

ON THE PATH TO REGULARITY: EXPLORING THE INDIVIDUAL COSTS OF REGULARIZATION AMONG UKRAINIAN AGEING DOMESTIC AND CARE WORKERS IN ITALY¹

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Abstract: This study focuses on the paths to regularization of Ukrainian migrants in Italy. Qualitative in its method and relying on in-depth semi-structured interviews, it uncovers in depth the fragmentation of status and rights that the process of regularization often brings, focusing specifically on the individual costs of “becoming regular.” The study subsequently looks at the emerging compensating mechanisms and networks that are developed by migrants in place of institutional dead-ends. Legality and regularity in migration – often presented in policy and public debates as a black and white matter – are in practice a complex and lengthy process for migrating individuals. The study makes its contribution by examining how individual migrants often individually shoulder costs linked to regularization, utilizing a combination of formal and informal means to achieve it. Most importantly, the study’s contribution highlights the role of age, gender and type of employment on the paths to regularity; by looking at the experiences of ageing women providing care and domestic work in private homes in Bologna I explore how age and individual relations with their families back at home and at work affect the meaning of regularization for this category of migrants and influence their prospects of ageing.

Keywords: *domestic work; care labour; ageing; regularisation; Ukraine*

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Introduction: striking a balance between fear and need in the EU

The 2004 and 2007 expansions of the EU triggered new waves of moral panics regarding immigration and gave rise to more elaborate forms of hierarchies that would regulate the spatial and social mobility of its citizens, particularly access to labour, welfare and voting rights. While physical internal state border controls have been disappearing, new forms of classifications, permissions, nationality- and occupation-based provisions pushed the frontiers of exclusion and inclusion inside the national labour markets and welfares, creating more tangible barriers for particular groups of EU citizens and, even more so, for 3rd country nationals.

EU nation states have moved away from closed national borders into a complicated pattern of openings and closures in the spheres of labour markets and social benefits based on the age, nationality and occupational background of a migrant, thus redefining the very nature of the relationship between the state, citizens and non-citizen/ mobile labour force (De Genova 2013). The economic meltdown of the last eight years and the austerity measures that have frequently accompanied it have increased the precariousness of local jobs; to some small degree it has intensified the competition between immigrants and local workers, but has mostly resulted in biased anti-immigrant sentiments, stereotyping and ousting of migrant labour into the most substandard, precarious and low-paid sectors (Anderson 2000, 2010).

These powerful transformations have led to a certain crisis of discipline in migration studies, as scholars are grappling with the nature of these changes, defining them as proliferation of borders (Mezzadra – Neilson 2013), fragmented citizenship (Deneva 2013), differential inclusion (De Genova 2013), contractual or contribution-based citizenship (Sommers 2008). All of these analytical frameworks grapple with the same idea – how the state redraws inclusion and exclusion of particular groups of people and individuals into labour markets and welfare, maximizing its benefit and individualizing the cost. Regulating migration by the ethnic, gender, social and professional profile of migrants, as well as their ability to generate a certain (usually quite high) level of income (as in the case of the UK points-based system) becomes one of the main ways of maximizing profits for employers and the state. The principle of categorization of migrants justifies the different treatment of human beings based on their perceived value for the EU labour markets: an approach which in

many ways has become not only a normative vision for policy makers but a form of “common sense” in thinking about migration (Tani 2006).

The division into highly skilled professionals, international students, and temporary, seasonal or circular (low-skilled workers) reflects the utilitarian approach to human individuals and furthermore justifies the differential provisions for migrants, such as prospects for long-term residence, renewal of contracts, reunification of the families, prospects for studying and career advance, and access to social benefits. The EU’s acknowledged priority for high-skilled labour, which found its reflection in the EU Blue Card Directive, also primarily reflects Europe’s reinforcement of the principle of “cataloguing” migrants by their skills, nationality and income. This principle has not only widened the gap between the “good” (high-skilled and prosperous migrants) and “poor” (and unwanted migrants) (De Somer 2012, De Genova 2013) but effectively legitimized intensification of control over various labour flows.

The flip side of such a position, however, is the implication that the EU does not need low-skilled migration. Nevertheless, there is much evidence that the EU continues to rely heavily on immigrant labour in many so-called low-skilled sectors, particularly all forms of care, catering, construction, food processing and agriculture. In this list, a wide spectrum of services, broadly defined as “domestic personnel” and “residential care activities” are among the industries experiencing the largest growth in foreign-born employment in OECD countries in 2007–2012 (OECD 2013). It is no accident that these jobs are most often performed by foreign born and immigrant women; located at the overlap of migration, employment and gendered regimes, these jobs signal the emergence of immigrant work sectors as the most underpaid, flexible and precarious (Shuttles – Anderson 2000). In its turn, the EU’s focus on high-road mobility and the construction of the aforementioned sectors as unskilled signals the state’s “reluctant reliance on immigrant labour” (Van Hooren 2011), its subtle production of irregularity of migrants through establishing policing and exclusionary migration regimes (Squire 2011, De Genova 2011).

The move from controlling the borders to controlling various sites of migrants’ engagement with the state (e.g. labour market or access to welfare) leads to what De Genova describes as “large scale recruitment of illegalized migrants as legally vulnerable, precarious and thus tractable labour” (2011), a *de facto* economic incorporation of irregular immigrant labour into the states’ economies by means of bureaucratic procedures of relaxing or enforcing certain policing practices (Burawoy 1976).

Responding to these differentiated opportunities, migrants choose situational practices that allow them to circumvent the limitations of status and enter into a partial relationship with the state, often based on their own contribution to the labour market and welfare. Such strategies, conceptualized by some authors as “acts of citizenship” (Isin – Nielsen 2008), render migrants as perfect subjects of neoliberal citizenship, i.e. “self-made” (we)men claiming their rights with the receiving states on the basis of their contributions to it (Deneva 2013). In each of these frameworks, regularity does not stand alone as a regulatory regime, but overlaps with labour regimes and, in the case of my research, very prominently with the care regimes.

In my analysis two definitions of regimes are equally helpful; I refer to William’s definition of regime as a sum of policies, practices and outcomes which lead to a particular configuration of opportunities and limitations for migrants (Williams 2012) but also to Lutz and Palenga-Möllnbeck’s (2011) ‘gendered regime’ as cultural scripts in which actions and responsibilities are seen as feminine or masculine. Williams observes that nation-states exist in a dynamic relationship of such interconnected domains as family, nation and work. Immigrant domestic care labour fits in a particularly timely way into the shifting nature of all three of these domains, i.e. the changing nature of work (as in the rising rates of women’s participation in labour markets), families (changes in the family structures linked to ageing and decrease of fertility rates) and nations (increasing role of multi-level governance, shifting dimensions of inclusion and exclusion mechanisms). Keeping in mind the gendered cultural scripts, on the other hand, allows for more nuanced discussions of power relations in the work place, and migrants’ active agency and governmentality in taking up their niche in emerging structural opportunities. In order to understand the emerging forms of migrant labour one needs to unfold the specificities of the national migration regimes, employment and care policy legacies, as well as ethnicised and gendered discourses (Williams 2012: 369). Therefore, I now turn to a brief overview of the migration, labour and care regimes that structure the experience of Ukrainian women employed in domestic and care work in Italy.

Intersection of migration and labour regimes in the case of Ukrainian domestic and care workers in Italy

Ukrainian labour mobility. Statistics on contemporary labour migration from Ukraine display a conspicuous uncertainty of estimates: from 1.5–2 million

indicated by some Ukrainian large-scale sociological surveys (Libanova et al. 2008, Malynovska 2006) to 5 million, i.e. 20 per cent of the working population of Ukraine (Kyzyma 2006, Hofmann – Reichel 2011). Emigration intensity and its demographic characteristics are mostly defined by the gendered occupational sectors in the receiving countries; while more men migrate to Russia and Czech Republic to perform construction work, more women migrate to Southern Europe to engage in domestic and care work. Though male migrants dominate Ukrainian migration, the number of migrating women is reportedly higher in the western regions of Ukraine, where women comprise 60–70% of those working abroad (Volodko 2011, Zhurzhenko 2008). The flows to such countries as Italy and Greece are particularly feminized: over 80% of all migrants are women in both cases (Istat 2011, Volodko 2011). Employment in the domestic sector among Ukrainian migrants accounts for the lowest per cent of written contracts (just over 16%). Respectively, the countries that hire a great number of Ukrainian domestic workers share the lowest percentage of written contracts (Russia, Poland, Italy) (Vakhitova – Coupé 2013).

In terms of work sector the division of Ukrainian migrants abroad is as follows: 50–55% of migrants are involved in construction, 15–20% provide domestic and care services, 8–9% are in agriculture and a similar percentage is engaged in trading activities and only about 5% in industry (Malynovska 2010, Vakhitova – Coupé 2013). Russia is the preferred destination country (almost 50%), followed by Italy and the Czech Republic (13–14%), while 7–8% of Ukrainians migrate to Poland, 2–4% to Spain, Portugal, and Hungary and 8–9% to other countries (estimations from Malynovska 2010).

Italian domestic and care work context. Ukrainian migration to Italy is considered to be new; i.e. it has no history prior to the post-independence wave. Thus, Italy has 170,000 officially registered migrants and twice as many according to unofficial estimates; around 80% of all registered migrants are women, the average age of Ukrainian women in Italy is over 40 (Marchetti et al. 2013), the majority of whom are working in the domestic and geriatric care sector. The majority of the migrants arrive in Italy on short-term tourist visas issued by another Schengen state and, making use of the EU borderless territory, make their way to Italy. Here, as will be discussed in greater detail in the results section, many women find work as live-in domestics, overstay their visa and spend several years in pursuit of legalization.

Various forms of informality punctuated the histories of most of my respondents in both my previous large scale research for my PhD thesis

(Fedyuk 2011) and in this project, which made them invisible to other than anonymous, in-depth interview methods of surveying. However, before I turn to discussing interview materials, I shall first turn to a more detailed discussion of migratory, welfare and labour regimes in Italy.

The group of policies that set the basis of the present-day immigration regime in Italy dates back to the end of the 1990s – early 2000s. Drafted by the right-wing government in power at the time and being rather harsh on immigration in general, it was challenged by many social actors (including the Catholic Church, trade unions, employers' associations and individual employers) exactly on the basis of the importance of the role of the domestic workers and carers in Italian families (van Hooren 2010, 2011). This resulted in adaptation of the regulations to allow for annual regularization of immigrant workers, in particular domestic and care givers. The annual waves of regularization were organized around national and general immigrant quotas until 2005, when domestic workers were singled out in addition to national and other occupational quotas, receiving 15,000 places, compared to 16,000 places for all other occupations. Domestic workers'/ carers' quotas grew at an amazing pace ever after. In 2008, due to the perceived effect of the economic crisis, Berlusconi's government abolished any other occupational quotas for migrants, at the same time raising domestic workers' quotas to a record number of 105,400 places (van Hooren 2010). This is particularly indicative of the fact that despite the economic recession Italy, which has in the past 30 years seen an increase in the demand for care (especially geriatric care), has maintained a steady demand in this sphere irrespective of the crisis.

There are thus three distinct ways in which Italy has opened the doors to domestic and care workers while maintaining a fairly high anti-immigrant sentiment in general: (1) regularization for domestic workers already present in the country illegally or working in this sector irregularly (i.e. without proper work permits), (2) special entrance and work permit quotas for care and domestic workers (vs. national quotas for migrants for other occupations), and (3) allowing Romanians and Bulgarians, as new EU accession citizens, to take up work in the care sector without any restrictions, as opposed to labour market limitations in other occupations (van Hooren 2010, Marchetti et al. 2013).

This outstanding effort to maintain the supply of immigrant care labour was in sharp contrast not only to the generally anti-immigrant governments and the increase in negative sentiments among the public (especially in

relation to particular nationals, such as Romanians). It further went along with the 20 years of persistent failure of the Italian state to reform its welfare in the areas of long-term care and particularly care for elderly and disabled people (Da Roit and Le Bihan 2010). This particular combination of care and immigration regimes marked the transformation of the Italian “family” care model into the “migrant-in-the-family” model of care (Van Hooren 2010, Bettio et al. 2006, Van Hooren 2011) and positions migrants as providers of welfare (Marchetti 2013).

Aims and methodology

Several conceptual frameworks attempted a more nuanced understanding of the new practices of exclusion and inclusion of migrants through rapidly changing ideas of borders, forms of access to national labour markets, social benefits and political rights in the EU and Schengen zone (for instance De Genova 2013, Squire 2011). In public debates and policy-making legal/regularized migrants are often presented as welcome and wanted, while illegal ones as unwanted and often criminal. In practice, however, the lengthy process of regularization and the lack of communication between various state institutions involved create a vast number of semi-regular states of liminal legality (Menjivar 2006) among migrants. Many spent years suspended in processes of applying, re-applying and (re-) validating their status. All of these shades of regularity affect migrants’ paths to employment, spatial mobility, social services, health services opportunities and, to a great extent, affect people’s professional opportunities, migratory decisions and trajectories, family rights and personal lives.

The contribution that this paper aims to make by examining the individual migrants’ costs on the paths to regularity specifically among ageing Ukrainian women is to contextualize these experiences as gendered and shaped by a particular position of domestic and care workers as the context of often informal employment in the privacy of homes. Age, as a regime of gendered social expectations in Ukraine and Italy, was another important factor affecting women’s experiences, goals and expectations. Thus, while De Genova’s (2011) conceptualization of differential inclusion and Menjivar’s (2006) liminal legality bring to the fore the ways in which nation-states are present in the individual experience of migration, my material brings gendered regimes of employment and age into this picture.

Investigating specifically the paths to regularization in a highly gendered–segregated sector, domestic and care-work, the paper achieves several objectives:

- Challenges the assumption that “legality” or “regularity” of migrants’ status is a clear-cut categorical state; rather it is a complex and lengthy process for migrating individuals that can take years and can result in various partial statuses.
- Discusses how fragmentation of migrants’ status affects their access to work, social security, and mobility and leads to individualized costs, often expressed in monetary value, or leads to (self-)exploitation among migrants.
- Questions the value of regularity status in the light of the long-term effects the paths to regularizing have on the prospects of adequate care and protection of ageing migrants.
- Explores how specificity of employment in care affects migrants’ strategies on the way to regularization and after.

In relation to these objectives nine women and one man between the age of 33 and 70 were interviewed in Bologna. Six out of nine women worked in geriatric care, one (the youngest woman) worked as a baby-sitter and two were self-employed (one was running a cleaning agency and the other a women’s clothes shop). The interviewed man was out of work (for details on respondents see Annex 2). The respondents had spent between four and 15 years in Italy and had various regularity statuses. Five respondents were respondents during my PhD dissertation field-work in 2007–2008, which allowed me to better see their trajectories, shifts in plans and aspirations. The other five were recruited through respondent-driven sampling. Most of the respondents had more than one round of interviews, each lasting from one to three hours and aiming at in-depth discussion of individual trajectories, as well as motivations for choosing certain paths and individual evaluation of the choices made.

The collected data presented a large amount of highly detailed and personalized narratives, in which migrants’ opinions were equally important to their accounts of their migratory histories. The samples by no means aimed to be representative; rather through great focus on detail and the personal judgement of the narrating individuals it aimed to capture mechanisms of making sense of the project of regularization in the context of a gendered employment sector and migration flows. Including a man in the sample allowed me to gain an idea both about whether men narrate their migration stories differently

and whether a man's narrative about women's migration differs from that of women themselves. The material from this interview is not present in the paper explicitly but implicitly; it did not in any significant way alter my findings, but rather allowed me to fine-tune my further interviews and inquiries.

Interviewing respondents with complex or partial regularity status allowed me to access respondents otherwise "invisible" to authorities and various forms of surveying. Specifically the interviews focused on (a) tracing professional trajectories before and during migration, (c) accounting for personal experience of overcoming employment difficulties, (d) tracing the role of semi-formal strategies and networks that lead to employment, (e) accounting for the effects of various partial regularity statuses on personal lives and mobility. Interviews were analysed by identifying repeating themes around such key stepping stones towards regularity as initial arrival in Italy, the process of acquiring and switching jobs, negotiation rights in the work place and access to health and social services.

Findings

Italy: an ageing care-worker

When the interviews are summarized, a certain collective profile emerges out of the similarities of my respondents' trajectories. It can be presented in the following highlights:

- Entering Italy on a tourist visa and overstaying.
- Staying 2–5 years in irregular employment, reluctant to change the original employer in the hope that the latter will regularize them (agreeing on less money, more work, harsher conditions).
- Women are more likely to become regularized than men, as men work on construction sites and in less regular jobs that do not lead to establishing a close connection to the employer.
- After regularizing their status for the first time, all respondents had to renew residence permits every one to three years for at least five years: the bureaucratic drag of the seemingly clear procedure often delayed renewal of the papers, forcing respondents to postpone their visits home or switching to a better job.
- Preferring to stay with employers who can secure renewal of the documents, even in cases of underpayment, failure to pay social security benefits or provide lawful free time.

- Due to the personalized nature of care work most respondents preferred not to solve any issues with tax or social security payments via legal means, but through negotiation or avoiding conflict.
- Due to the nature of care work respondents suggested that they had little or no opportunity to leave the person in care to attend hospitals or health checks even if they were entitled to access to the health service in Italy. In Ukraine, they relied on informal paid services that allow them to obtain services on the spot but at a rapidly growing price.
- No bilateral agreements exist between Ukraine and Italy concerning pensions; a care-giver is eligible for a pension payment in Italy after 15 years of regularized work, which in the case of Ukrainian migrants has two major problems: (1) many migrants spend several years in irregular employment, which are “lost years” from the social benefits perspective, (2) due to the particular demographic profile of Ukrainian care-givers in Italy (i.e. over 40) many quit due to age and the hardships of the profession before they reach the required 15 years of regularized occupation.

I will now turn to discuss these points in the context of the findings I registered in my interviews.

The interviews made it clear how various temporary work statuses consistently resulted in migrants’ putting on hold their professional advancement, family life and spatial mobility. Additionally, years spent in waiting for full legalization of statuses left most respondents with “white spots” in their careers which negatively affected further professional opportunities, access to social benefits and obscured the possibility of their return to Ukraine. However, an important element in all interviews was the comparing of the migrant’s present situation with their perceived opportunities in Ukraine. In relation to this, gender and age played a crucial role, as most respondents considered themselves ‘unemployable’ in Ukraine at their age, and saw themselves as limited to unpaid labour at home. I will now turn to discussion of the main points in these findings by detailing them through my interview materials.

Specifically, I focus on discussing (a) the costs of initial entry to Italy, (b) access to employment, (c) negotiations of rights in employment with varying legality statuses, (d) access to health services at various stages of migration. All of these areas came up as thematic fields in the interviews and in my analysis all speak of the individual costs of the paths to regularization and informal strategies that often pave these paths. Significantly, the findings speak of the

complex power relations that exist in the private domestic and care sector, where migrants enter multidirectional power struggles, not only as the objects of power regulations but active agents structuring relationships with their employees and clients (see section 4.4). Looking at the experience of crossing borders, consequent attempts at regularization of status and employment trajectories clearly demonstrated that while they all managed to cross the physical borders of Italy, multiple internal borders continue to define everyday aspects of their lives, especially in connection to access to the labour market, social benefits and spatial mobility.

The cost of initial migration

For many of my respondents, initial migration was linked with extremely substantial expenses due to (a) a fairly desperate economic situation at the moment of their departure, (b) lack of transparent mechanisms for obtaining travel documents or permissions for work and lack of access to knowledge about the existing opportunities, (c) the often fraudulent activities of intermediaries. In Italy all of my respondents identified the following expenses linked to their initial migration: (a) travel expenses, (b) visa expenses (identified by and paid to intermediaries), (c) the price of the job (that had to be bought from the previous employee or from an intermediary), (d) rapidly growing debt on the money that was borrowed in order to pay the travel and visa expenses.

None of my respondents entered Italy on a proper work visa; the majority entered on a Schengen travel visa to some country in the EU via more or less official intermediary companies. In relation to travel expenses, several of my respondents made more than one trip before they could enter the destination country; several travelled with fake or doubtful visas, and a few respondents were detained and returned to Ukraine at least once:

...In fact, I've left Ukraine twice: once we had a proper visa but they found some wrong stamp in my passport, so I was turned back from the German border with a deportation stamp. The second time I went by myself, through Moscow, then Barcelona, and then France. I paid 800 USD the first time [which was not given back]. The second time I threatened them [the visa issuing agency]... Since I had the protocol from the German border I said I would take this paper to the police. They gave me a new visa for free, but I paid 450 Euro for the trip. (Katia, 52)
...I also changed my passport three times...of course, for all of this I had no money... at first I had a German visa, but was returned from the border, the second time

I had a Spanish or Portuguese visa...I don't remember...but I didn't go because my husband then got stabbed and he was in the hospital. The agency said "fine, pay the money for the visa and don't go, fine with us." So I paid but I didn't go...I had to start all over again, the third time...it was a Greek visa. (Lilia, 39)

These experiences of initiating migration under such desperate conditions often became traumatic for my respondents and in many ways determined their further trajectories rooted in insecurity and pressure. Moreover, they lead to dependencies on substandard employment for prolonged periods of debt repayment. Many resolved to migrate as a "last resort" when other means of securing income were exhausted. The idea of migration possibilities, vague rumours and imagined ideas about the conditions of work and salaries made many into docile objects of entrepreneurial schemes by the "travel" agencies, willing to pay any price for the mere possibility of migration. Often being in a desperate financial situation, my respondents borrowed money at particularly high rates, thus creating long-lasting dependencies:

...I first came to Greece...back in 1994...our [Ukrainian] women were already there, some for 3–7 months, they could speak some Greek. And I couldn't learn a word... I was depressed, thinking that I have debts and that if something happens to me my children will have to pay back the debts, but how??? I only prayed to God to pay back those debts. (Veronica, 60)

...You know, it was a horrible time [2000]...Everyone was leaving for abroad, and not only that, it was a real dead-end, no money at all. No money to pay for electricity, gas...Catastrophe! No one was helping me, so I decided to borrow money at a rate. From some strangers [here: non-family], at a 10 % monthly rate. One month passed after I borrowed 500 USD – 50 more to pay.... And I have accumulated pretty big sum, because first I thought I would go to Portugal but God helped me, and instead I went to Italy... I was very worried, waited for 2–3 months – no reply from an agency, and the debts were growing...it took me around 8 months of work in Italy to just pay back the debts. (Ljuba, 55)

Similarly, in another interview where my respondent initiated her trip 3 times, each time paying a fee for a false visa and then being sent back from the border, she did not manage to recover the money for either the visa or the trip. My interviewee recalls that she borrowed 2,500 Euro at a 10% rate per month (i.e. 120% yearly rate) for the trip. However, it was 6 months (after she

borrowed the money) before she accomplished the trip successfully, during which time she stayed at home waiting for the documents and unable to pay back the debt:

...I worked to pay off those debts for 3 and half years. No one knew how much money I owed. I never told my children. No one knew, only me and God. (Hanna, 70)

Investment in the first trip opens up the issue of the individual cost of both entering visa regimes and overcoming distances. Many of my respondents were stranded from a few months to a few years in paying back the expenses linked to relocation and obtaining a job. This is an important obstacle for considering circularity – a pattern that has been particularly celebrated by EU policy makers (see Triandafillidou 2011) – even in those cases when there is suitable employment and a legal status. The costs of such a move seem to weigh heavily both on migrants' economic situation (especially considering the state of chronic unemployment and under-payments that precede the decision to migrate and on migrants' emotional state). Thus, most of the accounts of initial travel to Italy remained a traumatic experience for my respondents, linked to periods of extreme dependencies (on intermediaries, border officials, and in three cases from Italy, criminal networks), insecurity and lack of control over the situation.

Access to the labour market

In an informal system, described to me by some of my respondents as “common only for Ukrainian migrants” a successful job reference for an employer would be a paid service, even if exchanged between friends or relations:

...In 2002 I paid 600 Euro for that job...well, she [my friend] cheated me a bit. She said she wouldn't take any money but when my first month of work was over she borrowed some money from me and never gave it back. When I asked her about this she responded: “What did you think, I found you a job just like that, for free?” (Katia, 52)

...I was coming here [to Italy] to join my relative, but wherever you go, you need to pay for the jobs. I paid her 300 USD. Back then [2000], in Naples that was the price... I worked only 3 months there and then escaped from there...because there I was not even allowed to go out...after three months I was going crazy... I called another friend and I asked her to do something, to take me out of there...

ok...so I went to Bologna where she found me a job, and there I had to pay 500 Lira. (Oksana, 56)

Paying for jobs effectively stands as an obstacle to mobility in migration; it prolongs migrants' debts, often makes a change of job a risky, expensive enterprise or leads to months of work without actual income. Thus, in one of the interviews, Ljuba (55) in a complex narrative of the string of jobs she took after her arrival 12 years ago, describes her periods of work as 3, then 11, then 2, and then 3 months of consecutive employment periods in different families before she managed to secure a 3-year long job at an employer who also helped her to legalize her status. While with each new job she had an increase in salary (mostly due to the fact that she was moving from Naples up north), in each case she had to pay amounts ranging between 200–350 USD for a new job.

These cases of selling and buying jobs among migrants are interesting for my analysis on several levels. On the one hand, it shows the vulnerability of migrants to intermediaries not only in the process of migration and post-migration access to employment. The fact that the intermediaries are in fact other migrants, with similar status but better networks, reveals migrants not as only passive objects of regulations but in an entrepreneurial way capitalizing on the very existence of migratory and employment regimes that create individuals with vulnerable status. Finally, these cases are also an important entry point into the debate on how the ethnic networks in migration not only create opportunities but can often limit and serve as regulatory mechanisms of migrating individuals (Uribe 2014, Castles – Miller 2009, Rodriguez 2004). I argue that, with migration, many of my respondents entered not only a different employment status and career paths, but committed to an entirely different mode of moral economy, which prioritized income generation, as a way of supporting family and bringing closer family reunification (Fedyuk 2011). The next section will demonstrate in detail the role played by gendered moral codes in structuring power relations in the work places of Ukrainian domestic and care workers.

Rights vs. informal agreements

In Italy, where the nature of care and domestic work implies a more personalized connection to the employer, the methods of solving such issues as working hours, the scope of tasks, days off, the level of payment and the arrangement of social benefits varied greatly from respondent to respondent. While the interviewees seemed to be equally informed about their basic rights and

payments (e.g. minimum salary, per diem in the case of live-in workers, yearly premium and contract termination payments), only one of my respondents (a younger woman) resolved to take actual legal action against the employer. The rest of the respondents were prone to self-exploitation in various forms, making their non-confrontational behaviour a symbolic investment in a good relationship with the employer, or a necessary rite of passage in the beginning of the migration.

In the following somewhat more elaborate example, Ljuba (55) narrates the history of her undocumented stay in Italy. After three years she was promised a signed contract by her employer, which would allow her to go home. However, when the documents were ready her employer prohibited Ljuba from leaving:

...‘You, Ljuba,’ – she told me, ‘won’t go home now. My mother has a terminal disease, the doctor said she won’t live long, so you need to stay.’ But how long? No one knew. So I agreed. And stayed... There is law in Italy, but if you tried to follow the law, you would end up without a job, so you compromise with your employer, even if it’s against the law...anyway, what is this “law”? It’s nothing.

Similarly, after another employer of Ljuba’s retained 30 per cent of her 13th salary payment for three years, she confronted him with this, but as the employer refused to pay Ljuba, she simply stepped back:

...What could I do, go to court with him? I always say, thank God I have a job, whatever he [employer] gave me is fine. I always compromise, those of our women who try to prove something, there are they are sitting in the park on a bench [unemployed]. I always compromise and they [employers] like people like me.

In another striking testimony of self-justification of the mistreatment, Veronica speaks of the sum of 6,000–8,000 Euro which her employer retained over the course of her work by not paying the 13th salary, even though she had an official employment contract:

I have never asked for anything. Look, I have worked in Naples for three and a half years in one family... I was working legally, I had a contract. They didn’t pay me once, neither my 13th salary, nor “contract termination” payment. All in all there was 6,000–8,000 Euro that I lost. I never said a word. I told my employer once: “you haven’t paid me.” She said that that they have given me presents and therefore

won't pay me money. I could have gone to the lawyer, the law was on my side, and they would have had to pay me. My daughter said: "We'll go to the lawyer without your permission." I told her: "Listen, they go to church every Sunday, they say they are Christians. Legally I had to receive this money, they kept the record, wrote down that they have paid it, but they didn't, so I leave it on their consciousness." I came to a foreign country, it was my own country that robbed me, deprived me of a job [possibility to have a job]. [In Italy] I am not working in this family, I am helping them. I will not go to court with anyone, I am a Christian... If they give me something [payment] – good, if not, also good... Now, where I work now, we have agreed on a salary and I know that by the law I need to have a day off and an afternoon off per week. They let me out only for 2 afternoons, so I work extra half a day. I don't demand, I tell myself: "thank you, God, I have 1000 Euro... for Ukraine it's a lot of money." Our people sometimes go to court, I cannot do that, it's not in my nature... there are so many people out of work these days, and compared to Ukraine I have an excellent salary so I never discuss money issues.

In both testimonies above, the mechanism of comparing the lack of opportunities in Ukraine and the prospect of losing employment in Italy became a strong self-disciplining principle that allows the interviewees to get over the injustices even though they have a legal status that can protect them from such injustices. Furthermore, both respondents give both law and money a symbolic, if not metaphysical relevance; thus, Veronica portrays her work as “help” and her act of abandoning 6000 Euro as an act of Christian kindness, while Ljuba relies on compromise and consensus, asking an essential question: “what is this ‘law’, anyway?” This informal approach to work, symbolic investments and docile perspective comes up in another interview excerpt, where my respondent reflects on the nature of her work as a domestic live-in care-giver:

...Before me, 7 Filipino workers went through this house. After me, no one will be able to pick up this job. Because we [Ukrainian women] are stupid like that. A Filipino woman is paid to do this and that, and she will do it, but nothing else. And when we are hired to look after an old man, we look after him, but in the meanwhile, “I'll cook as well” or “I will clean the flat, since I am here”, or “I will iron the laundry.” You know? Like as if we are at home. And an Italian employer will never hire a woman whom he has to pay separately for looking after an old man, for cooking and then for ironing. He will only hire a woman like us. This is how we bring down prices for everyone, because we are too desperate. (Iryna, 55)

Another widespread strategy among domestic workers is informal employment during time off work, and the use of occasionally-arising opportunities to earn extra money. In fact, the majority of my respondents in Italy, even those who have permission to stay and work, would practise extra unregistered work along with their main official employment. Ideally, a geriatric-care job would be coupled with some hours of cleaning or ironing in other people's homes, undertaken during time off. Depending on the individual arrangement, a domestic live-in worker would have a free day on Sunday and a free afternoon on Thursday, with an additional possible break of 1–2 hours every day. These hours would often be used for additional jobs, as some of my respondents stated that they work for as many as six extra families in addition to their full time live-in employment. The tolerance of the main employer for these extra activities was considered a particularly valuable asset, even to the degree that women unhappy with a low salary would keep working for such employers “because they allow me to earn on the side”. Moreover, women who had no such jobs often expressed regret that they “waste” their time during their breaks (for a more detailed discussion see Fedjuk 2011, chapter 7).

Social benefits: balance between paying and using

Pensions remained the issue of greatest insecurity among all the respondents in Italy. Among other factors that complicated the pension issue for my respondents in Italy were (a) the minimum necessary number of years of legal employment (and consequently paid taxes and contributions), which was problematic because many respondents had considerable periods of unregistered employment, (b) practical arrangements for receiving payments without holding residence in the country of migration, and lack of bilateral agreements between the migration country and Ukraine about pension payments, (c) constantly changing rules and regulations, which left my respondents with a feeling that this issue was completely out of their control. In relation to Ukraine, two main problems linked to pensions were that (a) the level of pensions was very little, especially in comparison to the migrants' current earnings and (b) those who started their migration earlier in their lives lacked any employment status in Ukraine. Those of my respondents who were too young to work in the USSR and consequently never worked in independent Ukraine were doubly disadvantaged; they remained unsure about their pension entitlements in the receiving country and had few prospects beyond a minimum pension in Ukraine.

...Pension [in IT]? What pension [ironically]?! For a pension you need 15 years of legal work, all taxes and contributions paid, and around the age of 67–68 they will pay this pension. So, what kind of pension is that? What, you expect me to push a walker here in front of me in Italy? Maybe I'll die by the age of 68. I pay all the taxes and pension contributions, but I am afraid [that I will not receive the pension]. Some people say: "don't pay". But how? If I need to renew my residence permit, and I want to have a permanent residence here. Maybe one day, really I would be able to work 3 months here, 3 months staying at home, if I have that permanent residence. (Ljuba, 55, 12 years in Italy)

As the interview above shows, there is a reasonable mistrust among the respondents of social security benefits and their entitlement to them. Pension and other social contributions are often seen as a way of securing legal status in the country of migration rather than as an investment in one's future. The question of the pension system seems to me one of the most urgent issues of social support to be solved, as it is creating a strata of the population whose members will have no entitlement to pension support in any of the countries and therefore will be increasingly dependent on their families. Already now, several respondents in Italy who are approaching retirement age but see no prospects of either receiving a pension in Italy or supporting the standard of living created by the remittances on their Ukrainian pensions, remark that they will stay in Italy and work "as long as health permits."

My respondents in Italy had highly contrasting opinions and a wide range of practices that tapped into the health systems of both countries. Some respondents had very positive experiences with the Italian health system, others relied completely on the paid Ukrainian services. Those who preferred the Italian system argued that the health system was more humane and provided a very functional system of discounts, which made it incomparably cheaper than using the Ukrainian system, where all medications came at full price and services had to be unofficially paid for in an envelope. Many indicated that the very nature of their employment in the domestic and care sector did not leave them time to enjoy the free health system in Italy:

...I pay all my taxes so I have my doctor here [in Italy]. But I don't go to see a doctor here. Whenever I have a problem, I wait till my vacation, and then do all the check-ups in Ukraine. Because here, even to have a blood test, you need to go there, leave your old granny [the person for whom Ljuba cares], which means you need

to call her children first, ask them to come, and they never have time. So I prefer not to bother them. And in Ukraine, you pay and they will do the full check-up. Or if you have some acquaintances [doctors] or if you don't some of your family might, so they call the doctor and everything is taken care of. ... Last time I had a whole treatment, I paid and they took such good care of me [laughs]. Though I am laughing because I had money to pay. But what about those who don't? (Ljuba, 55)

The informality and the preferential treatment that was enjoyed in Ukraine, for those who could afford to pay for the services, was often quoted as the main advantage of the system. Some interviewees, however, reflected on this practice as morally problematic even for the users, as they could not but compare themselves to those who did not have enough income to secure privileged services.

...Last summer I had surgery. [...] I was praying so hard and it all went very smoothly. Of course, I had to help, I came to the hospital prepared. I work in geriatric care here, I know things and technologies that our poor hospitals have never seen or heard of. I brought everything with me – clean sheets, shirts, pampers, panty liners for bleeding...everything. And of course I paid for all the medication, bandages, food while in hospital, everything. Then I immediately gave 30 Euro to the doctor, to the nurse, so that after the surgery the doctor himself checked if everything was fine... I know that some people prefer to go to the doctors here in Italy, but here you need to pay 30 Euro just for a blood test! What is 30 Euro here? It's nothing! And in Ukraine, ok, I had to pay more, but still, I was treated like a queen! It hurt me though to see some women in my ward who had no money and no one to come take care of them. I had my daughter-in-law coming with home-cooked fresh food every day... When I was leaving, I gave some money to the nurse to take better care and to change sheets and shirts for this one old lady, who was there in the ward all alone with not a soul visiting her. (Oksana, 56)

This highlights the important point, raised in some of the existing literature, that migrants tend to deplete the Ukrainian health system. Vakhitova and Coupé (2013) remark that “migrants use social security and health care systems financed from the Ukrainian budget without paying taxes and social contributions in Ukraine” (2012). While patterns of using the health services varied greatly, all those respondents who made use of it in Ukraine indicated that they were paying for every medication and operation (officially), as well as gratitude payments to doctors and nurses. This also held true for the members

of their household; whenever there were health problems in my respondents' families they indicated that all other channels of expenditures would be cut down and remittances would be directed in order to get the best, paid treatment. Thus, respondents in my study contributed to the commercialization of medical services in Ukraine and – through their readiness to make gratitude payments – to the flourishing of medical profession individuals, often observing the inflation of prices that their capacity to pay has brought to local medicine and feeling haunted by the fact that they will not have a foreign income to make up the difference some day.

Conclusions

This study has examined the paths to regularization among ageing Ukrainian domestic and care workers in Italy and revealed the great complexity of the meaning of regularity in migrants' narratives. Responding to differentiated opportunities, migrants choose situational practices which allow them to circumvent the limitations of status and enter into partial relationship with the state, often based on their own contribution to the labour market and welfare. Such strategies, which can be seen as “acts of citizenship” (Isin – Nielsen 2008) render migrants as convenient subjects of neoliberal citizenship, i.e. “self-made” (we)men claiming their rights with the receiving states on the basis of their contributions to it (Deneva 2013). My interviews confirm this last view particularly strongly through the symbolic approach to regularity: obtaining various forms of long-term residence permit was often seen by my respondents as the ultimate goal of their stay in the country, justifying their work under unsatisfactory living and work conditions and family separation. Often respondents did not identify the specific goals that obtaining such documents would guarantee them or the prospects it would open, except for a general sense of “securing a future.” As in the case of regular status, the payment of formal welfare contributions was often invested with a vague and symbolic meaning of serving as an insurance against expulsion from the country. Even without a clear and comprehensive idea of how to claim benefits, or whether they can be claimed at all, most of my respondents continued to pay the former as a way of (a) proving good will in case of future openings for legalization, (b) staying “legal” in their own consciousness or (c) as a way to claim their “usefulness” if they needed to defend their case in the event of deportation, etc. The value of legal status thus transcends its original form of a “right” that is given for free to all those who comply with regulations

and norms, and turns into both social capital and an item worthy of monetary investment (Ong 2006).

The fragmentation of migrants' citizenship often leads to their further falling through the rights and benefits system available in both Ukraine and Italy. This is particularly visible in case of failure to secure and receive pensions or transfer individual occupational skills into meaningful employment from one country to another. These obstacles aggravate the personal price of migration, often turning it into "lost years" in terms of occupational trajectories or social benefits. Thus, migrants are often left to themselves to finance their old age, periods of unemployment and health problems, and none of my respondents expressed an expectation that either the Italian or Ukrainian state would provide secure retirement for them. Here, the situation is particularly aggravated for ageing care-givers; their highly professional acquired skills would not be able to generate them paid income in Ukraine, where care services are provided mostly by the family and where most families cannot afford to pay adequately to hire external help. At the same time, most of my respondents had lost their jobs prior to migration and could not see themselves being successful on the Ukrainian labour market upon their return.

These patterns of uncertain regularity often lead to mobility obstructions, tremendous complications in family communications and reunifications, and obstacles in the personal lives of individuals. The case of ageing female migrants in Italy, despite the elaborate care-chains that to some extent make up for the absence of mothers and grandmothers from the households, has led to a major national blaming discourse directed against migrating women in Ukraine (Vianello 2013, Fedjuk 2012, Solari 2006, Volodko 2011). Some reflection of this discourse can be seen in the terms like "ATM mothers" and "euro-orphans" used by a broad range of the Ukrainian media to reflect perceived corruption of values and morality in families, particularly with female migrants.

In focusing on the paths to regularity and individual costs for migrants associated with achieving regularity I challenge the discourses blaming migrants for violating regularity statuses, but rather shift the focus on to the regularity regimes as a set of policies and outcomes that classify people, fragment workers' rights and create a vulnerable and cheap work force. However, looking deeper into power relations in the work places allows me to step away from a portrayal of migrants as victims of the migratory regimes, and, while acknowledging the obstacles and dependencies created by their status, to see Ukrainian care-workers as engaging in complex multi-dimensional power relations, moral

economies concerning the ethics of care (Romero et al. 2014). Finally, I have indicated that the prospects of my respondents should not be seen as connected solely to their success in the regularizing process; more than anything, their prospects for dignified retirement, adequate health services and care are linked to their position as ageing women, lack of employment opportunities and social status in Ukraine. As my research hints, with very few options in Ukraine, women often choose to stay in challenging and exhausting employment, literally “as long as health permits.”

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Annex 1.

Categories	Italy (data for 2011)
Numbers	218,099 residence permit holders
Percent of total migrant population:	6% (5 th largest migrant group)
Average age	mean age 42
Gender composition:	20% men, 80% women
Dominant labour market sectors	– social and family services – approx 70%
	– commerce
	– construction (for men)
	– agriculture
National legal framework (in relation to migration)	– work permits are central to residence permits
	– from 2000 – planned flow system or on call system
	– 2002 and 2009 – amnesties for all migrants who have work contracts
	– in 2010 Ukrainians appear for the first time as having a national quota in the regularization process
Historical reference	Ukraine and Italy have no historical connection in the migration area. Some authors suggest that Ukrainians started arriving in Naples due to its connections with Odessa port, others, suggest that Ukrainian women followed in the tracks of Polish care-workers who started doing domestic work in Italy after 1989 (Vianello 2009).

Annex 2.

Respondents profiles (anonymized)						
Name*	Age	Family status	How long in Italy	Regularity status	Education / job history in Ukraine	Work in Italy
Oksana	56	Married in Ukraine, 3 children (all married), 4 grandchildren	15 years	Permanent residence	Vocational school (food and catering). All her life worked in her field (until 1996)	Geriatric care (live-in worker), cleaning houses
Hanna	70	Married in Ukraine, 2 children, grandchildren, and 3 great-grandchildren	7 years	Irregular	Vocational training, (book-keeper). Worked as head of storage of a small alcohol production line. Retired due to reaching retirement age in 1997	Geriatric care (domestic live-in worker)
Katia	52	Widow, 2 adult sons (one of whom is special needs)	10 years	Entrepreneurial license	Education level unknown. Worked for 10 years as a worker in a coalmine. Later 15 years as an engineer and a head of a brigade in the same mine	Owens her private cleaning company, provides cleaning services for pools, offices, enterprises
Iryna	55	Married in Ukraine, adult daughter, 2 grandchildren	12 years	Permanent residence	University degree in engineering. For 19 years worked as a master technician in a plant	Geriatric care (live-in worker), cleaning houses

Vasyl	50	Married in Ukraine, 4 children,	4 years	Irregular	University degree. Priest of UGCC	Unemployed
Zhanna	47	Separated from her husband, 3 adult children	7 years	Romanian passport	University degree, economist. 12 years of work experience in a construction company, (book-keeper)	Geriatric care (domestic live-in worker)
Vira	33	Was married to an Englishman, but separated 2 years ago. Keeps no contact with him.	7 years	Long-term residence permit	Education unknown. Work experience – none	Baby-sitter, cleaning
Lilia	39	Separated, has 20-year old daughter	8 years	Entrepreneurial license	Vocational training (geodesist). Work experience – none	Owens a clothes shop
Veronica	60	Widow, has 2 adult married sons	5 years	Long-term residence	Vocational training school. For 8 years worked in a factory, later in a laundry	Geriatric care (domestic live-in worker)
Ljuba	55	Widow, 2 children and 3 grandchildren	12 years	Long-term residence	Vocational training school (cook). Never worked in her field. Worked periodically as a hospital nurse	Geriatric care (domestic live-in worker)

* All names have been changed to maintain anonymity.