

## WHO CARES? (AGEING, CARE AND MIGRATION)\*

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**Abstract:** *The Czech Republic is in the process of transforming its social system which is not capable of managing adequate care of its old citizens. In the last years we have witnessed an increase in the number of mediating agencies that import mainly Ukrainian migrants for the purpose of engaging them in care work focusing on elderly people. The paper presents results of pilot ethnographic research and focuses on commodification of care work for elderly people and the vulnerable character of domestic care work provided by Ukrainian female migrants in the Czech Republic. I argue that this specific “product” – the Ukrainian female caregiver – is based on the intersections of gender, ethnicity and migration.*

**Keywords:** *Migration; gender; domestic work; care*

*“Then we decided to hire Yelena.*

*We started to search on the Internet.*

*Who, what and for what price.” (Blanka, employer)*

Hired domestic and care workers, a form of employment which seemed to be on the verge of disappearance in modern society, today provide a private solution to a public problem to an increasing degree. Migrant women as providers of care work, for instance, leave their own home for work because they perceive this as the only way to sustain their family (Ezzeddine 2009). Thus contemporary social organization of care is systematically connected to structures of the global economy and social inequalities (Ehrenreich, Hochschild 2004). Changing family relations, increasing women’s participation in the labor market, and

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alternate patterns of family life style converge with demographic trends of ageing of the European population and simultaneously with institutional trends of weakening of the Western model of the welfare state and rising neo-liberal globalization (Lutz 2008).

The contemporary Czech Republic is in the process of transforming its social system, which is not capable of providing adequate care for its senior citizens. In recent years we have witnessed an increase in the number of mediating agencies that import mainly Ukrainian migrants for the purpose of engaging them in care work focusing on elderly people. The aim of the study is to examine commoditization of care work for seniors based on the intersection of gender, ethnicity and migration and to analyze the character of care work (working conditions) provided by Ukrainian female migrants in the Czech Republic.

In my pilot research of care work for seniors provided by Ukrainian migrants I will focus on the social situation of care work and the participants involved. I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews with twelve Ukrainian female migrants who work as caregivers, twelve clients – employers of caregivers (mostly the children of care-receivers) and three owners of agencies “selling” this specific care work. After a lengthy decision-making process (which was connected with the ethical aspect of research and the selected methodology), I also conducted three interviews with people receiving care from Ukrainian caregivers. I used these interviews only for the contextualization of the remaining data. For a better understanding of the researched problem I also analyzed the web sites of the agencies and their promotional material. I was allowed to study the work contracts under which the caregivers perform their work. The research was realized in the metropolitan area of Prague in 2011/2012.<sup>1</sup>

## **1. Contemporary migration trends of Ukrainian migration to the Czech Republic**

For a better understanding of my ethnographic data, in the following part I will focus on the analysis of gender in contemporary migration trends of Ukrainian migration on the territory of the Czech Republic. According to the studies of Ukrainian migration to the Czech Republic, we can characterize Ukrainian contemporary migration as economic migration (Drbohlav 2001, Uherek 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> According to research ethics, I keep all the names of my research participants and the agencies anonymous.

Leontyeva (2006: 33) states that: “The prevailing poor economic situation of Ukraine, the geographical proximity and the relatively small linguistic and cultural barriers are the main reasons behind the fact that Ukrainians currently represent the largest group of economic migrants in the CR, while the temporary labor migration of Ukrainians to the Czech Republic has for several years gradually begun to have the character of permanent migration.” Here I consider it necessary to mention that the descendants of the earlier waves of migration who are associated in expatriate communities in the Czech Republic try to distance themselves from the newly arrived economic migrants (Drbohlav, Ezzeddine 2004). During the last decade, the migration zone shifted to the east of Ukraine, and currently people from the central and even eastern parts of this country also travel to the Czech Republic to earn money. The geographic closeness of Ukraine and the Czech Republic means that male and female migrants tend to choose circular migration. Leontyeva (2006: 35) explains this as follows: “The physically demanding work conditions and often disastrous residential-stay circumstances of the Ukrainian so-called ‘gastarbeiters’ can cause a feeling of alienation, and they have the desire to earn the necessary amount of money quickly and then return home, where their families, relatives and friends are waiting. But shortly after their return, economic problems often occur. This is also influenced by high unemployment and therefore repeating the ‘work trip’ is often considered to be the only possible solution.”

It turns out that the more time female and male migrants spend circulating, the more they tend to settle down and relocate their nuclear families (Ezzeddine, Kocourek 2006). Ukrainians in the Czech Republic (like other foreigners) are concentrated in Prague and other large cities. The reason for this specific concentration is work opportunities – mainly in the construction and car industries (male migrants) and the service sector and light industry (female migrants). As Uherek states (Uherek 2001), this concentration does not indicate a tendency of placing Ukrainians into ghettos or creating ethnic space enclaves. In the case of the metropolitan area of Prague, this concentration is rather conditioned by the local locations of cheaper hostels or cheaper housing subleases at specific locations on the outskirts of the capital rather than their effort to live near their compatriots (Drbohlav, Ezzeddine 2004). According to Czech official statistics, the Ukrainians in the Czech Republic are the second largest migratory group.<sup>2</sup> By December 31, 2012, about 112,549 male and female Ukrainians lived in the Czech

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/cizinci-s-povolenym-obytem.aspxhtt>

Republic. Characterizing the educational and qualification structure of Ukrainian immigrants on the basis of existing research is quite difficult. On the one hand, partial studies (Drbohlav 2008, Gabal Consulting 2007) show that Ukrainian economic migrants are characterized by having a good educational background and high qualifications in the country of origin, but by low placement on the segmented labor market in the country. On the other hand, some representative studies (Horáková and Čerňanská 2001) presented findings which show that in the environment of Ukrainian labor migration we cannot speak about a high-average education, only 12 percent of migrants having a university education. The causes of inaccurate estimation of educationally qualifying characteristics of male and female migrants from Ukraine according to Leontyeva (2006: 34) are due to: "...the subjective inaccuracies of the testimony of the respondents. Here we must take into account both the subjective valuation of their education and conversely its secrecy and deliberate underestimation due to concerns about being 'too' qualified to perform an unskilled job."

As research shows (Gabal Consulting 2007), although Czech society is linguistically and culturally close to Ukrainian migrants, they often do not understand the rules of Czech laws and institutions. The social capital which is necessary for life in migration is not, in their case, a result of their kinship ties, but migrants buy it from the intermediary agencies which have contacts to employers, hostels or officials. But, in addition to that, the agencies also offer cultural capital – the knowledge of laws and the Czech language. The agencies change this capital into a kind of commodity or goods that immigrants pay for and the agencies do business with. Given the previously described information asymmetry, the migrants agree to the agency rules.

This gender disparity in the use of intermediary agencies is due to the above-mentioned professional segmentation in the Czech labor market. At this point I must also mention the significant number of Ukrainian migrants participating in the illegal sector. This high representation, as argued by Leontyeva (2007: 35), is due to the difficulty and the bureaucratization of the process of applying for work permits and visas, and lack of comprehensible information "pushes Ukrainian workers to often prefer a 'simpler' way of earning money. The hierarchically built networks of brokers and various 'entrepreneurs' usually behave like parasites on this, and they rob even the less well-off illegally employed Ukrainians. What also contributes to this is the high demand for cheap labor in the construction field and the lack of sanctions against those who employ illegal workers in the destination country – the Czech Republic.

The studies (Drbohlav, Ezzeddine 2007, Leontyeva 2006) show that since 1989 masses of mainly men of productive age (with their own nuclear families left behind) travel from Ukraine to the Czech Republic. They mostly come alone in order to earn a living for their families or close relatives who remain at home. However, in the last five years we have started to witness a change in this pattern and now we are seeing an increase in female migration, so that the difference between numbers of men compared to women is continuously decreasing. In 2009, Ukrainian women made up 42 percent of the total number of Ukrainian migrants in the Czech Republic (Foreigners in the Czech Republic, 2009). Family studies (Ezzeddine and Kocourek 2007, Gabal Consulting 2007) show that 70 percent of male and female Ukrainians in the Czech Republic live without their children. They therefore form the largest group of transnational parents who live and work in the Czech Republic.

## **2. Migrant care work as a product (commoditization of care work)**

According to Hooyman and Kiyak (2011: 394) caregiving “whether informal or formal, denotes supportive, nonmedical, mostly low-tech services, such as help with bathing or eating, and some medical services, such as administering medications and attending to surgical wounds.” In this way, agencies that mediate jobs sell care work to their clients – families that hire caregivers to take care of their parents and their relatives. As I found out in my research, together they form a specific “product” of care.

I will argue here that this specific product – a Ukrainian female caregiver – is based on the intersection of gender, ethnicity and migration. I will focus on each category in detail.

As my research shows, casework for the elderly in a household is primarily based on the reproduction of traditional gender relations. Although it is physically quite a demanding job, it is still expected to be carried out by a woman. Bridget Anderson (2000: 113) argues that: “Paid domestic workers reproduce people and social relations not just in what they do (polishing silver, ironing), but also in the very doing of it (a foil to the household manager). In this respect the paid domestic worker is herself, in her very essence, a means of reproduction.” Care of the sick and the elderly has an intimate character. As physical hygiene is considered a part of the care procedure; it is closely associated with the body. Based on interviews with the families and agencies I believe that this is the

strongest reason for choosing women caregivers. As Gregson and Lowe (1994: 3) say: “Employers want more than labor power. They often openly stipulate that they want a particular type of *person*, justifying this demand on the grounds that they will be working at home.” As my analysis shows, agencies construct an ideal type of *person* whose characteristics include typically female qualities: loyalty, willingness, diligence and empathy. This discourse is also supported by the visual aspects of web sites and marketing materials, on which we can find stylized slender, smiling and attractive caregivers dressed in bright medical uniforms. Clients, namely the families who order this service for their relatives, have also reflected in interviews what typical characteristics they imagine in the caregiver. These have been mainly trust, loyalty, discretion, willingness, diligence, cleanliness and empathy. The narrative of Jiřina (a Czech employer) here may be used as an example of how features of the “ideal” caregiver are characterized:

*“Well, she must be a sensitive woman. Helpful and kind. She should not be scruffy, but must be careful. And I have to trust her, because my mother has valuable things at home.”*

The female character of this type of work is also based on the age of Ukrainian migrants. All my informants were women with personal and actual experience with motherhood and care, and their ages ranged between 30–45 years. Maternity seemed to add to their quality for this type of work.

*“They are simply experienced women, mothers of families. They know how to take care of the household, and they are strong women who know how to work hard.”* (Agency 2)

But the flip side of the value of motherhood in this case is its form. As Sotelo argues (Sotelo 2001: 16): “Transnational mothers bring a new dimension to the quality of motherhood; new inequality and a new meaning of the family.” In addition, transnational mothers are responsible for the maintenance of their nuclear home in Ukraine. During interviews Ukrainian mothers reflected feelings of guilt that they “failed” in fulfilling the socially expected intensive motherhood. Irina reflected on this:

*“This life here is not easy, neither the work nor the fact that you are far away from your children. You feel sad, but you do the job for them. Every mother wants the best for her children.”* (Irina, Ukrainian caregiver)

*“The hardest thing for me is that I am far away from my family and children... It is true that they are now teenagers, but I miss them. I say to myself that I have to withstand the loneliness. Because of this they have a better life.”* (Oxana, Ukrainian caregiver)

Another important category is the migration status of care workers. The Czech Republic is chosen by Ukrainian transnational mothers as a destination for their work migration mainly because it is possible, due to the geographical proximity, to conduct circular migration between the two countries. On the one hand the life “here” and “there” and the mobility of female labor migration give Ukrainian mothers the possibility of coordinating productive and reproductive work. On the other hand, they are “trapped” in the net of unqualified work, and it is hard for them to obtain a stable job (Ezzeddine 2011).

Another specific feature of gendering this type of work is generally linked with the position of Ukrainian female migrants in the Czech labor market. We can observe some professional segmentation, when male migrants are employed mainly in construction and industry, women in the service sector and light industry (Ezzeddine, Kocourek 2007). This is closely linked with another problem of female worker migrants (not only from Ukraine) – non-compliance of gender equality in the Czech labor market. Employed female migrants stated that they earned approximately a quarter less than men, which is a big difference in the case of social rank and the size of the salary of the economic migrants (Gabal Consulting 2007). This unequal situation was also reflected by caregivers whom I interviewed. They described it as the main reason for accepting a job in the field of domestic care.

The residence permit for foreigners in the Czech Republic depends on the existence of a valid employment contract. Thus, if the economic migrant suddenly loses his/her job for some reason and is unable to find another one quickly, he/she is obliged to leave the country. This can cause strong dependence on his/her employer or agency (Tollarová 2006). In this context my Ukrainian informants expressed feelings of insecurity, fear and worries about the future. If faced with problems in the course of their work (such as not respecting the working hours or a change in the job description) and it not being possible to agree with clients through the agencies, they considered other options for their stay abroad. Since most women I surveyed sent remittances to Ukraine on which their nuclear families (especially children) depended, their decision to stay in degrading working conditions was more difficult.

*“It is a problem: when you lose your job, you have to find another one quickly. If you don’t find one, you lose your residence permit. You suddenly re-think about that. Now it is harder to find a job because of the crisis. The whole family in*

*Ukraine is waiting for my money. I am a widow and so I am responsible for them. Then of course you try to negotiate.”* (Natasha, Ukrainian caregiver)

*“In the first family I was responsible for a very hard case. It was a case of dementia, an aggressive grandfather, poor guy...well, I really didn’t manage that physically and psychologically. Yeah, but the agency did not have anything else to offer me. So I had to stay and wait. In this in turn they helped me, they are polite people. But normally you would have left. But I can’t do that. I am a foreigner and this is a problem.”* (Yelena, Ukrainian caregiver)

The problem of employing migrants in the Czech Republic is the complicated system of legalizing the stay of migrants, which leads to a combination of legal and illegal practices. Here I find it important to remind the reader that in the Czech Republic it is very hard for a family to employ nationals of third countries to work in private households. Agencies use this fact in a clever way and offer a “suitable” solution. Legalizing the residence is one of the benefits they seduce their clients with. An illustration might be the following argumentation on the web site of Agency 1: “YY (name of the agency) can ease for you all the administrative work that is linked with the legalizing of your helper. If you are interested, we can help you and minimize the unpleasant and lengthy arranging.”

The agency type of work might not necessarily be an adequate solution for female migrants themselves. The problem of employing migrants in the Czech Republic is the complicated system of legalizing the residency status, which leads to a combination of legal and illegal practices. With regard to the situation of working migrants in the Czech Republic, Jacob Hurrle claims that “the problem of the current system is the ‘production’ of illegality: it is very easy for a migrant to turn into a person who behaves illegally, for example due to minor administrative problems. In many cases migrants are not aware of this because they are ‘administered’ by intermediaries (Hurrle 2011: 5).”

The last category involved in the process of commodification of care work for seniors provided by Ukrainian female migrants which I will analyze is their ethnicity. Ukrainian female migrants in my research talked about the limits arising from their ethnicity connected to their experiences of their situation as second class citizens. Especially with regard to situations of conflict arising during the interaction with clients and their families.

*“The old man thought that he was missing some cash. So he started shouting at me that I am that Ukrainian thief. That we shouldn’t be trusted. So with his*

*daughter we searched the whole house and found it in the bathroom. He forgot it there. He is sick, but it is not nice that he curses me as a filthy Ukrainian woman.”* (Irina, Ukrainian caregiver)

*“I changed my work place. In the previous place they thought that if they hired a Ukrainian woman, she would work there like a horse. No free time, and they did not abide by the contract. After that they said to me that as a Ukrainian I have to be glad that I live in ‘civilization.’ And I am from Lvov!”* (Yelena, Ukrainian caregiver)

I suggest that there are more reasons for the negative evaluation of reflection of their ethnicity. First of all, Ukrainian male and female migrants work more as employees, where they come into close contact with Czechs as subordinates. Secondly, compared for example with Vietnamese male and female migrants, they do not move in closed social networks of their communities. Thirdly, they are not considered different by the mainstream society, and, fourthly, they come from one post-socialist country to another post-socialist country. But ethnicity has become an important aspect that paradoxically favors them on the Czech care market. Owners of the agencies that employed them stressed the benefit of their ethnicity and membership in the Slavic ethnic group, as it is something that is not totally unknown and is financially affordable compared to other types of domestic care.

*“Originally we wanted to apply the Israeli model and bring Filipino women here. We were surprised that there was no interest in them. People here are still xenophobic, they fear anything new. So we shifted to Ukrainian women who learn Czech fast, look the same as Czechs, and understand the life here.”* (Agency 1)

*“Ukrainian women are like us. No problem. They can speak the language, it is simply the same. Old people are conservative and it is hard for them to get used to someone who is not from their family. This job presents big penetration into privacy.”* (Agency 2)

*“Some want only Czech women, but they are simply cheaper. And this is what wins. There is hard competition even in this business!”* (Agency 3)

Here it is necessary to mention that agencies in their advertisements do not directly target their potential clients (families buying care for their elderly relatives) by offering them Ukrainian caregivers (even if they mediate work for Ukrainian female migrants). Agencies use the term *foreign* female domestic worker or *foreign* female caregivers.

### 3. Care work as a family issue

I observed in my research the gendered nature of family care. Researchers suggest that there are specific characteristics of women as caregivers. These are based on their feelings and psychological responsibility. We cannot say that male members of the family will be totally excluded from family care. Men tend to focus more on sporadic task-house maintenance, financial management or occasional shopping (Hooyaman and Kiyak 2011: 402): “Sons are more likely to adopt an attitude of ‘you do what you have to do’ and use a ‘work’ paradigm in approaching care giving.” But in comparison to female caregivers they provide less personal care such as bathing, dressing, etc. The decision to involve another – foreign female migrant in the care process was motivated by more than one factor. The first related to the inability to link their job with coordination of care for the elderly. Although Czech social policy officially proclaims the importance of family care, the reality is more complex. Helena, who employs a Ukrainian caregiver for her father, argues similarly:

*“I’d love to take care of my mother by myself if there were a possibility to work for fewer hours and get good money... but if I do not go to work, I cannot support and feed my family from social benefits only because the children are still studying. And what kind of pension will I have then? I can’t do that, certainly not in this period.”*

Contemporary Czech families depend financially on the wages of both partners. This is the main reason why female caregivers try to coordinate their productive activities with caregiving. As my research shows, some women have tried to implement flexible coordination of work and care. However, they find this way to be problematic. An example of this might be the story of Jitka (who took care of her mother after a stroke):

*“I managed to arrange things at work, but it was difficult. You are at work for only four hours, but then you fly back home where someone who needs care is waiting for you. You have to do the speech and walking therapy with her, taking her out for a walk. Then you have to cook, clean... then again there come the children who are waiting for you at home, and you have to take care of them, too. I was very tired. Every morning I take care of my mother till the time Oxana comes. She stays with her for four hours, takes her out, does therapy with her. She cooks for the whole family and cleans the house. I cannot manage that physically any more.”*

Another reason for hiring an aide was the fatigue accruing from taking care of elderly and sick persons. Elderly people often experience not just health

problems, but also cognitive impairment and associated behavioral problems. This stress creates a sense of burden on the caregiver. It is necessary to remember that family caregivers are not professional care givers with appropriate training for this type of work (but that does not mean that they do not experience similar feelings).

*“I almost collapsed. I was very angry at his (the father’s) behavior, and sometimes I did not know if I was not even worsening my care. I am not a doctor after all. In addition, I had no contact with any one, I did not have enough time for my family and friends. I was isolated. But I always wanted to take care of them. I considered that my duty. But after almost three months I said ‘Enough!’”* (Věra, Czech employer)

I have to suggest here that my research shows differences between the social group of employers who employ groups of in-home and out-of-home care givers. The price of in-home care is too high compared to the average wage in the Czech Republic. While out-of-home service is used by middle-class families, families hiring in-home caregivers are those with above-average incomes from the metropolitan area of Prague. They work as managers, businessmen, doctors and bankers. During interviews with this category of employer-families their socio-economic position was clearly reflected. Rather than express feelings of guilt or personal dilemmas regarding the coordination of work and care, they spoke about their *“financial possibilities to be able to pay for the best standard”* or *“ability to provide the best that is on the care market.”*

But both social groups of employers reflected the same difficulties in the decision-making process of whether or not to involve Ukrainian migrants for their care needs. Families carefully considered various options for care. Their reasoning was based on the critique of state-managed institutions which do not have a good reputation because of the bad conditions that prevail in them. The only solution then is to hire a paid caretaker who will take care of the elderly in their own environments to which they are emotionally attached.

#### **4. Paid domestic care work for seniors – a real job?**

As research shows, employment agencies do not advertise this type of work as care work, but rather generally as domestic work. The reason for this special perception of care work is very pragmatic. It stems from the fact that the Czech Republic is protecting its own labor market and requires care work to be carried out by people with verified adequate education or professional certification.

Czech state officials accept original qualifications and education for only 30 percent of Ukrainian female migrants – mostly with university degrees (Gabal Consulting 2007). At the same time the process of verifying qualifications takes time (from six months to one year) and involves additional costs and expenses for professional translators and bureaucracy fees.

*“Agency XY will procure for you experienced helpers and housekeepers from abroad who will provide you and your relatives with long-term assistance at your home.”*(Agency 3)

*“Since we have available experienced and proven helpers and housekeepers from abroad, we can help ensure a helper for you who will focus on all the client’s specific needs.”* (Agency 2)

When care work is implemented (even by qualified caregivers) in the private environment, it is perceived as reproductive-unskilled labor (Sotelo 2001). However, during interviews with clients (potential employers of caregivers) agencies emphasized the contrary, i.e., the professionalism of their care workers, based on relevant qualifications and experience of working in medical institutions. In my previous research I found that Ukrainian female domestic workers (nannies, maids) strictly based their employment biography on “before” and “after” obtaining skilled work, where they were more able to apply their original education and personal abilities (Ezzeddine 2011). Ukrainian caregivers perceive their care work for the elderly as skilled work, even though they prefer to regard home care service as a stage on the path to a future job in health service in the Czech Republic allowing them to return to their original profession.

*“I am something like a nurse, I give injections, I give treatments like in a hospital. I do everything like in a hospital, only I am at someone’s place at home. It is more like health work. Something which I studied. It is not only cleaning anymore.”* (Svetlana, Ukrainian caregiver)

*“It is like a nurse. Just at home. Yes, you have to clean, to cook but it is more like a nurse’s job. I am waiting for verification of my nursing education from Ukraine... So it is at least experience. It can help me when I look for a job. I want to work as a nurse in senior homes. To rent a flat, to bring the children and to work as a regular nurse.”* (Nina, Ukrainian caregiver)

On the other hand agencies offer the market a comprehensive care “product.” They also include other types of service relating to the organizational and hygienic functioning of the house, for example, cleaning, cooking, shopping or ironing. Agency web sites promote vague and general specifications of work activities – “ordinary household cleaning.” This can lead to various conflicts for

both sides – clients (employers) and caregivers (Ukrainian female migrants). Employers argue that they ordered full service, and caregivers highlight the housework as an additional service.

*“We have ordered whole service from the agency, including cleaning. That is why we are demanding it. There is lot to do, I admit. But we ordered and paid for it. It is like any other service.”* (Jiří, Czech employer)

*“Well, I just don’t consider cleaning the windows every month as regular cleaning. I clean every day, and they (the children of the person who is been taking care of) come and say that I need to clean the cellar. I don’t have that in my contract.”* (Natasha, Ukrainian caregiver)

Caregiving includes performing emotional work. There are existing social expectations about appropriate feelings, based on one’s social role and the situation and the actors involved in it. Hochschild refers to “feeling rules”: “An individual is conscious of a moment of ‘pinch.’ or discrepancy between what one does feel and what one wants to feel. The individual may try to eliminate the pinch by working on feeling.” When we are trying to link a particular emotion to an appropriate situation – (in this case caregiving), we are performing “emotional work” (Hochschild 1979: 562). The expectation of the “human” aspect of caregiving, decent manners and individual attitudes are perceived as the main reason why families decide to hire a caregiver. The “human aspect” of home care was shown in contrast to inhumane conditions found in hospitals and senior medical institutions.

*“I did not want to give her (Mum) to those collective institutions, maybe they do good health treatment but they do not perceive you as a human being. They have no time for you. I want something different, somebody who will behave with good manners toward her.”* (Milena, employer)

*“To be nice! To take care of her, to listen to her long stories, to speak with her, to accompany her..... That is all I want. And what I pay a lot of money for...”* (Vladimír, employer)

*“I know that ((he) still will be Mr. XY, not just a room number like in a senior home. Even though he is old and ill, he still feels emotions, he needs to feel human communication....!”* (Josef, employer)

Concurrently Ukrainian caregivers also stressed the emotional aspect of their work. They reflected on it as an important part of their work; they spoke about “*keeping a good atmosphere at home because it helps them....*,” “*keeping them optimistic with a smile, even if you are personally not in the mood at that moment,*” or “*the good mood of a senior saves your energy.*” Caregivers

emphasized a clear link between the psychological and physical condition of elderly people, which helps them to improve social communication during care work. Another problematic aspect of this type of work concerns in-home domestic care – six of the studied Ukrainian caregivers work in in-home care – where caregivers live in the house of the person they are taking care of. The latter type of service in which the caregiver lives and works in one household is less common in the Czech Republic (for example in comparison to the situation in Germany and Austria). According to the agencies that organize this type of service, it is still perceived as problematic in the Czech Republic. People are not accustomed to sharing their intimate domestic space with a “stranger.” They see it as significant penetration into their private space.

*“There was a problem here to convince people that the form of in-home service is simply more convenient. In terms of the safety of the health of an old man, but also with regard to financial issues. People here are not used to this kind of service; we have to convince them in almost every case.”* (Agency 3)

When you conduct your work in the same place as you live, and that space is not your own personal space, it is difficult to maintain a boundary between work time and private time. The lack of personal space and one’s private and personal life can lead to feelings of social isolation, frustration and feelings of loneliness. This can be even truer in the situation of Ukrainian female migrants who live geographically far from their friends and loved ones, even though my informants were not new in the host society – most of them had already stayed at least six months in the Czech Republic.

*“What is hard about this work is that you live there, actually in your work. And you don’t have your life. I cannot invite friends to visit me because they don’t wish that. I also don’t go out too much and sometimes I feel very sad. I think that I can stay on this job for a year... not more than that.”* (Irina, Ukrainian caregiver)

*“I don’t have any life. I live where I work. My only free day is Sunday. This is what we agreed upon. But I am simply locked up there with that old lady. She doesn’t talk a lot... and she sleeps. The only time I go out is when I do the shopping. I miss people.”* (Yana, Ukrainian caregiver)

Since female migrants work in the same place where they live and the performance of their work is done within the closed walls inside a private flat or house, it is difficult to formalize the nature of the work. Interviews with the owners of the agencies showed that it was also difficult for them to set up their business in Ukrainian care work to form work contracts in accordance with the present – in their view inadequate – legislation. The final versions of working

contracts were formed only during real experience and practice. Even so they contained vague and general commitments that could be interpreted in different ways. An example is the following formulation of a specific contract:

*“Monthly expenses for domestic workers and maids are 15,000 Czech crowns for six working days a week (plus full board and lodging in the house of the employer).”* (Agency 2)

According to interviews with the families that employed Ukrainian caregivers and according to testimonies of Ukrainian caregivers, it was shown that mainly the food (specifically in reasonable quantities) and the intensity of work (especially for personal free time) were perceived as conflictual areas of the work relationship.

*“It was written in the contract that she has to work six days a week, but she was always sitting there watching TV when I came home in the evening. I understand that she doesn’t have to work all the time, but when I told her that she should clean the windows, she stared weirdly. She has to know what to do for all that money...”* (Karel, employer)

*“I did not go shopping. That was always done by the daughter or son of that sick person. He eats mainly diet food and very small amounts...and I was always hungry. Accompanying him to the toilet and cleaning him up – this is hard work. I was shy to tell them, so I also buy my food alone. Even though it is included in the contract, yes.”* (Yelena, Ukrainian caregiver)

Even though in-home care causes socio-psychological problems for in-home caregivers it also has positive impacts on the economic status of Ukrainian female migrants. It reduces living expenses (accommodation, food) during the economic migration and increases remittances sent back home. In 2011 the average wage in Ukraine was 248 EUR while in the Czech Republic it reached 1060 EUR. The monthly wage for a Ukrainian in-home caregiver is around 610 EUR and depends on the agency and professional demands of care.<sup>3</sup> My informants cited reaching a target accumulation of remittances as their primary motivation for in-home care work. Leontyeva and Tollarova (2011) found that the average annual sum of remittances sent back by Ukrainian female migrants working in the Czech Republic is 1220 EUR. It is obvious that my informants could easily save more money than the average Ukrainian female migrant in

<sup>3</sup> Statistical data for Czech Republic are available at [http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/prace\\_a\\_mzdy\\_prace](http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/prace_a_mzdy_prace). Statistical data for Ukraine are available at <http://job.ukr.net/news/samyevysokie-zaprplaty-v-kyieve-a-samyenizkie-na-remopolwine/>

the Czech Republic. Caregivers regarded a one-year work contract as a chance to “earn good money” and, owing to the nature of the work, the right time limit in a demanding job far from home and families. Female migrants spoke about the psychological aspect of having a clearly defined time frame to spend in someone else’s private home.

*“It is important for me to know that I will work like this just one year. I am counting the days on my calendar. I will see the children at Christmas and during holidays. I want to stay in the Czech Republic longer, but not in this job. I can save money to send back to them. But one year is enough.”* (Oxana, Ukrainian caregiver)

The second group of Ukrainian caregivers (six Ukrainian female migrants), out-of-home caregivers (who provide care service from five to eight hours daily), had lower salaries. They prefer out-of-home service because they are aware of the precarious situation of in-home care service associated with the psychological demands of this type of work. They had to find complementary wage-earning activities such as cleaning (private homes or hotels) or occasional baby-sitting in order to accumulate more remittances. As a result of this combination of jobs they work nine to thirteen hours daily. As my research shows, out-of-home care work is favored by more experienced Ukrainian female migrants (some of them with in-home care experience) who have built a strong social network which helps them to find (and sustain) complementary jobs.

## Conclusion

Even though families have always been the primary caregivers of elders, family care used to be perceived by Czech policy makers as nonexistent. The first time “family caregiver” was used by policy makers was in The National Program for the Preparation of Ageing for the period 2008 to 2012 (Quality of Life in Old Age): “Care is provided for elderly people in particular by family, partner and children. It cannot be expected that the family ceases to play an important role in the coming years. The role of the family will not consist only of providing care, but also of providing necessary assistance and support. Family policy should pay systematic attention to the adoption of comprehensive measures to support families and caregivers.” But as Hooyaman and Kiyak (2011: 395) argue: “Nevertheless, the family significant contributors to elder care is still largely unrecognized by many policy makers, creating a ‘shadow workforce’ in geriatric health care.”

As my research shows, even those female family caregivers who had expected to enjoy caring and the opportunity to experience emotional closeness to the elderly family member expressed tension over the obligation of returning the care to their parents. This tension arises from feelings of guilt for not taking care of them when they need them most versus the obligation towards their own families (both emotional and financial). The isolation and the lack of time for personal interests and hobbies, as well as time for their families, were given as the main reasons that led to the decision for employing a caregiver. The decision to involve Ukrainian migrants in care was not a simple process. Families carefully considered various options for care. Since state-managed institutions do not have a good reputation because of the bad conditions that prevail in them, the only solution is then to hire a paid carer who will take care of the elderly in their own environment, to which they are emotionally attached.

On the other hand, it is precisely the endeavor to improve their children's lifestyle as well as the material and financial circumstances of the family that Ukrainian caregivers consider when preparing to migrate for work. They could assign their remittances (Carling 2005) to achieving the goal of transforming their family structure through providing basic requirements such as education and health care, etc., for their children. Their earnings also could contribute to the country of origin in the sense, for instance, of migrants investing in land purchase, agricultural implements or of setting up a family business. Tolstokorova (2009a) points out, however, that the accumulation of economic capital derived from migration is primarily spent on direct consumption, education for their children and housing. A great deal less is spent on investing in small businesses. Tolstokorova (2009b) attributes this minimal investment in long-term sustainable family businesses to Ukraine's lack of support (legislative, political, and economic) for developing this type of entrepreneurship. The consequence of this is that migration influences the growth in economic consumption of the migrants' families but possibly only at the cost of one or more family members being absent from the family for a longer term.

I believe that the process of ageing society in the Czech Republic will lead to the recruitment of a larger amount of foreign labor. It is important that migrant caregivers receive all their social rights, especially a dignified residence status, verification of qualifications and, if necessary, even an easier process of reunification of transnational families.

The problems and risks of domestic work are already reflected on the international level. In June 2011 the International Labor Organization (ILO)

adopted the *Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers*, where for the first time it even applies its rules to the informal economy sector. Particular attention here is paid to female migrants because of their increased vulnerability and inequality which lead to further abuse of rights. States do have obligations under international agreements, for example the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women*, to adopt procedures in order to ensure the same protection rights for these groups. However, in reality the question of the position of female workers in domestic work stays outside the interest of many countries, including the Czech Republic. It is necessary for the Czech Republic to adopt relevant laws which will solve the position of domestic workers (including migrant caregivers) on the legislative level.

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