

## WELFARE FOR WHOM?

### THE IMPACT OF CARE DRAIN IN ROMANIA AND UKRAINE AND THE RISE OF A TRANSNATIONAL WELFARE

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#### Our empirical research on transnational welfare

This article is the product of a series of studies conducted by CeSPI over the course of the last few years<sup>1</sup>. Empirical research on transnational welfare has been carried out jointly by the Centre for International Political Studies (CeSPI) in Rome and by the International and European Forum of Migration Research (FIERI) in Turin through qualitative interviews, conducted between the winter and spring of 2006, with 60 Romanian and Ukrainian female careworkers residing in Turin and Rome and with 40 family members of female careworkers (often belonging to the same family units as the women interviewed in Italy) in the countries of origin. With a view to gaining a more comprehensive overview of the phenomenon, more than 50 privileged observers were also interviewed in all three countries in which the field work was carried out.

The heavy reliance on foreign labour in the care sector by Western countries (particularly those in southern Europe) and the creation of more stable migration chains composed of migrant women, is fuelling a **growing process of feminization of migration in Romania and the Ukraine**. In Romania, this process coincided with the abolition in 2002 of the requirement for a visa for short stays that, reducing departure costs and difficulties, enabled women to set out alone on their own migration path. To a growing extent, these are women who do not emigrate to reunite with their husbands but rather to work abroad or elsewhere in their country, often leaving behind their families.

#### Some figures on the feminization of migration

In Romania, according to the estimates of CURS (Centre for Urban and Rural Sociology) on a sample of 1,199 family units, female appears to have doubled in just 3 years (between 2001 and 2004) going from 16.7% to 31% of total migration. The percentage of female migration in the Ukraine is similar, according to figures from the Ministry for Family. Strong female migration networks are even concentrated in specific areas. Ternopil in the Ukraine and Iași in Romania are cases in point. In these areas, according to local research, female migration flows currently account for 50% of total migration and, at least in the Ukraine, entirely account for the increased migration in recent years.

**This migration has a new impact on the countries of origin, that is, it adds to the “skill drain” problem – which has already been extensively examined in the literature – the less well-known**

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<sup>1</sup> In this regard, see: E. Castagnone, M. Eve, E. R. Petrillo, F. Piperno, Madri Migranti. *Le migrazioni di cura dalla Romania e dall'Ucraina in Italia: percorsi e impatto sui paesi di origine*, Working Paper CeSPI 34/2007, March 2007, <http://www.cespi.it/WP/WP34%20Madri%20migranti.pdf>; F. Piperno, *Fuga di welfare. Quale equilibrio?*, CeSPI, October 2006, <http://www.cespi.it/SCM/strand2/fuga%20di%20welfare-Piperno.pdf>; and F. Piperno, F. Pastore, *Could transnational welfare provide a strategic framework for decentralised cooperation?*, Discussion Paper, February 2006, <http://www.cespi.it/SCM/strand2/welfare-dp-eng.pdf>.

**problem of “care drain”.** Indeed, women are generally the principal caregivers within the family and their departure necessarily deprives the neediest of care: in particular, children and aged parents. It is not surprising that, precisely with reference to minors with parents abroad, Romanian media and NGOs have begun to talk of “*de facto* abandonment” while, in Ukraine, it is now common to talk of “social orphans”.

In reality, our research and that of others shows that only in a minority of cases does care drain translate into absence of care and thus abandonment, due to the fact that the members of transnational families put into place a series of **compensatory strategies which limit the impact of care drain**. Mothers continue to perform a caring role for their natural family and to provide, as Parreñas<sup>2</sup> puts it, guidance and emotional support from a distance. Frequent trips back home<sup>3</sup>, almost daily telephone calls and remittance flows that are firmly directed towards meeting care needs (that is, allocated to surrogate carers who look after children and aged parents, to education and tutoring for children, to health expenses and savings for a pension, etc.) are the principal mechanisms employed to ensure the continuity of relationships.

*In loco*, care is reorganised through the expansion of the traditional role of the extended family and, in particular, thanks to the involvement of maternal grandmothers, aunts and sisters, while the engagement of fathers is lower. Alternatively – and this is a new phenomenon in these countries – care is reorganised through the acquisition of new care services on the private market, especially by resorting to the services of domestic helpers, babysitters, surrogate carers who perform the role of guardians or basic childminders, lodgers also entrusted with a caring role or by making renewed use of religious institutions. Finally, we noted how children themselves reacted to the departure of their mothers, reinforcing friendship ties (which in some cases ended up becoming almost *de facto* cohabitation situations) and relationships with siblings and, at least in Romania, travelling to see their mothers<sup>4</sup>.

**Nevertheless, the compensatory strategies adopted by transnational families often prove insufficient and an underlying care shortage persists.** This is evident in cases where minors, despite receiving remittances and daily telephone calls from parents, are actually alone (that is, without any family support) in the country of origin. On the other hand, those family networks that do mobilise themselves are placed “under pressure” as a result and are not always capable of providing adequate solutions. Relatives and guardians may experience difficulty in providing effective care and supervision. The generation gap between grandparents and grandchildren may be too great, placing both groups in difficulty (especially in cases where in order to be looked after by grandparents minors have to move from the city to the country, where the difference in mentality can prove to be insurmountable). In other cases, the care situation proves to be “short-term” because relatives or guardians cannot keep the child with them for long and the children find themselves shunted from one home to another repeatedly (in these cases, there is a kind of internal migration which flows from the care need). Finally, the forced proximity of family members or neighbours who take on the role of guardians often does not give rise to a close relationship, leaving an

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<sup>2</sup> R.S. Parreñas, *The care crisis in the Philippines: children and transnational families in the new global economy*, in Ehrenreich B. and Hochschild A. R. (ed.), op. cit., 2003, pp.39-55

<sup>3</sup> In this regard, during our field work it was surprising to note that Romanian and Ukrainian women adopted very similar movement patterns, even though the greater geographical vicinity and different visa requirements would have led one to believe that return trips would be more frequent among Romanian women. Both among Ukrainian and Romanian women, trips back home were very rare during the stage of illegal stay in the destination country, subsequently stabilising at an average of one or two trips a year.

<sup>4</sup> In contrast to young Romanians, the children of Ukrainian women had not travelled abroad and generally had no desire to do so. In light of this, we can say that the accession of Romania to the European Union, which facilitated movement across borders, further diminishes the possibility that care drain will translate into an absence of care.

emotional and communication void. In almost all cases, when children were asked who supported and guided them in times of difficulty, they were unable to identify any adult that they could turn to apart from their mothers who are abroad. Even then, despite finding new outlets at a transnational level, communication between mothers and their children (central to both parties and often forming the focal point of the mothers' social lives abroad) is sometimes made particularly difficult by the distances involved.

### **Communication difficulties between mothers and their children**

For many women, handling the period prior to departure is particularly painful and, for this reason, some of them end up emigrating without informing their children or surprising them with the announcement. Once abroad, managing long-distance parenting can also turn out to be quite complex. Some women point to difficulties in maintaining control of their children, others (especially those with small children) struggle to be acknowledged as mothers. In the end, some women reported that, as a result of the distance, the relationship with their children had changed radically, sometimes permanently, and that this, among other things, contributed to making meetings during visits and family reunions particularly traumatic. From the point of view of the children, they sometimes struggle to re-establish a relationship of trust over the phone, to share times of pain and difficulty with their mothers (believing that they too suffer from the same problems) or to form and express the feelings that follow the departure of mothers abroad (for instance, the sense of guilt over the sacrifice made by their mothers). In the long term, all this can contribute to making relationships between mothers and their children weaker and more unstable and increasing the hardship and suffering of the members of transnational families.

**The absence of care (understood as nursing and communication) and, hence, belonging to a less-protected family situation, naturally impacts on the experiences of children and their behaviour<sup>5</sup>.** It intensifies times of difficulty that everyone experiences, increases latent problems in more fragile children and exacerbates problems intrinsic to certain social situations (where, for instance, behaviours such as bullying and child deviance<sup>6</sup> are more engrained).

For that matter, the problem of lack of care is also pronounced in the case of the aged, who find it more difficult than minors to find replacement caregivers *in loco*, also because there are few people willing to offer the same services in their homeland that they could perform abroad earning a higher wage (in this case, the effects of the skill and care drain seem to merge). This aspect has attracted little attention in the literature and from local policy-makers. Nevertheless, it becomes even more evident if we consider that Ukraine and Romania, which export labour to support Western welfare systems that are struggling with an ageing population, are experiencing exactly the same – if not more dramatic – demographic trend as that in Italy. An ageing population and a fall in birth rates combine with a negative migration balance to produce a net population loss<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> The fact that some NGOs and local institutions in Romania have started to conduct social research into these issues is in itself indicative that a problem exists. In particular, see: G. Irimescu, A.L. Lupu, *Home alone! An inquiry conducted in Iași on children separated from one or both parents by their leaving to work abroad*, Alternative Sociale, Iași, 2006; FRCCF and UNICEF, *Foreignland: dreamland or nightmare? Research study on the migration phenomenon from Oaș*, October 2005; M. Alexandru, *Unaccompanied minors in Italy. A community study in two Romanian villages*, CeSPI, Roma, November, 2005; FONPC, *O noua forma de abandon: copiii romanilor care muncesc in strinatate*, Conference proceedings, December, 2005

<sup>6</sup> A significant example is provided by Iași in Romanian Moldavia, where juvenile petty crime is particularly advanced and where, according to the figures of the Regional Police Inspectorate, the number of minors with parents abroad who commit crimes (especially petty theft and car burglary) is increasing.

<sup>7</sup> In this regard, see: Ali Mansoor and Bryce Quillin (ed.), *Migration and remittances. Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union*, The World Bank, Washington, 2007, p. 31

**All this, inevitably, has an impact on the welfare systems of the countries of origin.** This is also an aspect that is never discussed in the literature or brought to the attention of the public in the West. In fact, welfare systems in the countries of origin are having to respond to progressively more complex problems with few resources at their disposal. In 2005, in Romania, the National Child Protection Authority (ANPC), which answers to the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, estimated that 14% of minors both parents of whom had gone abroad with a legal work contract (around 17,000 minors) benefited from some social services assistance programme and a further 3%, though left in the care of up to fourth-degree relatives, were on the waiting list<sup>8</sup>. Among the minors who benefit from public assistance, around a quarter had been placed in care institutions, another quarter had been placed in the care of families different to their own and around half had been assisted to resettle into their natural families<sup>9</sup>. This naturally results in great pressure being placed on the local welfare system.

### **The guarantee agreement**

It is thought that in the future, in Romania, the pressure on local social services will increase further following an agreement signed in 2005 between the ANPC and the Department for Labour Abroad of the Ministry of Labour, aimed at guaranteeing the legal appointment of an adult guardian to stand in the shoes of parents that emigrate. Indeed, the agreement delegates to local authorities the task of monitoring the situation of minors with parents abroad and proceeding through social support measures where difficult situations are encountered. But in the absence of an allocation of *ad hoc* funding, many observers say they are sceptical as to whether the programme can be effectively implemented.

The situation regarding the aged is no better. The manager for homecare services of the Municipality of Bucharest stated that a significant percentage – if not half – of the aged persons assisted by her department have children abroad<sup>10</sup>.

Even various educational institutions, where the impact of what we may call “care drain” is particularly felt, find themselves under pressure. The principal problems cited by school teachers and psychologists are: absenteeism and dropout; lack of study motivation, which in Romania would also be attributable to a strong trend towards child migration (due also to a view that is spreading among youth that those who find work opportunities abroad are more successful than those who study); difficulties in reintegrating students into school after time spent abroad; and the lack of opportunities for holding parent-teacher meetings, thereby weakening the position of teaching staff. Various teachers interviewed in Romania and Ukraine also noted that behavioural problems, such as conflict and lack of discipline, make class management even more complicated, but some spoke simply of the difficulty of supporting students who have problematic emotional backgrounds and who tend to withdraw into themselves. In this regard, we were struck by a statement made by one female teacher interviewed in Focşani, who said: *All this changes them, the children, but it also changes us because we come into contact with problems that are increasingly difficult to resolve. From one year to the next, the situations continue to get more complex.*

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<sup>8</sup> Autoritatea nationala pentru protectia drepturilor copilului, *Situatia copiilorai caror parinti sunt plecati cu contract la munca in strainatate la sfarsitul*, Trim IV 2005.

<sup>9</sup> The fact that half the minors were resettled into their natural families demonstrates that in the majority of cases the problem is not one of *de facto* abandonment but rather one relating to the difficulty of reorganising transnational families, who often require guidance and assistance.

<sup>10</sup> Interview conducted in May 2006 in Bucharest with the Director for Homecare Services, Department for Social Welfare Services and Child Protection, Municipality of Bucharest, sector I. The situation in Ukraine is currently less critical, although eldercare services are starting to face the problem.

In general, during the field work carried out in Romania and Ukraine, we realised that without the West noticing, minors with parents abroad have started to benefit from a community-level mobilisation on the part of local welfare actors, particularly local schools, institutional bodies and NGOs. This mobilisation is in its early stages, but it is definitely worth noting since in responding to new problems that emerge in the community it highlights their existence.

In conclusion, we would like to recall that various studies<sup>11</sup> conducted into the Italian situation have demonstrated that care migration, in responding to new needs created by globalisation, ends up transforming the shape of Western welfare systems. Migration enables them to respond to a growing number of needs, but also brings them face-to-face with a greater precariousness and fluidity of care services and with the emergence of a parallel market built on a direct and little-institutionalised relationship between migrants and families. From what has been stated above, it is nevertheless evident that this migration also transforms welfare systems in the countries of origin. It drives local institutions (NGOs, schools and social services) to mobilise themselves to respond to needs of a new kind, highlights the limits of their actions, creates (in countries of origin also) a parallel welfare system thanks to the compensatory strategies put into place by transnational families to alleviate the care drain problem and the substantial flow of remittances allocated to meet care needs.

It is precisely because of this close nexus, through care migration linking the development of welfare in destination countries to that of welfare in countries of origin, that we can speak of **“transnational welfare”**. Nevertheless, it is a transnationalism which currently is not sufficiently understood nor regulated at an institutional level. Precisely at a time when the European Union is promoting an economic, social and political integration policy perspective both internally and towards third countries, it is actually draining care resources from countries of origin, leaving local welfare systems to deal with the impact on their own. Moreover, the failure to manage care migration and its impact at the local level ends up creating a parallel and informal transnational welfare system, managed on a private and individual basis both “here” and “there”.

It is clear that finding solutions to internal welfare problems without considering external problems and without any conscious planning is neither ethical nor sustainable. It is therefore necessary, in our view, to raise awareness of the interdependence which links the development of welfare in destination and origin countries and to develop **strategies which are geared towards promoting common welfare, a positive transnationalism or, in other words, what we could call “co-welfare”**. An outlook, therefore, which does not focus, in destination countries, solely on the problems of training and mediation between families and female migrant workers nor, in countries of origin, solely on the problem (sometimes overly emphasised) of abandonment, but which instead aims at managing the problems and opportunities that are linked to care-related migration on a transnational level, making the most of the relationship which connects welfare systems “over here” and “over there”.

For instance, it is possible to encourage transnational partnerships between local welfare systems that are geared towards improving the forms of recruitment of careworkers and at the same time reinforcing the supply of such services *in loco*; or using the mechanism of training, ensuring that it

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<sup>11</sup> Among others, see: M. Ambrosini, “Dentro il welfare invisibile: aiutanti domiciliari immigrate e assistenza agli anziani”, in *Studi Emigrazione*, XLII, issue 159, 2005; M. Ambrosini, C. Cominelli *Un'assistenza senza confini. Welfare “leggero”, famiglie in affanno, aiutanti domiciliari immigrate*, Fondazione ISMU, Milan, 2005; J. Andall, *Gender, Migration and Domestic Service. The politics of black women in Italy*, Ashgate, Aldershot, England, 2000; A. Colombo, G. Sciortino, *Sistemi migratori e lavoro domestico in Lombardia*, IRES Lombardia, Milano, 2005; and L. Zanfrini, *La rivoluzione incompiuta. Il lavoro delle donne tra retorica della femminilità e nuove disuguaglianze*, Edizioni Lavoro, Roma, 2005.

addresses the needs of both welfare systems; or further still, adopting policies that enhance the capacity of emigrant women to offer care services at a transnational level, making them driving forces of a genuine care gain, not only in destination countries but also in their countries and communities of origin.

#### **Female careworkers as agents of care gain**

Female emigration does not merely produce a care drain. Women continue to provide care even while abroad. *Ad hoc* policies can sustain and foster the role of women as welfare providers, putting in place strategies which support communication between mothers abroad and their places of origin, such as those aimed at improving the management of long-distance parenting, limiting the negative impact of care drain and strengthening the intervention of local welfare actors working with minors left behind in the homeland (the work of teachers and educators, for instance, is much less effective if performed in isolation). Similarly, policies aimed at channelling a part of care remittances into forms of welfare mix, as many local NGOs would like to see, would strengthen the supply of local welfare and, at the same time, make available to transnational families a supply of reliable services which are capable – compared to “do-it-yourself” solutions – of exploiting economies of scale. Finally, if supported by *ad hoc* policies, women could become social entrepreneurs and agents of transnational welfare networks thanks to the skills and contacts acquired abroad. This is particularly so in situations like that of Romania where, following accession to the European Union, welfare services are rapidly transformed, coming into line with western organisational standards and models.