

## **Executive summary:**

The Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) funded research project 'Transnational digital networks. Migration, and Gender' (MIG@NET), was implemented over a three year period (2010-2013) in eight countries of the European Union (Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Slovenia and the UK) and was coordinated by the Centre of Gender Studies, Department of Social Policy, Panteion University in Athens, Greece.

The research was structured along thematic, rather than country-focused axes. Thematic WPs were coordinated by the partners that had expertise in the specific areas, who were also responsible for the overall thematic research design. Specific case studies were implemented by teams of researchers from three different partner institutions.

- Border Crossings: Germany, Greece, Italy
- Communication and Information Flows: France, Greece, Slovenia
- Education and Knowledge: Italy, Greece, Netherlands
- Religious Practices: Netherlands, Greece, UK
- Sexualities: Slovenia, Greece, France
- Social Movements: Cyprus, Greece, Germany
- Intercultural Conflict and Dialogue: UK, Greece, Cyprus.

One of the innovations of MIG@NET was that several thematic teams decided during the initial stages of the research design to work in common on the production of the thematic synthesis report rather than to produce distinct national case study reports, which would be later synthesized by the thematic coordinators. This decision was taken in order to address the transnational character of the research themes in question (namely border crossings, sexualities and social movements) and provided researchers with more flexibility to work on a common theoretical and methodological framework.

The research conducted for MIG@NET rested on the common notion that migration processes are increasingly becoming digitalised. While all social life is becoming subject to processes of digitalisation, migration is viewed as a privileged space to study these transformations. Apart from approaching digitalisation as a key aspect pertaining to all the project's activities, researchers collaborated with new media artists and web developers for

thinking further about how the research process can be translated in a series of digital media artefacts. These collaborations led to the development of three different types of digital visualisations of the migratory flows studied throughout the project that have been and will continue to be used as dissemination tools of the project's research findings: the production of digital mappings at the first stage of the project; the development of a web platform and the production of a video game at the end of the project.

## **Project Context and Objectives:**

MIG@NET tried to explore how migrant individuals and communities participate in the production and transformation of transnational digital networks and the effect of transnational digital networks on migrant mobility and integration. Transnational digital networks were studied as instances of socio-economic, gender, racial, and class hierarchies, where the participation of migrant communities entails the possibility of challenging these hierarchies. The participation of migrant communities was investigated in detail through particular case studies in seven thematic areas: Border Crossings, Communication and Information Flows, Education and Knowledge, Religious Practices, Sexualities, Social Movements, Intercultural Conflict and Dialogue. The project addressed these issues through a tripartite conceptual and methodological approach:

(a) a critical approach to the separation between the digital and the real

Digital networks were treated as sets of social practices (not just pieces of technology) that map onto real, rather than virtual geographies. From this perspective, research and analysis placed on the same plane the experiences, histories and everyday practices of migrants moving between geographical areas and between digital spaces. The engagement of migrants with digital mediums were seen as a means of producing, re-producing, or challenging cultural forms and identities. The 'connected migrants' digital activities are expansive: through the global interconnections offered by the web, migrants re-draw the relationships they have with their environments at home, at their host country or in-between, and may participate in multiple worldwide networks that are integrated into their everyday local reality. In this sense, MIG@NET did not just address the 'use' or the 'effects' of digital technologies: instead, it looked at how migrants attempt to construct cultures and identities in a transforming communicative environment, how they can locate themselves in this environment and at the same time try to mould it in their own preferred image.

MIG@NET also tried to cover a largely unexplored area, that is the multiple intersections between migrant and digital networks, since much of the existing evidence and research has been focusing mainly on the use of new digital tools and platforms by migrants for diverse cultural purposes. MIG@NET addressed the rise of transnational digital networks as both an opportunity and a challenge for the inclusion of migrants in the European project. It highlighted the multiple obstacles -language barriers, entrenched social, class, gender, race inequalities- that migrants face in the process of co-producing transnational digital networks, in order to see the openings and transgressions emanating from the circulation of migrant identities and experiences through digital media.

(b) a transnational approach to migration

MIG@NET undertook the task of researching and analysing the ways in which migrants participate in the production and proliferation of transnational digital networks. Against a dominant trend that perceives the phenomenon of migration according to host and sending societies and devises methodological tools and policy responses based on ethnocentric approaches, the project was based on a transnational perspective that focused mostly on the links and networks that cross, and transcend, national and gender borders connecting migrant individuals and groups across the globe. From this perspective, migrant movements were not conceptualised simply as linear processes leading migrant individuals and groups from one place to another, but as multi-directional processes, determined by transnational patterns of travelling and communication, as well as exchanges of information, ideas, histories, memories, and goods across national territorial and cultural borders. Moreover, transnationalism for MIG@NET was not just a theoretical approach, but also and more a methodological choice. Apart from identifying and reflecting on the multiple links between the development of migrant networks and broadband technologies and their further impact on potentialities of contemporary transnationalism, much of the research itself was conducted beyond separate national contexts.

(c) an intersectional approach to gender

Mainstreaming a gender approach across these perspectives was one of the central premises of MIG@NET, since both transnational migration and digital networks are constructed on the basis of gendered relations. Gendered approaches to migration and new media studies have highlighted how intersecting power relations, based on racialised, ethnicised, gendered and sexualised discrimination, affect the different social positions occupied by (migrant) men and women, as well as the different practices they engage in. Therefore, researching the intersecting dynamics of migration and digital future, which is at the heart of the MIG@NET project, cannot but address these transnational processes through an approach to gender that engages with the multiple intersections between gender, nation, race, class and sexual orientation. As both cyberfeminist and migration studies scholars have argued, intersectionality is at the heart of transnational phenomena leading to a multiplication of gender identities and positions. In the context of MIG@NET, the appropriation of multiple identities and performativities in digital spaces challenging dominant representations of masculinity and femininity as well as the rigid distinction between the digital and the real parallels the multiplication of gender roles and identities in transnational networks.

## Objectives

The main MIG@NET objectives included:

- a) To produce a state-of-the-art contribution to the literature and policy on transnational digital and migrant networks, which would take into account the spread of new digital technologies of communication and would not focus exclusively on citizens, but would also include migrants as active participants in the production, exchange and consumption of culture within the European digital space.
  
- b) To use new methodologies that challenge the ethnocentric bias of contemporary migration research and the rigid separation between 'real' and 'digital' practices, often found in the study of digital cultural networks, through which new and important research insights and conceptualizations will be produced and disseminated.
  
- c) To enhance the European debate on mobility and cultural diversity and on the prospects of intercultural dialogue and cooperation by using all the advantages of a consortium composed of experts in two different fields where transnationalism constitutes a salient social dynamic in order to explore the theoretical and policy implications of a broad range of social issues commonly separated into distinct fields of expertise.
  
- d) To contribute to the ongoing European debate and policy making efforts towards constructing effective policies and institutions, which would manage cultural diversity and mobility and promote intercultural dialogue and cooperation at the local, national and European level as well as creating the basis for a common European cultural identity through the usage of digital networks that connect people across borders.

## **Project Results:**

MIG@NET has conducted innovative research combining different disciplines, methodological tools and research areas. The main innovative element of MIG@NET was the ongoing collaboration between social scientists and IT experts and artists. The central theme of MIG@NET and its main premise, which is the correlation between material and digital spaces beyond artificial dichotomies as it is manifested through migrant actions and networks, had called from the beginning for such an interdisciplinary and inclusive approach. Moreover, following the spatial potentialities of digital networks that are not hindered by national or other geographical borders, MIG@NET has adopted a transnational approach both at the theoretical and methodological and practical levels.

Therefore, the research was structured along thematic, rather than country-focused axes. Thematic Work Packages were coordinated by the partners that had expertise in the specific areas, who were also responsible for the overall thematic research design. Specific case studies were implemented by teams of researchers from three different partner institutions.

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The case studies conducted within the framework of the project did not treat digital and non-digital networks as separate fields of inquiry. Along these lines, the fieldwork as a whole was based on the integration of digital and traditional social science methodologies.

The research teams used a variety of social science methodologies. In this context they used online and offline interviews and focus groups with migrant and native users, discourse analysis of off- and online texts, images and video, gender analysis of online and offline performativities and transnational ethnographic research. However, they also attempted to experiment with various methodologies in order to highlight the continuum across digital and physical materialities. These methodologies are rarely used in mainstream social scientific research, even in cases when there is an attempt to study social phenomena with digital dimensions (MIG@NET-WP3 2010).

The innovative methods employed in the course of the project included:

- Creating Facebook profiles for research purposes to follow and analyse digital interactions between users in the context of the religious practices and intercultural conflict and dialogue work packages. This method proved to be particularly useful with regard to the analysis of racist digital networks, which were difficult to approach for interviews and focus groups, but also gave a broader understanding of every-day interactions and gender relations amongst Muslim migrant women in the most popular digital mediums of social networking.

- Recording and analysing of video sequences (on Skype) in the homes of services users in the context of the research on information and communication flows. Through this method researchers were able to identify every-day patterns of digital interconnectedness between migrants and relatives or friends in the place of origin. Through this method researchers were able to transcribe the 'multi-modality' of the video communications: rather than focusing solely on oral or written speech, they were also able to analyse gestures, eye contact, facial expression, objects, ritual sequences.

- Developing web cartographies were used in both the information and communication flows and in the sexualities thematic work packages. Through web-crawling, researchers were able to analyse the interconnections between hyperlinks and map digital spaces in an innovative way. The resulting web-cartographies provided useful information about social and discursive links and relations emerging online and the ways in which digital networks are structured.

- Combining IT teaching with research. Instead of conducting research based solely on interviews, focus groups and participant observation, some of the research in the WP on education and knowledge was conducted through IT courses organized on a weekly basis by MIG@NET researchers after an agreement with the relevant school authorities and parents associations. This method enabled researchers to explore aspects of migrant and native children's digital interactions and increased the researchers' awareness of the possibilities of

using new media to enhance intercultural exchanges and cooperation in education through the usage of new media.

Overall, in order to address the challenges presented by its central theme, the MIG@NET team had to use and develop innovative methodological tools to study the complex and multifaceted processes of gender, migration and digitalisation in Europe. One of the basic premises of the research was that in order to study transnational and digital networks, we must integrate new technologies and transnational research into the research design. Thus, each WP utilised a unique methodological and theoretical approach (analysed in the WP on Research design) that enabled each team to work in a transnational and interdisciplinary way, integrating social scientific perspectives on gender and migration to the study of digital technologies and new media. Thus, the resulting findings (which are analytically presented in the thematic reports) reflect not only the diversity of the thematic areas studied, but also different methodological perspectives and approaches.

### **Theoretical and conceptual context: Literature review**

The MIG@NET literature review showed that despite differences in the historical migration trends in each of the societies studied (post-colonial, guest workers, new migration, post-socialist) there is a growing tendency across Europe in the academic literature on migration to acknowledge the salience of the processes of transnationalism. The turn towards the study of transnational migration signifies a critical move away from state-centric and ethnocentric perspectives and reveals many of the dynamic and positive aspects of migrant movements. However, in migration studies, as the literature review observes, transnationalism often remains a vague concept that needs to be further explicated through the usage of concrete case studies and analyses. Thus, MIG@NET research sought to contribute to the existing literature and academic debate by providing concrete examples of transnational case studies, which were researched and analysed -as explained in the previous section- through the usage of innovative methodologies.

Contrary to transnationalism, the relationship between gender and migration has been researched and analysed extensively during the past decades in different European academic contexts. While the debates may differ in terms of their focus and scope in different national and disciplinary contexts, overall gender is perceived as an essential component of all migration research. Despite the progress made in this field, however, most studies continue to focus on migrant women. As the relevant report states: 'Gender, for instance, albeit the massive development, production and impact of Gender studies remains in many cases a mere sex category. Although it has been theoretically established that gender is a constitutive element of social relations and processes, not confined only to the case (and cause) of women, most often it is conceived and used within the transnational



corpus examined for the needs of this report as a simple sex category, the evocation of which offers a global comprehension of social phenomena' (MIG@NET - WP2, 2010: 16).

MIG@NET sought to go beyond this exclusive focus on migrant women, addressing gender as a social relation placing particular emphasis on the construction of masculinity and femininity and the intersections of gender, race, class and age in different online and offline environments. Only one of the WPs had as its main focus migrant women (i.e. Muslim migrant women in religious practices) while all the other WPs addressed how gender discourses and performativities emerge and how notions of femininity and masculinity are established in digital and non-digital settings and how race, nation and class impact on male and female migrant identities and practices.

Finally, the literature review pointed out to the scarcity of theoretical analyses and case studies focusing on the interconnections between gender, migration and digital networks. Putting these three variables together constitutes one of the originalities of the work conducted in the context of MIG@NET. Building on pioneer research conducted by one of the MIG@NET partners in France, particularly through the project 'TIC Migrations' (see <http://ticmigrations.fr> online) and on the literature on digital diasporas, MIG@NET research challenged this hypothesis and produced innovative theoretical and analytical results that will be outlined in more detail in the next section and thus making a very positive contribution to the existing academic debates.

The main theme of MIG@NET presented many challenges for the research team because it touched upon different thematic areas and addressed different groups of migrants, as well as diverse online and offline practices. The organization of the project work into thematic areas enabled researchers to engage into in-depth analyses based on concrete empirical case studies that were simultaneously conducted on national and local levels, and on the transnational level. Main challenges for MIG@NET researchers included: how to address the double focus on online and offline practices, how to delimit the object of research to specific areas of interest for migration studies, new media studies and gender studies, how to limit the geographical scope of the empirical studies given the fact that digital and migrant networks mostly operate on a transnational level and how to address current political debates related to gender equality and to transnational digital and migrant flows. The main findings of each one of the thematic work packages and the most significant results are presented below.

#### **WP4: 'Border Crossings'**

With regard to digital control, the research found that there are significant divergences between different member states and regions. Contrary to those analyses that scrutinise the technical effectiveness of EURODAC, the research emphasised the ways in which the system is becoming operational in different social and ethnic environments. In this context, it became apparent that EURODAC entries were perceived by administrative and police personnel mostly as gender-neutral 'numbers' that provide very little information about migrant identities and are used mostly to exercise the effective closure of borders to potential entries without taking into account migrants', including asylum seekers', rights.

Moreover, EURODAC was perceived by administrative and police staff in borderline regions as imposing unequal burdens amongst member-states. Contrary to the German authorities, in first-entry and transit borderlines, like the Greek and to a lesser extent the Italian one, police and administrative staff sought to minimise this burden by producing incomplete, delayed and inaccurate data entries. The report also found that digital borders are not simply constructed through the practices of EU and national institutions, but also through migrant agency. While in transit, migrants use digital technologies to cross and push the border further. At the same time, their strategies were determined by the threat of digital deportability to the extent that in order to avoid digital fingerprinting many of them had to be subjected to arbitrary and violent policing practices and precarious living conditions. Contrary to the gender-neutral approach of EURODAC, the strategies of migrant border crossers tended to be differentiated on the basis of gender.

#### **WP5: 'Communication and Information Flows'**

The research findings showed that migrants have a strong drive to remain close to the family, a desire of presence, which often overrides economic constraints. Although they use ICTs, for the vast majority of migrants the mobile phone remains the main channel of communication. Rather than being absent from their places of origin, migrants become present in different geographical locations simultaneously, through the use of digital technologies. This connected presence does not simply imply a digital mediation, but mainly a digital proximity. It is thus more and more common for migrants to maintain remote relations typical of relations of proximity and to activate them on a daily basis through the usage of new media. Media and particularly Voice over IP (VoIP) technologies contribute, in this regard, to the construction of various kinds of home territories for connected migrants. In this capacity, digital technologies become a principal social terrain for the reconfiguration of gender relations by giving rise to a variety of mediated domesticities.

## **WP6: 'Education and Knowledge'**

The research highlighted processes of ethnicisation, gendering, and 'alienisation' (in the sense of rendering migrants aliens/foreigners) of migrant students that are produced and reproduced within education institutional settings in Bologna, Athens, and Utrecht. These strategies assume different forms, but ultimately contribute to the stratification and segmentation (social, linguistic, behavioural, etc.) of the educational system. These processes, however, do not act on the 'bare life' of victims, because migrant students are productive subjects of forms of resistance and autonomous knowledge production. Migrant students at all stages of education often create autonomous ways of sociality that can cohabit or conflict with institutional ones. The research documented, along these lines, the creation and use of new transnational languages and forms of interaction, as well as conflicts among students. The construction of these transnational behaviours constituted a resource for challenging practices of institutional normalisation faced by migrant students. As an integral part of these dynamics, digital technologies constitute tools that enhance the construction of transnational relationships and ways of life amongst students.

## **WP7: 'Religious Practices'**

Research in this WP showed that especially for Muslim migrants, male and female, new media offer the possibility to challenge the prevailing images and representations of Muslim masculinity and femininity that dominate more mainstream media. Particularly specialised web-pages and online fora give Muslim women a voice that they often lack in other public spaces. Age, language, ICT literacy, but also legal status, are determining factors with regard to the ability of Muslim migrant women to connect in transnational digital religious networks. The research found that particularly young Muslim women in Europe use extensively new media (especially relevant blogs, e-mail and Facebook) in order to communicate, exchange views and enhance their presence in public debates in the host countries. Through their online practices this becomes effective. As the report argues, "Contrary to what is sometimes assumed, rather than freeing themselves from the constraints of their identity, it seems that Muslim women more often try to restructure and redefine their identities online and to renegotiate religious affiliations and transnational diaspora belongings" (MIG@NET-WP7 2012: 89).

## **WP8: 'Sexualities'**

With regard to the controversy analysis of the 'trafficking versus sex work debate', the research found that in online environments proponents of the two perspectives remain

largely disconnected suggesting that anti-trafficking discourses and policies tend to have a limited impact on migrants working in this sector. On the contrary, web-sites that adopt a sex-worker perspective tend to address more issues related to gender equality and migrant rights. Moreover, one of the main findings of the empirical research is that migrant men and women sex-workers make extensive usage of new media technologies (including mobile phones, Skype, the internet, social media and web-sites) in order to communicate with relatives and friends in their home country and in migrant communities, to exchange ideas and receive information. In addition, some categories of sex workers use new media for work purposes, including female and male escorts who often consider new technologies as a means of escaping abusive relations of exploitation that dominate the sex industry. On the contrary, according to the analysis of two commercial web-sites in Greece and in Slovenia, sex workers have very little power over the texts and images that advertise them in online user generated spaces, where the users are mostly clients. Sexist and racist discourses in these environments portray migrant sex workers as sexual objects, reinforcing gender inequalities and gender-based exploitation by both agents and clients.

#### **WP9: 'Social Movements'**

This work package explored an interesting reloading of the Lefebvrian 'right to the city'. It essentially documented three distinct instances of the metaphor in each city under study. This can be analytically distinguished as the right to inhabit and to adapt ones built, cultural and social environment according to one's habitus; the right to transform the environment to belong; the right to enter and to move on to another city and country. The migration as a social movement approach transgresses, therefore, the debates on integration and the politics of representative democracy. Along these lines, the research extends the scope of migrant-related social movements to specific living struggles of migrants, often depicted as underground, marginal or surrogate, or sometimes on the edges or margins of the law. The living struggles that the research brought to light were connected to the formation of a mobile commons by unaccompanied underage refugees moving in and out of Istanbul, to the subversion of a gentrification process in central Athens by ephemeral migrant inhabitants of the area, and multiple transformations of urban space in the divided city of Nicosia with particular emphasis to the space of its buffer zone.

#### **WP10: 'Conflict and Dialogue'**

The main finding of the analysis is that materiality and digitality become increasingly integrated in the processes of racist conflict and dialogue taking place in European societies. Especially with regards to the development of racist conflict and violence in specific neighbourhoods in the centre of Athens and Nicosia, the analysis demonstrates how the online and offline tend to be interconnected feeding upon each other to produce collective

images of the other as threatening. Moreover, the analysis stresses a perspective according to which conflicts arise not only between a dominant group of natives and a subordinate group of migrants but also between and within subgroups of different race, class and ideology. The analysis found that these conflicts tend to be linked to the notion of Europeaness and European identity, especially in the case studies of conflict between Russian migrants in the UK. Finally, the research found that on online and offline discourses stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity that are defined by ethno-nationalist, racist and linguistic criteria are dominant.

## **General results**

The research material of the thematic packages can be grouped under three main themes. This categorisation does not exhaust the work undertaken in all different areas of the project, nor is it necessarily prioritised by all the research teams involved. It can provide, however, a useful lens through which key aspects of the project's results can be re-used for further analysis and possible future research dimensions can emerge.

## **The digitalisation of migration**

The MIG@NET project introduced the concept of the 'digitalisation of migration' to approach the emerging amalgams of machines and people that produce new social relationships, identities and bonds in the context of migrant mobilities. The concept of the digitalisation of migration refers to the argument that contemporary forms of integration, and exclusion are enmeshed in the materialities of digital networks. This understanding does not consider the operation of digital networks as conceptually distinct from other social processes that may at first sight seem non-digitalised. For example, MIG@NET research on religious practices showed how the practice of prayer may be interwoven with the operation of digital networks. Praying is related to the production of digital information flows when cyber-imams give advice to Muslim believers on how and when to pray, or when believers ask questions and exchange or challenge, existing views about praying or when digital images and videos on how prayers should be digitally performed are produced and disseminated (MIG@NET- WP7 2012). The totality of everyday practices performed by migrants can be seen as being produced by and through networks with digital and non-digital nodes and edges. The digitalisation of migration, in this respect, calls for the analysis of these networks from multiple angles, focusing on the moments of conflict but also of cooperation and paying attention to how moments of tension might lead to their potential reassembling.

The concept of the digitalisation of migration takes us a step further from the 'digital diaspora' argument that defines virtual space as a new place for the reconstitution of traditional communal identities and bonds or the reinstatement of new transnational identities and networks. Different aspects of MIG@NET research show that the digitalisation of migration does not simply function as a form of transnational reconstitution or reinstatement of social relationships, but amounts to the production of new forms of social relationships, in which the machinic and the human become entrenched and impossible to disassociate.

## The digital European border

The machinic aspect of migrant networks was described by the MIG@NET border crossings research team, who argued that the digitised border was reconstructed as 'an assemblage of different (online and offline) human and non-human agents in their disputed, hierarchical and dynamic interplay' (MIG@NET-WP4 2012: 11). This approach attempted to go beyond the main assumptions of the existing literature on digital border regimes, which is based mostly on a critical analysis of the discourse of key policy actors and agencies responsible for its implementation, by producing actual field research on how EURODAC concretely influences the transformation of the border in Europe. In effect, one of the main findings of this research was that digitalisation is not merely a duplication of a clearly defined territorial border via the use of digital technologies as most of the existing theoretical approaches assume.

MIG@NET field research attempted, instead, to document the radical de-coupling of the digital from the territorial border. The main concept that was introduced by the project research team in order to capture the transformation of migrant mobilities in the face of the digitalisation of border control was that of digital deportability (expanding the notion of deportability used by Nicholas De Genova). Digital deportability has to do with the extension and multiplication of border zones within the European Schengen area as an effect of the digitalisation of the control of migrant movement. The threat of deportability becomes ubiquitous; territorial borders are displaced and then dispersed almost everywhere within Schengen as the digital identification of migrants becomes the primary source of anxiety of their presence in Europe wherever they might be located. In numerous interviews, migrants expressed this constant fear of being digitally fingerprinted and digitally identified as the principal obstacle to their mobility.

The border, through these accounts, seems inextricably linked to the practice of fingerprinting and especially to the continuous operations of the EURODAC system in categorizing and identifying or not-identifying migrant bodies through their digitized fingerprints. Border zones are thus produced via the interrelation between migrant bodies and digitized representations of these bodies; one can say that migrants embody the border - especially in the form of their fingers (MIG@NET-WP4 2012: 69). The digitalisation of migration in the context of the border and of the management of migration control gives rise to a series of alternate understandings of Europe and of migrant mobility that go beyond the common sense physical representations of space. As one Afghan woman told the researchers in an interview in downtown Athens: "Athens is the border" (MIG@NET-WP4 2012: 38).

## **Connected migrants**

Processes of digitalisation do not concern solely the construction of the border and the informatisation of migrant bodies. The research conducted in MIG@NET attempted to capture diverse aspects of the digitalisation of migration in relation to the thematic areas that were studied. Based on the concept of the “connected migrant” (term coined by the MIG@NET team member, Dana Diminescu in 2008), the project explored how migrant mobilities and subjectivities are already enacted, enabled, mapped on digital networks. Some of the key concepts that emerged in the course of the research were the following.

## **Connected presence**

Migrant mobilities in Europe are increasingly shaped by the participation of migrants in digital networks. Instead of viewing this participation of migrants through the prism of the digital divide, as is the case in many studies, MIG@NET aimed to research the materialities produced by the multiple intersections between migrant practices and digital networks. During the fieldwork, MIG@NET researchers conducted numerous interviews with migrants who produce everyday cultural and affective bonds with their places of origin or places where they have friends and relatives via the use of ICTs. VOIP technologies and mobile phones are used to construct the connected presences of these migrants within different locales. The everyday lives of migrants belong, thus, co-instantaneously to several geographical zones and social milieus. The socialities produced by these connected 'presences' highlight even more the precarious, temporary dimension of migrants' mobility but also the density of their relational networks. 'This connected presence does not simply imply a digital mediation, however, but mainly a digital proximity' (MIG@NET-WP5 2012: 5).

The connected presence of migrants was investigated by the project research teams in various forms. On the one hand, it was considered in the relation to the concept of 'home'. The digitalisation of migration challenges the notion of a single or static notion of migrant home or of a clear distinction between 'here' (their current location) and there (their place of origin). MIG@NET research showed that 'home' for migrants, whether they are on the move or have settled in host societies, signifies the ability to be connected. Migrants think of home as having access to a digital device, in many cases a mobile phone that allows them to collect information and communicate. This digital device becomes a basic need for migrants as it enables their communication with a network of friends and family wherever they might be located. As a migrant from Algeria explained, 'I sold things to buy the phone. I don't care how I'm dressed [showing her shoe with a hole]. Phone is vital. Without phone you don't have any identity' (MIG@NET-WP5 2012: 30). This led MIG@NET research to adopt a dynamic and fluid conception of 'home' that depends on the possibility of accessing digital networks and also activating them on a constant basis. Along these lines, the home is



extended into multiple localities through the use of digital technologies and in the process it produces new materialities and new mobilities.

### **Digitised knowledge and practices of mobility**

Another example emanating from MIG@NET research is how this connected presence maps on to and has a real impact on physical geographies. In the research conducted in the work package on social movements, it became clear how specific contested urban spaces were produced through the circulation of digitized information and knowledge about mobility and the possibilities of migrant settlement. The urban struggles and movements over Athens, Nicosia, and Istanbul were, thus, directly related to the migrant production of digital networks. 'People on the move create a world of knowledge, of information, of tricks for survival, of mutual care, of social relations, of services exchange, of solidarity and sociability that can be shared, used and where people contribute to sustain and expand it (MIG@NET-WP9 2012: 71). This knowledge and information produced by migrants did not only travel mouth to mouth, but were also exchanged via social network sites, geolocation technologies, alternative databases and communication streams. Some characteristic examples from the fieldwork included the appropriation of a Presbyterian church run by a Korean priest in central Athens by Afghani women for the acquisition of free meals and free medical care (some had learnt of the existence of this church when they were back in Afghanistan by contacting fellow Afghanis on the move via Skype or email) (MIG@NET-WP9 2012: 52) and a 24 hour internet cafe in Istanbul located in so-called 'Black street' (because only black people frequent it) that is used also as a sleeping place by migrants who do not have a place to stay (they sleep on the chairs of the cafe) (MIG@NET-WP9 2012: 74).

The research thus contributes to the existing discussions and theorisations of migration as a social movement by analysing how information and knowledge circulating new media about routes, shelters, hubs, resting places, policing and surveillance and strategies to defy control; but also about existing migrant communities, social support, educational resources, access to health, ethnic economies or micro-banks become crucial for the production of urban spaces. These mechanisms include potentially subversive usages of public space that result into processes of contestation within the urban fabric where migration constitutes a key dynamic. MIG@NET investigated different forms that these urban contestations may take both in relation to the development of racist conflicts in different European cities and in relation to the urban struggles over specific gentrification projects.

## Gendering the digitalisation of migration

Gender scholars, NGOs and feminist groups had already raised criticisms against EU migration policies for being gender blind and for silencing the forms of gender discrimination experienced by migrant women. MIG@NET research on the digital border points out to the ways in which new technologies of border control and surveillance are also gender blind. Migrant bodies are constructed as 'data-bodies', bodies that undergo processes through which they are identified and registered in European and national digital databases, such as EURODAC. Following identification data-bodies become objects of statistical calculation, bureaucratic evaluation, and technical hierarchisation. Although, in these databases the categories 'male' or 'female' exist, in practice they are rarely used for search purposes by the administrative and police staff. Gender categorizations are based on external observable characteristics without any reflection or evaluation of gender inequalities and discrimination. (MIG@NET-WP4 2012: 56-57)

Moreover, these gender-neutral control technologies and policies can be contrasted to the gendered strategies and practices that migrant women and men adopt in order to cross borders and to enhance their presence simultaneously in host and sending societies. Thus, migrants become data bodies in a different sense too: they enter networks of information and communication that allow them to acquire the necessary knowledge communication and information in order to cross borders. Their ability to have access to an internet connection or a mobile phone is vital not only because it gives them access to useful information about everyday life but also because it allows them to connect with the transnational networks of people on the move (MIG@NET-WP4 2012, MIG@NET-WP5 2012). Thus devices, such as digital phones or computers, that provide the means to acquire information and communication while on the move become indispensable 'machinic extensions' of migrant bodies embedded in gender practices and performativities. These findings point to the contemporary debates on gender and technology, which take as their starting point the idea that bodies are no longer -if they ever where- determined by natural differences between the sexes, but they are increasingly fashioned by technological 'prostheses'. How are gender identities formed and how are gender relations transformed when bodies on the move become connected through their machinic extensions?

The literature on gender and migration has already demonstrated migrant women's autonomous movements and showed how migrant women's affective ties become transnational as they move across borders leaving their spouses, children and other relatives in the country of origin. In the past, remittances, letters and phone calls were the main means through which migrants, especially women, were able to communicate, to continue to participate in family life from a distance and to form transnational ties. The shift that takes place in gender relations with the rise in the use of new media technologies by migrants is that as the cost of digital connections becomes lower and the time required to

connect is compressed, migrant women and men are able to connect on an immediate and every-day basis with their country of origin (MIG@NET-WP5 2012). This possibility transforms migrant lives, homes, families, and communities into transnational spaces where the digital and the material are impossible to separate and distance becomes relative to the ability to communicate.

### **'Body-based identities'**

From a gender perspective, the main question that MIG@NET raised was whether gender relations determined by geographical distance and digital proximity challenge established inequalities and hierarchies permitting migrant women and men to adopt different perspectives and alternative positionalities with regard to dominant structures, representations and perceptions of gender, race, ethnicity, age and class. In other words, one of the issues that re-emerged during the course of the research in different thematic areas was whether or not the convergence of digital and migrant networks produces spaces of gender emancipation. One of the most common, but much contested, arguments about digitalisation and gender is that it has the potential to become the locus for the construction of communities and ties which are free of gender inequalities and discrimination. This argument has been particularly influential in the study of virtual reality and gaming, which gave the false impression of a freedom from 'body-based identities' because in cyberspace one could choose his or her own body and external appearance.

Contrary to these utopian perspectives, MIG@NET research found that rather than doing away with body-based identities, new media is a terrain where bodies are re-constituted. An interesting case concerns the usage of video communication technologies, such as Skype, which according to the MIG@NET research were often considered by migrants as a means of reinforcing gender control from a distance (MIG@NET-WP5 2012). The requirement to be in a specific place at a specific time in order to communicate with relatives and friends at home, as well as video transmission in real-time were often experienced by migrant women and men as a means of surveillance of male and female migrant bodies. Rather than a body-free experience, video transmission technologies become a tool through which relatives and spouses at home are able to exercise power over migrant bodies to conform with the norms of masculinity and femininity in the society of origin (including norms on how to dress and speak, when to go out, how to behave).

Another area where MIG@NET research sought to make a contribution was that of the study of sex work and migration. The relevant debates in feminist studies have divided scholars between those who argue that the rise in migrant prostitution in Europe is a product of gender violence (including structural violence and trafficking) and those who advocate the rights of migrant sex workers. Studies of the impact of new technologies on sex work have

analysed the significant role that they play in providing sex workers in general -and migrant sex workers in particular- with the means to become autonomous. Evidence from the MIG@NET research shows that this is not a universal trend. Migrant sex workers engaged in gay escorting, who mostly used global specialised websites in which people of the same sexual orientation interact, challenged racialised representations of themselves or of other sex workers and explained that these were mostly absent from digital platforms. Gay escorting sex work appeared in the fieldwork as being relatively free from processes of ethnicisation and racialisation, as those migrants involved in the business worked largely independently and they were in a better position to be able to control the digital representations of their bodies and their profession (MIG@NET-WP8 2013: 49-50).

MIG@NET research on sexualities, however also focused on the development of web-sites based on user-generated content by heterosexual male clients. The analysis showed tendencies towards strong sexist language and the predominance of racist representations of migrant women's bodies as commercial products to be rated and evaluated by male clients. The exchange of information between male clients as well as the exclusion of female migrant sex workers' voices from these web-sites, especially from the forums, resulted into the digital production of a sexualised and racist discourse of migrant women (MIG@NET-WP8 2013). This case shows how 'body-based' identities of migrants constructed online depend on the extent to which migrants themselves are able to influence and participate in the production of content. User-generated web-pages that address and are closed to specific racially, ethnically and sexually distinct users, such as white male heterosexual prostitution clients, and exclude migrants are producing new forms of racialisation of migrant bodies.

The research on sexualities concluded that there were very few cases where participation in digital networks became a means for empowerment for migrant sex workers. Apart from a minority of gay male sex workers, the wide majority of migrants had no, or merely a marginal, voice in digital manifestations of the sex industry (MIG@NET-WP8 2013: 62). The market-driven formation of online sexualities, permeated by the impetus for making profit and commercially expanding the industry, oriented the digitalised sex market towards attracting and serving the gaze of clients-consumers. As a result, migrant women continue to be predominantly represented as 'objects of desire, who only exist online as images designed for no other purpose than to please or satisfy the male gaze and attract the clients-consumers to use them' (MIG@NET-WP8 2012: 55).

Similarly, MIG@NET research on conflict addressed the ways in which user-generated content produced by ultra-right wing individuals and groups in blogs and social media - such as Facebook or twitter - reinforced and disseminated representations and ideas about migrants as inferior and uncivilised others (MIG@NET-WP10 2012). One of the most interesting findings of this strand of research was that the online dissemination of racist and anti-migrant messages, texts and images had a distinct gender component. Discourse

analysis showed that migrants were identified as criminal and uncivilised; propagating images of uncontained, savage and dangerous masculinities, while women migrants were portrayed as stereotypical victims of male aggression. These gendered representations legitimised violent racist conflict particularly in neighbourhoods with large concentration of migrants. Ultra-right-wing violent practices were represented as masculine and virtuous responses to these dangerous forms of migrant masculinity. The absence and silencing of migrant voices from these debates made possible the widespread conviction that intercultural dialogue was impossible and racist conflict was inevitable.

Problematizing the visibility of migrant perspectives in public debates throughout MIG@NET enabled researchers to expose the ways in which gender, race, ethnicity and class are reconfigured in digital environments to produce new forms of inequality, sexism and racism. However, MIG@NET research also found that new media provide migrants in general and migrant women in particular with an open space, where they can express opinions and identities that are marginalised in host, but also sending societies. The case of Muslim women constitutes a paradigmatic example of how new media can offer a space that enables the participation of migrant women and the visibility of female migrant identities that are misrepresented (MIG@NET-WP7 2012). Similarly to gay and queer online sexual practices, discussed above, Muslim women's participation in the production of online content radically subverts the limitations of the discourse about migrant agency, cultural practice and otherness in European societies. More broadly, however, this case study manifests the ways in which migrant women, who often lack access to public space, can create mediums of expression and initiate channels of intercultural communication with European societies through the usage of social media, web-pages, blogs, twitter, online video and photography. In particular, younger migrant women are able to challenge prevailing stereotypes about their otherness and produce digital narratives and images about themselves that are radically opposed to the racist and sexist representations of migrant femininity.

### **Antinomies of the digitalisation of migration**

Through the prism of the digitalisation of migration, MIG@NET analysed contemporary forms of power as they are exercised upon migrant bodies and the social struggles that emerge in the context of these processes. The perspective of digitalisation allowed for a wider and more complex understanding of these struggles as they become embodied in digital networks, circulate as data flows and become articulated as struggles for the control of the networks themselves.

## **Appropriating digital platforms**

The dramatically increasing imbrication of digital networks in everyday life poses a challenge to the hierarchical operation of traditional media. The possibility for users of generating and circulating content gives the opportunity to counteract the once authoritative discourses produced by traditional media experts. Accordingly, MIG@NET studied how migrant users of digital platforms challenge the dominant (mis)representations about migration and migrant subjectivities and also how in this process they potentially subvert the constitution of the networks themselves.

In the case of the study of religious practices the project showed how Muslim women consider new media platforms as tools that allow them to challenge stereotypical and negative imagery that is reproduced by traditional media throughout Europe. Digital platforms become the tools that give them voice and the spaces where this voice can be heard, a right which migrant Muslim women often lack in physical public spaces. Muslim women produce, along these lines, digital networks as sites where they can express their religiosity, where this religiosity can become publicly visible (MIG@NET-WP7 2012: 89). In order to do so, migrant Muslim women often attempt to appropriate the individualized, commercialized spaces of social media for uses that were not originally built-in the development of these platforms (i.e. of Facebook or YouTube). While social media platforms are designed as machines for personalising social interaction, migrant Muslim women make through these platforms publicly visible religious practices that were previously restricted in the private sphere.

It is important to stress, here, that this attempted appropriation of the digital networks should be situated in a web of practices constituting what has been termed as 'multiple critiques'. The appropriation of digital networks does not only amount to an invasion of repressed religiosities in social media platforms and an attempt to challenge the public/private divide. Migrant Muslim women's digital performativities are also directed 'internally' as a critique of existing hierarchies within Islam and conservative Muslim communities. The appropriation of digital networks operates thus additively in challenging predominant gender roles within Islamic communities, opening up the space for non-conventional readings and interpretations of the holy texts and of performances of religious rituals and practices. Along these lines, migrant Muslim women 'create new histories and knowledges about their own lives and criticise the many accounts that are often produced about them, without consulting them' (MIG@NET-WP7 2012: 45).

MIG@NET research results have shown, however, that the appropriation of digital platforms is not a one sided process pursued by migrants. On different realms and in relation to diverse social struggles, practices of appropriation are emerging which are directed against

the rights and desires of migrant populations. As explained above, the fieldwork on intercultural conflict looked at how ethno-nationalist and racist discourses targeting migrants were propagated via digital networks. These discourses were principally distributed following the dispersed, bottom up architecture of social networks and were primarily user-generated, relying on expanding social networks around Facebook groups, pages, profiles, and likes, YouTube accounts and comments, Twitter accounts, tweets, re-tweets and mentions. In the capacity of being propagated by ordinary users, these discourses were supposed to counteract the official, anti-patriotic narratives of mainstream media.

### **Refusing essentialist identities**

MIG@NET highlighted processes of racialisation, gendering, and ethnicisation, of migrant populations, which were propagated by formal and informal actors at different societal levels (state institutions, the media, NGOs, informal social groups). Through these processes the race, gender, or ethnicity of migrants comes to be associated with a set of 'natural' roles, chaining them to their 'native' community. Racialisation, gendering, and ethnicisation are usually articulated in the context of exclusionary, or even overtly racist, politics, but they can also be associated with a politics of integration, or even multiculturalism in different contexts. An example of the first strategy is the association of essentialist racial or ethnic characteristic of migrants with a propensity for criminality and violent or sexist behaviour. An example of the second is the process where migrants are invited and expected to integrate in a specific societal environment, provided that they assume the role of a representative of their 'natural' community.

In order to criticise these processes, the research focused on practices adopted by migrant subjects that challenge or subvert their categorisation as bearers of essentialist identities. The politics of gendering, racialisation, and ethnicisation are quite overtly manifested in the more controlled and hierarchical environment of educational institutions. The research conducted in these institutions concluded that transnational and local forms of socialisation among the students were constantly challenging formal institutional norms. This was evident in the research in Bologna where in a school with a high concentration of migrant population, students shared a strong common feeling of belonging to their neighbourhood that overrode ethnic and gendered identities attributed to them by educational institutions. Students constructed their neighbourhood, located at the periphery of the city, as a source of identity that was quite autonomous from any type of ethnic belongings and functioned as a zone of transnational mixing, unified by common socio-economic conditions and the distinct social behaviour of its inhabitants. (MIG@NET-WP6 2012: 29-30). In the fieldwork conducted in Athens, the research showed how this challenging of essentialist identities by migrant students could be concretely performed through the use of digital machines. The use of Chat, an application allowing students to connect and discuss through their laptops, was performed by students, in many cases, in a new hybrid language - not proper Greek

neither the native languages of the students. Exchanges were written in a mixture of English, Greek, Bulgarian, Albanian and Georgian using alternatively both the Latin and the Greek alphabet. ICT student practices produced a hybrid language written acoustically, not following existing formal rules of written language. This language did not simply divert from the existing rules, but tended towards establishing its own ground rules: its reconfiguring existing grammar, syntax, or spelling, mixed with a use of the computer keyboard. (MIG@NET-WP6-2012: 32). Transnational moments lie thus above all in the bodies and practices of socialisation of the migrant students, questioning the essentialist identities of the migrants and the processes of ethnicisation and gendering.



## **Potential Impact:**

### **Dissemination activities**

The research conducted for MIG@NET rested on the common notion that migration processes are increasingly becoming digitalised. While all social life is becoming subject to processes of digitalisation, migration is viewed as a privileged space to study these transformations. Apart from approaching digitalisation as a key aspect pertaining to all the project's activities, researchers collaborated with new media artists and web developers for thinking further about how the research process can be translated in a series of digital media artefacts. These collaborations led to the development of three different types of digital visualisations of the migratory flows studied throughout the project that have been and will continue to be used as dissemination tools of the project's research findings: the production of digital mappings at the first stage of the project; the development of a web platform and the production of a video game at the end of the project.

### **Mapping the digitalisation of migration**

During the first phase of the project, the research teams undertook an extensive exploration of websites, forums, blogs, social networks that would be used as research material. These online resources, which were subsequently used in the different thematic research areas, were digitally mapped through three different methods that emanate from three different aesthetic forms. These three mappings are not supposed to complement or refute one another. They are supposed to be seen, instead, as operationalising an understanding of the process of mapping as the co-presence of a multiplicity of perspectives and performances.

First, through database aesthetics. The sub-site that was created for the collection of online material is in fact a mini database (see <http://www.delicious.com/mignetproject/> online). Its structure does not 'order this list' of sources in a predefined way and there is no central narrative that can represent it. The navigation of this sub-site reveals the multiple possibilities of re-using and re-ordering this list of sources and of creating alternate visual representations of it.

Second, through geolocation aesthetics. All the online sources have been placed on an interactive web map (see <http://www.mignetproject.eu/apps/map> online) according to the various topologies that have been linked with them through the bookmarking that the research teams did.

Third, through online video aesthetics. The online sources that were collected by the research teams were used in the creation of 8 online videos - 1 per each thematic package and 1 synthetic. Each video attempts to visualise a conceptual mapping of the sites and networks that were chosen by the research teams, trying also to capture the main theoretical premises that have informed the fieldwork. (See <https://vimeo.com/24276200> online).

## **The platform**

The digital platform is, first of all, an open publication tool addressing principally migrant organizations and individuals and anti-racist groups and initiatives. Via a one-step registration process, users create their profile, choose their preferred language for publication and translation and immediately get their own blog/user space where they can publish all the material that they see fit.

Organisations and individuals can then initially publish posts that are relevant to their activities, events they organize or participate in, views on current events and so on. Posts can be either original or a re-publication of articles appearing elsewhere and linked to the original web source. In this respect, the digital platform is foreseen to be used mainly, for re-publication purposes since most users are expected to be already active in some type of existing digital publishing tool (be it through personal or collective blogs and/or websites or through social media accounts).

All user profiles and all content of the digital platform are linked to one another via a multi-language interactive translation service. Every post that is uploaded in the digital platform by any user in any language is automatically translated in all the other languages that are embedded by all the other users in the platform.

Additionally, each user can also view and group all the posts that have been published by all the other users in the digital platform in his/her own space/blog translated in the language s/he has chosen. Importantly, the translation service is designed as an open and interactive process; that is the users can intervene in the translations to revise and offer alternate versions in an effort to ameliorate the translated texts in a collaborative manner.

The choice of producing an open publishing tool based on original translation services has the following advantages for migrants:

-It does not replicate other initiatives for the digital networking of migrant organizations or anti-racist groups that have been based on a straightforward social networking model or that are, in effect, limited to the national level.

-By focusing on the practice of translation, the digital platform provides a useful service for migrant groups and individuals by multiplying the digital reach of their activities, events, views in a variety of languages and disseminating them to a targeted group of fellow organisations and individuals beyond their national borders in the language that they can master.

-It attempts to address the difficulties of 'operationalising MIG@NET's transnational approach' (MIG@NET-WP3 2012) in the realm of digital production. The platform prioritizes, in this respect, the exchange of digital content and networking across borders and languages. This digital exchange of information is not necessarily mono-directional (from a particular national space to another) and not necessarily conceived as a homolingual address (from a particular language to another), but embodies the interconnectivity and the co-presence of a multiplicity of digital spaces and languages.

-It attempts to address the communication gaps amongst migrant groups and individuals across borders that emerge in many occasions as a result of language barriers (i.e. that the digital content produced by migrants is, in many occasions, only available in the 'native' language of migrant groups or individuals or the language of the host country where they inhabit).

## **The game**

The videogame Banoptikon, aspires to simulate social and political situations referring to migration flows which traverse cities, networks, rural areas and are above all inscribed on human bodies (see <http://banoptikon.mignetproject.eu/> online). Bodies are the sites where old and new technologies are applied and therefore bodies remain the basic topoi of social struggles.

The introduction of the game, takes place in a European bar where an immigrant woman narrates -facing the avatar of the user (a migrant as well)- her story of migration from Africa to Europe. The narration ends with her prompting the migrant (user) to tell his own story, at which point the user is transferred to the entrance level of the game: the Border Zone.

The user is supposed to navigate different levels of the game in order to reach its final level: The Euro-city. This is the seeming end destination of the main avatar/migrant of the game, simulating a mixture of Western European cities. It is uncertain, however, if this will actually be the final destination for the user as the risk of deportation is still present. A policeman can check the "papers" of migrant/ user and send him out of the Euro-city and back to one of Banoptikon's previous levels. In this respect, the game has no real end, as the migrant condition is sketched as always precarious.

The other levels of the game include:

- The Border Zone. a simulation of an Evros River passage of the Greek-Turkish borders. The user's mission is to cross the border and get on the bus to Athens.
- The Detention Camp: of the famous -inactive today- camp of Pagani at Lesbos Island. In the Camp, as the user explores the space, she will listen to different stories, be informed about the process of fingerprinting, the stay conditions in the Camp and of other issues concerning migration. From the Camp the user can be transferred to Athens Down Town area.
- Athens Downtown: a simulation of an area of downtown Athens which has become a dominant imagery in the discourse on migration in Greece. The user's mission is to flee in order to reach the harbour
- The Harbour: a simulation of the harbours of Igoumenitsa and Patras, is the exit gate to Italy and Europe. The user navigates this level with the purpose of getting on the boat to Italy.
- The Euro-City: a simulation of a European capital (a mix of several European cities), which is the city that migrants try to reach. There are dialogues and cards that inform the user about religious and educational issues, and the role that migrants hold in these.

## **Potential impact as far as policy is concerned**

The MIG@NET policy review found that relevant EU and national policies focus mainly on enhancing the skills of migrant and women in order to enable them to integrate into the European 'information society'. What is implicit in this policy perspective is the presupposition that most women and migrants are disadvantaged social groups that lack sufficient skills to participate in the 'information society'. Moreover, concerning migration policies, there has been a strong effort to harmonize the digitalisation of policies on illegal immigration, while policies on legal migration, integration have been mostly limited to national policy initiatives aiming at the integration of ICT specialists in European markets and the ICT training and education of migrants.

The review found that there is a gap in the existing policy framework with regard to the positive usages of new media as a means of promoting the connections of migrants with families and friends in their home country, as well as with other national and transnational networks (religious, educational, cultural, political and economic). In addition, there is still a lot of underexploited potential for the usage of new media as a means of promoting intercultural dialogue and anti-racist practices, as well as migrant women's emancipation and participation in public life and discourse. The potential of new media to facilitate the integration of migrants in host societies has been so far underestimated mainly because most policies presuppose that migrants are ICT illiterate. MIG@NET findings challenge these presuppositions and propose policy recommendations according to which new media and ICT technologies already constitute part of migrant lives, especially for younger generations and should be further used to promote synergies between migrant communities and host societies.

In this context, MIG@NET is proposing a policy framework based on the following principles.

-Acknowledge migrants' connectivity

Throughout the MIG@NET research, the salience of digital networks for migration policies was made apparent. Migration policies, however, have until today mostly considered digitalisation as a means of enforcing a more effective control of illegal border crossings. The emphasis placed both in terms of funding and policy making procedures on the control of migration flows by digital means tends to have a negative impact on migrant lives and the respect of migrant rights, including asylum seekers' rights. On the contrary, the ways in which new media is increasingly becoming a medium of migrant integration and migrant participation in the public and political life of European societies is an issue that is marginalized in policy making processes and debates. This is mainly because stereotypes about migrants' (especially migrant women's) backwardness and inability to master new

technologies are still dominant. Moreover, migrant perspectives are in most European societies still excluded from formal policy making institutions and processes as well as from most mainstream media.

-Use new media to promote migrant integration

The findings of MIG@NET suggest that digital media should be more effectively used in migrant integration policies at the EU, national and local levels. The creation of digital platforms and information web-sites may become an effective medium for migrant integration advocacy and mentoring. Moreover existing migrant forums based on ethnic, religious and gender affiliations should be used by European and national institutions in order to disseminate information on migrant policies and deliberate with migrant communities proposed legislative and administrative changes in migration policies. Also social media, such as Facebook, should be used as effective tools to boost migrant participation in public life and in decision making processes.

-Recognise migrant women's agency in digital networks

One of the central components of the MIG@NET research was gender. The studies on communication, religion and sexualities in particular showed that migrant women are increasingly becoming part of transnational digital networks as active users and producers of digital content. These findings should be integrated into gender equality policies that aim at the promotion of migrant women's role in host societies. Challenging the conception of especially young and second generation migrant women as IT-illiterate, policies and programs aiming at making use of their IT skills and knowledge may contribute to their access to European labour markets. Moreover, forums that strengthen migrant women's voices should be encouraged and developed in a way that they are more visible in official policy debates. At the same time, sexist and racist stereotyping of migrant women as sex objects online should be addressed in policies that target clients of prostitution and trafficking networks.

-Challenge dominant notions of gender, race, culture, class through digital mediums

In addition, as the MIG@NET research shows, the question of gender should not be addressed only in relation to migrant women, but also in relation to dominant notions of masculinity and femininity. In particular, migrant girls and boys tend to have a very positive impact on educational processes because through their practices they assert an active

critique of predominant gendered and racial divisions that proliferate in formal educational systems and to push towards more inclusive and gender sensitive educational practices. This impact should be effectively used in policy making on multicultural and intercultural education to improve existing curricula. More extensive usage of digital technologies in European classrooms is likely to have a positive effect on both the integration of migrant and second generation children and on gender equality.

-Use new media to fight against racism and enhance intercultural dialogue

Finally, MIG@NET findings indicate that digital media are central to the development of intercultural conflict. The rise of racist and extreme-right wing violence in many European societies and neighbourhoods has been interlinked with the spread of new media. Neo-racist groups, as the Greek and Cypriot studies on conflict and dialogue showed, have found an open ground in social media to promote ideas, beliefs and ideological positions that have been banned from mainstream media and discourse. Although the policing and control of digital xenophobic and racist speech is already on the EU agenda, its implementation is partial and incomplete. Rather than using only negative methods, new media should be used more effectively in order to bring to the forefront of public debate migrant voices against racist conflict and exclusion and promote dialogue between and within native and migrant groups.

## **Potential impact as far as research is concerned**

MIG@NET was an innovative project that may open up avenues for future research and public debate on the intersections amongst new media technologies, migration and gender. The fluidity and dynamic transformation of the objects under study requires that future research places specific emphasis on further developing innovative methodological tools and new conceptual categories for the exploration of digital networks and migrant mobilities. As the accelerated growth and continuous modulation of new media poses the continuous challenge for their concise analysis, academic researchers should be aware of the arduous task of providing useful policy insights for their social impact and political ramifications.

Taking as its starting point the interconnectedness between digital and physical worlds, new social science research on the digitalisation of migration should, therefore, draw on data visualisations and online interactions as empirical and analytical tools. It should also keep in mind that existing social science categories need to be rethought in the light of the increasing digitalisation of physical objects and spaces.

In conclusion, future research should focus on analysing both the ways in which new technologies enable the control and surveillance of migrant border crossings and the ways in which new media open up spaces for the visibility of migrant identities and practices. Another area in which especially research on gender and migration should focus is the development of transnational affective ties through the utilization of new technologies by migrants. Also, the emergence of online social, religious and educational practices that challenge gendered, racial, ethnic and class hierarchies and inequalities should be further investigated and theorised. Finally, MIG@NET has brought to the forefront the need to further develop policy oriented research on the potential of new media to enhance anti-racist initiatives and to promote integration and dialogue.

### **List of Websites:**

<http://www.mignetproject.eu/>