

## Press Release

### Gender and Communities

Athens, July 7 2021

The Centre for Gender Studies of Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences organized in June two online events for the **ProGender** project. In the lecture entitled **“Immigration in Norway: History, Gender and the Present”** held on **May 10 2021**, **Guro Korsnes Kristensen** (Professor in Gender and Equality, Deputy Head of the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture, at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology) presented an overview of migration and refugee issues in Norway during the pandemic.

At the beginning of the presentation, she gave a historical overview of immigration and refugee inflows from the 1950s to the present. In 2020, 38.000 new immigrants were recorded, of whom 52% were men and 48% women. The majority of male immigrants came from Poland, Lithuania and Romania, and the majority of women came from the Philippines, Thailand and Russia. The male labor force is employed in industry and agriculture, while the female labor force is employed in domestic work. The earnings of domestic workers are low and during Covid-19 the situation worsened.

During the coronavirus crisis, many immigrants were infected and hospitalized. This is explained because most people live in small apartments with extended families and also because information about the spread and infection of the virus didn't arrive in time. The government delayed the dissemination of information about Covid-19 in different languages.

As for the refugee population, most of the inflows are from Afghanistan and Syria and are male dominated. In 2015, 31.000 asylum applications were made. According to official data, 4.4% of the Norwegian population has refugee roots. Regarding their settlement, in the 1990s the Norwegian government developed a strategy to reduce the concentration of refugees in large cities. As there are many rural areas in Norway, the aim was to distribute the refugee population across the country to avoid the creation of ghettos in large cities and to increase interactions with local populations in rural areas, where there were labour shortages. Due to Covid-19, the number of incoming asylum seekers was reduced and refugee resettlement and family reunification processes were delayed.

The discussion panel entitled **“Migration and Gender during the Pandemic”** took place on **May, 26 2021** in collaboration with the RIKK- Institute for Gender, Equality and Difference (University of Iceland) and the Center for Gender Research (Norwegian University of Science and Technology). Participants included:

- **Tatiana Papanastasiou** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees- UNHCR) gave a talk about the gendered impact of the pandemic on prevention and response to Gender Based Violence (GBV) amongst asylum seekers and refugees. Because of COVID-19 lock downs and restrictions, the number of refugee and asylum seeking survivors of GBV decreased significantly in the second half of 2020 because there was no access to services and there were obstacles to reporting incidents of GBV to the police or social services. Vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers faced several gendered challenges during the pandemic including limited access to health services, to emergency shelters and employment counseling and employment services.
- **Olga Lafazani** (Postdoctoral Researcher at the Hellenic Research Foundation) made a critical assessment of the government campaign for the quarantine during the pandemic. The Greek government’s campaign promoted the message “STAY HOME, STAY SAFE”, which could not be implemented by migrants and asylum seekers because many of them do not have a home to stay in, and are stranded in overcrowded camps, where hygiene conditions are poor, water is scarce, and protective material is difficult to find. Even refugees who had previously access to social housing were denied this right. Things became even more difficult for victims of GBV who were left unprotected in conditions of confinement. Lafazani argued that after the pandemic we need to reconsider the concepts of home and security and contemplate on how they change and acquire different meaning depending on the living conditions and the vulnerability of different subjects.
- **Alma Belem Serrato** (Psychologist from Iceland) approached immigration and the analyzed the meaning of discrimination in psychological terms. She argued that high social status prioritizes access to resources and provides some groups with privileges, while other groups are left without access to basic resources. During the quarantine, refugees in Iceland were among the most vulnerable groups, both mentally and physically.
- **Anna Maria Wojtynska** (Anthropologist, Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Iceland) presented her research in the Polish immigrant community in Iceland, which is the largest group of immigrants since 1996. Most Polish immigrants are low-

income workers and during the pandemic, they were portrayed in the media as a health threat and economic burden for society. While they were being scapegoated by the press, many of them lost their jobs and became unemployed. The analysis emphasized the socioeconomic aspects of the pandemic bringing to the forefront the economic hardship that precarious workers faced during the lock downs. Although there was a movement of support from citizens, the impact of the pandemic on these immigrant workers was unequal.

- **Sonia Ahmadi** (Activist and Research Advisor at NTNU) spoke about the situation of Norwegian refugees, who become vulnerable because of cultural difference (language, social codes, lack of access to resources). Especially refugee women, who are full-time mothers and housewives, are confined at home and do not have the opportunity to learn the language, get an education, find a job and become economically independent. Without language skills, she argued, women cannot work outside the house, or even they do, they have low-income jobs. COVID-19 created more vulnerabilities amongst refugee women, who lost their jobs and their social contacts.
- **Sanna Julie Rødsten Jacobsen** (Norwegian Red Cross Volunteer) talked about her work as a volunteer in an organization providing services to unaccompanied minor refugees aged 15-23 of all genders and explained how the Red Cross addresses issues of loneliness and social exclusion that these young refugees face.

The videos of the events have been posted on Facebook @[ProGenderproject](https://www.facebook.com/ProGenderproject)

For further details please contact via email [progender@panteion.gr](mailto:progender@panteion.gr) and follow us on:

**Facebook** <https://www.facebook.com/ProGenderproject>

**Instagram** <https://www.instagram.com/progenderproject/>

**Twitter** [https://twitter.com/ProGender\\_hub](https://twitter.com/ProGender_hub)

***ProGender: A Digital Hub on Gender, the Covid-19 Crisis and its Aftermath**, is funded by the Bilateral Fund of the European Economic Area (EEA) Financial Mechanism 2014-2021 (EEA Grants 2014-2021). The EEA Grants represent the contribution of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway towards a green, competitive and inclusive Europe. There are two overall objectives: reduction of economic and social disparities in Europe, and to strengthen bilateral relations between the donor countries and 15 EU countries in Central and Southern Europe and the Baltics. The three donor countries cooperate closely with the EU through the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA). For the period 2014-2021, the EEA Grants amount to €1.55 billion.*