



Synopsis of the Virtual Discussion "Global Care Chains"

7-18 September 2009

For full transcripts of the discussion please visit:

<http://www.un-instraw.org/grvc/fireboard/virtual-discussion-discusion-virtual-discussion-virtuelle>

The nature of care work & the globalization of care

The formation of global care chains represents one of the most paradigmatic phenomena of the current process of the feminization of migration occurring within the context of globalization and the transformation of the social welfare state, a phenomenon that is reflective of the realities of the feminization of migration in the context of globalization and the need to transform social welfare systems. Studying global care chains therefore provides a valuable position from which to examine the relationship between migration and development of analysis from where the relationship between migration and development can be debated.

With the aim of motivating the debate on that topic, between the 7-18 of September 2009 UN-INSTRAW's Gender and Migration virtual community hosted the discussion 'Global Care Chains: Assessing the situation and policy challenges' which resulted in the information presented in this paper.

Care work is the responsibility of women. As Yamina Medouni from Algeria writes, “whether women work in the household or outside the home, it is women who are responsible for taking care of children, elderly, handicap.” Participants also expressed that care work is generally ‘invisible’ and therefore not valued as real work. In Cyprus, for example, migrant domestic workers and migrant women working in the sex industry are the only two categories of migrants who do not fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance because there is little recognition of domestic work as a category of labour. In Taiwan, despite the efforts of NGOs, care work is not covered by the Labour Standards Laws for it is not seen as ‘real work’. Because of care work’s invisibility it often carried out in precarious conditions for very little or no pay. As Anthoula Papadopoulou writes, “inequality and multiple discrimination are part and parcel of the [Cypriot’s] state’s policy and practices. Indicative of this inequality and discrimination is [domestic workers’] pay, which remained unchanged from 1990 at CyL150 a month (then the minimum wage).”

These aspects of care work are not new. Indeed, Suzy Bermudez. writes it is for historical reasons that care work is as such. However, as Francesca Degiguli writes, “what is new is really the global dimension of it”. From her context in Italy she reports, “Care continues to be a women’s affair, but no longer only Italian women. It is now Peruvian, Romanian and Nigerian women who have to perform this work”. In Cyprus domestic workers constitute the single largest migrant group.

The globalization of care is not simply a matter of outsourcing care work to migrants. As the discussion participants report it also involves a change in attitude of those both in countries of destination and in counties of origin. As Magdalena Díaz Gorfinkiel writes, ‘the main change in Spain in the past few years is the acceptance of domestic service and of somebody ‘outside’ the family that enters the ‘home’” The term ‘globalization of care’ to Yamina Medouni involves a “an expanding consciousness among working class families that international migration to undertake low skill work is a viable option that even they can entertain.”

Another dimension of globalization of care is creation of a transnational service class and “transnational capitalist class that have more in common with each other across national boundaries than with other citizens within their own boundaries”. As Yamini N. Atmavilas writes, migration is closely related to “the creation of a class of professional women who are further enmeshed in either the world or work, or the work of status production (that includes having a maid take care of young children, for instance) according to commodified ideals.”

Countries of Origin

When women migrate it is often other women who take over the care responsibilities that were previously performed by the migrant. In some cases the grandparents or husband will be responsible though, as Maria Victoria Whittingham writes, as care is typically ‘women’s work’, when men are responsible for care they can be mocked by friends and family. All participants noted that care needs are not being met in countries of origin. Migration can cause school dropouts as the need to cover care responsibilities increases. This situation is closely connected to situations of child labour, child abuse and domestic abuse and violence against women. Many older people spend their last years alone, feeling neglected. They rely on neighbours or distant relatives for care although many care needs are not met at all. The Mexican government is promoting programmes to assist adults. However, in times of economic crisis these programmes are the first to be cut.

Many participants stressed that there is no institutional support in countries on the periphery to meet care needs. Nor has the migration of women generally a discussion about how to meet those needs. Instead, as Ana Silvia Monzón points out, the migration of women has generated a discussion about remittances in the media.

The media has also focused on the problems caused by the absence of mothers. There was some disagreement among participants as to whether or not this constituted an ‘alarmist discourse’. Some participants believe the ‘alarmist discourse’ about women’s migration usually comes from the social control that has traditionally oppressed women (priests, male patriarchs, right-wing politicians) others believed that it is impossible to deny the long term negative impacts that migration and the absence of mothers have on families.

Maria Victoria Whittingham writes that the plight of children growing up without mothers is being discussed in the press from a patriarchal perspective. Rosa María Aguilera-Guzmán writes that women who make the decision to migrate are sometimes seen as ‘selfish’ ‘liberated’ and ‘bad’ because their motivations do not coincide with what is expected of them, “from male eyes”. Many agreed that it is impossible to ‘blame’ women for migrating when they really have no choice for survival. Sy Cotiary Ba writes that in Africa, where populations suffer the effects of conflicts, political crises and poverty, women are not at all guilty. She writes, “It’s the system put in place by men that is guilty”.

“The global movement related to care among women caregivers is expanding and the dynamics and interactions of the new comers to the receiving countries are just being explored; on the other hand, the effect on the sending countries both on a macro and micro level is receiving even less attention:

(Shereen Hussein)

Some participants believe it is impossible to find generalizations between the negative effects of migration and emotional problems and “Doing so only further stigmatizes migrant families”. Maria Victoria Whittingham writes that there are certainly some very serious problems of family disintegration and profound changes in traditional structures but the alarmist speeches do little to understand or manage the problem.

Yet, Alissa Tolstokorova reminds us that not everything can be dismissed as ‘alarmist discourse’ and that there are indeed serious “negative impact of long-term absence of mothers on families left behind – both on children and the elderly, as well as on husbands.” She writes, Ukrainian children of migrants are often left without any care at all which leads to a host of social problems, including minors who are at risk for behavioural problems such as “draining the remittances sent by migrant parents; involving them in gambling, drug and alcohol taking, pornography and child-trafficking; using them as objects of sex tourism etc.”

Participants noted the fact that a lot of the problems that migration is seen to cause are already part of larger societal problems. For example, they argued that family dysfunction is often thought of as a result of migration but it affects non-migrant households as well as migrant households.

Countries of Destination

All participants noted the poor conditions under which migrants in the care sector work. One participant wrote that a domestic servant's fate was often a matter of luck – because their living conditions depend so much on the family with whom they live. There are no control mechanisms in place to ensure a minimum of safety for these – mostly female – workers. Access to social rights is conditioned by legal status. In Taiwan migrant workers who work as domestic workers or caregivers in a household are not covered by the Labour Standards Law (LSL). They are very vulnerable to all kinds of abuse and exploitation. Extensive work hours, very limited days off and all kinds of abuse are common. (Regina Fuchs). “Foreign care givers in nursing homes often complain of the massive workload and the overtime that very often is not paid accordingly.” (Regina Fuchs, double check this)

Civil society efforts are falling short to advocate for migrant rights and it is hard for domestic workers and caregivers it is not easy to get organized to defend their rights. Sandra Panopio writes, “participation in domestic workers groups depends on free time, citizenship/residential status and capacity to organize”. Migrant workers in Taiwan are not allowed their own union. Many of them are not allowed to go out and have only few opportunities to communicate.

Several participants noted that migration is only a temporary fix to a greater social problem of meeting care needs in the developed world.

Looking Ahead (?)

Many participants expressed their concern that migrants in the care industry often operate in a near 'policy vacuum' and are often unable to access sources of legal support. There is very little institutional intervention when it comes to care work which is what is needed: "It is absolutely essential that national governments together with supranational organizations intervene in providing on one hand to help families who are no longer capable to provide full time care, and perhaps, more importantly in allowing im/migration women to provide paid care as legal workers worthy of respect and fair wages" (*Francesca Degiguli*)

New legislation in Argentina grants migrants, regardless of their status, the same rights as national citizens. As Carlota Ramirez writes, "This is very important because migrant women can send their kids to school from kindergarten to university, they can access health and social services, legal advice and every right in international conventions and constitution." She acknowledges that discrimination is the most significant barrier to accessing and realizing those rights but "having a framework is critical and makes a huge difference".

Participants also encouraged NGOs and interest groups to get involved pressuring governments to enact policy. Governments won't seek advice on their own: "there has not been, at least up to now, any attempt to involve or consult civil society and NGOs, such as those fighting for the rights of migrants, including domestic workers." (Anthoula Papadopoulou) She goes on, "It is very important for the international community, including the UN, other world organizations and bodies, migrants women's organizations and other NGOS, to raise their voices and pressure governments to recognise domestic work as a from/category of labour, thereby integrating domestic workers' rights in labour legislation and other measures of support and solidarity."

Specifically, Yamini N. Atmavilas stressed that advocacy needs to occur for better social services for women in developed nations, advocacy for better conditions of work for migrant women workers in developed nations and advocacy for better preparation and legal channels of migration in countries of origin. Unfortunately, "efforts are often hijacked by corporate and untenable concepts of managing mobility that are not necessarily rooted in a rights framework".

Often a discussion of the situation of domestic workers will lead to a discussion of the rights of nationals. As Amaia Orozco writes, "If carework is thought to be a household-based responsibility (a permanent trade-off between domestic workers' rights and female native rights) employers' ability to work outside the home appears. It keeps on being a matter of power relationships within the domestic sphere." In Lebanon the ILO overcame this by research and advocacy around unmet care

needs of households in Lebanon and the implications for women in these households. As Simel Esim reports, The response around social care needs and deficits was very enthusiastic and there has been significant public dialogue around care issues since then from researchers, media, some NGOs and policy makers.”

There is a great need for international cooperation around care work. Yamini N. Atmavilas writes that there is need for “transnationalize advocacy to work in tandem with the transnational nature of care work”. This would mean the “development of an agenda and praxis for cooperation between organizations that work with migrant women workers in countries of origin and those that work on social policy and gender concerns in countries of work”. Sandra Panopio also speaks to this need for greater international cooperation: “Current work in academia and international organizations on global care chains should be further translated and distributed at the grassroots level to aid and contribute to the crucial organising and informational campaigns aimed at human rights and justice for migrant workers...A great momentum can be built by key collaborations and links between all people and institutions that are committed to the subject of global care chains and all its intersecting themes”.

Appendix I.

List of participants

Alissa Tolstokorova	ISEO, Ukraine
Amaia Perez Orozco	UN-INSTRAW, Spain
Ameena Alrasheed	University for Peace, Costa Rica
Ana Silvia Monzón	FLACSO, Guatemala
Anthoula Papadopoulou	KISA, Cyprus
Bukola Kolawole	University of Toronto, Canada
Deb Brennan	UNSW, Australia
Fernanda P. Amaral	Brasil
Francesca Degiuli	UC Santa Barbara, USA
Franziska Schallehn	Spain
Isabel Vericat Nuñez	Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM), Mexico
Laura Olsen	UN-INSTRAW, Dominican Republic
M. Carlota Ramirez	FLACSO, Argentina
Magdalena Díaz Gorfinkiel	Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Spain
Maria Kontos	Institute of Social Research at the J.W. Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main, Germany
Maria Victoria Whittingham-Munevar	CIREM, Spain
Meltem Hamit Balcioglu	PhD Student, Cyprus
Norma Sanchis	Asociación Lola Mora, Argentina
Regina Fuchs	Taiwan
Sahro Ahmed	UNDP, Somalia
Sandra Buccafusca	Centro de Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos, Argentina
Sandra Panopio	UN-INSTRAW, Dominican Republic
Shereen Hussein	King's College London, U.K.
Shiuho Lin	Gray Panthers, USA
Simel Esim	ILO, Lebanon
Suzy Bermudez Quintana	Colombia
Swarnalatha Ukwatta	PhD student, Australia/Sri Lanka
Teresa Castaño González	Colombia
Viorela Ducu	PhD Student, Romania
Yamina Medouni	Université de Djelfa, Algérie
Yamini Atmavilas	Centre for Human Development, ASCI, Hyderabad, India
Yolanda Villavicencio Mapy	Asamblea de Madrid, Spain

Appendix 2.

List of Documents submitted by Participants

1. "América Latina y el Caribe: Crisis económica e impactos sociales y de género", by Alma Espino and Norma Sanchís, 2009 <http://www.un-instraw.org/grvc/fireboard/virtual-discussion-discussion-virtual-discussion-virtuelle/cuidado-y-crisis>
2. "Las actividades del cuidado en Argentina", Red Internacional de Género y Comercio Capítulo Latinoamericano, by Norma Sanchís, September 2007 http://www.un-instraw.org/grvc/images/fbfiles/files/Arg_Actividades_del_cuidado.pdf
3. "Did you know? Frequently Asked Questions and Answers about Live-in Domestic Workers in Lebanon", ILO, Lebanon, 31.08.2009, http://www.un-instraw.org/grvc/images/fbfiles/files/Frequently_asked_questions_on_women_migrant_domestic_workers_in_Lebanon_ILO_Beirut_Aug_31_09.pdf
4. "Costs and Benefits of Labour Migration for Ukrainian Transnational Families: Connection or Consumption?", by Alissa Tolstokorova, June 2009 <http://urmis.revues.org/index868.html>
5. "technologies of globalization, International Conference" by Reiner Anderl, Bruno Arich-Gerz, Rudi Schmiede, 31.10.2008 http://www.un-instraw.org/grvc/images/fbfiles/files/Locally_Neglected_Globally_Engaged.pdf
6. "AN OVERVIEW OF MIGRATION AND DOMESTIC WORK IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPE" by Meltem Hamit <http://www.un-instraw.org/grvc/fireboard/virtual-discussion-discussion-virtual-discussion-virtuelle/part-1-the-globalization-of-care-la-globalizacion-de-cuidados-la-mondialisation-des-soins-10>
7. KISA's contribution to Cyprus' report on the Resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations 60/139 on "Violence against women migrant workers", 7.05.2007 http://www.un-instraw.org/grvc/images/fbfiles/files/Memo_Violence_against_women_migrants_7May07.pdf
8. "Reading Affect—On the Heterotopian Spaces of Care and Domestic, Work in Private households" by Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez, May 2007 <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/240/532>
9. "Adrift through the circuits of feminized precarious work, Precarias a la deriva", in european institute for progressive cultural policies (eipcp), April 2004
10. "Women in the Lives of Romanian Transnational Families", by Viorela Ducu http://www.un-instraw.org/grvc/images/fbfiles/files/Women_in_the_Lives_of_Romanian_Transnational_Families.pdf