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Who will care for the (Ukrainian) carers?

This issue of CMR Spotlight focuses on the situation of Ukrainian migrants in Poland in Covid-19 times.

Their fate has drawn media and political attention, with a government member even claiming that a million Ukrainians had left Poland, freeing up workplaces for Poles in crisis times! In fact, the number was 150,000 to 180,000 persons (see data in article by Ignacy Jóźwiak – page 6).

Some other important issues linked to their work in Poland are not publicly commented upon. "No one is discussing the fact that Ukrainian migrants in Poland are significantly involved in providing social care to the elderly, making them both potential vectors of disease to our most vulnerable citizens, and essential workers who need protection" - warns Alexandra Levitas (page 2).

Ignacy Jóźwiak focuses on the precarious position of Ukrainian workers in Poland, which was the case even before the epidemic. Many attempt to transition out of this temporality. Will the epidemic hamper their efforts? (read page 6)

CENTRE OF MIGRATION RESEARCH

Care Work During Covid-19: Public Health Implications of Ukrainian Migration into Poland

Alexandra Levitas

No one is discussing the fact that Ukrainian migrants in Poland are significantly involved in providing social care to the elderly, making them both potential vectors of disease to our most vulnerable citizens, and essential workers who need protection.

On January 30th, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the outbreaks of Covid-19 a "Public Health Emergency of International Concern" – its highest alert status (World Health Organization, 2020). In the subsequent months as the disease spread worldwide, governments introduced unprecedented measures to curb viral spread, including locking down cities and closing international borders. These drastic measures to restrict population movement and slow transmission were designed to protect healthcare systems from overload. But the pandemic is exposing more than just the fragility of national healthcare structures. It also sheds new light on the complex issues that come with global migration.

First, the crisis has made it clear that population movement across borders can pose serious public health threats, especially if migrants are not given access to healthcare services in their host countries. Second, the crisis has made visible the critical roles migrants play in host country economies, particularly in agriculture where food supply chains have been disrupted without the influx of seasonal migrant workers.

In Poland, attention to both these issue remains in its infancy. To its credit, Poland has acknowledged that leaving migrants without healthcare access can be detrimental to controlling viral spread and is now allowing uninsured foreigners to access Covid-19 related treatments (Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej, 2020). At the same time, the country is scrambling to figure out how to make up for the lack of nearly 145 thousand seasonal Ukrainian workers who would normally have come to Poland between May and June to work the fields (Minich & Kravchuk, 2020).

So far, however, no one is discussing the fact that Ukrainian migrants in Poland are also significantly involved in providing social care to the elderly and chronically ill: populations that are at once the most vulnerable to Covid-19, and also require care currently not being adequately provided for by Polish institutions. In short, Ukrainian migrants fill a gap in Poland's provision of social care which gives their work important implications for the country's public health. Amid a pandemic, they become both potential vectors of disease to

our most vulnerable citizens, and essential workers who need protection themselves.

Social Care and Ukrainian Carers

The provision of good social care is an important, though often forgotten, aspect of a functioning healthcare system. Currently, as elderly and sick individuals are more at risk of developing severe Covid-19 symptoms, ensuring their protection is critical in keeping mortality low. Still, care homes worldwide, including in Poland, have seen devastating death rates and are struggling to keep both carers and care home residents safe.

Most of Poland's social care, however, is not institutionalised, as the system is still underdeveloped. Instead, a vast majority of individuals are informally cared for at home, with some of this care, especially in larger cities, outsourced to Ukrainian domestic workers. Though we do not know the exact extent to which care is provided by migrants, the role Ukrainian women play in providing informal social care is dangerous to ignore.

Ukrainian women were largely invisible as caregivers even before the Covid-19 pandemic. Most have retired early in Ukraine and come to Poland in search for temporary, usually informal work to supplement their incomes. Some may have nursing backgrounds, but many have no formal care training and engage in a mix of domestic tasks including cleaning, cooking, childcare, alongside care work. Significantly, the majority of this work is uncontracted and informal, with migrant women travelling in circular patterns between Poland and Ukraine and picking up work shifts as needed without the cost or administrative hassle of formal employment. The informal status of domestic workers,

however, leaves them in a precarious situation, with limited access to social services, no workplace protections, and a lack of national health insurance. In the context of Covid-19, it is especially important to address these vulnerabilities and to question how the crisis is affecting these caregivers.

Public Health Implications

It is currently impossible to say precisely how Covid-19, and its associated border closures, will affect Ukrainian domestic workers in Poland. The pandemic, however, has already intensified some of the vulnerabilities migrant carers face worldwide, and has exposed weaknesses of informal social care systems.

Migrant women risk unemployment as employers may fear domestic workers will transmit Covid-19 to their family members. In Italy, where Ukrainian women take on similar roles to those in Poland, many have been stranded after losing their jobs, with no income and limited ability to return to Ukraine (Ghiglione, 2020). In Poland, the proposed *Anti-Crisis Shield*, which would provide economic protections during the crisis, has been criticised as insufficient (Rae, 2020) and does not include any protection for those working informally or those dismissed from informal work. Ultimately, the fear of being stranded without income has been so great that tens of thousands of Ukrainians returned to Ukraine when border closures were announced (IOM, 2020). While the long-term effects of this exodus remain unknown, Poland must be cautious and ensure economic insecurity does not negatively affect the future flow of carers into the country, as the aging population and lack of formalised care is likely

to continue increasing the demand for informal carers.

Meanwhile, those domestic workers who do remain employed during the pandemic face inherent risks from care work: unavoidable close contact, exposure to bodily fluids, and emotional fatigue as caring for the sick and elderly throughout the crisis will undoubtedly come with heightened hygiene expectations and additional stress. At the same time, domestic workers worldwide are not being provided with adequate personal protective equipment (PPE), have no access to paid sick leave, and, given the informality of their work, often lack training on how to best protect themselves and those they care for. Ukrainian women in Poland are no different, leaving them with an increased vulnerability to Covid-19 infections, especially as the pandemic may also increase the need to provide care. Some domestic workers may be pressured to live-in with their employer to avoid transmission, though this raises concerns about profound isolation and possible abuse, as seen in countries where live-in arrangements are more common (Daragahi & Trew, 2020). Closures of places of worship and institutions supporting migrants may additionally cause collapse in migrant support networks, adding additional vulnerability.

From a public health standpoint however, workers who continue working in multiple households are a particular concern. Covid-19 spreads through close contact, which is why physical distancing and restrictions on interactions have been generally successful in slowing transmission, and why particularly vulnerable individuals, such as the elderly, have been asked to self-isolate. Yet carers moving between households threaten the success of distancing and isolation and introduce the possibility of the virus being brought directly into people's homes. This threat is further exacerbated by the typical living conditions of domestic workers in Poland, who share apartments with multiple other women, who in turn might interact with more households during a typical day. In fact, even in countries like Singapore, which have successfully kept Covid-19 death rates low, the most significant outbreaks occurred in migrant worker dormitories. In Poland, the additional failure to conduct adequate Covid-19 tests among the general population, makes it difficult to identity when migrant carers carry the disease thus making it impossible to isolate them at critical times. These factors combined could lead to a terrible worst-case scenario, with Ukrainian women continuously being hired as vital care workers for the vulnerable but instead becoming a source of vulnerability, and victims in their own right, as they both contract and spread Covid-19.

Protecting Populations

This pandemic will undoubtably change the way we think about both health systems and migration. In the context of care work, it is critically important to recognise the role domestic labourers play in providing social care, as well as the fact that many domestic workers are immigrants. It will be necessary to consider the future of mobility and care work, both in terms of epidemic preparedness, and as countries move past their outbreak peaks and begin to slowly open up businesses and borders.

Poland has already taken the first step to migrant protection by giving foreigners access

to healthcare irrespective of insurance status during this pandemic. This is an important development given the instabilities of healthcare access for Ukrainian domestic workers in the past. It is still unclear however, how long these provisions will last, and concerns have been raised about the lack of proper information campaigns (Karwowska, 2020). Still, even temporary access will protect migrant health and provide services to those who fall ill, additionally discouraging them from trying to return to Ukraine to seek care, which would risk further disease spread.

Yet more can be done. Portugal, for example was quick to grant automatic permanent residence to all migrants and proceeded to build housing and provide meals to seasonal labourers. Ireland has ensured that both regular and irregular migrants have access to a "pandemic package", which includes a provision for universal Covid-19 testing irrespective of legal status. Canada has extended the status of essential worker to carers in an attempt to ensure long-term stability for their social care sector, given the uncertainty of future global mobility (Letzing, 2020). Finally, the International Domestic

Workers Federation has called for domestic carers to be formally treated as part of national healthcare structures (IDWFED, 2020), provided with hazard pay and protective equipment, and that supplementary allowances for undocumented workers should be included.

Most important for Poland, however, will be the acknowledgment that Ukrainian migration fills an important gap in Polish social care, a role likely to grow as care becomes increasingly outsourced away from family provision as the population ages. To fill that gap safely, care work must first and foremost be regularised, with Ukrainian carers both receiving proper training in care work and being granted economic and medical protections. This will be critical in ensuring that Ukrainian carers can maintain mobility across borders to continue providing care services where they are needed. At the same time, it will ensure that care happens safely, with protections in place for both migrants and the families they care for.
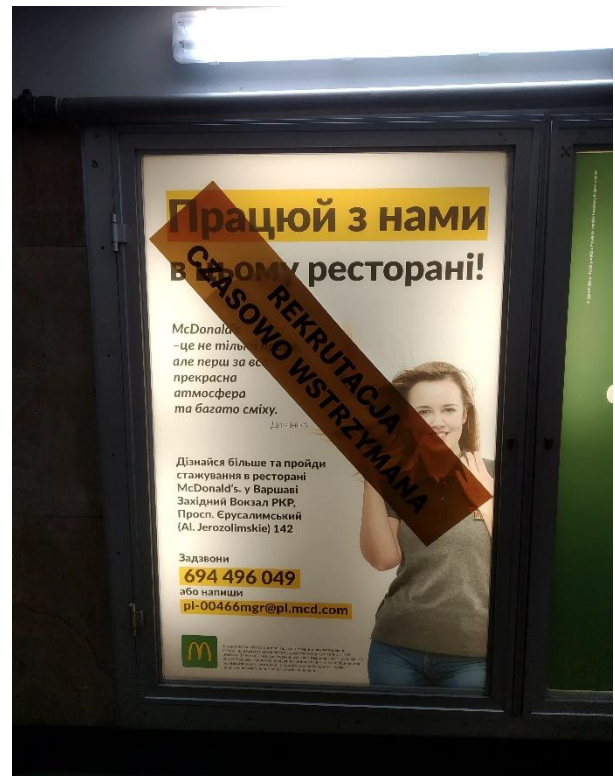
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Before the pandemic: temporality, unevenness and possible transition. Ukrainian migrants in the Polish labour market

Ignacy Jóźwiak

What do we know about Ukraine-to-Poland migration?

There is no coherent statistics in that matter, but Ukrainian citizens working abroad count in millions (Fedyuk & Kindler 2016) and Poland appears as one of the top destination country for the Ukrainian migrant-workers. According to the World Bank estimations, in 2018 the amount of money transfers to Ukraine from abroad was $16 billion, which equalled 13.8% of the country's GDP and was bigger than the value of foreign investments (almost $2.5 billion) in this country in the same period. Ukraine-to-Poland labour migration dates back to the early 1990ies. It was related to opening the state borders and simplification of exit and entry policies of Poland and its "Eastern Neighbour(s)". These were not accompanied by any kind of facilitation of employment opportunities. A certain breakthrough took place in the second half of 2000s, with Poland introducing the simplified procedure for temporary employment of certain groups of third-country nationals in agriculture (2006) and extending this mode into other sectors (2007). The number of Ukrainian workers in Poland has been gradually increasing but the actual breakthrough could be observed in 2014, following the economic crisis resulting from political tensions and the armed conflict in Ukraine.

"Work with us in this restaurant" – says this poster in Ukrainian at the Warsaw West bus station. "Recruitment temporarily suspended" – updates the sticker in Polish ©Ignacy Jóźwak

The data presented in this intervention come from the "Quality assessment of public employment services in terms of the simplified employment procedure for foreigners (POWER)" research project founded by the European social Fund and realised at the Centre of Migration Research. Its in-depth analysis was further supported by the CMR Small Grant held by the author. The main aim of the project was to study the employment of

the so called third country nationals in Poland and the way this processes impacts the labour market in Poland, whereas the grant was aimed at analysing the position of Ukrainian migrant workers in Poland – the problems they face and the strategies they apply in order to improve their presumably uncertain position. Within the project, 50 semi-structured in-depth interviews with Ukrainian migrant workers were conducted in different parts of Poland in 2017 and 2018 (15 by the author and the remaining 35 by other project members). It shall be noted that the migrants' situation world-wide has undergone some changes in the face of Covid-19 outbreak in March 2020 and related economic changes and ant-crisis measures (see: Jaroszewicz 2020, Levitas 2020 – in this issue of CMR Spotlight).

The aforementioned simplified procedure enables work for six months within twelve months, with no additional permissions or a labour market test required. At first, it was addressed to the citizens of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia and later extended to Moldova (2009), Georgia (2010/2011) and Armenia (2013/2014) (Górny et al. 2018: 16). In 2018, along with the necessity to adjust Polish regulations to EU requirements, certain amendments were introduced. Seasonal work permits in selected sectors were introduced for all non-EU citizens, while the already existing "declaration system" for the respective six countries remained (Górny et al. 2018: 4). Due to geographical proximity and the demographic factor (Ukraine's population as compared with Belarus, Georgia, Armenia or Moldova) Ukrainians, mostly from the Western parts of Ukraine, have been the most numerous among the temporary migrants in

Poland. The post-2014 turmoil has had a quite negative impact on the Ukrainian economy and the labour market, which in turn has clearly influenced migratory dynamics.

Since the introduction of the simplified procedure, the number of Ukrainians employed though this scheme has increased from 20 260 (93% of all declarations) in 2007 to 1 446 304 (91% of all declarations) in 2018. In the first half of 2019 the number was 764 759 (All data from the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy. We should remember, though, that the number of declarations and the number of actually employed are not identical). A similar trend can be observed with work permits. Here, not only the numbers but also the percentage of Ukrainians among the recipients has multiplied. It was 5 400 (30% of all recipients) in 2008, 238 334 (72% of all recipients) a decade later, and 171 854 in the first half of 2019. In addition, in 2018 Ukrainians received 133 372 (96% of all) seasonal work permits. Importantly, not only the numbers and the proportions have changed. Origins within Ukraine have also diversified, and the inhabitants of (former) industrial centres in the South and East of Ukraine have become more and more numerous. We should bear in mind that this process is related more to the decreasing attractiveness of the regional labour markets in Ukraine, than to the armed conflict in Donbas, which does not directly impact these territories (Górny et al. 2018: 109). The open question is: to what extend is work in Poland more attractive (since there is hardly any doubt that in general it is)?

What do we know about work conditions of Ukrainian migrants in Poland

Available sources regarding Ukrainians' work in Poland, on one hand, point to labour market segmentation and numerous (though not necessarily representative) cases of workers' rights violations. On the other hand, the knowledge of certain rights and entitlements is growing. We also know that a growing number of migrant workers is interested in having an employment contract instead of civic contracts, which are still quite common, not only among the migrants (Górny et al. 2018: 105-106). This is usually accompanied by plans of settling in Poland, which can be framed as transition from temporary to long-term or permanent migration. However, the "simplified procedure" and the "seasonal directive" promote flexibility and temporality. The temporal horizon provided by the existing regulations makes the migrant workers accept harsh work conditions, extensive work time, work performed based on civic contracts (instead of employment contracts, which guarantee insurance) or in the grey zone. This is the case mostly with the newcomers who were eager to save as much as possible and bring or send home (cf. Górny et al. 2018; Okólski 2019; Keryk 2018). Those who had specified plans for settling in Poland preferred more regular working hours and accommodation organized independently from the employer. It can be generalised that those more settled or planning to settle in Poland prefer direct and documented employment, based on work contracts and without intermediaries.

Outsourcing and subcontracting are a global phenomenon. They can also be perceived as a kind of a litmus test for the labour standards within companies and branches.

The agency work appears as the easiest to find and to arrange (as agencies assist in all kinds of paperwork, arrange accommodation etc.) but also the toughest, as specific branches use this scheme. It can be described as the least attractive but also, due its availability, the most common among the newcomers, whereas those more experienced in travelling and familiar with the specifics of the labour market in Poland always prefer to find a job on their own and work directly for the employer, without any intermediaries. Another problem, apart from the heavy and underpaid work, is unpaid salaries and doing a different kind of work and in a different location than initially offered. These situations lead to disappointments with work and living conditions and push migrants to search for more attractive job offers. This in turn leads to frequent changes of work and relocations within Poland.

In March 2020, the situation changed literally within a few days. After the state of epidemic was declared in Poland, dozens of thousands of Ukrainian citizens faced the dilemma whether to stay in Poland or go to Ukraine. Many of them (especially those lacking long-term, or any work contracts) lost their jobs and accommodations and since international transportation got suspended and the situation at the borders seemed unclear, travelling to the country of origin turned difficult or impossible. Pictures of thousands of people crowding around the checkpoints amid the international lockdown and global #stayhome campaign have circulated in Polish and Ukrainian press and resonated in social

media. As of May 2020 [data of the Polish Border Guard](link) and Ukrainian Embassy in Poland, between 150,000 and 180,000 Ukrainians left Poland in the period between 15th of March and 30th of April (while 53 thousand entered). This kind of uncertainty, as well as various speculations about the numbers of people who actually left and re-entered Poland may serve as yet another example of the unstable and precarious position of Ukrainian migrants in Poland. It concerns not only the work conditions, but also access to health care, social security, information and, last but not least, right to stay in Poland and its possible prolongation.

Conclusions

1. In general, migrant workers are, far more than their non-migrant colleagues, exposed to precarious work conditions and workers' rights violations.

2. A growing tendency to reach a certain level of stability can be observed among Ukrainian migrant workers in Poland. Many of them also tend to perceive long-term work contract as a guarantee of the right and ability to settle.

3. Determination and activities undertaken by the migrant workers focus mostly on improving one's individual situation, or finding a more satisfying job, rather than changing work conditions at a particular workplace or a branch.

4. Migrant workers are also, more than their non-migrant colleagues, entangled in multiple (multi-level) dependencies: on visas and work permits, landlords, employers and intermediaries (work-agencies, brokers).

5. Work conditions and salaries in Poland appear more attractive than in Ukraine. This is not necessarily the case with work time, the amount of work required from the employee, housing conditions, and the so called work-life balance.

6. The current state of pandemic and accompanying political and economic turmoil has put migrant workers in an (even more) vulnerable position, but it also pointed to their essentiality in some sectors of the Polish economy and labour market. This issue definitely requires further and in-depth studies, accompanied by public advocacy for the migrants.

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