



**The Invisible Impact of
Frozen Conflicts: A Case
Study of Foreign
Domestic Workers
in Cyprus**



The main argument

The perpetuation of the frozen conflict is one of the factors that explains the dire living and working conditions of foreign domestic workers (FDW) in the Republic of Cyprus. The conflict has:

- **deprioritised the feminist agenda**
- **normalised nationalist speech and policies**
- **skewed the public's understanding of human rights.**

All three have had particularly detrimental effects on FDW.

Two key definitions

➤ **Foreign Domestic Workers (FDW):** typically, responsible for the three Cs: **C**leaning, **C**ooking and **C**aring of children, the elderly or disabled persons

Overwhelmingly women from non-EU countries

Arrive to Cyprus on a special FDW visa

➤ **Frozen conflicts (Smetana and Ludvik, 2019):**

(a) the parties attempted, but failed, to resolve their incompatibilities through war

(b) after the ceasefire, the core issue over which the war was fought remains a potent instrument of mobilisation in domestic politics


(c) violent re-escalation is still a possibility



FDW are vulnerable everywhere...

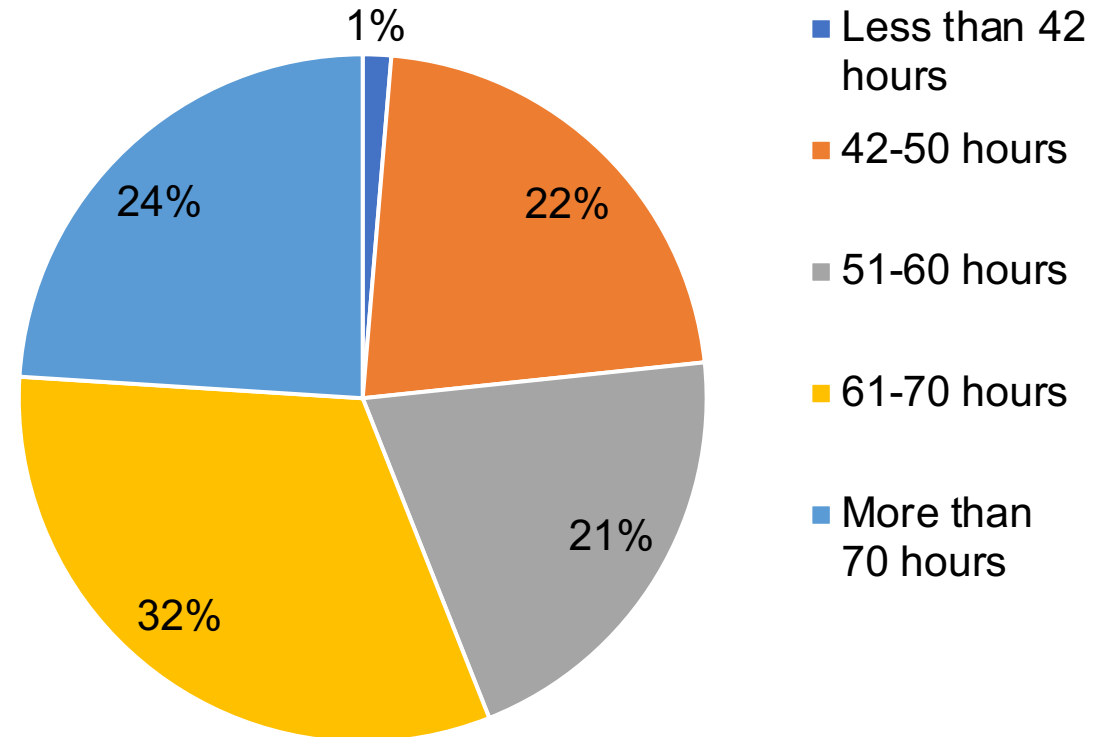
FDW work for more hours and get paid less than the average worker.

Factors that increase FDW's vulnerability:

- FDW are primarily women
 - FDW are migrants
 - FDW do not speak the language of the host country
 - FDW do essential yet unappreciated work
 - FDW often live in their employers' homes
 - FDW often work alone
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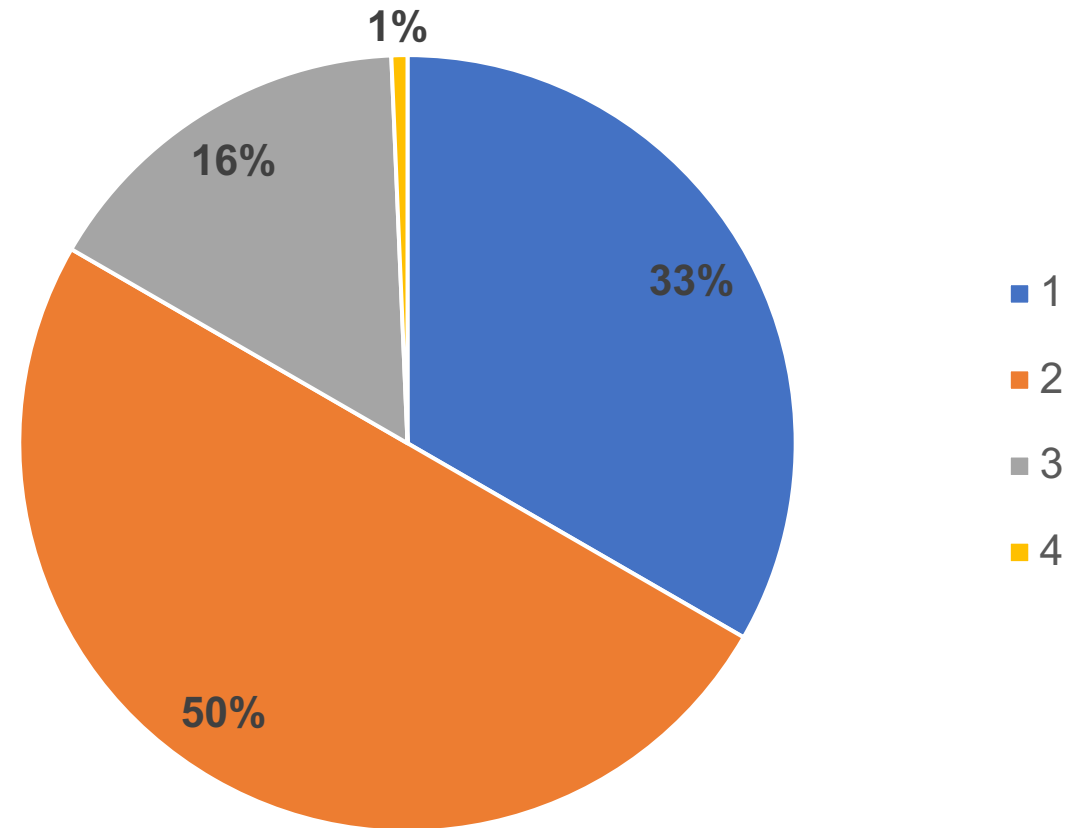
... but they
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Participants' working hours



... but they
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Number of houses participants clean



Lack of attention paid by the Republic of Cyprus

Response to the police's failures to investigate disappearances relating to serial killings

- President of the Republic promises to establish
 ‘a special department within the Ombudsman Office, which would investigate every complaint relating to FDW’s living conditions in Cyprus’
- The Ombudsman already has this mandate and reports to the President
- Standard employment contract drafted by the Migration Department in 1991
- Contract remained unamended until 2019
- Significant gaps remain in the contract of employment

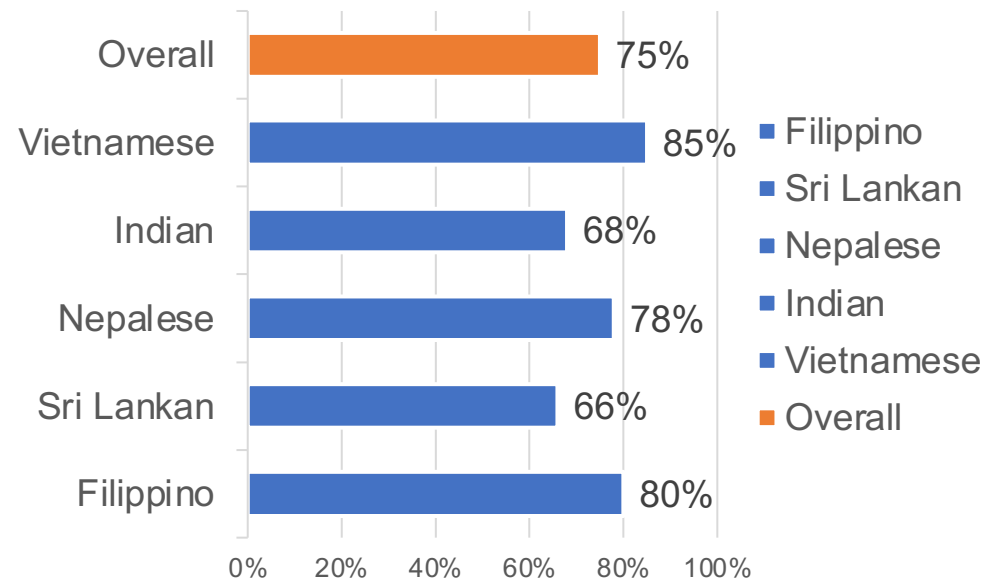
De-prioritisation of the feminist agenda

- Gender Equality Index
 - Cyprus ranks 21st out of the 27 EU Member States
 - Scored 57 out of 100 points, 11 points lower than the European average
 - In the domain of power, Cyprus ranks 24th out of the 27 EU Member States
 - Scored 29,8 out of 100 points
- 'let's sort out the Greek-Cypriot-Turkish-Cypriot thing first, and then we'll sort out the gender thing'.

Implications of deprioritising the feminist agenda

- If a FDW is a victim of abusive behaviour, she is left with three options:
 1. Report, but stay without any income
 2. Stay with her abusive employer
 3. Leave her employment and become an irregular migrant

% of participants who would not report assault to the police



Implications of deprioritising the feminist agenda

FDW are not aware of the fact that they have access to a biannual free pap test.

- 32% of participants replied that they do not regularly have a pap test.
- A further 46% of participants answered that they do not know what a pap test is.
- Lack of attention by the state renders the right illusory.

Normalisation of nationalist speech

Societal beliefs that sustain a frozen conflict include:

- in-group's victimization
- positive self-image
- need for unity
- delegitimization of the out-group

These create a fertile ground for a sense of nationalism or even racism camouflaged as nationalism

Someone remains an outsider if:

1. She is perceived as sharing characteristics with the out-group
2. She shares characteristics with neither the in-group, nor the out-group

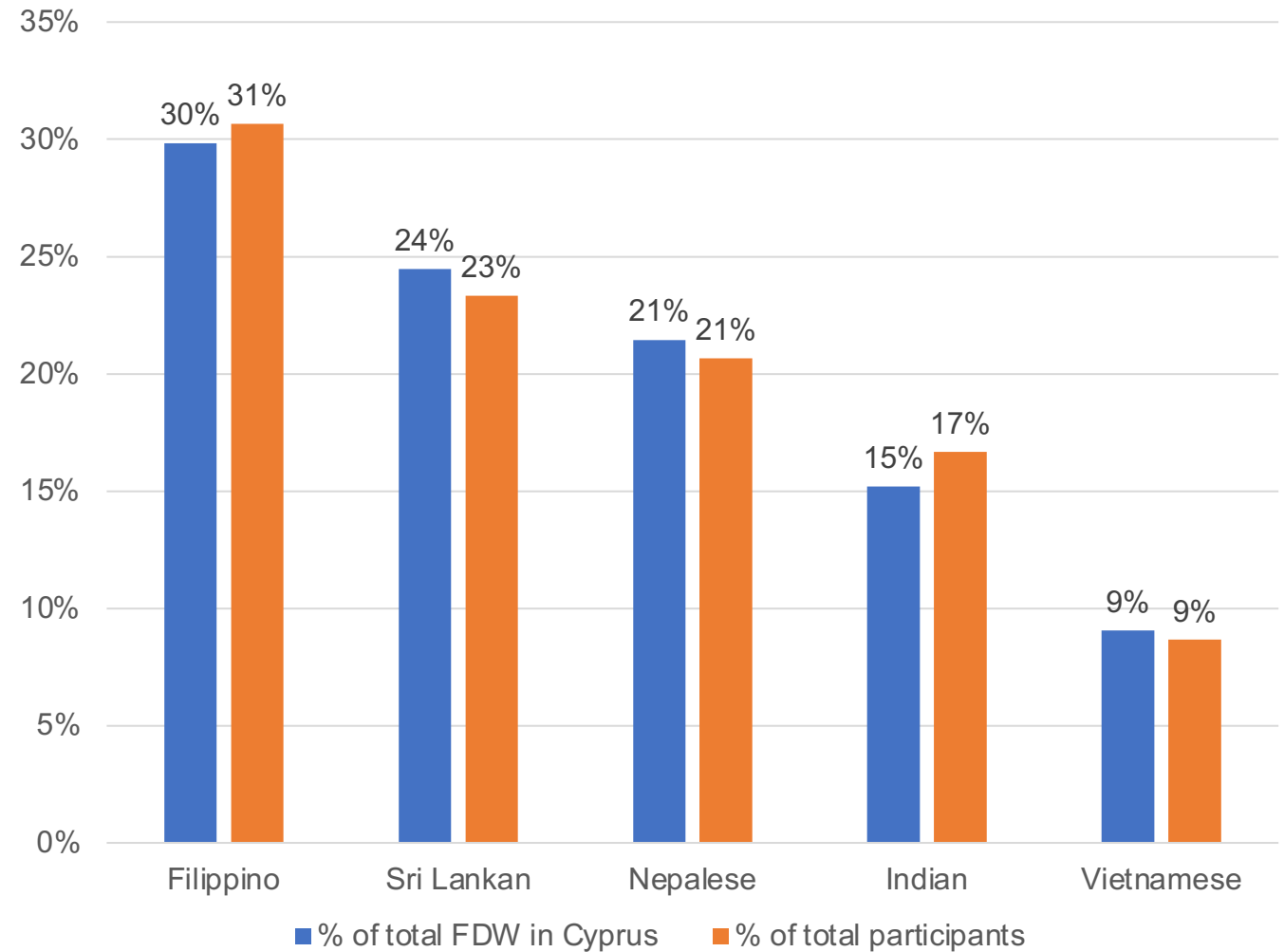
‘the Turks being uncivilized as they are, have a mentality that is different: it would not bother them at all to kill, to loot a country. . . in general their mentality is very Asian’.

10-year old boy quoted by Spyrou (2006)

‘there is a danger that in Cyprus, a Muslim minority will be created. [...] There are settlers in the free areas’.

RoC Minister of the Interior,
2019

Nationality Distribution



Being a 'temporary worker'

The introduction of foreign workers [in the 1990s] was only acceptable as a *temporary* measure in limited numbers and occupations where their immediate cover by [Greek] Cypriots was not possible.

Ministry of Labour, 2007

Being a temporary worker means that

1. FDW can never hope to be employed in a different sector
2. FDW will always be experiencing insecurity as precarious migrant workers
3. FDW, 79% of whom are mothers, will always be disqualified from family reunification.



Skewed understanding of human rights

- Greek Cypriots are the victims of human rights violations as a result of the 1974 invasion.
- Contrast the state's treatment of Greek Cypriot displaced persons on the one hand, and third-country refugees on the other
- '[Greek] Cypriots experienced war and refugeehood in 1974 and know first-hand what it means to be *a real refugee*'.

Minister of Interior, 2020



The impact of the skewed understanding of human rights

- When primary school teachers were asked to mention human rights violations in the country, *all of them* used 1974 as their starting point.
- This is reflected in the views of students:


‘I am a racist, I admit it. I just want migrants out of my country. I don’t see anything wrong with that. If we want our country to remain Greek, migrants and Turks should leave. [...] I believe I have the right to be racist, when half of my country is occupied, and the other half is about to lose its Greekness.’

Quoted in Zembylas and Lesta (2011)

- In 2015, the payment of expenses to bring a FDW to Cyprus was one of the gifts in a state school’s Christmas raffle.
 - This was the year the Ministry of Education set ‘Awareness raising of students against racism and intolerance’ as its priority learning aim



Conclusions

- **Frozen conflicts create ‘minor losses’ (Demetriou, 2018)**
 - **They might be non-violent, but they are certainly not cost-free, especially for those within the society that are not members of a dominant group.**
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Thank you!

Any questions?

Nasia Hadjigeorgiou

Contact me: ahadjigeorgiou@uclan.ac.uk

More about me: nasiahadjigeorgiou.com

