

MIGRANT AND REFUGEE COMMUNITIES DEMAND EQUAL RIGHTS

Free & Fair Access to the labour market!

Migrants face significant discrimination as they have access only to low paid, unskilled jobs, in especially restricted sectors with fixed by the government salaries at the lowest level possible and which remain the same for the last 30 years, irrespective of their qualifications which are not recognized due to lack of such procedures. There are, therefore, specific limitations in the jobs they can do mainly in sectors like agriculture, cleaning, domestic work and similar sectors. In addition, working conditions in these sectors are very harsh and sometimes comparable to forced labour and extreme exploitation. The migration system ties migrants not only to specific employment but also to specific employers. As a result, migrants do not enjoy the same rights with the rest of the workers when it comes to the freedom to change either jobs or employer. The fact that employers have full control on migrant workers by, amongst others, often withholding their personal documents and the power to terminate their work and resident permits takes away their last bit of freedom. This discrimination must come to an end, so that all migrants have free access to the labour market, according to their skills and qualifications. Additionally, migrant workers are usually obliged to pay huge amounts of money in fees to private agencies as a result of which they often find themselves in bonded labour.

We demand:

- **Equal access to the labour market for all workers irrespective of their nationality or status in the country!**
- **To put an end to all elements in the migration chain which captivate migrants in bonded and forced labour or similar conditions**

Equal access to the National Health System (GESY) for all people!

We welcome the inclusion of the migrant workers in the newly established National Health System (GESY). However, migrants face enormous barriers and discrimination in processing their registration with GESY. Asylum seekers and undocumented migrants are not allowed to register with GESY, which deprives them of their right to health care but also entails a serious risk for public health.

Asylum seekers face significant problems when accessing health care services: with the medical card issued by the state, they can only visit doctors in public hospitals, which necessitates very long waiting times and limited health care services. Migrant workers are still obliged to have a private medical insurance for which they and their employers pay and at the same time they also contribute to the GESY Fund. Access to public health services is one of the basic and fundamental human rights. This practice of discriminating against migrants and excluding asylum seekers and undocumented migrants from GESY has to change so that all people enjoy equal access to their right to healthcare.

We demand:

- **Equal Access to the GESY system for all migrants, refugees and anyone who lives in Cyprus, irrespective of legal status or nationality**
- **The elimination of all obstacles and discriminatory barriers in the registration of migrant workers with GESY**

Reform of Social Insurance Scheme to guarantee the benefits of our contributions!

In the last 30 years migrants have been paying some 4 to 5 million euros per month as contributions to the Social Insurance Fund but they are de facto without access to the benefits of the Fund, and in particular to their pension. Although the criteria for the SIF benefits (accumulation of a minimum amount of points) appear to be the same for all, migrants are indirectly discriminated and excluded from the benefits of the Fund. The combination of their very low salaries, which are set by the government, and the timely restricted residence and work permits, which is also imposed by the government, does not allow them to accumulate the minimum points required in order to be able to access their benefits. In violation of European Union and international law, domestic workers for example, need 19 years to make up the required minimum contributions for pension and 6 years for the lump sum benefit at the age of 68. Migrants also face indirect discrimination because of restrictions of the migration system in the case of unemployment, sickness, maternity and other benefits as de facto they do not have access.

- **We demand:**
- **Reform of the social insurance Law so that all contributors to the Fund have access to their benefits and especially to pensions without the discriminatory provisions/ threshold of the minimum points.**
- **Reform of the Social Insurance Fund so that migrants will have efficient access to lump sum payments for their contributions:**
 - **Lift the threshold of the minimum 6 years contributions, and**
 - **Establish an effective mechanism accessible from anywhere, including their countries of origin, which will enable migrants to get their payment easily and without excessive transfer fees.**

Stop violence against migrant women!

Violence against migrant women is a major challenge migrant women are faced with on an daily basis in Cyprus. In the last few years, the number of cases of violence against migrant women, including the serial killing of 5 migrant women and 2 young girls daughters of two of the victims, has risen alarmingly. Migrant women are exposed to all forms of violence (physical, verbal, psychological, harassment, rape and even femicide). The perpetrators can be their employers and their family members, their partners and husbands, the men/people with whom they get in touch with in their everyday life. The situation becomes even more intolerable since in most cases violence is tolerated and/or motivated by the acts and omissions of the State authorities and the justice system. Despite announcements that the competent authorities are taking increased measures for the protection of victims of domestic and gender-based violence, cases of this violence are rising alarmingly. What is also worrying is that gender-based violence against migrant women continues to be mismanaged and mistreated by the authorities, especially by the Police.

We demand:

- **From the Government to adopt a comprehensive strategy and action plan for the elimination of all forms of violence against migrant women, as a particularly vulnerable group.**
- **From the Law Enforcement Agencies and especially the Police to examine violence against domestic workers by their employers and their relatives under the domestic violence Law**
- **From the Police and the Ministry of Justice to take all necessary measures for the elimination of the mismanagement and mistreatment of migrant women by frontline police officers.**

Migrant children rights matter!

!According to the international as well as the Cypriot legal framework, children should enjoy all rights equally, irrespective of the ethnicity or the status of their parent(s). However, children with migratory biographies face enormous obstacles in enjoying their rights despite the fact that they have lived their entire life here, they attend school here and sometimes they don't speak the language of or have never visited the country of their parents. Children with migratory biographies very often are confronted in their everyday life with discrimination and bullying. The exclusion of their parents from society and the discrimination against them in the labour market very often affects the development and prospects of these children, despite the fact that Cyprus is the country where they are born, where they live and with which they identify themselves. Especially children without secure resident status and valid travel documents very often are not able to acquire the necessary documentation in order to access healthcare services, travel documents and registration in higher education institutions. One of the major problems is the connection of their status with the status of their parent(s). When they become 18 years old they sometimes risk to become undocumented and requested to leave the country or find employment in

become undocumented and requested to leave the country or find employment in agriculture, cleaning and domestic work irrespective of their qualifications and potential, sometimes even their degrees from Cypriot universities.

We demand:

- **Access to citizenship for those children who live in Cyprus for longer than 7 years irrespective of the status of their parents and before they reach the age of 18**
- **Access to citizenship for all children who are de facto or de jure stateless, immediately upon their birth in Cyprus**

Acknowledge & Respect our contributions to society!

Cyprus is a multicultural, diverse country! Migrants, refugees from all over the world and paths live and work in this country. Despite the advanced provisions of the Cypriot constitution and the relevant European Union law, migrants and refugees are confronted on a daily basis and in all areas of life with discrimination, racism, hate speech and exclusion from public life and the media. Theoretical recognition of diversity cannot be sufficient to guarantee the equal treatment and active participation of all members of the society. Whilst diversity acknowledges difference within society and its multiple identities, it does not guarantee social justice, active participation, inclusion and social cohesion. This can only be achieved through the processes of integration, the struggle against racism and the development of an inclusive society, which respects and recognizes the different identities and their contribution in the society. Giving migrants a voice, recognizing their valuable contribution to the economy and society, creating the necessary framework for their active participation in all spheres of life and building their sense of belonging to the Cypriot society, in short empowering migrants, is the only appropriate policy choice in a democratic society. It is this choice that will enable us to ensure fair and just societies for all and allow migrants to both be integrated and feel integrated.

We demand:

- **An Action Plan for combating racism, hate speech and hate crimes in the society, elaborated with the active participation of the migrant communities themselves**
- **An Action Plan for the effective integration, inclusion and active participation of migrants in the society, elaborated with the active participation of the migrant communities themselves**

***Adopted on
the occasion of International Migrants Day 2019***