

Domestic Workers In Cyprus - Introductory Statement/Εισήγηση (Brochure)

Historical Note

This brochure was published by [antifa λευκοşa](#) in August 2016, in Nicosia. It acted as the opening statement of an event with the same title, that took place on the 11th of 2016 in [social space Kaymaklıv](#).

Content

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Introduction

Antifa Lefkoşa as a collective began in December of 2014 following the hunger strikes of Iranian detainees in the migrant detention centre of Menoyia in 2013. The group's concerns have centred primarily on issues regarding the politics of migration in Cyprus and Europe and we have mobilised around them through actions such as demonstrations at the detention centre, a demonstration and microphone intervention in Nicosia, and presentations of the pamphlet that we wrote last December. The pamphlet consists of a study of the Cypriot state's historical regulation and management of migration on the island, focusing closely on the processes and conditions by which a part of the migrant workforce is systemically criminalized as 'illegal', a phenomenon that as an effect results in the continuous devaluation of the value of their labour. On the other hand however, the migrant workforce described by the State as 'legal', we argue, live and work in circumstances in which they are always potentially criminalized. These legal and by extension social relations compose a regime that ensures the defacto continuation of the violent exploitation of migrant bodies by employers on the island. In this light and through this study we have recognized that the issues faced by domestic workers on the island to be of an urgent importance.

According to the 2013 count, 30952 domestic workers reside in Cyprus, the majority of which are from the Philippines, Vietnam, and Sri Lanka. This number makes up the 45.4% of the migrant population. Domestic workers consist for their employers to be a particular case; until recently they were officially described as 'domestic helpers', not acknowledging the fact that they are workers. While in 2012 the minimum wage was enacted at 870 euros, domestic workers were exempt from this legislation. Their minimum wage, enacted in 2013, amounts to 309 euros. We consider domestic workers to be within that part of labour that does not have to be criminalized because their conditions of work in their 'legal' status are barely different from those whom the State describes as 'illegal'.

So what does the employment contract that the Cypriot State has enforced upon migrant domestic workers entail? She is not allowed to change employer or the location of her work during the duration of the contract, she must work 6 days a week, 7 hours a day, she must "obey all the commands and directions of her employer", she has no right to a pay rise unless it is so stated in the contract or unless the employer so wishes, and she is not allowed in any direct or indirect way to participate in

any political action during the course of her stay in Cyprus.

Of course the list of exploitation extends beyond the constraints of the contract. Through unpaid working hours, unpaid work in the houses of relatives, forced labour on Sundays, the withholding of wages, the withholding of travel documents as a means to extort and threaten, the restriction of movement after work, the restriction of communication with family and through sexual violence etc. etc. But there's more, migrant women pay from 1500 to 4800 euros to agents in order to find work. In almost all cases they must borrow money, or mortgage property to get hold of these sums, leaving many women even more dependent through relations of debt to their Cypriot employers.

Moving onwards, in a study conducted in 2010, 25% of domestic workers stated that they felt undervalued from their social environment and 20% that they felt social exclusion. 14% stated that they had faced sexual harassment, 12% specified that they had experienced physical violence at the hands of their employer and 6% that they had been sexually exploited. Additionally, 4% proclaimed they had been raped by their employer. Through the employment contract and the institutionalized and socially reproduced sexism and racism, the State and the employers have created expendable bodies that for them do not matter. Bodies that are potentially criminal, who are not allowed to complain, that are objectified and upon them through terms of total violence the entire stench of Cypriot society is expressed.

Domestic workers can be considered to be subjects at the centre of a concentration of relations of domination, produced through the social and economic categories of 'race', 'gender', and 'class'. These structures of domination and violence constitute a vicious cycle, each feeding into each other, each accentuating the force of the process of their exploitation that domestic workers endure. Their status as migrants and women sets the conditions for their precarity and depreciation as workers. Their undervaluation as workers contributes to the aggravation of the violence they face and encounter as migrants and women through racism and sexism on an everyday level. An intersection of 'race' and 'class', on a legal and institutional level for example, is clear when we consider that domestic workers are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior, specifically to the department of migration and population and not the Ministry of Labour- thus, are barred from access to basic workers' rights such as union organization, or access to social insurance unless they have acquired citizenship by some miracle. Moreover, domestic work has been historically undervalued as it traditionally takes place within the private sphere of the home, characterized by unpaid, unrecognized work done by women. The home, additionally, is a space of relative urban geographical isolation, a space that lends itself not only toward the total disciplining and surveillance of domestic workers by their employer, but also directly creates the conditions that enforce the invisibility of these bodies and their struggles, that labour within our own homes.

Brochures, [antifa λευκοşa \(Group\)](#), [Decade 2010-2019](#), [2016](#), [Nicosia \(city\)](#)

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