigrants in the host country and on procedures and channels of appeal.

B. Participation of immigrant women in social and public life

- through education and training: including literacy classes if necessary, language classes, new technology knowledge, instructions about human, civil and social rights existing in the host country, awareness-raising as regards sexual equality, the sharing of family responsibilities and household tasks and multicultural education;
- by providing for information on the employment market and vocational training, not least for girls, to enable them to obtain sufficiently well-paid jobs to provide them with economic independence and facilitate their integration;
- by equal treatment of boys and girls in school and in the media, and equal access to sport, and considering immigrant's children educational needs;
- by the recognition of formal, non-formal and informal qualifications, skills and professional experience (e.g. of nurses);
- by granting electoral rights to immigrants at local level and requiring them to vote in person, which is an expression of independence and participation in public life for immigrant women;
- by supporting immigrant women's associations and women's sections within immigrant associations, and possibly a specific European association for migrant women;
- by ensuring associations for migrant women participate in the public debate on immigration in their host countries;
- by using the European Integration Fund to set up special bodies for the promotion of cultural diversity, including intercultural centres for women in regions with a large proportion of immigrants.

C. The gradual introduction of a common European integration policy which ties in with the Tampere and The Hague programmes and addresses the 'gender dimension'

- by the requisite coordination of integration policies in a coherent framework;
- while formulating common basic principles based on “give and take” between immigrants and locals and defining the rights and duties of both parties, especially regarding equality between women and men;
- through an awareness of immigration which takes account of all its gender-related aspects with a view to applying a specific policy to enable migrant women to play an active role in the integration of migrants in our societies.

Thus, the EWA urges the EU Member States to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all migrant workers and Members of their Families (UN 2003) if they have not already done so.