



THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC TO THE YOUNG MIGRANT WOMEN LIVING IN CYPRUS

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1. Introduction

The identity of the research

The COVID-19 crisis has had, and continues to have, an enormous impact on the Cypriot society. Not only because of the health issues and the loss of human lives, but also due to the series of financial and social situations triggered by this pandemic; situations which to many individuals are causing or enhancing a cycle of economic and social struggles, along with aggravating physical and mental health problems.

In order to rise to the challenge, develop strategies for the elimination of human suffering, and offer the support which is needed for the recovery of society, we first need to identify the nature and the extent of those impacts. To do so, one needs to examine what the pandemic has meant to different groups of people, and especially those who are most vulnerable in terms of their social and financial position.

This report comes as the outcome of such an effort made by the Center for Gender Equality and History (KIIF)¹ and funded by the Youth Board of Cyprus under the program “ReCOVer20”.² Particularly, this is an analytical report based on the results of the project titled “The Consequences of the Pandemic to Young Migrant Women: Experiences, Thoughts, and Suggestions”.³

The research took place from July to November 2020 with the use of a bilingual (English and Greek) questionnaire which was distributed from late September to mid-November 2020,

¹ www.kiif.com.cy

² <https://onek.org.cy/archiki-selida/programmata-ipiresies/efkeries-chrimatodotisis/recover20/>

³ <https://kiif.com.cy/recover20/>



complemented by interviews. Particularly, out of the 78 women who answered the questionnaire, designed by KIIF for the needs of this research, six of them were further interviewed in order to offer some deeper understanding to the researchers. The interviewees included one asylum seeker and one refugee from Cameroon, two refugees from Syria, and two migrant domestic workers, one from Sri Lanka and one from the Philippines.

“Young migrant women” in the context of this research refers to women between 18 and 35 years of age who themselves or their parents came to Cyprus from a “third” country (not an EU country), either as migrant workers, or as refugees/asylum seekers, or as university students. Students were included because third country nationals many times come with the intention of being part-time students and part-time workers while often aspire to extend their stay.

We recognise that the different groups of migrant women do not share the same characteristics but we chose to include all the groups in this research because migrant women—however different they may be in terms of nationality, culture, social and financial status—still share several common problems and aspirations linked to their identity as migrant women (for example, facing racism and prejudice, having family abroad, aspiring to build a new life in an unfamiliar environment).

Our aim was to capture some of the challenges and even some of the opportunities which may have emerged or intensified due to the pandemic and the situations linked to it such as social isolation, financial and work conditions, online communication and learning, building solidarity networks, etc.

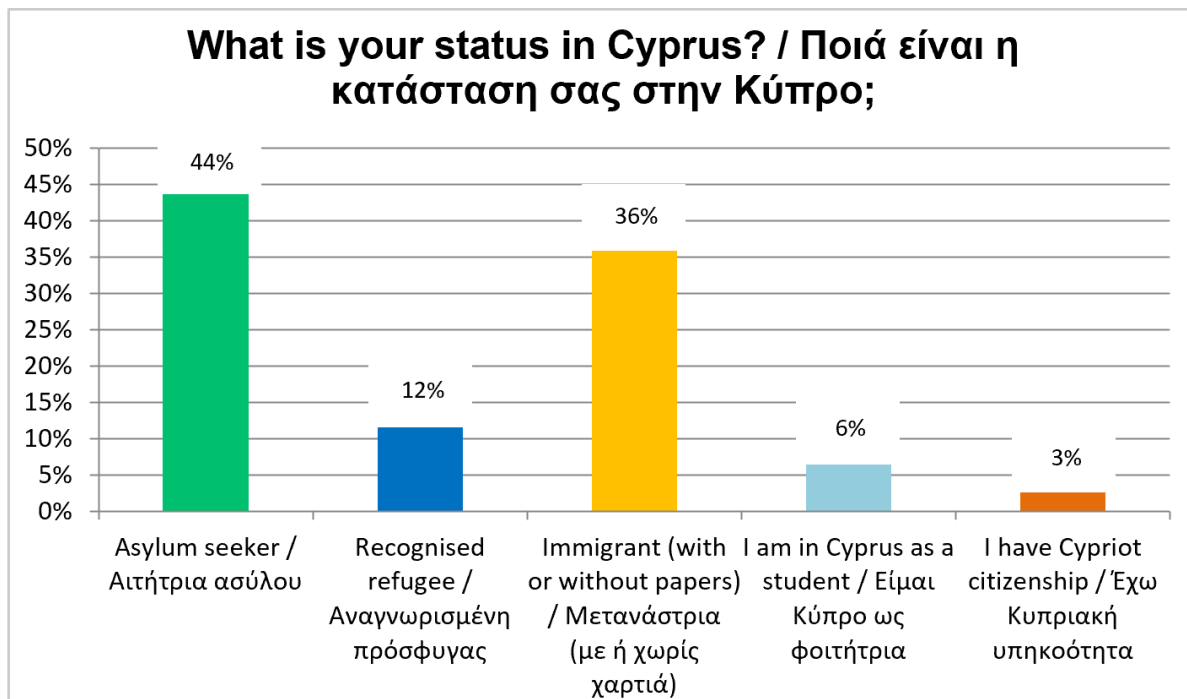
In this framework, the objective of this research was to make an initial mapping of the experiences of young migrant women in relation to the pandemic. Moreover, we aimed to establish a relationship between our organization and young migrant women from different

social groups. As KIIF, our intention is to use this study as a stepping stone for conducting more specialised research and activities in the future.

Our hope is that we have built this report in a way that respects the perspectives of young migrant women living in Cyprus and contributes to their empowerment and the promotion of their suggestions.

Demographics

The research participants consisted of 78 women—between 18 and 35 years old—of immigrant and/or refugee background. Around 44% of them were asylum seekers, 36% were migrant workers, 12% were recognized refugees (or under subsidiary protection), 6% came to Cyprus as students, and 3% held the Cypriot citizenship (see Graph 1).



Graph 1. The status of the research participants.

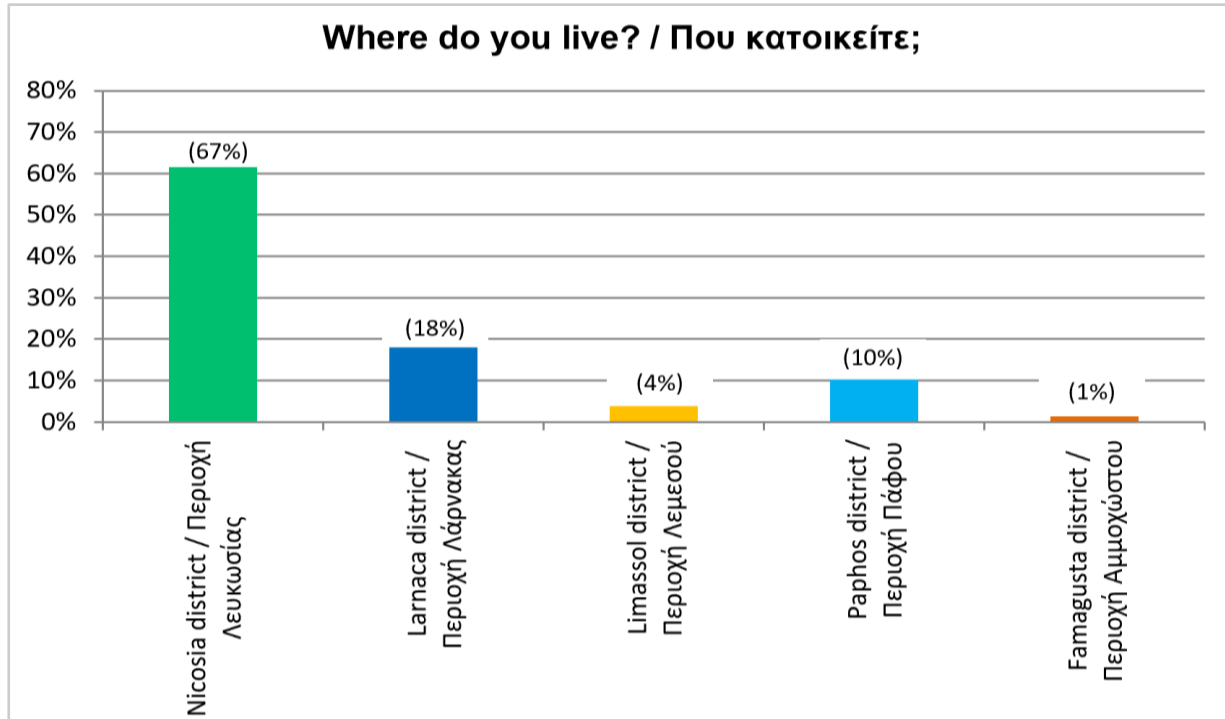


The 78 women answered a questionnaire designed by KIIF for the needs of this research (see the Questionnaire in Appendix 1 of this report, p. 37). Out of these women, six were further interviewed in order to offer some deeper understanding to the researchers. The interviewees included one asylum seeker and one refugee from Cameroon, two refugees from Syria, and two migrant domestic workers, one from Sri Lanka and one from the Philippines.

Overall, the participants were selected randomly, and their profile and characteristics were determined by the extent to which the organisers could reach the members of the target group through their online and physical network. In other words, this research was not built to represent the total population of young migrant women living in Cyprus but to shed some light on parts of their experiences and needs in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. In this respect, we do not claim to offer generalised conclusions as there was an over-representation of some groups over others.

For example, there is an over-representation of Nicosia residents who constituted around two third ($\frac{2}{3}$) of the participants (see Graph 2). That is because, although most of the questionnaires were completed online, the majority of the responses came from Nicosia where a network of individuals and NGOs were mobilised for the realisation of this project. For the same reason, there is an overrepresentation of urban areas in comparison to the rural ones with approximately eight in ten persons living in urban areas (see Graph 2).

The participants originated from 18 different countries (see Graph 3) and belonged to different age groups within the span of the age limits of this research, that is, within 18 and 35 years old. However, there was a slightly higher representation of the older ages of the span: most answers came from women between 30 and 35 years old (around 40% of the participants), many came from women between 24 and 29 (around 37%) while 23% of the participants were between 18 and 23 years old (see Graph 4).

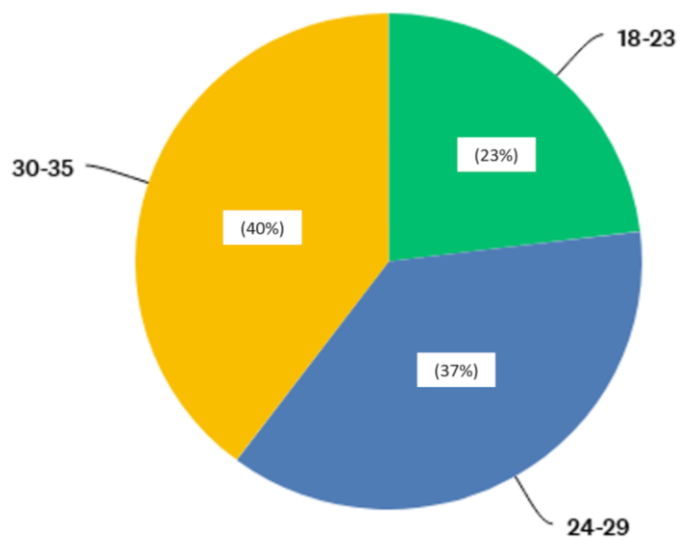


Graph 2. The areas that the research participants were coming from.

14 Cameroonians	2 Zimbabweans
11 Syrians	1 Belarus
10 Filipinos	1 Chinese
9 Nepalis	1 Congolese
6 Indians	1 Eritrean
5 Somalis	1 Russian
4 Sri Lankans	1 Georgian
3 Palestinians	1 Sierra Leonean
2 Egyptians	1 Iraqi

Graph 3. The nationalities of the research participants.

What is your age group? / Ποια είναι η ηλικιακή σας ομάδα;



Graph 4. The age groups of the research participants.

2. Consequences of the COVID-19 crisis to the financial and working conditions of young migrant women in Cyprus

Summary of findings

In terms of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic to the financial and working condition of young migrant women in Cyprus, this chapter notes:

- A negative impact on the employability of young migrant women;
- Increased unemployment rates and increased job insecurity within young migrant women;
- A negative impact on the salaries of young migrant women;
- Increased needs for governmental support and other institutional support to cover the financial and work-related impacts of the COVID-19 crisis;
- Some migrant women received external support from informal networks and individuals (such as friends, neighbours, owners of shops, employers) and/or formal networks such as civil society organisations (mostly organisations of immigrant and refugee communities and organisations for immigrant and refugee rights).

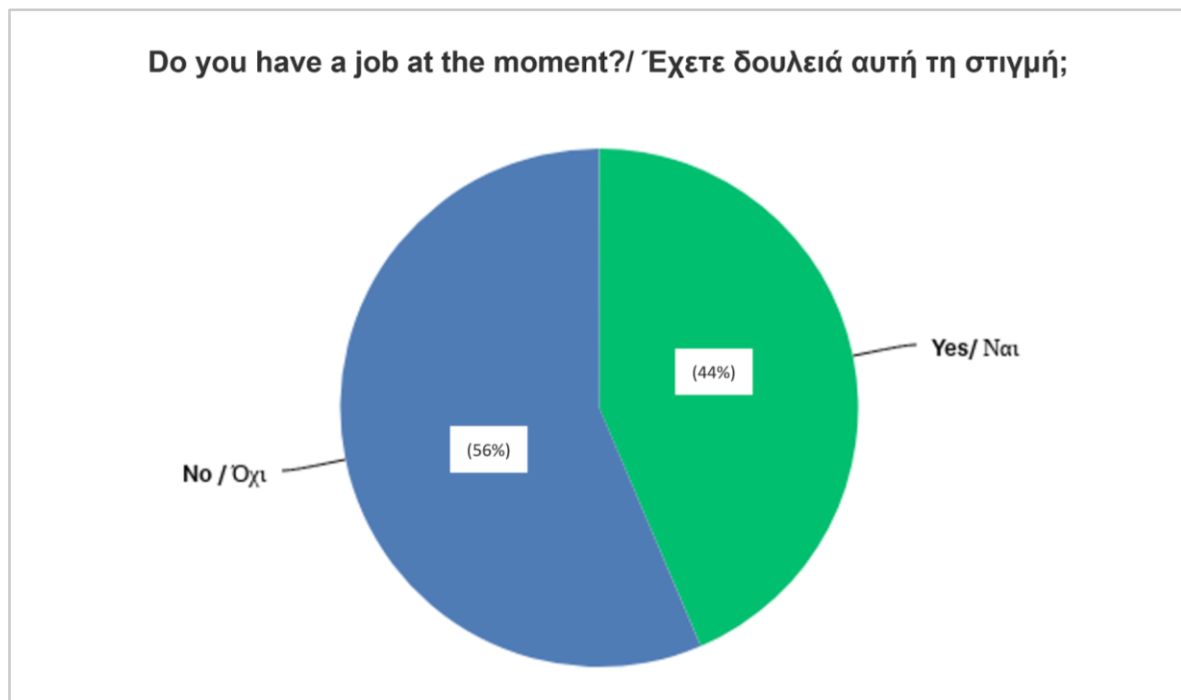
Analytically, the main findings of the research in terms of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic to the financial and working conditions of young migrant women were:

A. The COVID-19 situation worsened the already difficult position of migrant women in terms of employability.

The COVID-19 pandemic made it even harder for migrant women to find a job. This came on top of pre-existing obstacles such as prejudice and discrimination faced

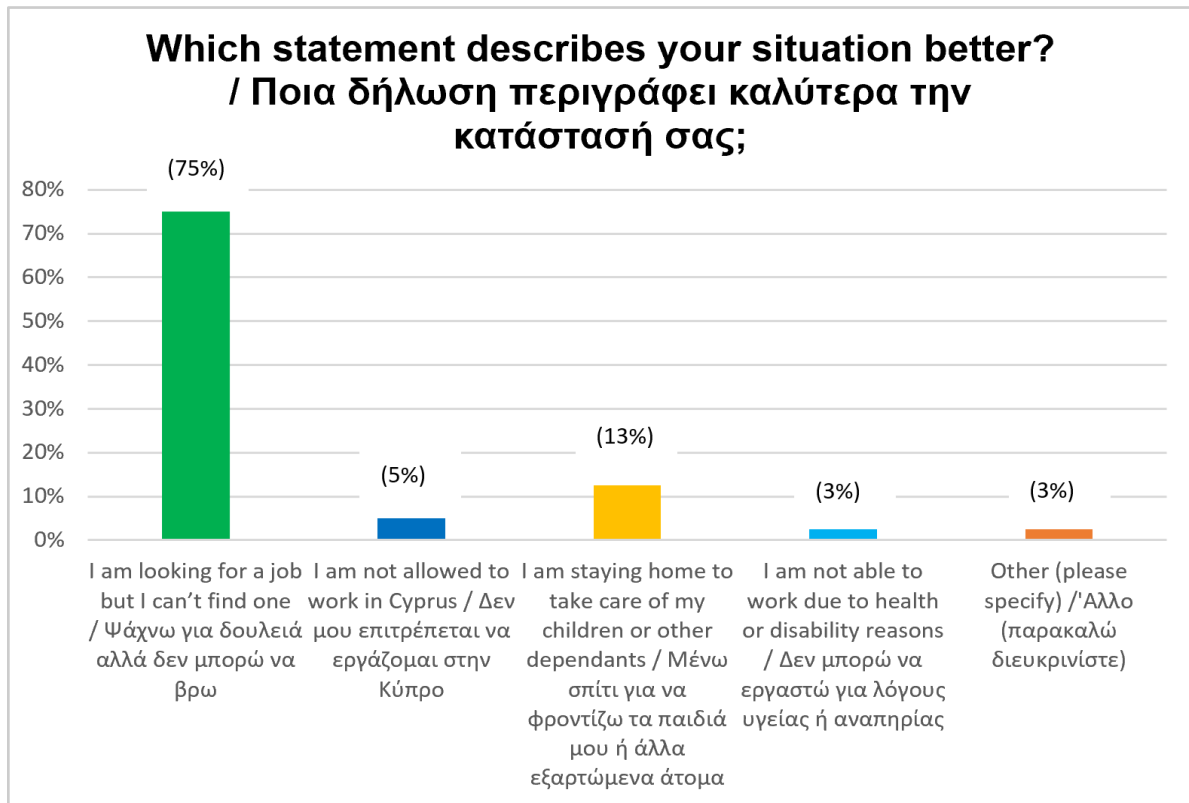
by migrant women entering the Cypriot labor market, and the lack of efficient and affordable child-care system to support the reconciliation of work and family life.⁴

According to their answers, the financial and work-related conditions of the young migrant women who participated were quite poor. Within the 78 women who participated in the research, almost six out of ten women (56%) did not have a job at the moment of the research (see Graph 5). Out of those, the majority declared that they were looking for a job but couldn't find one (see Graph 6).



Graph 5. The work condition of the research participants.

⁴ This was documented in several interviews and questionnaires. It was also documented in the fact that 13% of non-working women stated that the reason they weren't working was because they were staying at home taking care of children or other dependents (see Graph 6).



Graph 6. The work condition of the research participants.

Particularly, other than two women who stated that they were unable to work due to health reasons, and two others who stated that they weren't allowed to work due to their status in Cyprus, the majority (an approximate 75%) claimed that the reason they weren't working was that they couldn't find a job, despite that they were looking for one (see Graph 6).

In this respect, the pandemic situation had a detrimental impact on the employability of migrant women. On the one hand, employers were facing financial problems and were not looking to hire; on the other hand, the restrictions of movement enforced by the government to avoid the spread of the coronavirus decreased the ability of women to go out in order to look for a job.

In the meantime, beyond the women who were not working because of the lack



of job opportunities, there were approximately 15% who declared that they were not working because they were staying at home in order to take care of children or other dependents (see Graph 6).

This issue, of combining work and family, comes up very often by the research participants who have in different ways stressed the significance of having an affordable and functional child-care system which would give parents, and especially mothers, the opportunity to work.

This becomes even more necessary when it comes to single mothers who need to financially support their child(ren). Indeed, several women noted that they were actively looking for a job but it was even more difficult for them to find one where the terms and the working hours could be reasonably combined with their responsibilities as mothers.

Testimonies

A refugee woman from Cameroon:

“Before the Corona, I didn’t have a job, because I was pregnant. And before I got pregnant, I tried to get a job many times, but I couldn’t. I went to the Labor Office, they told me I can get a job there, that they can help me there, but I went there for more than one year and they never proposed me any job. [...] When I go myself [without the help of the Labour Office to get a job], [...] they said they don’t want an asylum seeker, so it was very difficult for me to find a job. I mean like, I need the Labor Office to help me ...



Everything changed during the quarantine. Because by that time I was ready to leave my baby [to child-care / school] and find a job but because of the lockdown I could not go out.”

A refugee woman from Syria (22 years old):

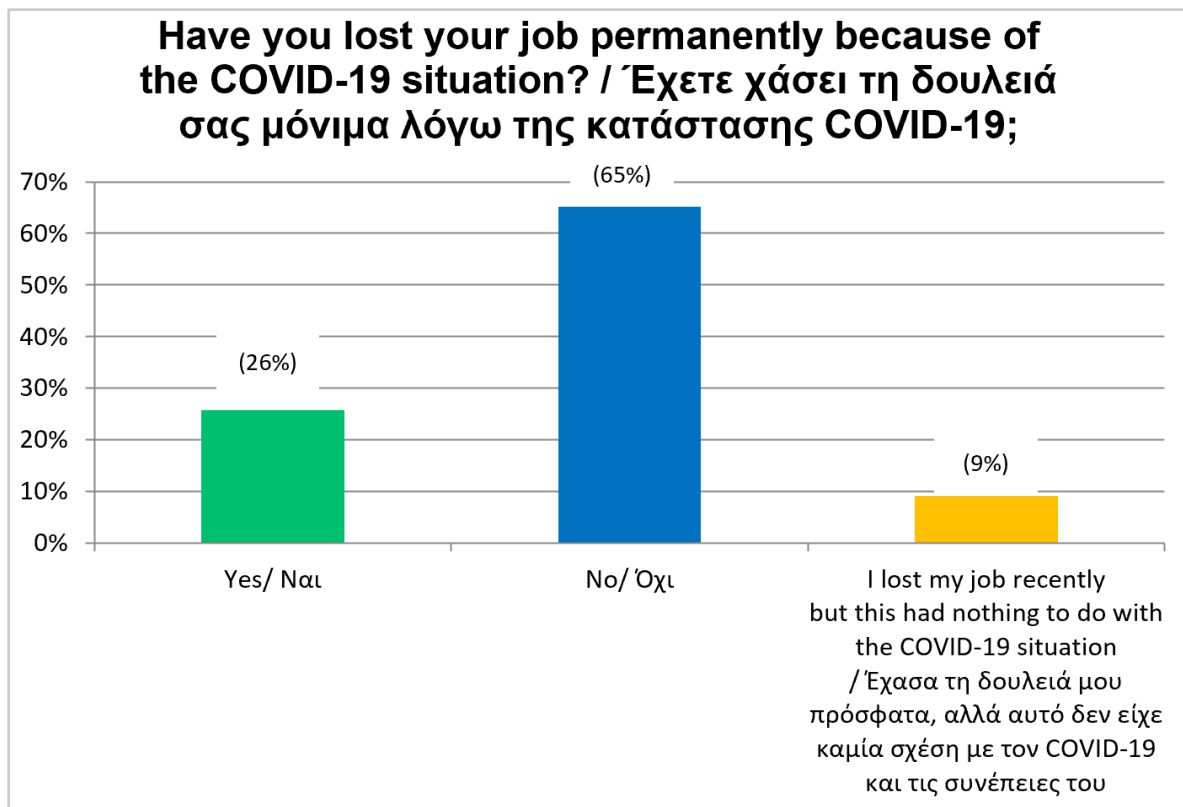
“Although I wanted to first study and then have a family, after not being able to find a job for so long, and after not being able to continue my studies because I couldn’t pay the fees, I decided to get married and have a family so that I would at least do something with my life. Sitting at home doing nothing was too hard. Life without any goals.. I couldn’t live like that”.

An asylum seeker woman from Cameroon (34 years old):

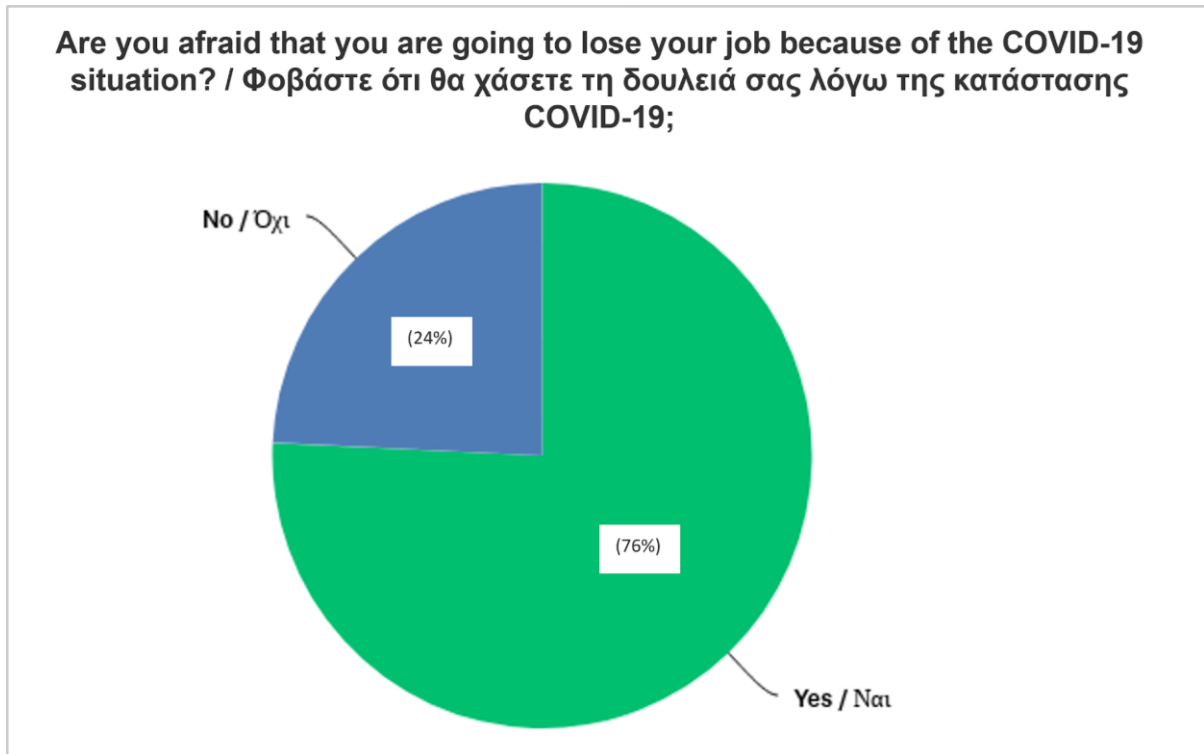
“After the lockdown, I tried to find work. I went to [company’s name]. They told me they cannot employ an asylum seeker. I went to other places, they told me they don’t have money now because of the COVID”.

B. Almost two out of ten young migrant women reported to have lost their job due to the COVID-19 situation. At the same time, seven to eight out of ten working women reported to be afraid that they were going to lose their job because of the COVID-19 situation.

According to the findings of this research, the COVID-19 situation increased the risk of migrant women losing their job, since almost two out of ten reported to have lost their job position due to the COVID-19 situation (see Graph 7). At the same time, young migrant women experienced high levels of financial and work-related insecurity as 75% of working women stated that they were afraid that they were going to lose their job because of this situation (see Graph 8).



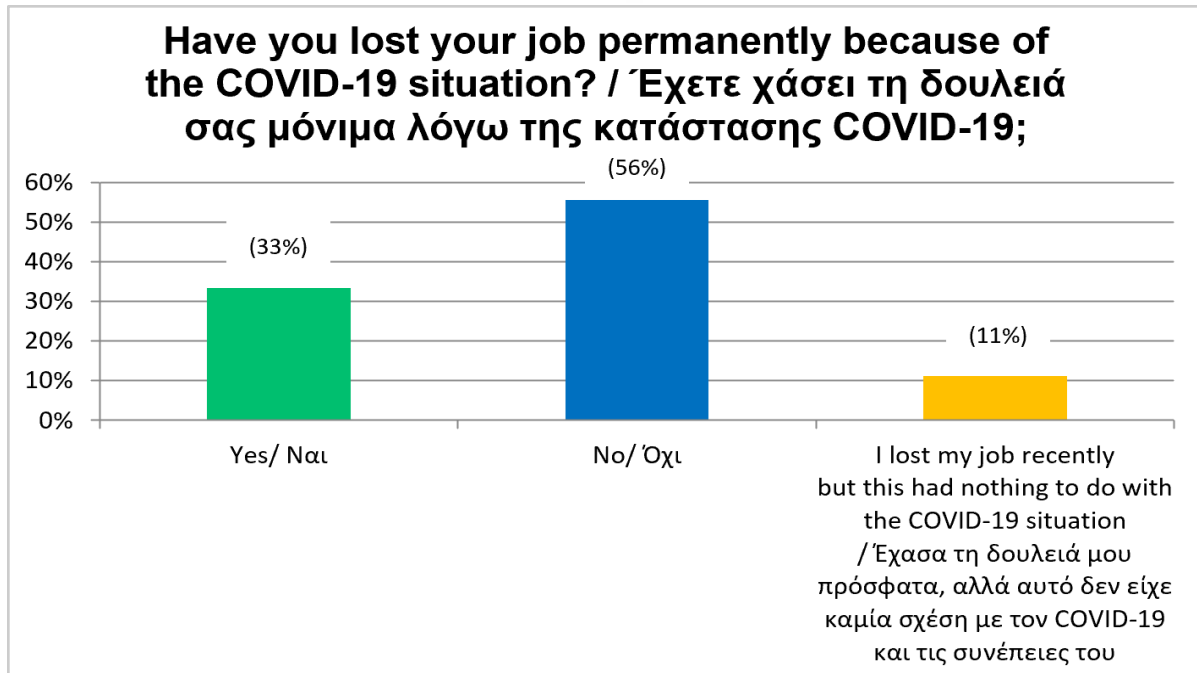
Graph 7. The impact on the research participants' job situation due to Covid-19.



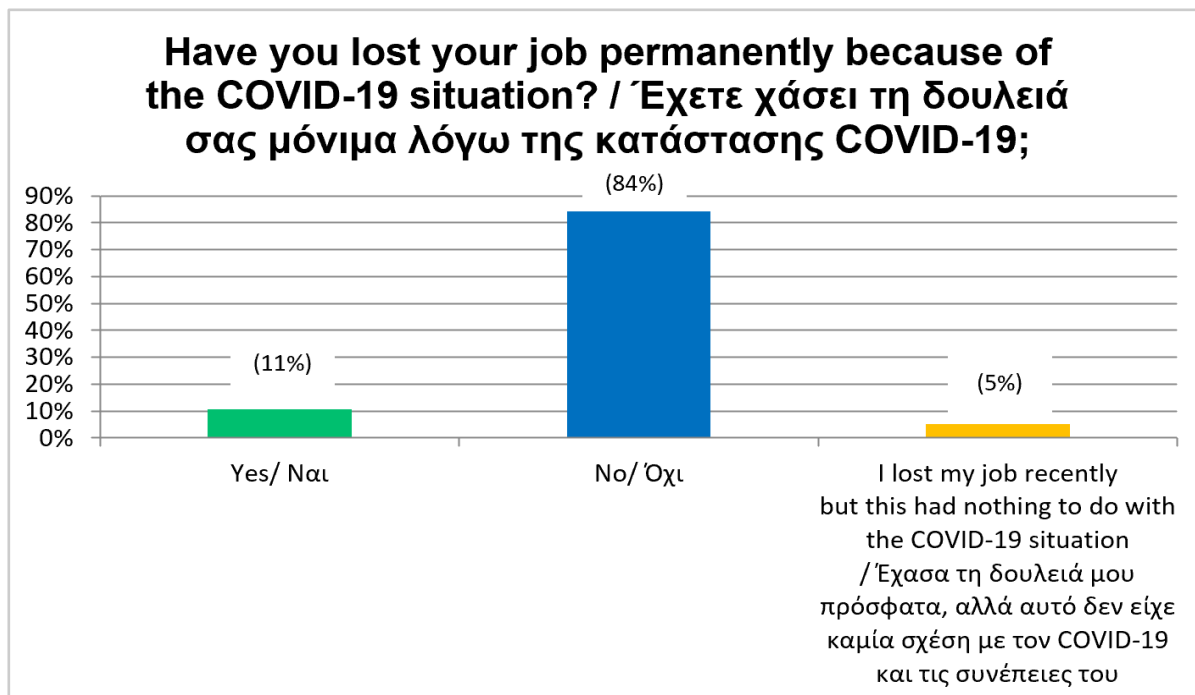
Graph 8. Participants' fear of losing their jobs due to Covid-19.

The most vulnerable groups in terms of being at risk of losing their job were the asylum seekers and the refugee women. Indeed, the percentage of those reporting that they had lost their job within this group was higher than the average (see Graph 9). Within the total of asylum seekers and refugee women put together, three out of ten reported to have lost their job due to the COVID-19 crisis, indicating an extreme level of vulnerability on behalf of this group.

In terms of the group of domestic workers—which includes women who came to Cyprus particularly in order to work as migrant workers as well as women who came to Cyprus as asylum seekers/refugees and were at the moment working as domestic workers—, the percentage of the domestic workers who reported that they had lost their job was one out of ten (Graph 10).



Graph 9. The work-related impact on asylum seekers and refugees specifically due to Covid-19.



Graph 10. The work-related impact on domestic workers specifically due to Covid-19.

This is particularly important considering that this refers to the occupation

practiced by the majority of migrant women working in Cyprus. This was also evident in the research as 7 out of 10 working women (70%) were domestic workers—while the rest held different jobs such as agricultural labourer, barista, translator and office administrator.

Particularly, from what was evident through the questionnaires and the interviews, the COVID-19 situation created a series of problems for domestic workers (see Testimonies below). On the one hand, many employers—especially when it came to employers of an older age—were afraid of catching the virus from their contact with others, including their employees. On the other hand, the overall crisis caused financial insecurity to many employers, making services like child-care and house cleaning less relevant.

In this context, some employers terminated—either temporarily or permanently—the employment of domestic workers. The causes and the impact that this had on domestic workers needs to be further researched as this research could not elaborate in terms of the reasons, the consequences and the conditions under which domestic workers lost their job during this period.

However, on a first attempt to understand the situation one must have in mind the different categories of domestic workers living in Cyprus and the importance of the residency and employment status of each category. Particularly:

- *Migrant women who are in Cyprus under contract in order to work for a particular employer and their status of residency in the island is completely dependent on the particular employer.*

These women usually reside in their employer's house. According to some

testimonies, during the COVID-19 crisis, some employers asked their employees to leave. Considering that these women are allowed to stay in Cyprus only as long as they have an employer, this has put domestic workers in the risk of staying without papers in case they couldn't find a new employer. Some testimonies referred to cases of employers who tried to overcontrol their employees (demanding, for example, from them to stay at home) causing conditions of extreme isolation for domestic workers who eventually chose to leave them, resulting once again in the domestic workers risking their residency status in Cyprus, let alone their financial survival.

- *Migrant women who work as domestic workers for multiple or single employers, either as self-employed or under contract; and their status of residency in Cyprus is not dependent on their employment status. This group includes for example asylum seekers/refugees, migrants with long-term residency status or other status of residency (e.g. mothers of minors whose father is of Cypriot/European origin).*

It is a reasonable assumption that many of these women were asked either to reduce their working hours or to terminate their services, either due to their employers' financial issues, or due to the fear of COVID contamination, and/or due to the curfews and other restrictions taken by the government against the spread of the virus.

- *Migrant women who live in Cyprus without papers and work under unregulated and uninsured work conditions.*

It is expected that many of these women lost their only income. This is, on many levels, the most vulnerable group of domestic workers as the employers were free to terminate their employment at will and they received no government support or other benefits.

Testimonies

A domestic worker from Sri Lanka (34 years old):

“When COVID came, I lost my job as the old lady I was working for got scared. I think she is really old, maybe 94 years old, and she is afraid due to the fact that I come and go with the bus. So she told me ‘do not come’ ”.

A domestic worker from Philippines (35 years old):

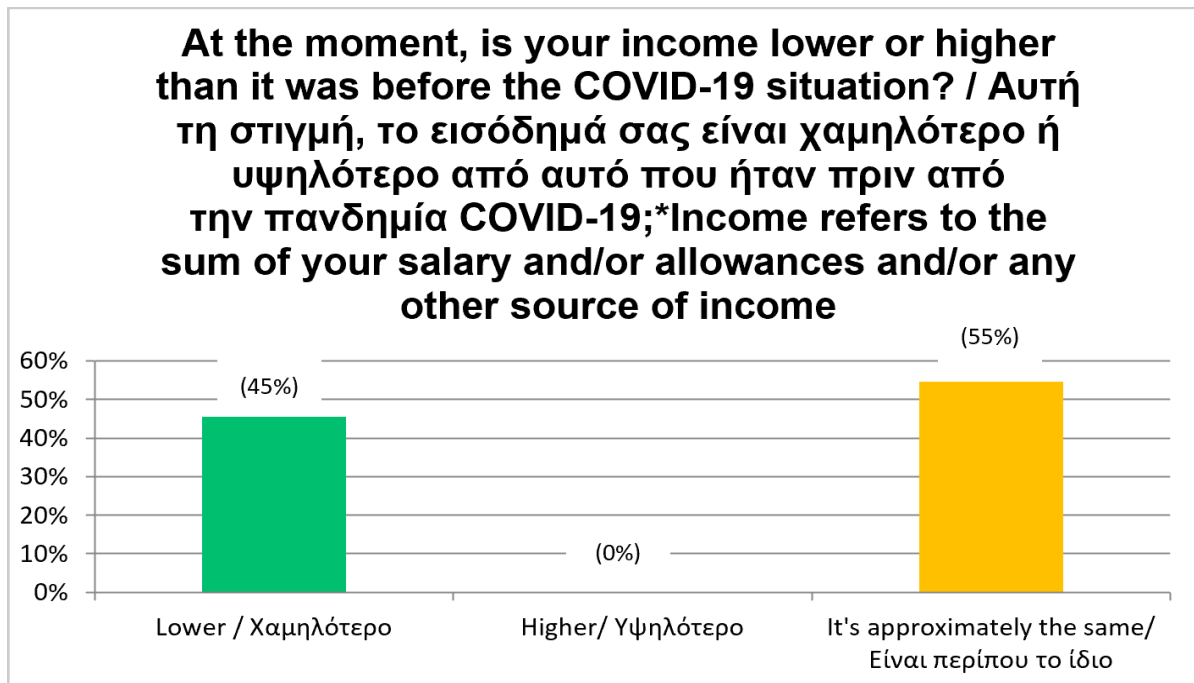
“I have many friends who have lost their jobs because there are many employers, some of them don’t work anymore, so they had to stay at home. So they [the employers] are staying at home, they can’t afford to pay someone to work for them ... Some of my friends were released permanently by their employer. And some of them stayed at home [temporarily] without being paid, because you know their employer told them you cannot come. Because some employers had underlying health conditions, so it is difficult... especially when you [the domestic worker] have to live outside (the house) and you have to travel every day”.

C. Nearly half of the women who participated in the research saw their income decreased during the pandemic.

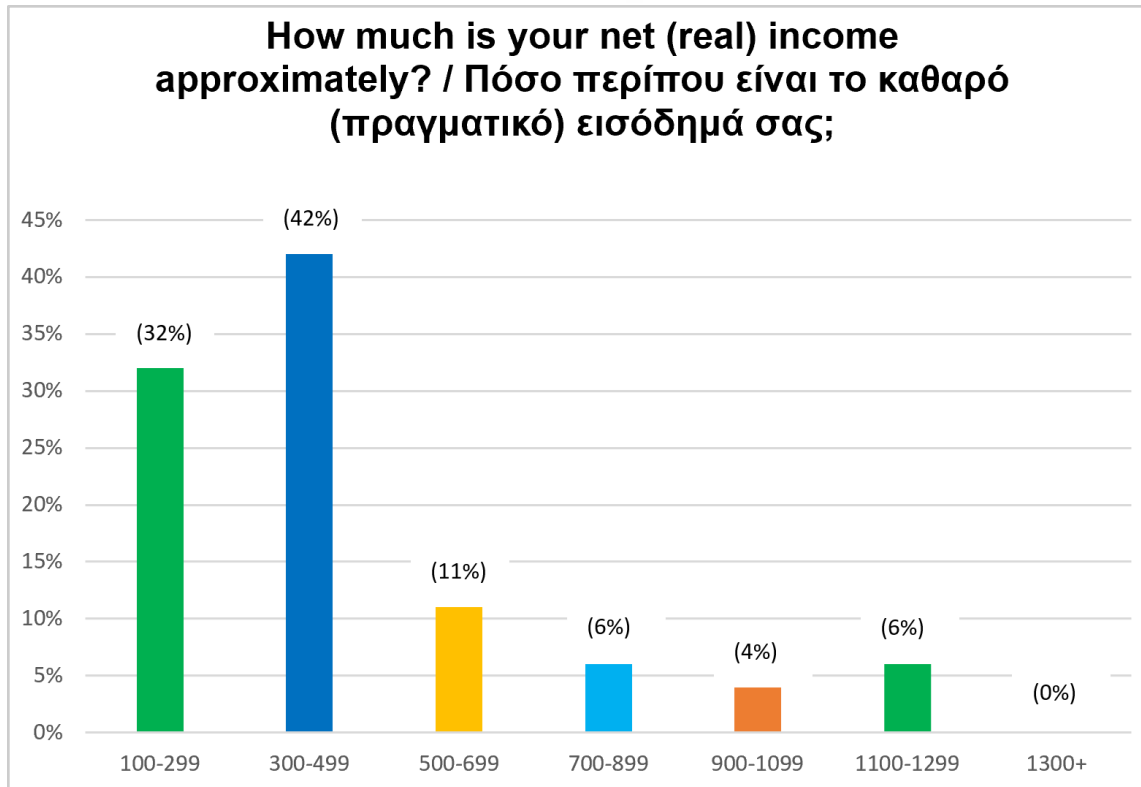
Particularly, a percentage of 45%, that is, almost five out of ten women reported that their income decreased during the COVID-19 situation (see Graph 11). This is of particular concern having in mind that most migrant women in Cyprus receive very poor salaries. This was evident within the context of this research (see Graph 12) as about 42% claimed to receive a net monthly income between 300 and 499 euros⁵ while

⁵ The net monthly salary in Cyprus is fixed at 309 euros, with the exception of the Filipino domestic workers whose salary is fixed at 400 euros based on a bilateral agreement between Philippines and Cyprus.

an important percentage of 32% received even less, that is, between 100-299 euros. 11% had an income between 500-699, while the rest 16% had an income between 700 and 1299. No participant received more than 1300 euros.

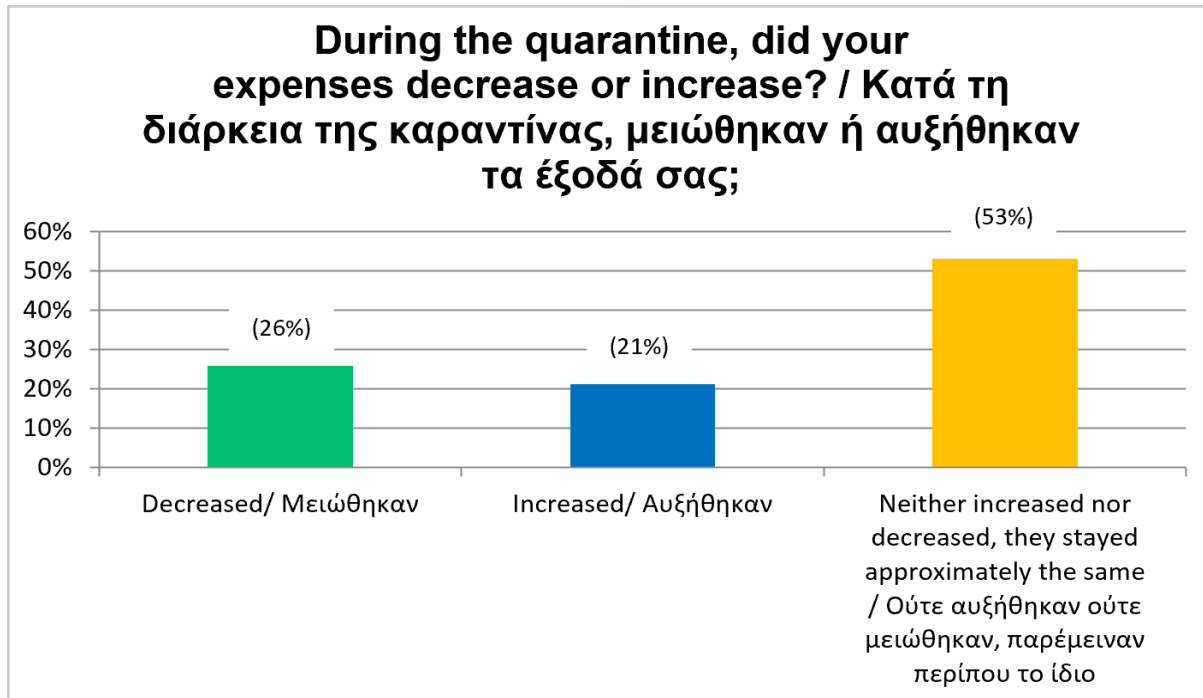


Graph 11. The income-related impact on research participants due to Covid-19.



Graph 12. The current income of the research participants.

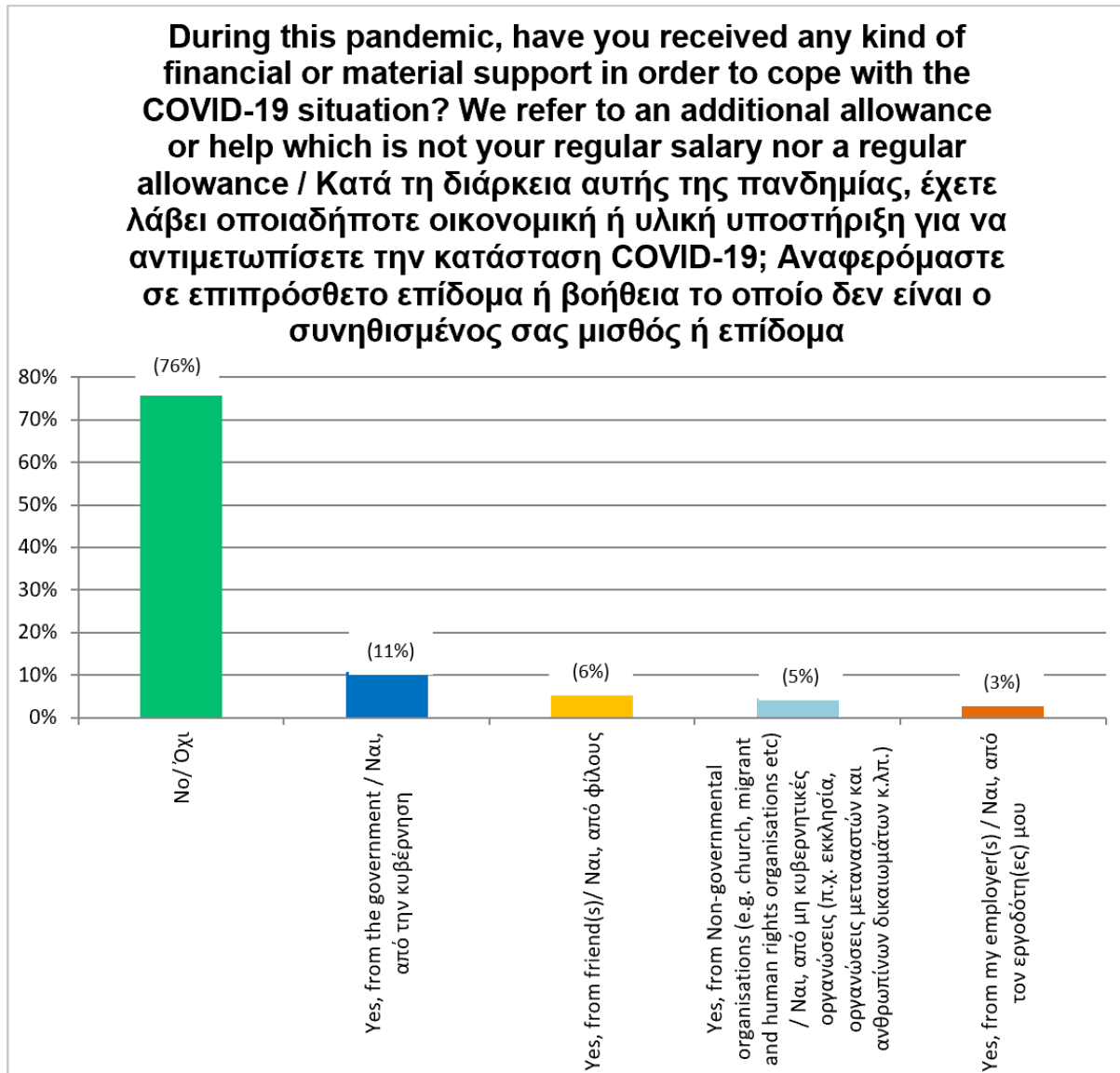
At the same time, most of the participants reported to have the same amount of expenses during the quarantine period as before (53%). Although a significant percentage saw their expenses to decrease during the quarantine time (21%), there was also an even higher percentage who saw their expenses to increase (26%) (see Graph 13).



Graph 13. Changes on research participants' expenses during the quarantine.

D. More than two in ten women (23%) stated that they received external support in order to cope with the financial and work-related difficulties caused by the pandemic.

The support came from either a formal agency—such as the government or a non-governmental organisation (a church or religious foundation or a migrant and human rights organisation)—or informal networks such as friends, neighbours, owners of shops, employers and others (see Graph 14).



Graph 14. Support that the research participants received to cope with the Covid-19 situation.

Testimonies

A domestic worker from Sri Lanka (34 years old):

“Thank God my husband had his job, and the son of my employer helped us, he brought us food and all that, a very good person, Cypriot, I love him”.

An asylum seeker from Cameroon (23 years old):

“The government now, they help me with the rent. But the check was not enough to pay the rent, to feed myself every month. Caritas helped me. I went there to pick food to eat. I also went to the Red Cross”.

3. Consequences to the overall personal and social well-being of young migrant women

Summary of findings

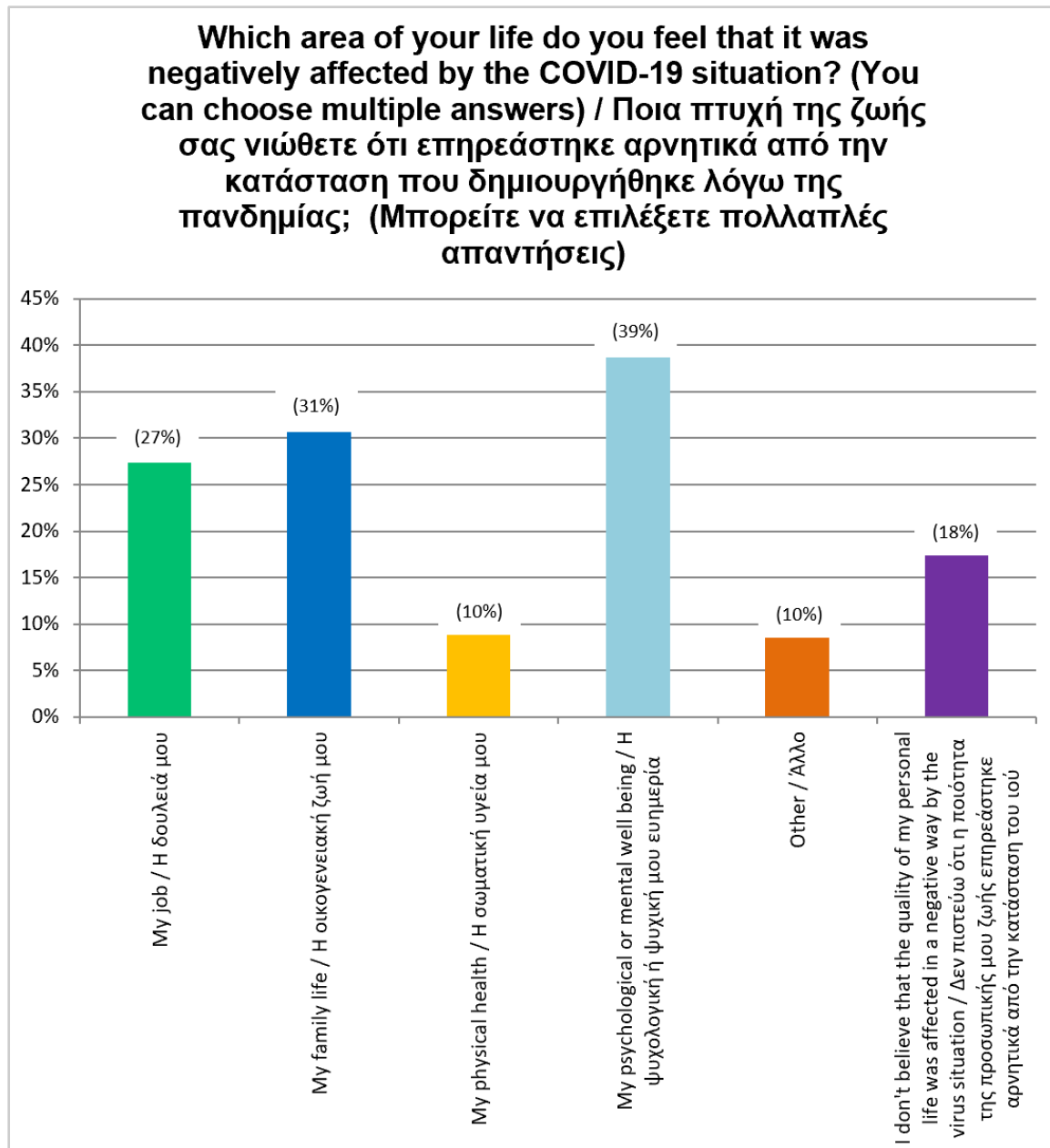
In terms of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic to the overall personal and social well-being of the young migrant women who live in Cyprus, this chapter notes:

- Negative impacts on the psychological and mental well-being of young migrant women
- Increased levels of stress/anxiousness/depression experienced by the participants since the pandemic
- Increased fear for their own safety, for their work and financial condition as well as worry for their families, including members of their family back in their home countries
- Increased feelings of loneliness and disconnection
- Negative impacts on their family life
- Negative impacts on the physical well-being of young migrant women

A. The consequences to the psychological and mental well-being

During the research, the participants were asked to choose which areas of their life were negatively affected by the Covid-19 situation (see Graph 15). In the following list, you can see their choices, from the most popular answer to the less popular one:

1. My psychological or mental well-being (39%)
2. My family life (31%)
3. My job (27%)
4. I don't believe that the quality of my personal life was affected in a negative way by the COVID-19 pandemic (18%)
5. My physical health (10%)
6. Other (10%)

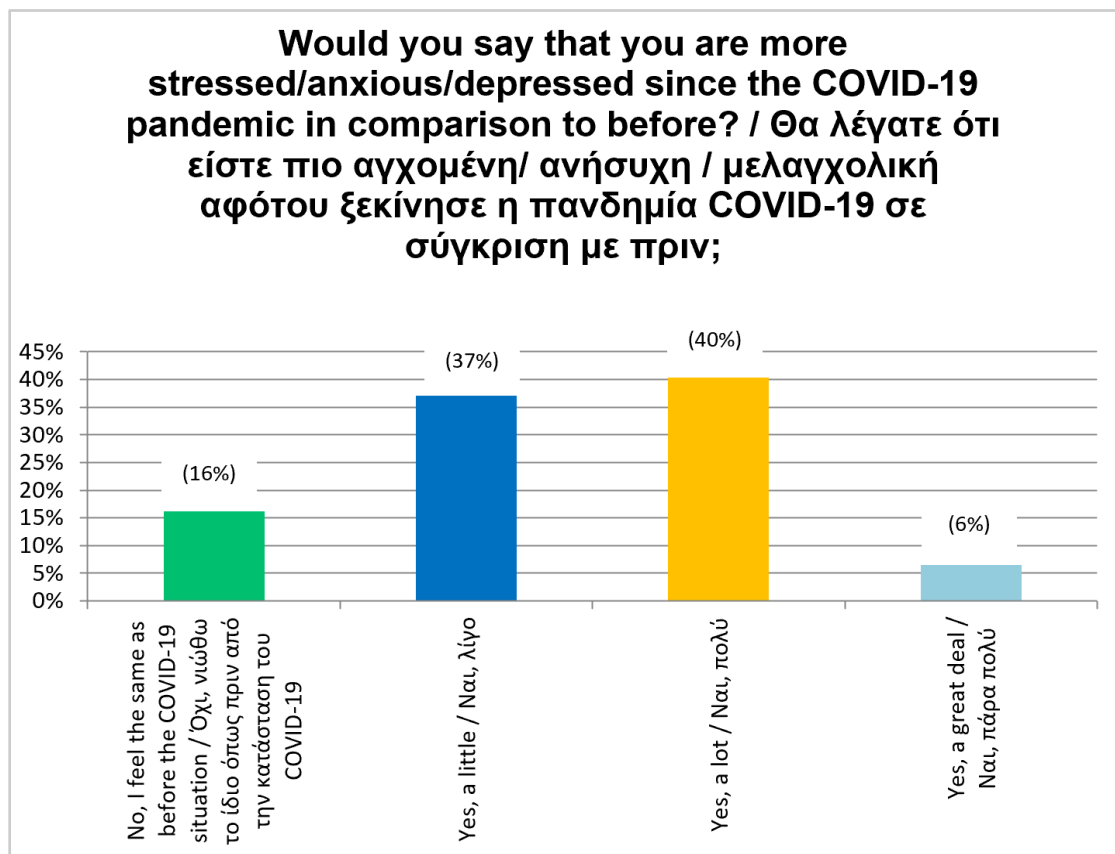


Graph 15. Areas of research participants' lives that were negatively affected by the Covid-19 situation.

The most popular answer—given by 39% of the women, that is, four out of ten women—referred to their “psychological or mental well-being”. In other words, according to their answers, the most detrimental consequence of the pandemic to the lives of young migrant women was the negative impact it had to their psychological and mental state.

This is obviously linked to the increased levels of unpleasant mental states such as stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and disconnection which were expressed by the participants in different parts of the research.

To begin with, when the women were asked to evaluate their mental situation since the beginning of the pandemic, compared to before, their answers revealed significant levels of increased stress / anxiety /depression (Graph 16).



Graph 16. Changes in emotions since the Covid-19 pandemic.

More particularly, the participants were asked to choose from a scale of the following four answers:

“No, I feel the same as before the COVID-19 situation”

“Yes, a little”

“Yes, a lot”

“Yes, a great deal”

In this context, the most popular choice was the third one (“Yes, a lot”), which was selected by 41%. The second most popular choice was the second (“Yes, a little”) made by 38%, while 16% declared “No, I feel the same as before”. Furthermore, there was a percentage of 6,5% who went to the “top of the ladder” by choosing “Yes, a great deal”.

This means that if one combines the two last choices together, that is, those who felt “a lot” more and those who felt “a great deal” more stressed / anxious / depressed, a total of 47,5% of the young migrant women who participated in the research were experiencing a noteworthy increase in their levels of stress or anxiety or depression. If one adds to the sum those who answered “Yes, a little” then an overwhelming majority of 84%, reported to have been feeling more stressed/anxious/depressed since the pandemic sparked compared to how they felt before it.

B. Is the virus pandemic turning into a mental pandemic?

If we turn to the findings of this research, we can detect some of the main reasons linked to the psychological and mental effects of the pandemic. On the one hand, the young migrant women who were interviewed expressed increased feelings of *loneliness* and *disconnection* connected to the circumstances of social distancing,



isolation and inactivity. At the same, the interviews revealed feelings of fear and worry for the participants' own safety, in terms of a possible virus contamination, as well as the safety of their families, including members of their family back in their home countries. To this, the insecurity for their work and financial condition—as was already discussed in detail in the first chapter of this report—added to the overall circle of worry and insecurity.

Testimonies

A refugee woman from Syria (22 years old):

“Before the pandemic you could see people smiling in the streets, now with the masks you can’t see the faces and the expressions, it affects my psychology”.

A refugee woman from Syria (25 years old):

“Before, you would see all the people inside, socializing, receiving food, making breakfast ... it was crowded here before, but now we don’t let people come inside for their own safety”.

“The first month [of the quarantine] was a disaster for me. I felt like maybe the world will end... will finish... it is difficult... not easy... you feel very... depressed, and staying at home, you have to stop everything and be late with a lot of things, you feel like you have lost this year of your life”.



A domestic worker from Philippines (34 years old):

“Stresssss! It is the first thing that comes to mind. Stress!... I was just very careful, you know, I am wearing my mask, with my gloves, always washing the hands like a 100 times a day! So thanks to God, until now I never got sick from the pandemic and my employers too”.

A refugee woman from Cameroon:

“Sometimes it was just getting crazy with the baby... if the baby cries, it is stressful, you couldn’t go to the park, the park was closed... For me it was like prison...”.

“Very scared, very scared [that I might get sick]! I lost a lot of weight because of the thinking, thinking, thinking...”.

C. Negative experiences in family life and physical well-being

Beyond the feelings of loneliness and disconnection discussed above, and beyond the fear and the worry linked to the possible virus contamination and the insecurity of jobs and financial issues, the research indicates a negative impact to the family lives of the young migrant women. As shown in Graph 15, more than three in ten women felt that the pandemic had a negative impact on their family life, while one in ten reported that their physical well-being was negatively affected.

Both the impact on family life and the impact on physical well-being would need to be further researched if we want to shed light to the ways that the COVID-19 has affected these spheres. However, we could make some reasonable assumptions.



In terms of physical well-being, an obvious reason would be the restrictions in movement enforced by the government in order to limit the contamination of the virus. This could lead to the restriction of physical activity affecting the physical agility and wellness of the body. Another assumption could be that some could have actually been sick with the virus or faced other health issues which might not have been appropriately addressed due to the challenges faced by the health-care system.

In regard to family life, it is expected, on the one hand, that the negative impact on the psychological and mental state of individual human beings—who are the ones who form the social and family relationships—could not *but* have an impact on those relationships. However, the fact that three out of ten women stated that the COVID-19 had a negative impact on their family life has also other dimensions.

For example, some women may refer to violence within the family, as an increase of incidents was reported by civil organisations since the beginning of the pandemic.⁶ Other women may refer to something completely different, such as feeling scared and worried about the safety of their families, especially the ones who had a family living away from them, as many migrant women do.

4. Opportunities and reflection

Beyond the inconvenience and the suffering associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, our research aimed to record how young migrant women found ways to

⁶ <https://unficyc.unmissions.org/domestic-violence-and-covid-19>



cope with the situation, reflect on lessons learned and opportunities found, within the otherwise difficult circumstances.

In this regard, the women were asked to answer the two following questions:

- a) In a few words, could you describe a positive experience for you or a new opportunity caused by this pandemic?;*
- b) In your experience, what would be one thing that could help immigrant women to recover from the impacts of this pandemic? This could be a suggestion to the government, or a suggestion to society, social organisations, or other people.*

In this context, some positive experiences/opportunities reported by the young migrant women were:

- Spending time with their family and/or friends
- Enjoying a hobby and things they love, like cooking and reading books
- Learning new things through online education and becoming more familiar with digital tools
- Exploring spiritual and religious concerns like trust and belief in God
- Volunteering and helping each other

It is worth noting the last point, that is, the fact that migrant women seem to have been incredibly active in volunteering and taking care of each other. For example, a woman explained that she had received help from a Bangladeshi shop owner in the neighborhood who was trying to make sure that everyone had food. Another woman explained that because she was working she was able to provide her friends and other women who had lost their jobs with food supplies. Also, several women saw the situation as an opportunity to assist others through organising informal groups aiming to help those in need or via volunteering in civil organisations such as NGOs.

At the same time, their testimonies imply an important turn towards reflexivity:

A domestic worker from Philippines:

“I hope that this was a wake-up call that not everything in this world is about money. Our life is very short and we need to take care of it. Government in Cyprus must organize a health course or at least give a chance to those people who want to study as nurses to help them and give the course for free because in this situation the lackness of people in the front line is the most difficult situation to combat and help those patients that need help. And for immigrant women like me who work here just think positive and continue your job but don't forget to always protect ourselves. Our life is in our hands”.

An asylum seeker woman from Cameroon:

“I learned that nothing is forever in life. Anything can change or be canceled at any time. We must help and love each other no matter the colour or the race so focus on helping and loving each other no matter the color or race”.

A refugee woman from Syria:

“I learned that physical and mental health are the most important of all matters in life”.

An immigrant woman from Georgia:

“During the quarantine I had the opportunity to do my hobbies like bake handmade breads, cooking etc. And I had more quality time with my family.”

An asylum seeker from Cameroon:

“It gave me the opportunity to work as a volunteer in the friendship cycle for food distribution during the lockdown period and I am happy to be part of the group. Being able to help others”.

Moreover, a series of interesting suggestions can be traced in their answers, such as:

- Make free and accessible courses for learning the Greek language (particularly for refugees and asylum seekers)
- Help women find jobs
- Create more quality jobs for women
- Provide an affordable and sustainable child-care system
- Help the refugee women study at universities
- Give opportunities to women to learn new skills
- Create accessible centres to support psychological and mental well-being
- Help the domestic workers who lost their jobs
- Open debates and spaces for migrant women to share their experiences

5. Closing Remarks

We close this report with some thoughts on what we can do to improve the lives of young migrant women living in Cyprus based on the authors' observations within the context of this research:

- Having self-organised communities of migrants and/or migrant women seemed to make their members feel more optimistic and less lonely in comparison to members of unorganised communities. For example, Filipino women—whose community is the most organised migrant community in Cyprus—tended to feel supported by their community, whereas members of less organised communities expressed sadness and bitterness for feeling isolated and not having networks of connection between their co-nationals.
- Young migrant women were often confused about their rights and the procedures they could follow on different occasions. For instance, there are often some alternatives or solutions that are not so clear to migrant women because they are confused on where to begin and who to ask for information regarding legal procedures and other logistics. As an indicative example, we mention, an asylum seeker thinking of opening a small business who was afraid that such a thing would be illegal for her and did not know who to ask for information. Similarly, some domestic workers were uncertain about the legal procedures that they were supposed to follow when they were released by an employer and wished to find a new one. In this context, awareness-raising campaigns and guidance-information centres are very important for the integration and the well-being of migrant women, and migrants overall.
- In our observation, African and Muslim women seem to be facing enormous prejudice and racism in their efforts to enter the labor market, and therefore they need particular support to find a job. From several interviews, it is evident that a woman wearing the arabic hijab is perceived negatively by the majority of the local employers.

- Too much suffering is caused because of how time consuming is for basic demands to just be examined by the government. Beyond the fact that applications for asylum often take years to be examined, there are many cases when this delay of procedures is a huge problem. An indicative example is the case of an asylum seeker from Cameroon who reported that she had made an application asking for her underage son to join her in Cyprus one year before and had received no answer. Considering that the area where her son lives is extremely violent she had been very stressed and worried about him. Moreover, the situation got worse in the context of the pandemic because, in her own words, “it is very difficult to complain because you cannot go to the office, you can only send a letter”.
- Cooperation and coordination of action between NGOs and Government Departments is necessary and urgent.
- We need more research-based action targeting the particular needs of young women and migrant women.

Appendix 1: The questionnaire



Appendix 2: Suggestions as expressed by the migrant women participants

We present the answers to the question below as they were written by the women participants:

‘In your experience, what would be one thing that could help migrant women to recover from the impacts of this pandemic? This could be a suggestion to the government, or a suggestion to society, social organisations, or other people.’

“ My opinion for this scenario is that we need to be ready at all times not

only for the virus, but also for the situation that will come ahead. I hope that this is a wake up call to all of us about the fact that not everything in this world is about money. Our life is very short and we need to take care of it. Government in Cyprus must organize a health course or at least give a chance to those people who want to become nurses to help them and set a free course. I suggest this because I believe that during this situation the lack of people in the front line cannot help in combating and helping patients in need. And for immigrant women like me who work here I would like to say to them just think positive and continue your job, and don't forget to always protect yourselves. Our life is in our hands”.

“To keep in touch in order to help them (migrant women) with exactly what they need, by providing for example, educational programs”.

“ Firstly, jobs should be created for women, as although we want to work, there are no jobs. Secondly, we need financial aid during this period of pandemic”.

“ The government should create better job positions for women ”.

“ The government should give financial support to women ”.

“ Financial support ”.

“ More job positions to open and more help in finding jobs ”.

“ The government could establish strict rules to improve the safety of women ”.

“ I suggest that the Government of Cyprus extends the support to everyone especially to those domestic workers who stopped their job because of this pandemic ”.

“ Not too much worrying, always staying positive, and always finding a solution when problems are arising...be happy and content with what we have at the moment. We-the Filipinos are easily recovered as life must go on...do not worry too much because it might cause depression and anxiety. Always look at the brighter side and not at the negative one, positivity is giving a nice outcome...losing a job is not easy of course, but life must go on by finding a solution, finding another job again. Also, learn to save some money that can be used in times of crisis...Moreover helping one another we call it Bayanihan in tagalog, giving a moral support, talk to each other to not worrying...it can help to ease the pain at the moment...always be happy and have a positive mindset for an abundant of life ”.

“ I suggest that providing education to migrant women is something that can change their life towards a positive society and world ”.

“ Involve migrant women in learning hand work ”.

“ The government has to give more work opportunities to women so that we can stop depending on the government. This kind of help is the first small thing in order to have a normal life ”.

“ Financial help is the only way... ”.

“ To offer them (migrant women) support in the case of losing their job, and also offer them advice when they are down psychologically ”.

“ The government has to create job opportunities and also to help those who are in need, such as pregnant women and mothers who cannot work now because of their newborn babies, and also those who don't have insurance yet”.

“ My advice to women is to try and keep clean everywhere and everytime. Keep reading the news about Covid-19 every day, and try to improve your knowledge by collecting enough information ”.

“ In my experience and also my suggestion to migrant women is to follow government’s health regulations and protection measures, and also to always wear a mask ”.

“ I hope they'll help us at least financially so that we can buy food and pay the rent. With what I'm going through right now, I'm afraid about my mental health ”.

“ To open debates and spaces where we can share our experiences ”.

