

EDITORIAL

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Our original aim in preparing this monothematic issue was to focus on a “blank spot” in migration studies – the issue of ageing in the process of migration. This is an area that has long remained empirically unresearched. In the field of migration studies, academic interest has focused more on the connection between migration and the ageing of the recipient societies (demographic studies) and the influence of migration on the ageing of the population in the country of origin, in other words on situations where those migrating are mostly of productive age. A further issue that arises during study of the connection between gender, ageing and migration is the field of care practices. This in the end proved to be the thematic axis of all the studies included in our monothematic issue. In this issue of *Urban People* we present selected empirical studies from the field of social anthropology and sociology. They use qualitative data from surveys of male and female migrants concerning, from various perspectives, the theme of old age.

The papers by Olena Fedyuk (the case of Ukrainian female migrants in Italy), Petra Ezzeddine/Hana Havelková (the case of ex-Yugoslav female refugees aged 50+ in Czechia), and Bernhard Perchinig/Katharina Schaur (the case of migrant seniors in Austria) look at the contrast between the systems of support in old age in these countries and the way in which this support is viewed by, in particular, ageing migrant men and women themselves, and how and why they are able or unable to access it. In terms of methodology, all three studies combine an analysis of the institutional support provided with qualitative research and analytical surveys, based on interviews with the target groups concerned. This combination allows us to show where, how and why the systems fail to take account of the situations of particular individuals, even in cases where these individuals are citizens of the recipient countries with full rights. This failure puts these ageing migrant women and men at serious risk of poverty. The essays identify the causes, which often consist not only of shortcomings in the social systems, but are also of a cultural nature, connected above all with traditional patterns and norms in family relationships.

The Czech and Austrian studies have a common target group, which in the Austrian case forms part of the overall group. These are migrant men and women with a refugee past who left the former Yugoslavia because of the war. In

the case, too, of the Ukrainian care workers about whom Olena Fedyuk writes, the decision to leave home cannot be considered an entirely free one, since their migration is, as we know, forced by the dire economic situation in Ukraine. Ewa Ślęzak, on the other hand, shows in her study that migration also has a major effect on those who do not migrate but stay at home. She looks at the ageing parents and relatives and the way in which they deal with the absence of their migrating children from the point of view of both the economic situation and the emotional ties.

Hana Havelková and Petra Ezzeddine consider an important specific feature of the research they present here to be that it covers a long time period of life in migration, which has proven to be as academically valuable as it is highly politically instructive. The long time period allows us, among other things, to show that the refugee experience of women is not linear but cyclical, gaining new significances at various stages of women's lives, in various social contexts (including the context of institutions) and transnational environments. The research showed a sharp discrepancy between the heroic working and social performance during the period of migration and the totally undignified financial reward in the form of the pension received in the recipient country, which is not enough to cover basic life needs. Moreover, women from the former Yugoslavia with refugee experience are dealing with a serious dilemma, connected with the traditional moral commitment to care for their families in their far-off native country. It is more difficult for them when older to organise "caring" visits to their parents, and they thus find themselves under a double pressure: they are trying to safeguard their own vulnerable position at work and at the same time to meet the normative commitments (traditionally expected from women) regarding transnational care of seniors.

Olena Fedyuk's study explores the individual costs of regularization among ageing Ukrainian domestic and care workers in Italy. She focuses on the role of age, gender and type of employment on the paths to regularity, looking at the experience of ageing women providing care in private homes in Bologna. She argues that the fragmentation of migrants' citizenship often leads to their further falling through the rights and benefits systems available in both Ukraine and Italy. She points to significant differences in how particular countries understand and define an established profession. Thus, the ageing caregivers, despite their professional acquired skills, would not be able to generate 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. As

a result, this leads to migration having a personal cost; it often represents “lost years” in terms of occupational trajectories, access to social benefits, periods of unemployment and health problems.

Ewa Ślęzak’s study looks at the question of economic provision for ageing persons who are the parents and relatives of migrant men and women working in highly-qualified positions in health care in Britain. In the case of this group, which clearly consists of members of the middle class, the author not only found no material want, but did not even find a need for financial support from the migrating children. The research revolves more around the emotional family ties and their maintenance in a transnational and “modern” context. We find it nevertheless strange that the author declares that she does not devote too much space to the gender dimension of the stories researched. We can see that it is strongly present here – no light is cast on the life of accompanying wives or women migrants with no children. It would be interesting to see to what extent their single or childless status is the price they pay for the economic advantages of migration, and how their parents deal with this in relation to their absent or non-existent grandchildren. As in the case of the ex-Yugoslav migrant women living in the Czech Republic, we see here a keenness on the part of ageing women that their children should be successful, which possibly leads them to downgrade their own interests.

We have included in this monothematic issue an interesting example of a research report regarding applied research into the care needs of elderly migrants in Austria by Bernhard Perchinig and Katharina Schaur, conducted by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development in Vienna. This empirical perspective was gained through semi-structured interviews with experts, and focus groups with elderly migrants of Turkish, ex-Yugoslav and Philippine backgrounds in the cities of Vienna and Linz. The authors argue that the focus groups showed that care in the family, by one’s own children, was the ideal for many participants, similar to the Austrian majority population. At the same time it also portrayed the strong social change that was going on in the second generation, the participants’ children. This research, too, identified certain barriers of a sociocultural nature in relation to the traditional norms of care for members of the family. As is usual in the case of applied research, the authors have included some practical recommendations for policy makers. They draw attention to the fact that the Austrian care system targets a middle-class audience with well-honed communication capacities, and does not reach the migrant population. They recommend a more proactive and targeted strategy

for communication with migrant communities and migrant associations, and the removal of language barriers when working with this target group.

To conclude, while we are currently observing the globalisation of economies and the interconnection of capital markets, on the other hand it can be seen that national social policies do not reckon with the social mobility of citizens and their transnational lives and rights. The empirical material from this research shows the importance of researching variously-situated persons in migration in connection with ageing. Besides this, however, it will be necessary in the future to strengthen the overall intersectional perspective in migration research in general, to focus more on the connection of social status (class) and gender, and not to reduce the identity of the people surveyed to only their migration and refugee experiences and status.

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