

A Look at the Linkages: How does Gender, Migration, Labour and Trafficking Intersect in Women's Lives?

A Qualitative Research
based on migration and labour experiences of women
from Ursoaia village, Republic of Moldova

Feminist
Participatory
Action
Research





By **Viorelia Rusu**, International Center for Women Rights Protection and Promotion or “La Strada” Moldova, Republic of Moldova
May 2010

Women know their lives best! They know their strengths. They know what they want changed. In Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR), women research the issues that affect their own lives in order to bring about needed change. As a community, they analyse their stories and talk about what actions they will take and what needs to be changed. As opposed to traditional research, women are active participants in the research process; they are not ‘researched on’.

FPAR requires a certain attitude - one that believes women can steer change; one that embraces and values the complexity of women’s lived experiences; and one that highlights the strength and resourcefulness of women in the face of disempowering and discriminatory circumstances.

This FPAR initiative follows an FPAR process facilitated by the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) in 1999 and 2000 which worked with several groups to explore what trafficking was and how it manifests in women’s lives. Ten years on, GAATW and like-minded anti-trafficking advocates have come to the FPAR process again, this time looking at how trafficking is connected to broader parts of women’s lives - to their experiences of gender, migration and their work.

GAATW conducted a methodology learning workshop with NGOs and Self-Organised Groups (or groups led by members of the target group themselves) in the Americas, Africa, Europe and Asia in 2009. Researchers went back to their communities, or to the communities they work with, and acted as catalysts for the FPAR process. Research groups included: the Federation of Women Lawyers in Kenya (FIDA-Kenya); Legal Resources Center - Untul Keadilan Jender Dan Hak Asasi Manusia (LRC-KJHAM) in Indonesia; Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia-Jakarta or the Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers (ATKI-Jakarta); Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM) in Thailand; RESPECT Netherlands together with TRUSTED Migrants and the Commission for Filipino Migrant Workers in the Netherlands; Researchers Noushin K and Fereshteh in Canada; Akina Dada wa Africa (AkiDWA) in Ireland, La Strada Moldova; Movimiento De Mujeres Unidas (Modemu) in the Dominican Republic; Sociedade De Defesa Dos Direitos Sexuais Na Amazônia (Sodireitos) in Brazil; and Centro de Apoyo Aquelarre (CEAPA) in the Dominican Republic.

At the end of this FPAR process one Self-Organised Group said: ‘This is a feminist process’. The anti-trafficking sector has often been accused of determining what’s best for women ‘for their own good’. This initiative seeks to counteract that idea by documenting how women are steering change in their communities. We are proud to share their knowledge and their stories of resilience, hope and strength.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
ABOUT LA STRADA MOLDOVA	6
ACRONYMS	6
1. INTRODUCTION	7
2. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK	9
Research Objectives	9
Research Methodology	9
Data Collection Methods	10
Initiating Contact	10
Sharing experiences	11
Ethical Considerations	12
Working terminology	12
Participant’s Definitions	12
Other Definitions	13
National and Village Context	13
Economic and Labour Migration from Moldova	13
Ursoaia Village	15
3. HOW DO GENDER, MIGRATION, LABOUR AND TRAFFICKING INTERSECT IN WOMEN’S LIVES?	16
Gender	16
Mixed stereotypes about gender roles in family life	16
Women and Men: Perceived Comparative Vulnerability to Exploitation	16
Women and Men: Differing Responses to Negative Migration and Labor Experiences ..	19
Migration	20
Why do Women Migrate?	20
Choosing Formal or Informal Processes for Labour Migration	22
Women’s Feelings About Their Migration Experiences Upon Return to Moldova	24
Labour	26
Balancing Motherhood and Work Abroad	26
Exploitation and Human Trafficking	27
Perceptions of Exploitation and Trafficking Realities	27
Attitudes Towards Victims of Exploitation and Trafficking	29
4. INTERACTION BETWEEN LAW, POLICIES, AND MIGRANT WOMEN’S REALITIES	30
Women’s Perceptions and Knowledge of the Law	30
Improving Migration and Labour Legal Frameworks	31
5. WOMEN IN ACTION	33
6. FINAL THOUGHTS	35

FOREWORD

*“We, women, are now in the challenging position:
how to combine being a Mother, a Wife and a Breadwinner..”
A.C., 41 y.o., Ursoaia village, Republic of Moldova*

The phenomena of migration, labour and trafficking are realities for many countries in the globalised world, and the Republic of Moldova is no exception. The studies conducted in the Republic of Moldova have mainly targeted the phenomena of migration or trafficking separately. But there is less information about the links and intersections between these four aspects - gender, migration, labour and exploitation. It became crucial to research the experiences of women at the center of these phenomena, and to incorporate feminine voices and visions in improving current awareness-raising activities and migration/labor/anti-trafficking policies.

This particular feminist participatory action research (FPAR) combined research with educational and action objectives. This allowed rural women to identify their needs and knowledge of various phenomena during semi-structured individual interviews and to use their increased understanding to empower themselves, to defend their rights, and to take action to change the situation in their community.

This research is a part of larger FPAR initiative by the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) to link the traditional marriage of gender and trafficking frameworks with those of migration and labour. As a member of GAATW, the International Center for Women Rights Protection and Promotion “La Strada” from Moldova decided to participate by implementing a FPAR project in Moldova.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the women who kindly gave their priceless time to participate in this FPAR. Additionally, we thank the Mayor of Ursoaia village, *Mr. Ion Postica*, and the Secretary at the Mayor’s Office, *Mrs. Zinaida Bacalu*, for their generous support in facilitating FPAR in this community. They facilitated access to women in the community with labour migration experiences and supported women’s self-organising, mobilising and collective local action. We also would like to acknowledge the service providers who joined their efforts with “La Strada” Center to organise an awareness campaign within the village provide professional counseling to local women: *Mrs. Elena Oboroceanu* and *Mr. Ion Oboroceanu*, the lawyer/advocate and Director of the Causeni Law Center, and *Mrs. Lubovi Popov*, social worker/chief specialist at the Department of Social Assistance and Family Protection in the Causeni region.

We hope that this report will provide useful information for field professionals in understanding the worries, perceptions, values and needs of rural women/returnee migrant workers through a gender, migration, labour and exploitation lens. By sharing their labour migration experiences, the women participating in this research expressed their hopes for better opportunities and protection for migrants, workers and exploited persons. Let’s do our best.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Past research on migration and trafficking in Moldova has often explored these phenomena separately, where women have been defined as objects in migration and trafficking processes. This feminist participatory action research (FPAR) is a unique research project in that women are placed at the center of the above-mentioned phenomena and because their voices and visions are central to shaping the research report. To date, this FPAR is also the only research that examines the existing links and intersections between gender, migration, labour and exploitation.

Grounding the research within the context of Ursoaia, a medium-sized rural community in Moldova, allowed the researcher to take into account current and evolving gendered rural stereotypes and values when researching the migration and work experiences of local women. The focus groups identified the common values shared by women in the community. But sensitive information about the lessons learned from migration experiences and the problems that arose from migration were only collected during individual interviews.

The impact of women's labour migration experiences on families was by far the most significant issue for participants involved. For many in the village, labour migration was an economic survival strategy due to high unemployment rates in rural areas. Labour migration broadened women's social roles and changed men's social roles; women became economic providers while some men had to take on more domestic responsibilities. Women were very honest about how they struggled emotionally and socially with family separation, and about the painful decisions between economic survival and family unity.

Women had to frame their labour migration experiences very carefully once they returned to the village. Women described the village community as being 'cruel' to those who had experienced exploitation or negative migration experiences. As such, women only dared to share their negative experiences in individual interviews (women mostly shared positive experiences in focus groups). For most participants, exploitation largely meant not being paid for one's labour, although sexual exploitation was also acknowledged as a risk for women (e.g. feeling pressured to endure sexual harassment to keep one's job). Many women also did not identify themselves as *victims* of exploitation even though they talked in detail about the exploitation that had happened to them - a distinction that should be considered by assistance organisations in destination and origin countries.

The typical anti-trafficking frameworks have a strong law enforcement/criminal justice orientation yet women described the limitations of these frameworks in addressing exploitation that occurs in "lawless" contexts. Many of the women were very skeptical about the value of existing legal systems. The current research confirms again that migrants are often left alone or without guidance when they encounter problems in destination countries. Stigmatisation by rural communities of returnee migrants who are also victims of exploitation is also an important issue that needs to be addressed in anti-trafficking campaigns in order to change existing attitudes and stereotypes.

This particular participatory research was a process that combined research with education and action. The FPAR identified women's demands, particularly the need for information on existing laws and policies related to labour migration and the need for social or psychological support due to negative labour migration experiences. The FPAR in Moldova demonstrated that the women who shared their experiences gained spaces to reflect on their experiences, be self-critical and self-improving, and perceived themselves as powerful persons who had resisted adversity and survived.

Initial actions included a campaign event coordinated by La Strada in Ursoaia village. During this event, women had the option of directly accessing professional counseling services from a psychologist, a social worker, and a lawyer. The campaign also promoted La Strada's toll-free Hotline number where women could access information related to labour migration issues. After the campaign event, the number of Hotline calls from the Causeni region increased three-fold.

The FPAR consolidated the group of community women and they continue to have ad-hoc meetings discussing various aspects of their lives. Based on the wishes of participants to continue the group discussions, the local administration kindly offered space in the Mayor's Office where women could meet each other.

It is hoped that women's testimonials and comments in this report will assist stakeholders in improving current labour migration policies to better reflect the needs, goals and perspectives of migrating women so that women can fully access their rights - whichever country they are in.

ABOUT LA STRADA MOLDOVA

International Center for Women Rights Protection and Promotion “La Strada” Moldova

The International Centre for Women Rights Protection and Promotion “La Strada” was founded and registered in Moldova as non-governmental organisation in 2001.

The International Centre “La Strada” strives to build a society based on the principle of respect for human rights, related to the issue of trafficking in persons and all forms of abuse against children and women. It is active in direct assistance, prevention activities and lobbying activities;

Assistance activities include victim identification, facilitated rescue and repatriation, emergency psycho-social assistance, facilitated rehabilitation and reintegration; mediation service for vulnerable witnesses during legal proceedings and court hearing; these services are organised within the Drop-in-Centre for trafficked persons which also runs SOS-Line and capacity building programs for practitioners on addressing cases of human trafficking and assisting trafficked persons;

Prevention and education activities include awareness, information and training. These activities are organised by the Resource Centre for migrants that runs peer-to-peer educational program, Toll Free Hot-Line and special library and capacity building programs for practitioners on trafficking prevention;

Lobbying activities include technical support and legal expertise to policy makers in developing and implementing anti-trafficking framework and strategies; research and analyses on the trafficking and associated issues; consultancy, legal and analytical support to various international anti-trafficking programs.

One of “La Strada” Moldova’s principles is widening victims’ access to assistance and protection, irrespective if they are willing to cooperate with the police.

Contact Details

Address: P.O. Box 259, Chisinau, Moldova 2012

Tel: + 373 - 22 23 49 06

Fax: + 373 - 22 23 49 07

Email: office@lastrada.md

Website: www.lastrada.md

ACRONYMS

FPAR	feminist participatory action research
GAATW	Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women

1. INTRODUCTION

In their lives, women play challenging roles and status that are often dictated by human communities or nature. For the women in this project, the highest assignment and the happiest experience as a woman is being a Mother. A Mother's position often leads to struggle for better opportunities and for their children. In many countries, women have to leave their families and countries and become a migrant worker in order to support their children. While women aspire to change their lives for the better by migrating for work, women also often assume high risks during the process and are at risk of being exploited.

Previous migration or trafficking research in the Republic of Moldova mainly defined women as 'objects' in migration or trafficking processes. Yet, many women's rights activists have asked themselves: *"What do women and men want when thinking or deciding to work abroad? Who makes the decisions? How do men and women negotiate resources and power between each other? What kind of barriers do men and women face? What are the gains and losses resulting from migration, and how does it influence people's values? Are men and women vulnerable to exploitation in different ways and how is vulnerability created? How are social relations embedded and embodied in women's everyday lives? What power imbalances and silences are emerging and how will these be anticipated and dealt with?"*

This feminist participatory action research (FPAR) in Moldova is unique as it examines the links and intersections between gender, migration, labour and exploitation (rather than examining these phenomena separately). This research places women at the center of the above-mentioned phenomena. In this project, feminine voices shaped the research.

Many poor women are excluded from social processes and their communities. As such, an open and flexible theory-building approach is needed, one that confronts and is respectful of women's day to day experiences¹ and one that reflects a "grassroots" approach rather than a "top-down" approach. This FPAR asks us to respect and learn from women who have often been socially excluded. The processes for this research were also intended to empower women and enable women to analyse their own migration experiences. The FPAR in Moldova demonstrated that the women who shared their experiences gained spaces to reflect on their experiences, be self-critical and self-improving, and perceived themselves as powerful persons who had resisted adversity and survived.

This FPAR was grounded in the community and combined research with education and action. The FPAR identified women's demands, particularly the need for information on existing laws and policies related to migration and work abroad, and the need to access social or psychological support due to negative migration experiences. Together, the researcher and community members strove to maximise benefits from the increased knowledge and understanding gained during the FPAR process and to take action to better the situation in this particular community.

Increasing women's participation in civil society is crucial to improving women's roles in Moldova and stemming the tide of trafficking. Overwhelming evidence from around the world has shown that when women participate fully in a country's economy and politics, there are vast improvements in both. Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen argues that including women in economic and political decision-making structures results in

¹ Lather, P. (1991). *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy within the postmodern*. New York, NY: Routledge.

policy making that is more inclusive, protects individual rights, and is more likely to resolve social inequalities that harm both men and women².

“The root causes of migration and trafficking greatly overlap. The lack of rights afforded to women serves as preliminary causative factor at the root of both women’s migrations and trafficking in women...By failure to protect and promote women’s civil, political, social and economical rights, governments creates situations in which trafficking flourishes”³

This FPAR was intended to share women’s voices and reflect on the experiences of women who had migrated and worked abroad. It is hoped that this knowledge will contribute to the improvement of existing policies at international, national and local levels, thereby increasing women’s status and making their roles happier and more successful.

² By Denise Horn, assistant professor of international affairs and political science at Northeastern University (Boston). see: http://www.rferl.org/content/Bringing_Moldovas_Women_Into_The_Democratization_Process/1927570.html

³ Radhika Coomaraswamy, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women. Published in: USA Department of State’ Trafficking in Persons Report 2009. p.36.

2. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Research Objectives

This research aims to document women's experiences of migration and employment and to analyse women's experiences from a feminist and human rights perspective. The research process and findings are intended to encourage local action steered by women in the community, including advocacy for policies that create a rights enhancing environment.

Some of the key questions explored in this FPAR are:

- How do gender, migration, labour, and trafficking intersect in women's lives - both in terms of experienced realities and the laws and policies that surround them?
- What is the context which impacts on the ability of women to make decisions in their lives (social, economic and political)?
- What are the official or formal processes for migration and labour, and are women choosing to use these? If they are choosing informal processes, what are they, and why are women choosing them?
- In what ways are women experiencing power relations and exercising power and autonomy to claim rights?

Research Methodology

This research is based on feminist action research principles - a conceptual and methodological framework that attempts to address women's needs and limitations and to locate the study of women's status in a broader social justice agenda. Feminist action research (FAR) enables a critical understanding of women's multiple perspectives and works toward inclusion, participation, action, and social change while confronting the underlying assumptions the researcher brings into the research process. Feminist action researchers typically use qualitative research methods to generate in-depth understandings of women's experiences and places women's diversity at the centre of the analysis. FAR strategies attempt to be inclusive, participatory, collaborative, and to elucidate poor women's experiences. Indeed, FAR can be seen as a research tool to better understand the factors that perpetuate women's poverty, to appreciate the diverse and often disparate ways that poor women negotiate their lives, and to respond to social injustices through advocating collective action and social change⁴. In this way, feminist action researchers facilitate building knowledge to change the conditions of women's lives, both individually and collectively, while reconstructing conceptions of power so that power can be used in a responsible manner⁵.

Enhancing women's voices is part of the methodology and politics of FPAR. FPAR is an approach that aims to produce knowledge through democratic and interactive relationships between researchers and participants that are committed to making diverse women's voices more audible by facilitating their empowerment through "ordinary talk"⁶. Its aim is to connect the articulated and contextualised personal experiences with the often hidden structural and social institutions that define women's lives. This can foster the development of strategies and programs based on real life experiences rather than

⁴ Reid, C. (2004). *The wounds of exclusion: Poverty, women's health, and social justice*. Edmonton, AB: Qual Institute Press.

⁵ Ristock, J. L., & Pennell, J. (1996). *Community research as empowerment: Feminist links, postmodern interruptions*. Toronto, ON: Oxford University Press.

⁶ Maguire, P. (2001/2006) "Uneven ground: feminism and action research". In P.Reason and H.Bradbury, *Participative Inquiry and Practice*. London: Sage.pp.60-70.

theories or assumptions, and provide an analysis of issues based on how women hope to transcend problems encountered⁷.

Feminist participatory research involves a social action process that is biased in favour of dominated, exploited, poor, or otherwise ignored women, men, and groups. Participatory researchers work “with” rather than “for” the researched, breaking down the distinction between researchers and the researched while legitimising the knowledge people are capable of producing⁸. Consequently, participatory researchers outline and utilise explicit processes to facilitate ordinary people’s reflections and analysis of their reality. They attempt to involve participants in the entire research process, including an action phase, and present people as researchers in pursuit of answers to questions of daily struggle and survival⁹.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection methods included a combination of focus groups with community women, semi-structured individual interviews and direct observation.

Initiating Contact

This FPAR in Moldova took place in Ursoaia village, a medium-sized rural community in Moldova. Access to the community was arranged via a partner organisation, the Causeni Law Center. The Centre’s Director called the Mayor of Ursoaia village and told him about the “La Strada” Moldova initiative and asked about the availability and willingness of the local administration to cooperate with FPAR activities in Moldova. The mayor was open to cooperating and supporting local women. The mayor was then contacted by the FPAR researcher who provided more details on the research described in the official letter.

This was a ‘wise entrance’ to the community: the Mayor is the right person who can give the ‘go-ahead’, he is respected among villagers which increased the researcher’s credibility among villagers¹⁰. The Mayor delegated his Secretary to assist the researcher. The Secretary was a reputable woman who knew the problems of local women intimately. She later on provided important logistical support in identifying women for focus groups and interviews and also facilitated women’s movement and their actions in the village. In this way, the relationship between the external researcher and the women in the community was set, based on an important trust between the village authority and the women themselves.

The researcher encountered some challenges in selecting appropriate days for organising focus groups and interviews with women, due to the current agricultural season that demanded women’s involvement. Because of this, there were two days where people were religiously prohibited from working, so women used these days to meet each other and the FPAR researcher.

The self-selection bias among interviewees’ should be noted as a limitation of the research - all who participated in individual interviews and focus groups were women who

⁷ Barnsley, J. and Ellis, D. (1992) *Research for change: Participatory Action Research for Community Groups*. Vancouver, BC: Women’s Research Center.

⁸ Fals-Borda, O. (1991). Some basic ingredients. In O. Fals-Borda & M. A. Rahman (Eds.), *Action and knowledge: Breaking the monopoly with participatory action-research* (PP. 3-12). New York, NY: The Apex Press.

⁹ Nyden, P., & Wiewel, W. (1992). Collaborative research: Harnessing the tensions between researcher and practitioner. *The American Sociologist*, 24, PP.43-55.

¹⁰ Usually all events that are planned in a village with participation of external organizers should be preliminarily coordinated with Major’s Office. This is also due to the fact that many Moldovan villages are overwhelmed with different religious movements coming abroad causing disaffection from the local Christians and the Church.

agreed to share their labour migration experiences. It may be that some women who had negative migration experiences were initially pre-selected by the local public administration to participate, and may include those who were trafficked. Some women with negative migration experiences may have been reluctant or refused to share their experiences within this FPAR. There may also have been women with positive migration experiences who didn't participate because they were reluctant to share their experiences with the researcher or because they were not comfortable with the Mayor's involvement.

Sharing experiences

The focus group discussions were organised during 2 consecutive days with 8 women in each group (16 women in total) from Ursoaia village. The focus groups were organised prior to individual interviews and involved the same women. The main criteria for women's selection was having positive and/or negative migration experiences abroad and the willingness to share their experiences in a group and/or individually with the researcher. All women were contacted via the Mayor's Secretary who also scheduled the focus groups and individual interviews. The focus group meetings were held in the Mayor's Office which also assured an atmosphere of trust and comfort.

Since the women already knew each other, the group discussion was quite active/dynamic despite the relative homogeneity of the group. A mixed group of young and middle-aged women with experience in different destination countries provided valuable information about women's knowledge and emigration practices, attitudes and values. Special care has been taken not to combine groups on factors that would pose barriers to open discussions, e.g. women from different ethnic groups.

Women were mostly willing to share only positive migration experiences or speak about non-personal problems during focus groups. The focus groups identified women's shared common values, the lessons learned from migration experiences and general discussion about the problems that migration can generate for families. The most sensitive information was collected only during individual interviews. The researcher who facilitated the focus groups had a considerable task in using the group's dynamic to orchestrate the discussion, allow full development of the topics, and provide space for everyone to share their experiences and opinions. During the focus groups, the researcher's unspoken tasks were to build a sense of togetherness among the women, to encourage them to see migration-related problems from another angle, to accent the positive things in their lives and to help them feel powerful enough to act.

The individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 women in total - 16 women from Ursoaia village with labour migration experiences and the Mayor's Secretary. Although she had no migration experience, she still held a lot of information on the lives and problems of women in the community and was thus a valuable source of information. All interviews took place during two consecutive days in August 2009, in the Mayor's Office in Ursoaia village. The interviews were arranged with the help of the Mayor's Secretary so that women could choose the best or most comfortable time for an individual interview.

The individual interviews asked about women's negative migration experiences. Only through open dialogues in individual interviews was it possible to collect information on the nature of oppression, domination and exploitation and how it intersected with gender and other forms of advantage and disadvantage in the community.

Direct observation of women's behaviour in solitude or with others, during all of the researcher's meetings with women (including women's self-organising meetings) from and in Ursoaia village allowed the researcher to better understand women's feelings, values, attitudes and positions.

Ethical Considerations

The interviews were conducted in the Mayor's Office which was considered convenient by the women interviewed. The interview sessions were organised to suit women's schedules and priorities.

Voluntary verbal consent to proceed with the interviews was obtained personally prior to each interview. All women were verbally informed about the research objectives, how interviews would be conducted, duration of interviews, and how the information was going to be used. They were also provided with the researcher's contact details in case they had concerns or questions about the research at a later stage.

The researcher had previous experience in interviewing persons with negative migration experiences. No pressure was put on the respondents to share their traumatic experiences, and all questions were asked in a supportive and non-judgmental way. When a negative migration experience was touched upon, the researcher was attentive to the interviewee's comfort level and allowed them to lead the discussion. Each woman interviewed was reassured that she could decline to discuss anything she was not comfortable with at any stage of interview.

Respondents were not obliged to share any identifying information; even when it was provided, it is camouflaged in this report to respect women's privacy. Confidentiality was important as some interviews turned into confessions - women shared stories they had never told anyone. This presented a challenge for the field researcher - could we do more than just ask our questions and leave? Although the research objectives originally did not include providing specialised support, interviewees were provided with information on where they could get professional help on different issues. The FPAR evaluated the knowledge gaps and needs of the women interviewed. As an ethical consideration, a special action event was organised a month later, on September 17, 2009, to bring a psychologist, a social worker and a lawyer to the village so women could access specialised information and support.

Only the researcher had access to the recorded material and field notes. These were collected and stored in accordance with the Law of the Republic № 17-XVI (2007). The recorded materials were destroyed once the final report was completed.

Working terminology

Participant's Definitions

In this research, the term "*positive migration experience*" is used as it is understood by the women who participated in this research: a migration experience where one returned home with earnings.

The women in the village defined a "*negative migration experience*" as an experience that resulted in exploitation in the destination country and resulted in returning to one's home country without earnings, and often with debts and health problems. "Negative migration experiences" also included experiences of being trafficked.

Other Definitions

Victim of trafficking/trafficked person/trafficking survivor: A person who is subject to the crime of trafficking in human beings.

Trafficking in human beings: “(...) the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the treat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs”¹¹

Feminism is a term used to convey the diversity within feminist theoretical and political views on understanding the oppression of women¹².

Action is an integral part of reflective knowledge, and can be conceptualised as speaking, or attempting to speak, to validate oneself and one’s experiences and understandings in and of the world¹³. Action is defined as “the transmission of energy, force, or influence”¹⁴.

National and Village Context

Economic and Labour Migration from Moldova

Moldova is a former ex-Soviet country in Southeastern Europe. It is situated between Romania and Ukraine and has a population of almost 4 million people.

As in many other countries, migration represents a sensible and also controversial subject for discussion in Moldova. The number of Moldovans leaving the country for work abroad has been increasing in recent years. In 2008, the total number of Moldovans who migrated was about 600,000¹⁵; 340,000 among them still have families in Moldova, representing a quarter of the national labour force¹⁶.

One third of the migrant Moldovan citizens with non-residential status abroad stay in destination countries ‘illegally’ or on an undocumented basis. Workers’ remittances serve as a major income source for family households as well as for the national economy. In 2008, remittances totalled 1.8 million USA dollars¹⁷ or 30% of the country’s GDP¹⁸. The remittances helped to eradicate poverty, sponsored children’s educations and contributed to the economic growth based on consumption. Every third Moldovan household receives remittances, and for every second household among these, money from abroad represents

¹¹ Art.3 of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, Supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000.

¹² Ristock, J. L., & Pennell, J. (1996). *Community research as empowerment: Feminist links, postmodern interruptions*. Toronto, ON: Oxford University Press.

¹³ Gordon, G. B. (2001). Transforming lives: Towards bicultural competence. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice* (pp. 314-323). London, UK: Sage Publications.

¹⁴ Morris, W. (Ed.). (1982). *The Houghton Mifflin Canadian Dictionary of the English Language*. Markham, ON: Houghton Mifflin Canada Limited, P.13.

¹⁵ In accordance with the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Moldova that cited the statistics of the Border Guards Service, a number of 628 000 of Moldovans are settled abroad (March 2009). See: <http://www.azi.md/ro/story/1664>

¹⁶ National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, Labour Force Questionnaire “Labour Force in the Republic of Moldova: employment and unemployment in the forth quarter 2008); this number have been confirmed by the IOM Research “Labour Migration and Remittances in Moldova: Is the Boom Over? ”, 2009. See:

http://iom.md/materials/studies_reports/2009_05_05_remmit_boom_over_eng.pdf, accessed on February 05, 2010.

¹⁷ Source: National Bank of Moldova, 2009

¹⁸ see: http://unicef.org/moldova/ro/Fact_Sheet_-_Migration_-_ROM_Final.doc, accessed on February 05, 2010.

more than 50% of their total income¹⁹. The disposable income of the rural Moldovan population that is generated by remittances is twice the income of the urban population²⁰. This means that migration mostly affects the rural population. When disposable income among the population is analysed, women in rural areas declare an income twice as much as rural households headed by men²¹, which suggests that the number of men working abroad and remitting money home is twice as much than women working abroad. According to other research, 37% of migrants from Moldova are women²².

The major destination countries for migrants from Moldova are Russia and Italy. Moldovans choose the Russian Federation for its geographical proximity, comparatively attractive salaries in the construction field and language similarities; Russian is spoken by the majority of Moldovans due to their ex-Soviet past. Russian immigration regulations requires registration of all foreigners and allows stays for up to 3 months. Special permission for work is required. Yet employers mainly prefer not to arrange work permissions and work contracts.

While the wave of migration and flow of remittances has decreased due to the economic recession, emigration is still at quite a high level - more than half of the migrants who recently came back home expressed their intention to travel abroad again²³. The undiminished motivation to emigrate could be explained by the huge differences between salaries paid in the country and abroad. Migration continues to be an attractive opportunity, and remittances will probably remain a support for the Moldovan economy in the medium-term²⁴.

Negative consequences of migration include a massive brain drain from the country and an exodus of a qualified labour force that affects the public and private sectors as well as social consequences due to family separation.

In some cases, negative migration experiences resulted in cases of severe exploitation that are usually treated as human trafficking cases²⁵. Some official estimates report that between 200,000 and 400,000 Moldovans have been trafficked since the collapse of the Soviet Union, which includes men trafficked for labour as well as women trafficked for labour and sex work. Unofficial estimates put this figure much higher, while the UN's *2009 Trafficking in Persons Report* estimates that 25,000 Moldovans were trafficked in 2008 alone. Yet it is not clear how these figures have been obtained thus these should be considered critically.

Moldovan women are trafficked primarily to Turkey, Russia, Cyprus, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and to other Middle Eastern and Western European countries. Men are trafficked to work in the construction, agriculture and service sectors of Russia and other countries. The small breakaway region of Transnistria in eastern Moldova is outside the central government's control and remains a source for trafficking victims²⁶.

¹⁹ Ibidem, accessed on February 05, 2010.

²⁰ National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova. Aspects of the standards of living of population in 2008. Results of the Household Budget Survey. Chisinau, 2009. P.50.

²¹ ibidem, P.60.

²² Ghencea B., Gudumac I. Migrația de muncă și remitențele în Republica Moldova. / Alianța de Microfinanțare din Moldova, SOROS din Republica Moldova. - Chișinău: MMA, 2004, P.44.

²³ The IOM Study conducted in March 2009 "The Socio-Economic Impact of the Economic Crisis on Migration and Remittances in the Republic of Moldova: http://iom.md/materials/studies_reports/2009_06_02_socio_economic_impact_eng.pdf, accessed on February 05, 2010.

²⁴ Cited at: http://unicef.org/moldova/ro/Fact_Sheet_-_Migration_-_ROM_Final.doc, accessed on February 05, 2010.

²⁵ ibidem

²⁶ USA Department of State' Trafficking in Persons Report 2009, P.209.

As in many post-Soviet states, the role of women in Moldova has reverted to pre-Soviet "traditional" roles that emphasise women as mothers and domestic caretakers, but less as political or economic actors. Indeed, the International Fund for Agricultural Development reports that the majority of those unemployed - a whopping 68 %- are women. Those who do have employment continue to work in lower-paying jobs and represent an insignificant number of decision-makers in the economic and political spheres. Yet women are more likely to carry the burden of providing for their families. Thus, women are often placed in the contradictory position of being the family breadwinner - either for a lower salary than men or more commonly, for higher pay and higher risks working abroad²⁷.

Ursoaia Village

Ursoaia is considered a medium-sized Moldovan village. It is situated on 46°41'16.72" of north latitude and 29°24'55.59" east longitude, 80km south-east from the Moldovan capital city of Chisinau and about 14 kilometres from the nearest small city of Causeni. According to the national territorial division system, Ursoaia village is in the Causeni region²⁸.

The village has a population of 2714, the majority of whom are women. According to the Mayor's office, about 500 persons left temporarily to earn money abroad and about 200 people are employed within the village. There is a school in this village where 207 children could partially complete their high school.

Due to the national gasification program, about 40% of the villagers have natural gas - an important source of heating since winter temperatures in Moldova may reach -25 degrees Celsius. Due to relatively high temperatures in the summer (e.g. +35°C) and unstable precipitation, the agriculture depends on the water supply. In Ursoaia village, only 5% of villagers have access to a centralised supply of water. The largest number of villagers use the wells as a main source of water.

In Ursoaia, as in the majority of Moldovan villages where people are actively involved in agricultural work, the busiest periods are May (planting) and August-September (harvesting). Meat (pork, beef, etc.) and agricultural products (corn, grains, potatoes, etc.) are important sources of income for the village as well as important food sources.

The main destination country for Ursoaia residents is Russia, yet there are cases of women working in Italy and the Czech Republic. It is interesting that the majority of women who used to work in construction/renovation in Russia have learned the necessary skills from their husbands or relatives who first migrated, worked and found work for women relatives there. Due to Russian immigration rules, couples of women and men can work and travel in 3-months 'shifts'. Many women find this working regime comfortable since they can see their families/children every 3 months, then return to Russia for work.

In contrast to Russia, women who choose to migrate to Italy usually work there for a longer period of time. Women tend to arrive there with tourist visas and work as undocumented workers in private households. If they decide to return to Moldova, they receive a deportation stamp in their passport and are prohibited from entering the country for 5 years. Persons who work in the Czech Republic usually have work visas that are arranged for at least one year or longer.

²⁷ By Denise Horn, assistant professor of international affairs and political science at Northeastern University (Boston). See: http://www.rferl.org/content/Bringing_Moldovas_Women_Into_The_Democratization_Process/1927570.html, accessed on February 05, 2010.

²⁸ There are 33 regions and 2 municipalities existing in the Republic of Moldova

3. HOW DO GENDER, MIGRATION, LABOUR AND TRAFFICKING INTERSECT IN WOMEN'S LIVES?

Gender

When looking at women's lives, one can observe that each woman may have multiple identities. From this FPAR, we observed that she can be a woman, a mother, a migrant, a worker and even a victim of exploitation at the same time.

Mixed stereotypes about gender roles in family life

As mentioned above, traditional rural society in Moldova still adheres to the idea that men in a family are obligated to be the breadwinner or main economic provider while women are typically assigned to care for the children and the household. The urban population has already criticised this idea as a stereotype since the opposite is true in many families. This stereotype is also challenged in rural families where the wife has migrated abroad for work while the husband has remained in Moldova to take care of the children and the household. This FPAR found that wives migrated abroad and became the family breadwinner, while husbands had to take on traditional feminine roles such as cooking, laundering (hand-washing), etc.:

"I know that my husband, during the first time after I left to go abroad, was ashamed to launder, and hiding from neighbours...I get nervous when people say - women should do this...and men -this.... Do you think it really matters when you have to do everything to survive?"

"We reversed the roles. It was quite hard for my husband, but he finally managed...he had nothing to do."

The reversal of gender roles is typical for thousands of Moldovan families where women have migrated to Italy to work as housekeepers, leaving their husbands to fulfill domestic responsibilities in Moldova. In some families, daughters take up these "feminine" domestic responsibilities in lieu of their mother.

Women and Men: Perceived Comparative Vulnerability to Exploitation

The women who were interviewed were asked to make a comparative analysis of men's and women's vulnerability to exploitation including human trafficking while migrating and working abroad. Research participants formulated their own analysis based on their own experiences and their relatives' experiences.

Opinions were divided and interestingly, depended on the type of work done by women abroad. Women who worked in construction/renovation along with men perceived that both sexes were equally likely to become victims of exploitation:

"I think both sexes are equally exposed to the risk of exploitation. I have heard many cases when men were taken to Russia in minibuses to distant places (such as the forest) for construction work. When they finished the construction, they were handed money for a ticket and told "goodbye". If they tried to assert themselves, they were told - "Do you want to reach your home?"

"We have equal chances for imperilment. I have heard many cases about women exploited in construction. But I also know many cases when men became victims of exploitation - their passports were taken away, they were beaten as slaves, working hardly without remuneration, sleeping on the floor. I even have a young male relative who had such a negative experience in Russia - he was working without payment and was guarded...He managed to call home after 8 months to tell us that was alive...He needed help since he was injured by scissors in his back... We were praying to God to save him and finally arranged his escape from the place of exploitation...I was crying and thinking that I would never allow my husband or my brother to work abroad...I feel deeply sorry about the young men who migrated and were ensnared in a trap."

"Even when I travel to Russia for the purpose of work, I hear many stories on the train about cases of exploitation, even of couples...people tell their stories and cry...Many say that they had no choice - they were happy to come back home alive...I even have relatives who have such experience..."

Physical differences were perceived by women as the only difference between men and women that made the latter powerless. In assessing comparative vulnerability to exploitation for men and women, one of the women interviewed believed that men were heftier than women and thus had more physical power to struggle with an employer that women didn't have:

"Sometimes men solve the problem with force and pertinacity...and the woman is forceless. She may need to address somebody else for help, and if she does not have a defender - there is nothing she can do...she has to borrow money and return home."

Men were also beaten in front of women by exploiters to subdue women from the same group of workers and to frighten other women from claiming their salary:

"I was a witness to a situation when a man from our group demanded his unpaid salary for the last 6 months...the employer beat him badly...and we [women] felt dominated - if a man could not resist, what can we do then?"

The same woman said *"the only power the women have - is their inwardness...we should be strong enough to claim our rights where it is suitable"*. Interestingly, in this instance women are considered *suitable* to claim her rights *"in situations of legal employment and when men-employers do not dare to exercise their physical strength against women-employees, both of which didn't apply to my case"*. This woman felt she had no options at the beginning of work nor at the end, but considered herself in this situation as *"powerful enough to take the right decision to leave"*.

Women were seen to be more vulnerable to actual and attempted physical violence and sexual harassment at the workplace in the destination country:

"There, in Russia, we slept on mattresses in the same premise where we worked, in a 25 story building. The employer obliged us to lock the door so the police would not find us. One day we did not manage to close the door and were taking our lunch, when the police came with a ride... We [women] were very frightened...The policemen were shouting at the women, and they invited the employer...they told us that if we did not call the employer, they would take us in their cars and we would "pay in kind" for infringements of the migration law... I started to call my husband who was on the other floor but they did not allow

me...I told them I would jump out the window, that I would chose jumping rather than allow them to insult me...One policeman was laughing at me and at the same time was amused at how forward I was. Other women were crying, and what they had to do? Thank God, our employer came just in time, and paid the police..."

Sexual exploitation was seen as an additional tool used by employers to manipulate and take advantage of the vulnerability of women working in a foreign environment. Recessions and the limited number of jobs in the destination country increased competition for jobs. Increased job insecurity resulted in some women remaining in the job waiting desperately to receive their earnings. Others in more difficult situations feel pressured to endure "double" exploitation:

"The patrons/employers [men] are in the privileged position. I remember one day when the employer told us that he has to make redundancies due to the recession. All women workers did not sleep that night: We were thinking about our children for whom we had migrated for...Next morning he told one young woman that she has to leave, and took her by car to the head office, to settle accounts. We all were sorry for her, since she was a single mother, and had no absolute support from her family...But we were surprised to see her returning on the next day...When we asked her how she managed to keep her job, she started to cry, and all women understood - how terrible that was...None of the women wanted to be in her place."

One of the women interviewed supposed that there are many cases of sexual harassment that are endured by women due to debt bondage:

"I know one case of a woman whom I know closely - she finally got a job in an Italian house to take care of an old man, and the salary was paid by his son...he would enter her room and violate her...She could do nothing...she was illegal in that country, so could not complain... there also cases where his friends came and violated her...It is hard to know that many Moldovan women find themselves in such situations, women with education/teachers...whose families have debts and who are waiting to receive money..."

Some interviewees pointed out that the possibility of sexual exploitation for women workers is an additional vulnerability, compared to men working in the destination country:

"The risk positions of women are comparatively significant. I think that situations of sexual exploitation of men at the workplace are much less likely to happen compared to the same situations with women. The worst thing that may happen to a man is to be kept as a slave, to be unpaid for some physical job. But a woman may be often exploited in physical work and additionally, sexually exploited..."

Having multiple options is always desirable for the migrant worker, but rarely available. Yet one of the interviewed women received an unambiguous proposal while she worked in a household but she chose to return to her own family:

"While facing psychological abuse at a job in Italy, I found another job but it was even more complicated - I took care of an elder, who was actually waiting for his old wife to die and wanted me to remain with him...no, such a perspective was not attractive for me, I was too tired, and I chose to go back home".

Women and Men: Differing Responses to Negative Migration and Labor Experiences

Two thirds of the women interviewed women reported a negative migration experience during their work in Russia in the construction field. Most negative experiences related to non-payment.

"It was difficult psychologically to make up my mind after not getting paid. When it happened for the first time, of course it was hard to accept it, but I told myself, there's nothing I can do, I have to draw the lesson from it. And really, the next time I was more cautious. For example, when pay was delayed, I did not work there more than 1 month, I just left."

Since the majority of research participants' husbands had also migrated for work, women were asked to share how their husbands behaved in similar situations. It was interesting to see how women's and men's behavior differed in similar situations and how it influenced couples' relationships:

"When we [wife and husband] understood that we would not get money for 2 months of work, we were both stressed...You know, women are more stress resistant, compared to men. I started to cry, I poured my negative feelings away...but my husband internalised all his negative feelings, he was silent for a long time...later on, he even became explosive, accusing himself for taking me to that place or accusing me for not finding another job."

Many women felt that men rarely speak out about their negative migration experiences. This may be due to male stereotypes of strong, undefeatable persons:

"In our family my husband was the first who traveled to Russia for work. His first work experience resulted in non-payment. Additionally, he was badly beaten. He left and found another workplace, hopefully a successful one. But I found about it much later, when I came to that place to work together"

"He told me that he lost the passport and money, and he worked some time to cover the costs for a new passport...Many months later, when he returned home, I observed that it was the same passport he used upon departure".

Compared to women, men are generally more reluctant to speak about negative experiences due to fears of how it would be received by their family and but also by the community. It should be noted that the rural community in Moldova is quite cruel towards persons who have had negative migration experiences:

"Upon return I told about our [husband and wife's] negative migration experience to my old parents... they were of course unhappy but asked me not to tell anyone in the village about our experience. They were afraid that villagers would laugh at our family...like we spent so much time working abroad, and did not even earn enough to mend our roof..."

Interestingly, some women suggested that men are relatively less able to cope with difficult work and living conditions in destination countries:

"Men are less able to tolerate difficulties. My husband did not tolerate even a month, he came back home. Women are more frugal...I was sleeping on the chairs...The bad thing is that women do not comprehend that in such conditions the risks of exploitation are usually higher..."

"My husband could not gain money during the first months of work in the destination country - he could not cook, and used a considerable part of his salary for ready-made food. Gradually, he learned to do savings."

"Due to stomach problems, my husband finally came back home. I also have stomach problems, we both acquired it while working abroad...but you know, women's pain limit is larger, compared to men."

One of the women interviewed (who earlier mentioned that women have less physical power) said that *"this stamina somehow equalises the position of men and women"*, that *"the power one has should not be limited only to biceps..."*.

Migration

Why do Women Migrate?

The main reason Moldovan women and men migrate is unemployment within Moldova. In Ursoaia village, only one out of every ten able-bodied persons is fortunate enough to have a job within the village; these jobs mostly require high qualifications such as teachers, economists, etc. Thus, about 20% of villagers left the country temporarily to earn money abroad. According to the Mayor's Office's estimates, one-half of these are women. The lack of jobs in Ursoaia village was the also main reason given by research participants:

"We have the same problem - unemployment...we need money to support our families... I would prefer to work and stay with my family, but we do not all have available jobs in the village."

"Here in the village the jobs are limited, even in the Mayor's office many persons are relatives...and I understand them. If I worked at the Mayor's Office, I would also prefer to employ my relatives as to support them...and in the local grocery the same....Employers choose young salespeople, younger women, to facilitate sales -employers have plenty of choices..."

"I wish to have a job with at least 1000-2000 lei²⁹ per month and not have to leave the country...the problem is that even a 1000 lei/month job is impossible to find. And if you need to support your child, 1000 lei/month, it is not enough. Imagine then that I have three kids..."

Poverty is a main push factor for migration. Women are induced to go abroad to earn money, despite the sad stories about their compatriots' migration:

"I would wish to have a job in my natal village. You know, nobody is forced to go abroad, but you are somehow impelled...When I was working in the Mayor's office, I often heard from the villagers - she left abroad, but there's been no news from her for 6 months already...there are many unpleasant things happening to women...sometimes you intend to travel abroad to work, but suddenly a thought comes to my mind - if something wrong happens to me, who is going to take care of my children? But in hardship, you have no choice; you just run the venture..."

²⁹ About 56-112 Eur (calculated taking into account the National Bank Exchange rate as of February 12, 2010).

The situation of unemployment in rural areas appears to be similar for all villages in Moldova. The National Bureau of Statistics³⁰ shows that persons up to 30 years of age in rural areas declared that 45% of their incomes came from remittances. This confirms that the major reason for labour migration is to support one's families and children.

Three quarters of women interviewed in Ursoaia had children aged 1.5-19 years. Traditionally, Moldovan families support their children till they complete their professional education, such as covering the costs of tutoring, housing, clothes, etc.:

"The main reason I left Moldova is to earn money to pay for my daughter's university studies. I hope in the future she will get more chances to find a well-paid job here in Moldova."

Yet some parents continue financial supporting children until they marry or even afterwards:

"My daughter married and already has a child. They need a place to live. Together with my husband, we decided to work abroad to help them with money to buy some cheap living space. We do not want our daughter to go abroad, and have her leave the child and husband."

Hospitality is a strong Moldovan tradition; even poor Moldovan people are impelled to "lay a reach table"³¹ during various celebrations or sorrowful dates. The most costly event for a traditional rural family is a child's marriage ceremony which is usually covered by parents. Parents often have to prepare themselves for this event, and often the only solution for them is to go abroad to earn money. Relatives who come to this ceremony traditionally donate sums of money. The autumn (when each hospodar³² prepares with pride his own hand-made wine) in Moldovan villages is a typical season when you can hear traditional music of the marriage celebration:

"This autumn our family is invited to several celebrations...And you know, each one will cost us about 100 Euros...No, we cannot refuse: It's a big shame not to come to a celebration and not support a young family. Moreover, if we do not come, they also will not come to our children's ceremony. It is a tradition that we cannot ignore."

"My last migration experience was quite hard. In spite of it, I have to travel again - my daughter is a grown-up already, and I am afraid I will hear one day: 'Mom, I want to marry'..."

Due to almost total unemployment in rural regions, villagers have to explore every possibility to earn income. This is often limited to commercial farming of animals or labour migration. Usually the money earned by Moldovans is primarily invested in the household:

"You can always recognise the house of a successful migrant in the village. It is in the tradition of Moldovans to show off their well-being: to renovate the house, to

³⁰ National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova. Aspects of the standards of living of population in 2008. Results of the Household Budget Survey. Chisinau, 2009. P. 60.

³¹ "To lay a reach table" is to arrange a table with many sorts of dishes, including national dishes, and home-made wine. It is a strong tradition especially preserved in rural community where such an abundant table is a sign of the owner's prosperity. It is typically displayed during ceremonies.

³² A "hospodar" is a good household manager. Being considered as a "hospodar" by the community is the best praise for a man keeping a household.

build a nice, new fence, etc. Some people are jealous when they see it, but others, especially those who worked abroad, know what kind of sacrifices it requires”.

On the topic of sacrifice, it was interesting to observe the shift in values among women with different migration experiences.

Choosing Formal or Informal Processes for Labour Migration

Only one of the 16 women interviewed reported using official processes for migration; this was a woman whose husband worked in the Czech Republic for a long time and had made arrangements for his wife so she could also get a work visa and travel there:

“I was lucky - it is so difficult and a rare thing that a Moldovan gets a work visa in a European country... my husband had a good track record with an employer in the Czech Republic, and this was the reason... I had the possibility to enjoy my legal status - I met Moldovans who worked illegally there, and who were afraid to be expelled the next day.”

Most women chose to travel and/or work ‘illegally’ in destination countries. Almost all of them traveled to Russia, where formalities with local registration are arranged by employers. It is rare for employers to officially employ foreign workers as it is much cheaper to hire undocumented workers since legal employment requires paying taxes, etc. - which is considered a disadvantage for both employer and worker. Due to increased competition among the labour force, employers can always find workers who agree to work undocumented. Women reported that they had no other alternatives to undocumented labour migration:

“The employers in Russia choose migrants who are ready to work illegally...One can get a legal job only after a long period working in Russia, usually with the same employer and usually it is done by those who are interested to getting Russian citizenship and legalising himself.”

“I travelled to Italy with a tourist visa and paid 3000 Euros for it. People who arranged it, instructed me how to cross the transit countries so as not to have problems with the border guards. I was so scared, I did not speak any European language, but it worked...I was so scared, but what could I do? It is almost impossible for a Moldovan who has no previous relations with Italian employers to get a work visa...and the work visa is not issued for the household services usually offered by our women.”

Women’s work in Italian households is mainly undocumented as it’s not feasible to get such jobs under contractual circumstances. Women only get a chance to legalise their status during the government’s migrant regularisation or legalisation campaigns that are conducted every several years. Even legalising one’s stay requires employers’ involvement which is not always possible:

“The Italian hostess at my last job did not offend me. The only thing was that I had almost no rest - no free days... they told me that I came there not to rest, but work...I was to stay near a woman who stayed in the house for 28 years. They did not want to legalise me, even when I implored them that this is a chance for me to visit my family and come back again to this job (and not be deported)...they told me that if I want, I can leave, and they can find somebody else to take my place.”

Official statistics³³ show that only several women (and several men) from the Causeni region³⁴ have migrated abroad to work on a contractual basis. Official statistics do not provide figures how many undocumented migrants work abroad. The massive emigration abroad, mainly to Russia and Italy, and the remittances sent to Moldova, suggest that there are a lot of Moldovan undocumented workers abroad.

Women were asked whether they would prefer to migrate and work abroad legally, if that possibility existed. The majority of them said they would prefer to migrate and work legally but were pessimistic that such conditions would be soon available for Moldovan citizens:

"I would like to have such a possibility - to get a work visa to some European country and to work there. But to get such visa, I need to have a person there who can negotiate on my behalf with the employer and arrange all the documents needed for a work visa."

"There are intermediates, usually of Moldovan citizenship, who find jobs in European countries and offer their services... yes, it is legal, you get all papers and finally a work visa... but such services cost the same price - quite high - as the tourist visa. The problem is that many employers do not agree to invite persons whom they do not know yet - they prefer to employ persons who have already arrived."

"I would like to get some seasonal work in Europe... I have seen on TV that employers from Spain and Great Britain go to Romania to select workers - I wonder why we do not have such opportunity? It would facilitate people migrating legally, and correspondingly, they will have less problems."

Only one woman told us that she was not sure whether increased opportunities for legal labour migration would diminish the problem of foreign workers' exploitation in destination countries:

"I do not know, people migrate and work on illegal basis, and everything is ok. I personally know many cases when women migrated and illegally worked for many years, and nothing bad happened to them."

This again supports the fact that many migrants are still ready to accept the risks of undocumented labour migration. Combining labour and migrant rights frameworks allows us to better understand globalised structures. When an economy has a large need for labour (especially cheap labour) and does not have enough national capacity to fulfil that need, the labour market relies on migrant labour. This coupled with too few legal avenues for entry into a country means that migrants must go underground and so must employers. There is a great mismatch between immigration laws and economic and migrant realities. Exploitation then becomes likely, given that employment is not 'legal' and thus not protected by the state.³⁵

³³ National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova: see:

http://www.statistica.md/public/files/serii_de_timp/populatie/miscarea_migratorie/8_migr_pop_ang_contr_sex_prof_ter_2005_2007.xls, accessed on February 05, 2010.

³⁴ With total region population of 90,612 persons. Source: National Bureau of Statistics, see:

http://www.statistica.md/public/files/Recensamint/Recensamintul_populatiei/migratia/6_Migratia.xls, accessed on February 05, 2010.

³⁵ *Gender-Migration-Labor-Trafficking. Exploring conceptual linkages and moving forward*. Roundtable Report, 6-9 August, 2009, Bangkok, GAATW.

Women's Feelings About Their Migration Experiences Upon Return to Moldova

Women reported a wide range of emotions and reactions upon their return to Moldova, mainly depending on whether their labour experience was positive or negative. Some values had been revised or strengthened during work abroad. The values that were strengthened during labour migration mostly related to the unity of family institute, the necessity to provide professional education to children, and the importance of emotional and physical well-being.

Family institute

Interestingly, the women who reported only positive migration experiences felt most negatively about the time they lost being away from their children and loved ones. Overall negative attitudes and/or soreness towards emigration appeared during women's self-reflections:

"I could not earn enough money to cover the cost for my daughter's education - yet I covered her training for hairdressing.. I told her - learn...do not go working abroad. And she works as a hairdresser now, is already married and has a child...She says that it's better to have modest earnings and stay near the family...she does not want to leave the children alone as I did."

Many women felt that the profits gained abroad were not worth the trouble. The problem, in women's opinion, is that it's too late once women understand the price of migration:

"Yes, you can earn money, but you sacrifice your family relationships. I have two sisters, they both divorced because of this [as a result of their migration experience]. One sister even took her husband to the destination country, but it did not help - the time made them too different, and the family was destroyed..."

Probably the most painful aspect of labour migration was the separation from one's children. Women stressed that separation from one's children was necessary to assure their futures:

"Sometimes I was calling home, and my daughters were crying and saying they do not need money, they want me to come back home... but what can I do...I was telling them - study hard, only in this way can you hope for a better job. I do not want them to move away to earn money, I want them to stay [in Moldova] and work in a room like this [like the room where interview took place]...it is not easy to stay far away from home..."

As a result of working abroad, many women reported feelings of being dismembered - being far away from the children and family:

"You know, children need not only boots and clothes. There is an atmosphere of a family..when all members sit at the table, discuss something...you feel like a live organism."

One of the negative consequences attributed to migration was family disintegration. Some women talked about families collapsing due to tensions and/or new relationships in destination countries:

"I know cases when women forget about their family, and set relationships with another man...my relative even divorced because of this...I am sure there are a lot of similar cases in Moldova..."

In spite of all migration-related problems mentioned by interviewed women, no one has divorced. One woman even mentioned the positive things that she and her husband had learned from their migration experience:

“When we married, it was a difficult time - the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in economic crisis...We could not even buy clothes for our children - it was missing in the shops...Our family was strengthened by that crisis, we did everything to have a comfortable life. And now, when our children grow up and need our support in professional training, (the second test!), we decided to migrate together, as to make money for our children. When you are not alone in your intention it gives you force, you feel that you are not single in your efforts. The family is something that you give life to and that gives life for you”.

Health

The majority of women interviewed testified that migration allowed them to gain money yet with sacrifice of the proper health:

“Probably the most horrible experience was when I worked for 3 months in an apartment eating only instant soups provided by the employer so we wouldn't die and continue working...we were sleeping on the cement floor - we improvised beds from the cartons that our host took from the garbage...”

“We [migrants] often don't think about something important - our health...I mean not only working and living conditions...When you work, you are so tired, you want night to come, to have some rest...But when night comes, all kinds of thoughts visit my mind - what my child is doing, if he eats regularly - all these thoughts destroy the health.”

Interestingly, health issues were prioritised more by the more experienced or older women in the focus groups. This suggests that values change as people age and that some values, unfortunately, are appreciated only in retrospect, when something is lost.

Emotional well-beings and respecting religious beliefs

Rural communities in Moldova have quite strong Christian religious traditions such as prohibitions around work during religious holidays. One woman who chose to come back home after earning enough money to repay debts, mentioned the intolerance to discriminations in the workplace:

“It is also important for you to feel emotionally well at your work. When I was employed the first time in Italy in a family [as a domestic worker], I was told that I should feel like I am doing the work in my own house, that I should feel at home. But when I did all work and sat for a little bit, the owner told me - ‘do not sit...do this again’. She always felt like a master...even on Easter I was to work...”

In spite of this, she endured this attitude and continued working because of the family's difficult situation. It was unusual for women to return home when she faced problems in the workplace. In all other cases women reported that, even if they had such a wish, they could not come back home - due to the overwhelming responsibility to financially support family members or being held or manipulated by exploiters who withheld pay.

Labour

Balancing Motherhood and Work Abroad

All of the women talked about the difficulties combining their roles as a mother and a migrant. The emotions related to separation from one's children permeated women's stories, whether it was before one's departure, while working in the destination country or upon return to Moldova: *"I will never forget my children crying when I departed...Leaving home was a wrench."*

"Do you know how woeful it is to migrate? I personally do not sleep the night before departure...and when I see the train approaching, I feel my heart beating...and I think each mother feels like this when she thinks about her children left at home. My daughter performs well at school and wants to go to university, but understands and tells me that I cannot afford its costs - and my heart is breaking...I am ready to assume all risks to offer her a chance to get a better education."

Women leave their children with their husband, relatives or neighbors. Leaving home and being separated from one's children filled their hearts with troubles:

"They [children] remained alone. I asked my neighbor to give an eye to them. Sometimes they manage to do everything alone, sometimes - not...And I tell them - if you do not manage, I will stay with you at home, and have nothing to do...But my poor children understand that we need money, and do their best. My neighbor even told me that they have seen them washing the windows before Christmas...She admonished them for washing the windows in the frost...But they replied 'our mother will be so glad to find our house so clear'..."

Some of the women reproached themselves for missing important events in their children's lives, like the first day in the school [September 1st]:

"I remember one September 1st, I was working in a basement full of cold water...I was working and crying, but not of the cold, but because of heartache...I reproached myself for not accompanying my child to the first day of school...that I stayed here, not even sure that I will be paid for a job done..."

Many women confessed that their children's voices were the biggest motivator to continue working, despite the difficulties; children served as a motivation to stay and earn money:

"I was working for almost one year to repay my debts...I could only afford spending money for phone conversations, to hear the voices of my children..."

"When it was hard, I remembered my children at home waiting for improvements in their lives, and I become much empowered..."

Although many women spoke about the salvation telephone conversations brought, one woman said communication with her children became 'unbearable' because of 'the soul's distress': *"It was difficult psychologically. I was always crying when I called home. The voice of my children seemed changed to me...I felt disequibrated...As not to go mad, I decided to come back home. I just bought an air ticket and came back home."*

A woman (whose husband worked in a destination country) needed to come back home due to her university midterm exams. Upon return, she decided not to migrate again: *"My children were so happy to meet me...and me too: I understood the inward peace and*

happiness I can obtain only by staying close to my children...I told my husband that I would not return to work."

While some migrant mothers testified that they were overcome with tears thinking about their children in Moldova while they were working abroad, others continued to cry even after return:

"But when I came back to Moldova, I cried for a month...I felt that my son became distant...I was asking him - 'why you are silent'. My daughter told me - 'come on, do not cry, he grows up fast'...I could not cry...when I left, I was playing and running with him...it's never happened since that...I could not get rid of the feeling that I missed something."

"My daughter always starts crying when I tell her that I have to go abroad again to earn money...she was crying as I never leave them. When I left, she was to substitute me - to care for her younger brother and for the big household...I understand that it is too stressful, but there's nothing we can do."

Exploitation and Human Trafficking

Perceptions of Exploitation and Trafficking Realities

The focus group discussions allowed women to share mostly positive aspects of labour migration. The most sensitive experiences related to exploitation were revealed only during individual interviews. Many migrant workers also did not identify themselves as victims of exploitation even though they talked in detail about being exploited - an important distinction that should be considered by assistance organisations in destination and origin countries.

Women were asked how they understood exploitation and trafficking. It was interesting to observe that the majority of women defined "exploitation" as "non-remunerated work", whereas "trafficking" was correlated with sexual exploitation/ forcing women into prostitution:

"You know, I never reflected on the fact that I was exploited, but I see now that I was indeed...I was always thinking when I found a new job - 'maybe this time I will not be cheated and have enough luck'".

"We were locked in the apartment and worked for 15 hours a day...they provided us with enough food to survive...We slept on the cold floor...we worked two months, without payment...they knew we would never contact the police..."

"I do not know if I can be called a slave...but at least I felt I was a slave, I worked under slavery conditions".

Exploiters used different methods to influence and keep workers at the workplace. Means of coercion and deception are well-described in specialised counter-trafficking texts. However, the use of manipulation to keep and exploit workers should be carefully considered when identifying victims of exploitation.

Many women stated that they had not been paid for many months but were only promised to be paid someday. They were told that they were actually free to leave, but there was no way out, and were permanently reminded by their employer about this. As a result, they gave their 'consent for exploitation' without any obvious coercion. One woman explained that she was paid a miserable salary but it was suggested to her that if she stays

then she would earn much more in the future but if she quits then she will lose it all. As a result, the exploited women continued to work 'of her own free will' and accepted meals in the interim instead.

Because of cases like this, state officials and civil society (particularly service providers) should pay more attention to the identification of trafficked persons, especially those from rural communities with particular stereotypes about migration experiences.

Debt bondage should be acknowledged as another factor that increases migrant's vulnerability to exploitation: In order to arrive in a European country, even 'illegally', some migrants pay up to 4000 Euros, a huge sum of money for a rural family in Moldova. This is usually borrowed from relatives and is to be repaid. It is a form of debt bondage which pushes many women to bear humiliation in the workplace:

"I think women are subjected to more risks. Let's take an example: Italy, where Moldovan women, compared to men, are more likely employed in the private sector, illegally. They are maltreated, humiliated, but can do nothing - their families have debts...Only women themselves know what is happening to them in the workplace, what they are passing through."

It was amusing to note that for many women, the interviewer was the only 'outsider' who had expressed an interest in women's experiences of exploitation and with whom women had shared their exploitative experiences:

"I think it is usual for an ordinary Moldovan citizen to be exploited at least once during her/his [migrant] working experience...We do not discuss it with other villagers for two reasons - first, in our community women don't wish to show themselves in such stupid situations after the fact; and second, even if you reveal it, you're not going to amaze anybody."

"You are the first person with whom I have discussed it, and I somehow am surprised that our negative migration experience is interesting for somebody else. And I am happy that even hypothetically, via sharing my experiences, I can contribute to the eradication of exploitation in which our women find themselves abroad."

"I did not discuss the problem of exploitation with other persons except my husband. I was afraid that people would not take it well, or treat it with indifference. Now I see that there are people who care about women's fates, and that I am not alone."

Women stated that those with negative migration and work experiences prefer not to speak publicly about it, especially within a rural community:

"It is strange to hear so many various opinions about work experiences abroad: Some women say that they are so happy to work there, and others say 'let the person who has never been abroad, experience it'. And it happens like this - to find out the truth, you should experience it by yourself".

"I wonder whether other nationalities would speak publicly about the negative things. But I know that Moldovans prefer not to share the bad things that happened with others. They are reluctant to tell the truth...and therefore, they only talk about the apparently positive things".

In this way, projects where victims of exploitation have the possibility to share their negative experiences will allow us to better hear their voices and help readers understand how to assist them more effectively.

Attitudes Towards Victims of Exploitation and Trafficking

Not surprisingly, women's attitudes towards victims depended on whether they had personally experienced exploitation. Those who had experienced exploitation expressed compassion and empathy towards victims of trafficking:

"I deeply understand these persons...My heart is full of sorrow when I think about what they went through..."

"...I perfectly understand those people...You know, they are a stranger there; they have not got a soul to speak up for them...You should assist yourself. I was in situation when I had no money not even for a ticket...nobody helps you with money for a song...I thank God that I managed to go successfully through these problems..."

Women who did not encounter exploitation abroad shared their opinions about exploited persons: *"I am so happy that I was not used by employers...Thanks to God..."*; *"I had the luck to be paid for my work... others proved to be not so lucky... but you never know for how long the fortune stays with you..."*

Yet those who worked in the construction/renovation sector (whether they had or had not been exploited themselves), were judgmental towards women who were exploited in prostitution:

"I know two women who lived close to my house who were cheated and sold into prostitution... they were taken illegally to Europe and even disappeared for some time...I know it from their parent...and now what? Now they have jobs, they married in Italy... they arrived home, and told people that they take care of an old man...but when they showed the photos, it was clear from her appearance and surroundings what kind of work she does...I am an old woman and can understand it, but the problem is that many young women are disoriented, they see only the luxurious life that attracts them..."

"I know a woman from a neighboring village who became a victim of trafficking. I know that she was trafficked because she was exploited in prostitution. But I do not think she is a real victim since she knew before leaving that she will work in this field..."

The above statement reflects villagers' perceptions about trafficking and sex work, ideas such as: 'trafficking is about forcing women to provide sexual services (not about work in other fields)', 'women who provide sexual services (whether forced or voluntarily) are just prostitutes, not victims'. Eradicating these stereotypes will help prevent exploitation and help identify trafficked persons who need specialised assistance.

4. INTERACTION BETWEEN LAW, POLICIES, AND MIGRANT WOMEN'S REALITIES

Women's Perceptions and Knowledge of the Law

Initially, women were asked to share their understanding of a law. Women's understanding was closely related to women's surrounding situations:

"The law is something that should be known, respected and a 'must' for everyone. People should have fear about the consequences of law infringement. Here, in Moldova, the laws do not take effect, due to corruption, and this also affects respect towards laws in other countries...But actually when the law is working, it is an advantage for the respective country."

"People in Moldova do not really think about laws: They think instead about how to provide a meal for their children".

When women were asked what migration laws they were aware of, women were at a loss to answer:

"I do not know the laws on work for migrants; but you know, laws are spoken in the trains, people just share with each other...I know about the immigration law that says I should arrange registration during 3 days upon arrival in Russia, I was even informed about it by the customer..."

"I get to know the existing migration laws only when I enter and leave Russia, but I forget these immediately after."

Several women knew they were unaware of the laws in their country and destination countries and provided explanations why:

"I do not know laws...honestly speaking, where is the good in it? They are not respected neither in Moldova nor in Russia..."

"I have no time to study laws...when you work, the laws are changing, and it is impossible to keep up with them."

"I crossed the borders without problems, I mean that I bribed the border police and crossed. You know, it is better to pay and cross without problems, especially if you do not know the laws..."

Some women argued that even being aware of the laws is not always helpful:

"You may always pretend to know the laws but...nobody dares to wrangle with border police, they just take you off the train."

"Even if you know the laws - they [border policemen] tell you the opposite...and you have to accept it. Once the border police doubted that it was me on the passport photo, and the same for my husband; he asked us to get off the train...I started to protest, and my husband was pushing me to resign...I started to argue -

I was even wearing the same blouse as on the photo. He gave up and returned our passports."

"You may be an expert in the laws, but Russian employers do not have an interest to employ you on legal basis, it is like to feel yourself overboard."

Women were also asked to speak about the law's role in a migrant's life. Those who had negative experiences talked about how they sought help and, if not, why:

"I did not look for some exterior help... it is absurd...it was me who was responsible for giving approval for illegal work."

"Actually the police should help in such situations...but I never addressed them. They do nothing else than expect others to pay them for infringing the immigration law. But even if you not infringe the laws they do not want to help foreign citizens, they just refer you to the Embassy."

"I remember that we were working long nights for two weeks...And on the last day the employer told us - take your bags and go away...no money at all...We were crying together with my mother...whom I should complain to? We didn't even have a place to sleep...we were afraid of police..."

Improving Migration and Labour Legal Frameworks

Women were asked what could be done to improve laws so that Moldovan migrants' rights would be better protected. It was a difficult question for many of women:

"Honestly speaking, I do not know if something could be changed...the Russian authorities hardly manage to protect the rights of their own citizens, let alone foreigners."

"Even if you are officially employed and your rights have been infringed - the police is not interested in helping you. Possibly, several more staff persons should be employed within our Embassy in Moscow - let it be a chargeable service - 'protecting the rights of Moldovan citizens' - but it would be a hope to withdraw money from dishonest employers..."

Corruption of the border police while crossing the border to the Ukraine was identified as a problem by many women:

"The border guards at the Ukrainian border told me that I had a false registration in Russia and were intending to take me off the train. I was to pay 500³⁶ or 1000 Russian rubles. I have seen several persons from the wagon, obviously exploited in Russia and returning home, asking to borrow money from companions and intending to bribe the guards..."

"...When I was traveling by bus to Russia, it was a usual thing to pay border guards to facilitate our legal crossing...The driver even asked us to insert a banknote in the passports as to not lose time at the crossing point."

³⁶ 500 Russian rubbles = about 16 US dollars (calculated according RF official exchange rate as of February 12, 2010).

The eradication of corruption is not the only problem affecting migrants. Women were asked what the Moldovan Government should do, including at the legislative level, to make a difference. The majority of women could not answer. Several women pointed out that the most important thing is to inform the population about national and international legislation related to migration and migrants, and to implement existing laws:

"Maybe the laws are good, but these are not respected..."

"We are not aware of many things, we lack information...We migrate with closed eyes..."

"...the change should start from the mentality..."

"...It would be helpful to organise immediate assistance to migrants who find themselves in exploitative situations...we are not relevant to local authorities, nobody cares, and migrants lose hope..."

Women recognise the importance of being informed about migration and labour laws in foreign countries. In addition to awareness about existing laws, women needed to be empowered in order to defend their rights. This is why the FPAR ended by organising an awareness campaign for women from Ursoaia village.

5. WOMEN IN ACTION

In September 2009, the International Center “La Strada” Moldova launched a new awareness campaign *“The vulnerability of migrants, particularly women, to exploitation and human trafficking”* which aimed to raising people’s and authorities’ awareness about women’s vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking; inform the public about the human rights of undocumented migrants; and educate the public on safe migration and prevention of human trafficking. This campaign also encouraged potential migrants and trafficked persons, particularly the relatives of the latter, to call “La Strada” Center’s toll free Hotline to get information or to receive support and assistance. The public campaign activities have been held in at least one locality among the 33 regions of the Republic, including the Causeni region where Ursoaia village is located. The campaign lasted until December 2009. This was the opening message made by a La Strada representative on September 17, 2009 at a meeting with FPAR participants in Ursoaia village:

“We came here not only to confirm that you are beautiful, patient and caring, but also to remind you about your RIGHTS. We are here because we represent organisations that care about women’s rights, and even more, we are the ones who protect and promote women’s rights.”

In this public information campaign, women had the option of directly accessing professional counseling services from several specialists: the psychologist from the International Center “La Strada”, a social worker/chief specialist from the Department of Social Assistance and Family Protection in the Causeni region, and a lawyer from the Centre for Justice in Causeni. Young people also had the opportunity to discuss these issues with a team of volunteers and educators from the “Peer to Peer” Program coordinated by La Strada.

The campaign not only provided direct access to professional and confidential counselling services, but also promoted the toll-free Hotline number where women can receive all kinds of information related to labour migration issues. All women received informational booklets about the Hotline service; these booklets were also placed publicly in the Mayor’s Office. The materials described how potential migrants called the hotline when they received a concrete job offer, or just before departure, or when they needed help, or when they were trafficked.

In terms of immediate campaign results, all FPAR participants received labour migration information and many had the possibility to meet with professional counselors. The number of Hotline calls from the Causeni region increased three-fold. Unfortunately, we cannot track how many calls were from Ursoaia village due to the anonymity and confidentiality protocols.

The FPAR consolidated the group of community women and they continue to have ad-hoc meetings discussing various aspects of their lives. Based on the wishes of participants to continue the group discussions, the local administration kindly offered space in the Mayor’s Office where women could meet each other:

“I wish to meet with other women from the village, to discuss with each other, to learn something new...because it is hard to stay alone with my own problems...I’m thankful that women will be glad to meet, at least during the religious holidays or other occasions.”

"I want women in our village to meet at least once per month, to discuss something, to tell something, to share good and bad practices..."

"It is important just to talk, not just store up bitterness"

"Who better knows women's problems? And who knows the best solutions?...Yes...women... we should support each other."

The realisation of seeing and hearing other women 'like us' was a strong emotional memory³⁷ for women participating in the FPAR in Moldova. Knowing that other women felt the same due to their migration experiences made women feel more peaceful and amicable. In this way, the FPAR in Moldova was enriched by enabling local community women to reflect on their own experiences, to formulate their own analysis, and to plan how to change the situation for the better. These women had an opportunity to re-evaluate their experiences, personal behaviour and attitudes related to gender, migration, labour and exploitation issues. For example, the group discussions also touched upon the patriarchal foundations of rural communities and analysed how women manoeuvred in a world of gendered power relations and globalisation. Often the frustrations that came out of discussions turned to fun, and women themselves were amused how easily they could shift from negative emotions to positive feelings.

The reflexive dialogues enabled women to analyse their collective situations, increase their confidence in asserting their priorities and insights. The stories of exploitation that women dared to discuss in a group allowed women to recognise the values of their lives to other women both in terms of shared injustice and providing an example of how trauma and oppression can be resisted³⁸. Collective action could then be considered as women gained opportunities to reflect on their experience, to find out the causes of their collective problems and then meditate on future behaviour and action. The real action and changes in the lives of women starts with acting on insight. Action is an integral part of reflexive knowledge, and can be conceptualised as speaking, or attempting to speak, to validate oneself and one's experiences and understandings in and of the world³⁹.

The FPAR in Moldova and follow-up actions by self-organised groups of women in Ursoaia village developed positive relationships and social connections as part of individual and collective empowerment processes, and encouraged people to recognise that much depends on their personal behaviour and attitude.



³⁷ Ham, J. (2007). *Respect and Relevance: Supporting Self-Organising as a Strategy for Empowerment and Social Change*. Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women: Bangkok, Thailand.

³⁸ Ham, J. (2007). *Respect and Relevance: Supporting Self-Organising as a Strategy for Empowerment and Social Change*. Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women: Bangkok, Thailand.

³⁹ Gordon, G.B. (2001/2006) "Transforming lives: towards bicultural competence", in P.Reason and H.Bradbury, *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*. London: Sage. PP.314-323.

6. FINAL THOUGHTS

FPAR in Moldova proved to be an effective tool in placing women at the centre of the research in order to understand rural women's experiences of labour migration and exploitation.

Globalisation processes could easily be tracked via women's migration: unemployment in rural areas necessitating migration with women taking on the role of economic providers. The experiences women shared in this research showed how migrant women are subjected to labour exploitation and sexual exploitation (in various sectors) in destination countries. In many cases, migrant women were not able to specify the manipulation used by employers and did not identify themselves as *victims* of exploitation although they did provide a great deal of information on the exploitative situations they encountered.

The typical anti-trafficking frameworks have a strong law enforcement/criminal justice orientation yet women described the limitations of these frameworks in addressing exploitation that occurs in "lawless" contexts. Many of the women were very skeptical about the value of existing legal systems. The current research confirms again that migrants are often left alone or without guidance when they encounter problems in destination countries. Stigmatisation by rural communities of returnee migrants who are also victims of exploitation is also an important issue that needs to be addressed in anti-trafficking campaigns in order to change existing attitudes and stereotypes.

FPAR requires a great deal of patience, humility and reflexive dialogue between research participants so that all involved can learn from their failures and successes. The action part of FPAR was an effective supplement to the research - it allowed us to not only study problems faced by migrant women, but it also helped identify knowledge gaps. For many women from the rural community, important questions and dilemmas were answered by sharing experiences with each other and by engaging in a cyclical process of diagnosing and analysing problems, planning for action, implementation, and evaluating strategies aimed at meeting collectively identified needs. Participatory research perspectives demand up-to-date approaches to utilise indigenous knowledge in a globalising world.

By being based on real-life experiences rather than theories or assumptions, and by providing an analysis of issues based on descriptions of how women actually experienced those issues, the FPAR empowered local women to seek information and support and to develop strategies for change. Empowerment action was also grounded in the idea expressed by many interviewees - that women are strong because they have survived; this feeling was fortified through FPAR and is considered as the most important idea in the women empowerment program. The act of obtaining knowledge itself, as it was offered to rural women during the awareness campaign, created the potential for change - a change undertaken by women themselves.

FPAR in Ursoaia allowed participants to argue for and defend women's rights. It is hoped that the FPAR findings will also assist others in revising migration policies to reflect the aspirations and protection needs of migrant women workers. We hope that this FPAR (the first such research in Moldova) will expand horizons, enhance rights and ultimately improve women's situations.

