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# ‘Caregivers with a Heart Needed’: The Domestic Care Regime in Poland after 1989 and Ukrainian Migrants

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*The article discusses the welfare regime that emerged in Poland after the collapse of communism and the introduction of the market economy. It analyses policy in the sphere of child and elderly care, and household strategies related to care. It is argued that the care regime in Poland is a combination of the conservative and the social-democratic model. On the one hand, the state provides equal labour market access to women and men. On the other hand, publicly funded child and elder care is insufficient, resulting in a care deficit. The situation has created demand for domestic care workers, and while Polish women do such work, it is increasingly performed by migrant women, particularly from Ukraine. To summarise, the article argues how gender and care regimes in Poland boost the domestic work sector, where Ukrainian migrants play an important role, and how this development has contributed to changes in the Polish migration regime.*

## Introduction

Poland presently is regarded as both a sending and a host country in terms of migrant domestic care work. Labour migration from Poland to other EU countries started as early as the 1970s. As a consequence of the collapse of socialism and the introduction of the market economy, however, the out-migration process has intensified, and, at the same time, due to uneven economic development in the region, Poland has become a host country in migration terms. The political and economic transformation of the Polish state has affected, amongst others, the care regime at the level of the state and the family. With the decrease of state provision of care, the obligations of the family to provide care have increased, while women have continued to be seen as the main providers of care for children and elderly people. Thus, care is not shared between spouses; rather, in households experiencing a care deficit, it is grandparents and/or female paid domestic care workers, either Polish or migrant, who fill the gap. Political and structural changes in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 caused the influx of migrant women, especially from Ukraine, and it is they who have become a dominant group among migrant domestic and care workers. This situation raises the question as to which welfare regime was created in Poland after 1989: a liberal, a conservative or a social-democratic one? Or is Poland rather a hybrid model as suggested by Björn Hacker (2009) or a ‘laboratory of experimentation’ as Esping-Andersen (1990, 1996) suggests? What is the role of Polish domestic care workers in this system, and why do migrants from Ukraine participate in the domestic care work labour market?

In the following, a distinction is made between the macro- and the micro-level. Migration and family policy, especially state policy in the sphere of care provision, constitutes the macro-level for the purposes of this article, and will be examined through an analysis of political decisions, legal documents and the activity of state institutions since 1989. The micro-level relates to the response of households to the state's social policies, and, in particular, the role that the employment of migrant domestic carers plays in household care strategies. As illustration of the latter, the article draws on the findings from qualitative research conducted in Warsaw in 2009 with employers of migrant domestic care workers and migrant domestic workers from Ukraine. In particular, the article develops two case studies of Polish householders, Piotr and Ewa, who employ or have employed migrant (Ukrainian) domestic care workers. Piotr has employed two Ukrainian women for the care of his three children. Over a period of 15 years, Ewa has employed around 15 women from Ukraine to look after her 95-year-old mother, who has dementia and is in need of constant care. Additionally, Oksana, a nurse from Western Ukraine who cares for an elderly woman with dementia, and who is often asked to find Ukrainian workers for other Polish families, provides a case study of a migrant domestic care worker.

The article is structured as follows: in the first section, the Polish welfare regime, as it has developed since 1989, will be outlined. It will be argued that Poland represents a hybrid form of the conservative and socio-democratic models of the welfare state. This has repercussions for how people reconcile work and family life – paying for domestic/care work is one of the strategies. In the second section, Poland's policy on labour migration will be examined. It will be argued that since the early 1990s, this policy has been changing from a passive non-immigration policy towards an active, albeit chaotic policy, which was a reaction to a labour-force drain from Poland, particularly since joining the EU in 2004. Finally, empirical data on migrant domestic work – one of main immigrant labour market sectors in Poland – and the role of Ukrainian migrants in it will be presented.

### **The welfare regime in Poland**

Until recently, scholars who studied welfare regimes from a gender perspective believed that the process of transition from socialism to capitalism in the post-socialist states of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) was occurring at a pace and in ways that were generally similar (Glass and Fodor, 2007). Lately, the volume of research on the formation of welfare regimes in relation to gender roles in CEE states has increased, and is based on comparative case studies. These studies underline substantial differences in the types of welfare regimes emerging in CEE states post-1989, particularly in relation to areas of family policy, policies around gender equality in the labour market, and the gendered dimensions of migration policy (see, for example, Jordan, 2006; Saxonberg and Szelewa, 2007; Glass and Fodor, 2007; Szelewa and Polakowski, 2008; Plomien, 2009). In this context, the Polish welfare regime has come under scrutiny (see, for example, Butler, 1995; Saxonberg and Szelewa, 2007; Glass and Fodor, 2007; Szelewa and Polakowski, 2008; Plomien, 2009; Hacker, 2009). The Polish system of care provision and access to the labour market by women and men is classified as *implicit familism*, based on residual policies of care and employment (Szelewa and Polakowski, 2008), where limited state support for working mothers becomes an obstacle to the fair sharing of paid and unpaid labour within families (Paskall and Kwak, 2005; Plomien, 2009). Moreover, Poland and

CEE states are classified as dual-earner models, despite attempts to implement policies of re-familialisation or re-traditionalisation (Pascall and Manning, 2000; Pascall and Kwak, 2005), and are exemplary of several types of childcare provision (Szelewa and Polakowski, 2008; Plomien, 2009).

The welfare regime that was established in Poland after 1989 is the effect of political decisions taken by Polish governments regarding economic and welfare policies. In the 1990s, the Solidarity government intended to make a marked break from the communist past and began to promote conservative values and a traditional family structure with prescribed gender roles. The government supported a policy of re-familialisation, which implied the withdrawal of women from the labour market in order to raise their children at home. At that time, the general unemployment rate was high and there was limited funding to support public care institutions. By encouraging women to withdraw from the labour market, the government intended to give jobs to men and also to allocate care of children to mothers, thereby allowing a reduction in state responsibility in this area. In the period after 1989, state policy went through a transformation from the support of the single-male breadwinner model to the dual-earner model in the mid 2000s. This happened due to economic and social reasons, in particular, the need to sustain household incomes, and because of the professional aspirations of women. Moreover, under the influences of EU membership, globalisation and demographic changes, the Polish government came under pressure to modify the welfare system, including the development of family-friendly employment reforms (Plomien, 2009). In sum, the state assigns responsibility for the care for children and elderly people mainly to families. As a result of this gendered care responsibility, women have less access to the labour market than men. However, recently introduced policies seek to facilitate women's access to the labour market and provide better child-care support. Therefore, the social policy and welfare regime in Poland may, arguably, be classified as a hybrid of conservative and social-democratic elements. This welfare regime brought about higher rates of activity in the labour market among women and, because of the absence of institutional state support, it made possible the involvement of Polish and migrant women in remunerated domestic care work.

#### *State provision of care*

Although Poland has, in the main, a home-based system of care, the state shares some of the care obligations. Maternity leave and parental leave provisions, for example, are in place. The former has 100 per cent remuneration, and its length has been extended over time, from 14 weeks to 18–20 weeks at present. Parental leave is three years long, and has a means-tested benefit attached. Families in which the average income of each member is below 504 PLN (118 euros) are entitled to modest support; this limit does not change even when the minimum wage increases. As a consequence, few families are entitled to receive such support. (Plomien, 2009).

The Polish state provides public childcare institutions, nurseries and kindergartens, according to the age of children (1–3 and 3–6 years old respectively). Even during the socialist period, Poland provided only limited support for organised childcare; after 1989, such care became the responsibility of local authorities whose financial support decreased and as a consequence the number of care institutions also diminished (Muczyński and Żynel, 2008). Moreover, their services are rather unaffordable for a majority of families: the

estimated price of a nursery place as a proportion of net average income is 10–14 per cent in a public facility and 46–79 per cent in a private facility (Plomien, 2009). Kindergartens and nurseries in Poland are in high demand, but their number is insufficient and the need for nurseries grows despite negative opinions about them. They are regarded as offering a low quality of care, which is partly linked to their socialist legacy, and negative associations with that system. As one Polish employer of Ukrainian nannies, Piotr, indicated:

We are absolutely sure that we do not want our children to be in a nursery . . . we have a bad opinion about the way they take care of children in nurseries . . . they are not able to take care of a child, because there are many children, and it is a factory, and a child needs someone who will play with him/her, who will really be with him/her.

The nurseries' negative reputation does not make it easy to lobby for more and improved public-care for small children.

Care for old and disabled people in Poland is also perceived as the obligation of the family, and should be conducted at home. The state provides several types of assistance to elderly people: besides the pension, there is assistance from nurses (*siostry środowiskowe*) and institutional care. The number of stationary social institutions for aged persons in Poland increased from 199 to 298 during the years 2000–2007; however, the number of places in public institutions is not sufficient and there are waiting lists (Central Statistical Office, 2008). There is also opposition to such institutions, which can be traced back to an aversion to 'all things public' that developed under communism. Sending elderly parents to such institutions is still perceived negatively, as it violates the tradition that children should take care of their elderly parents privately, rather than trusting them with anonymous public institutions that are run by a government with little or no legitimacy and provide a Soviet-type service. Ewa, who employs migrant elderly-care workers, put it this way:

We should start by saying that in these homes in Poland, no one takes care of old people, they are placed in front of the table and they just sit nodding there, that's all! And they are just watched so as not to fall down or get hungry.

The decision to go to a public care institution has to be made by the person in need of care autonomously; often they tend to be hesitant:

If I were to tell my mother that she is leaving home and will go to some care house, she would not survive this. The public care institutions require that the person asks for that (care) house. (Ewa)

Private institutions are available in Poland and their number is growing, however, their price is high. Ewa indicated that in Warsaw the average price of a private care house is 1,800 PLN per month (422 euros), but that the quality is even lower than that of public institutions. One of the solutions for elderly care is the employment of a caregiver whose work can be constructed as 'family care'.

*Consequences of state welfare policy*

The conservative care regime established in Poland in the 1990s, and the changes that occurred in the economy and the position of women in society, had an impact on Poland's demography. It led to a decrease in the birth rate in Poland and the state's ranking as 26th among the 27 in the EU in terms of fertility rates. Women who want to have children and to continue their professional career have to rely on the support of family members for childcare, or look outside the family for a caregiver. Those who could not afford to employ a care worker or who lack help from parents withdrew from their professional career to the domestic sphere. Their return to professional activity after three years of parental leave is hampered by a competitive labour market. Moreover, after returning from that leave women had problems keeping the positions and salaries they had before that leave. Since care is currently perceived in Poland as mainly a woman's responsibility, employers prefer to employ men instead (Plomien, 2009). Men are still perceived in Poland as the main breadwinners, and fathers have higher rates of employment than non-fathers: among those aged 25–47, the employment rate of men without children is 72.6 per cent, while for those with one child it is 83.3 per cent, rising to 86.6 per cent for those with two children, and falling-off slightly to 83.3 per cent for those with three or more children (Plomien, 2009). In contrast, motherhood has the opposite effect on women's employment rate: among women aged 25–47, the employment rate for non-mothers is 74.1 per cent, but 69.6 per cent, 66.9 per cent and 57.0 per cent respectively for those with one, two and three child/ren (ibid.).

The demographic problems and demands of mothers to remain professionally active led to discussions about improvements in the provision of state care and support for the equal participation of women in the labour market. Crucial in this discussion was the accession of Poland to the European Union and adherence to the Lisbon Strategy. Poland was recommended to introduce principles on the equality of the sexes in the labour market, and to commit to the provision of childcare institutions ('Annual country assessments', 2008). In 2007, the conservative governing party, Law and Justice, elaborated the Project of Family Policy for 2007–2014, which was later approved by the centrist-liberal government of Civic Platform, and through which several improvements in childcare were introduced. According to changes in the Labour Code and other laws relating to the provision of support to women in childcare and their access to the labour market, the maternity leave was increased from 18 to 20 weeks; and between 2009 and 2014 will be extended by a further two weeks each year. Men are entitled to up to four weeks of paternity leave (Dz.U. nr 237, poz. 1654). Moreover, the Labour Code has been changed to oblige employers to secure employment and salary for parents returning from maternity leave. Still, the achievements in the state provision of childcare and the equality of women and men in the labour market are modest.

Presently, state policy provides little or no support for the employment of a domestic care worker. The possibility to deduct from tax the payment of a migrant for work in domestic care was introduced and cancelled in 2007. The procedure turned out to be too complicated and the advantages rather minimal, since it was possible to employ a foreigner as a domestic carer on the basis of a work permit valid for only for 90 out of 180 days. Currently, the government is considering the possibility of a tax-deduction for the employment of nannies (Plomien, 2009). If introduced, the policy could have a dual effect – the regularisation of that sphere of employment and income for the state,

but also lower salaries for employees and an increase in spending for employers along with the need to fulfil bureaucratic procedures, which would probably cause a limited popularity for the tax deduction. Such procedures could be even more complicated in the case of migrants, and thus limit the popularity of this deduction. For both employers and employees, non-regularised work in domestic care continues to be more financially rewarding than regularised work; therefore, migrants will continue to enter this section of the labour market.

### **Poland's labour migration policy**

After 1989, Poland faced increased out migration of Poles to EU states and the immigration (temporary/shuttle/permanent) of citizens from neighbouring countries to Poland. The discussions about the need for a state migration policy intensified only in the 2000s, before Poland's accession to the EU. In the 1990s, the state allowed migrants to come to Poland on tourist visas and tolerated their undocumented work. After EU accession, the visa regime became more restrictive, yet at the same time shortages in the Polish labour market provoked demands for migrant workers. In the context of economic growth during 2005–2008, employers lobbied for migrant workers to be allowed entry into Poland. At the same time, the EU demanded tighter controls on the external borders and for irregular migration to be curbed. Since most migrants in Poland were staying and working irregularly up to this point, there arose a need to regularise the migrants' existence and bring them out of the twilight zone. The Polish government introduced a document confirming employment intention for Ukrainians, Russians and Belarusians in 2007 (at the beginning for 90 days during a 180-day period, presently for 180 days during a 360-day period). During 2008, 156,105 people received such a document; however, the weakness of these data is that not everyone who received the document works in their declared sphere or even comes to Poland (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2008). Moreover, in 2009, the government introduced some facilitation in the complicated procedure of receiving work permits and expanded the list of foreigners and professions exempted from the obligation to apply for work permits. Still, this easing of the rules governing migrants' entry and their access to the labour market was a consequence of the economic growth that Poland was then enjoying and the question thus is whether this situation will change in a time of economic crisis.

### **Ukrainian migrants in domestic care in Poland**

Poland became one of the destination countries of Ukrainian migration after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening of borders. Migrants filled niches on the market of low-skilled work (agriculture, construction and domestic care). The number of Ukrainians working in Poland is difficult to pinpoint since their work is mainly irregular, but it is estimated at about 50 thousand to 300 thousand people depending on the time of the year (Bieniecki *et al.*, 2008). In the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s, there was visa-free movement between Ukraine and Poland, and the Ukrainians that crossed the border worked in different sectors. (Bieniecki *et al.*, 2008; Kindler, 2008b). During 2003–2007, with the accession of Poland to the EU, a visa regime was introduced for Ukrainians. To receive such a visa was relatively easy, so many Ukrainians came to Poland to work on tourist visas. At the end of 2007, Poland joined the Schengen zone and the visa

regime became restrictive and the access of Ukrainians to Poland more difficult. In 2008, 142,960 Ukrainians received the 'document of employment intention' (see above); only 7,614 of which were for domestic work. ('Data on Employment of Foreigners', 2008). Thus, domestic care is still conducted in the twilight zone, both by Poles and migrants, mainly Ukrainians.

Domestic care usually includes childcare and care for old and disabled people, as well as other obligations related to work at home, such as cleaning, shopping, cooking, ironing and such like. The work of migrants in this sphere in other national contexts has received attention for some time now (for example, see Anderson, 1993; Parrenas, 2001; Lutz, 2008). Only very recently, however, has the Polish case become the focus of research (Kindler, 2008a; Kindler, 2008b; Rosińska-Kordasiewicz, 2005; Samoraj, 2007). Domestic work was and still is perceived by society as unpaid work and is usually the obligation of women. With the appearance of non-family-member caregivers, whether Polish or migrant women, this work has left the realm of unpaid reproductive work and entered the realm of paid productive work.

Paid domestic care is a rather new phenomenon in Poland. Non-existent or hidden in socialist Poland, it spread, especially in large cities in the 1990s, along with an influx of migrants, especially from Ukraine. Limited care provision by the state meant that Poles were looking for possibilities to meet their care deficit. The demand for a caregiver grew with the improvement of the economic situation in Poland and the development of an upper-middle and middle class, the main employers of domestic caregivers. The communist legacy of women's role as a working one, now enhanced by the ambitions of women to be independent financially and successful in work, and combine this with a family, had an impact on the domestic care system and the inclusion of outsiders in the private sphere.

In the respondents' opinion, public care institutions for children or old people lack an individual approach to their charges, as opposed to home-based care workers, who provide exactly this kind of individual relationship. The preference for Ukrainian caregivers instead of public provision of care or the employment of Poles is based on various explanations, the principal one being their availability in terms of time and types of work done, price of services and market availability. Since Ukrainian women come to Poland without families and to work, they do not have many other obligations or much of a private life; thus, they can be available at any time of day and night. Ewa indicated:

The main reason (that Ukrainians work in care) is that when they come here they live together with this ill person. They provide services 24 hours a day, with some breaks ... they become in a way a member of the family ... this is very precious.

The availability of the caregiver is connected also with the types of obligations they have. Besides care work, they do other jobs in the house: cleaning, cooking, shopping, etc. The woman, who cares for Piotr's children lives with his mother-in-law and also takes care of her, by being a companion and doing cleaning or other housework. Piotr said:

She helps us with other work ... We have three children and the advantages of having a nanny are threefold: she does not take care of our 11 year-old son, but she is useful, because when we are not at home, we know that nothing bad will happen ... both of our nannies help us



with house work, so if we ask them to cook, they will both cook without a problem . . . If there is a need to clean the house, they will do this.

Ukrainians are the main migrant group working in Poland, including in domestic care. Respondents indicated that they have no competitors on the market. However, cultural differences and biases are the main obstacle in employing care workers of nationalities other than Polish. Still, their availability in the market and relative proximity to Polish culture made it possible to employ Ukrainians and, sporadically, Russians or Belarusians as care workers. By contrast, migrants from other countries, for instance from Vietnam, are rarely employed as domestic carers.

The further requirement of employers is the need for trust in the employee. Since the migrant care worker is employed on the basis of a reference, this person has the trust of their employer. In both the cases of Ewa and Piotr, this trust is built on the possibility to control the migrant, which is much bigger than in the case of a Polish employee. By living together or authorising various documents (residence permits or visas) for migrants, employers gain access to information about them. With a Pole who would live separately and have her own life, there would be no control of her, so for employers it would be difficult to trust them. Piotr stated:

the trust we have is a very important issue . . . There is no possibility to have the control and confidence in any other employee that I have in Galia. She lives in my house . . . I know all about her . . . I can trust her with my whole house, all my money.

Employing a Ukrainian woman is financially attractive when compared to a Polish one, especially when taking into account the salary in relation to the amount of work this woman does. The average monthly salary for a live-in migrant woman in Warsaw ranges from 1,500 to 1,800 PLN (respectively 351 and 422 euros – 4.11.2009), with accommodation and food provision covered. This cost, therefore, is comparable with the price of public care, even in private institutions, but a domestic worker can provide the individual care and additional labour an institution cannot, and is thus preferred.

The language of Ukrainian women is perceived as an advantage and disadvantage. For some employers it is important that migrant woman can teach their child another language, as in the case of Piotr's children. For him it was crucial that the nanny should speak Russian well. Ewa believed that cultural differences were unimportant, in any case very easy to overcome, since, according to Ewa, Ukrainians learn the Polish way of life and language fast. However, for some Polish employers, the language issue could be decisive in not employing a migrant. Parents are afraid that their children will speak with an accent (Samoraj, 2007). Employers that address Oksana for a worker in childcare also prefer someone with knowledge of Polish and generally favour a young person.

The legal status of migrants and the status of their work places have serious implications for the conditions of the work and life of migrant women, as well as public perceptions of them. Employers, on the one hand, protect their employees and help them, especially with documents, and build emotional ties, but, on the other hand, due to the character of the work and the place of work, they have the opportunity to exploit migrants. This is facilitated by the fact that their work is unregulated (Kindler, 2008b). Abuses can include: not giving days off or the possibility to invite friends or family to the home, and a requirement to do unremunerated work. Moreover, due to feeling unprotected and the

fear of losing their job, migrants are reluctant to claim their rights. A friend of Oksana's hesitated to claim a free day and indicated that 'it's not possible, it is not acceptable, it's shameful and I cannot' ask for it'.

Paid domestic care work in Poland is performed mainly in the twilight zone both by Poles and migrants, so-called invisible carers (Peterson, 2007; Kindler, 2008b). The state has made attempts to formalise migrants' work in this sphere by introducing work permits and facilitating the procedure to obtain them, but it is still problematic for migrants and their employers. They use various possibilities to avoid bureaucratic procedures, as did Piotr by recommending a Ukrainian woman, who works for him to pay for her studies. In addition to the opportunity to gain a higher education, her student status helped her with receiving a residence permit and facilitated the procedures to obtain visas. Her work as a child carer remains undeclared.

Working in the private sphere could also be perceived as emotionally exhausting for migrants, since employers require emotional devotion. In childcare, migrants usually work during the day – the employers' private space becomes their working place. They usually live outside their employers' house, which gives them more freedom. This was the case for all of Piotr's nannies and it is a usual pattern for other migrant women working in childcare (Samoraj, 2007; Kindler, 2008a). In the case of elder care, migrant women live with the person they take care of with few opportunities to leave the house on their own. The employer's house is their private and working space at the same time, something that is psychologically difficult. To survive emotionally, as Oksana indicated, some women change jobs and work as cleaners, while those who are tired with physical work switch to care.

## **Conclusion**

Polish governments in the 1990s promoted a conservative welfare regime model. However, the decrease of public support for childcare and elder care led to demographic problems; it also increased inequality in women's access to the labour market and furthered the growth of a 'twilight' market in which both Poles and migrants performed care work. To address the situation, the Polish government introduced changes intended to make the welfare regime of Poland closer to a social-democratic model. Such a model promotes women's roles not only as mothers, but also as active in the labour market. The Polish state, presently, is shifting in the direction of the promotion of equal entitlements to social benefits: however, there is opposition to such a policy and a belief that benefits should be income dependent, which is a consequence of the negative attitude to the socialist past and 'egalitarian' principle applied at that time. Thus, the system which is forming in Poland is a hybrid of post-communist conservativeness, with elements of social-democratic models.

Moreover, due to the problems with the introduction of the single-breadwinner model, there is a need for both parents to work in order to sustain the family, and thus there is a necessity for the employment of a caregiver. This is the case for the care of old people also. This niche has been filled by both Polish and migrant women from Ukraine; the latter caused both by shifts in the gendered practices relating to work and care in Poland and the migration policy of the state. In terms of the former, Polish and migrant women employed as care workers replaced their female employers in the role of caregivers, allowing the latter to remain professionally active. Since domestic care is performed exclusively by

women, both Polish and migrant, such work is still perceived as mainly women's work, although recently men have been awarded paternity leave. To the degree that such a provision is taken up by men, this policy could be expected to involve men in domestic care and change the status of the sexes in the labour market and in the family. In terms of migration policy, it was rather chaotic and governments' decisions were made in reaction to the existing situation. For a long period, governments tolerated undocumented migrant workers, especially when their employment in domestic care replaced public care. Upon joining the EU, Poland was obliged to strengthen its eastern border and introduce visas. It was then that the Polish government realised the importance of migrants for the economy and for its welfare regime and considered possibilities to facilitate the visa regime with Ukraine. The Polish state, thus, started to elaborate a migration policy in order to provide conditions for temporary migrant labour in Poland, in the domestic care sector, as well as in other areas of the labour market.

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