

## **Gender and agency in migration processes on the example of the Sahrawis migrating to Spain**

The main research problem of the study is the question of gender and agency in the migration processes on the example of the migration of the Sahrawi refugees. The research will be based on the theoretical discussion on structure and agency, and findings of gender and refugee studies.

The main research tool will be ethnographic research including narrative interviews, expert interviews and participatory observation. Ethnographic research will be conducted using the method of multi-sited ethnography in the key places of residence and migration of Sahrawis in Spain as Madrid, Basque Country and Andalusia. Interviews will be conducted with Sahrawi migrants (narrative interviews) and activists from numerous non-governmental Sahrawi organizations and with staff members of regional and state offices (expert interviews). Additional expert interviews will take place in the Sahrawi refugee camps in Algeria. Gender will be an important element in both data collection and analysis, as gender has a significant role in shaping social roles in migration processes.

The chosen case study – Sahrawi population – originates from Western Sahara territories in North-West Africa in the Maghreb region. The situation of Sahrawis is described as one of the examples of the population in the protracted refugee situation. From the beginning of the Western Sahara War (1975), the majority of the population has lived in exile in refugee camps in Algeria. From the middle 1990s, we can see a noticeable increase in the number of Sahrawis migrating to Spain. Spain is chosen by Sahrawis not only because of the geographical proximity but mostly due to (post)colonial ties: Spanish is the second official language of SADR in exile, and Spanish civil society is the most active actor of grassroots humanitarian aid in refugee camps in Algeria. Over the last 40 years of exile, we can see that a migration culture – aspiration, desire and habit of mostly young people to emigrate or start a circular migration – has developed. Mobility continues to be seen as a fundamental feature of young Sahrawis. Although the literature highlights the importance of migration for those living in refugee camps and significant new research results have contributed to our understanding of the migration in the prolonged refugee situation, the gender perspective was absent in the researches on the Sahrawi population

The detailed research goals are:

1. to describe the actual ongoing migration of Sahrawis and to introduce the socio-cultural aspects of the Sahrawi diaspora into Polish science,
2. to characterise the significance of different agents (including individuals, policies, institutions, laws, elites, imaginaries), as well as relations of power, inequalities and competition in creating migration patterns and socio-cultural context of mobility,
3. to distinguish essential structural factors which enable or constrain mobility for men and women,
4. to analyse routine practices and intentionalized actions of both migrating women and men and the impact of migration processes on gender roles.