

## **PRECARIOUSNESS AND CAPABILITIES: MIGRANT CARE/DOMESTIC WORKERS IN TWO INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS<sup>1</sup>**

*Abstract.* Across European societies there is an increasing number of precarious workers. In this study we focus on migrant care/domestic workers, an archetypical case to study the precariat in a sector characterized by informality, lack of access to employment rights and protections and where workers may face exploitation and abuse. We compare migrant care workers in two institutional contexts, Spain and Sweden, representing different welfare/care and migration regimes. Analyzing the effects of precarious work within the framework of capabilities, we consider whether there are similarities and differences in our two cases regarding wellbeing and quality of life of migrants working in the sector and their scope of alternatives for making change. The analysis is based on semi-structured interviews of migrants working in the care/domestic sector conducted in Madrid, Barcelona and Stockholm. We find less of a divergence than one would have expected, given our cases with different regimes and employment practices, though in Spain migrant care/domestic workers fare worse, which partly can be attributed to the recession.

**Keywords:** migrant workers, care/domestic workers, precariousness, welfare regimes

### **Trans-national migrants, precariousness and care/domestic work**

The global crisis has generated research debates and awareness on the widening gap in inequalities across regions and countries and within them. Piketty's *Capital* (2014) has been in the forefront of these debates with its long historical perspective on inequalities in wealth and the role

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of global capitalism—popularized in the US media as the 1% or the Great Divide. Standing's formulation of the Precariat has resonated in Europe with the increasing numbers of temporary and precarious workers (Standing, 2010, 2011). These debates have revolved around insiders and outsiders in the labor market, encompassing not only those with and without jobs, but the divide between those with secure good jobs and social protections and those who work in temporary and precarious jobs without entitlements. The dualism in European labor markets has been intensified with the global crisis, however, the processes reshaping the configurations in states, markets and families began over a decade ago (Flecker, 2010; Bonoli & Natali, 2012; Banyuls et al. 2009): global economic pressures forged with neoliberal ideologies placed a premium on efficiency and productivity, resulting in downsizing in firms, fewer protected jobs and the creation of more flexible and contingent jobs (Standing, 2010; Palier, 2010).

Leaner welfare budgets and a lack of social investment in care for elderly and children underlay the expansion in private markets for care and increased informality in the care sector (Meager and Szebehely, 2009; Morel, 2012; Shire, 2015). Trans-national female migrants have partially filled the care deficit brought about by women's increased labor force activity and aging populations. Migrating from poorer to richer nations—from the global South to North and from East to West Europe—they provide a source of cheap labor for these services and have swelled the ranks of the precarious workforce (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003; Parrenas, 2001).

Trans-national migrants make up a large share of the precariat worldwide (Standing, 2011). Eurostat data show that the foreign born comprise a higher overall average of temporary workers 16% in the ages 20–64 compared to 12% for those born in the country (Eurostat, 2013). However there is variation across EU countries. This reflects variations in labor markets, regulatory systems and more recently the depth of the effects of the crisis and recession and the austerity measures applied (Karamessini and Rubery, 2014; Banyuls et al., 2009; Hemerijck, 2013). Clearly temporary work is a broad category as is precarious work, which covers different work situations, including those with fixed contracts, part time workers, temporary agency workers and those often not registered but working informally who are among the most vulnerable of precarious workers (Vosko, 2009: 82–85).

We focus on migrant care/domestic workers who are employed in a sector that is characterized by precarious employment and informality. The employment in the sector fits the ILO classic description: A precarious job can have many faces, it is usually defined by uncertainty as to the duration of employment, multiple possible employers or a disguised or ambiguous employment relationship, a lack of access to social protection and benefits

usually associated with employment, low pay, and substantial legal and practical obstacles to joining a trade union and bargaining collectively (ILO, 2012).

Migrant care workers share many of the features defining the precariat: they have poor quality of jobs and lack a collective voice in the labor market to redress grievances or exploitation (Standing, 2011: 20). Although temporary precarious workers express anxiety and insecurity about their situation, as shown in a recent study of Slovenian precariousness and its effects on health and wellbeing (Kanjuro Mrčela & Ignjatović, 2012), migrant care/domestic workers feel this acutely. Beyond their lack of predictable employment, many migrants working in the sector fear losing their right to stay in a country without an employment contract. The undocumented, working in the shadow economy accept the worst conditions (Hellgren, 2014; 2015).

Yet while similar to other precarious low-wage service sector work, migrant care/domestic work has unique features: The work is done in private spaces (households) making it difficult to organize and regulate, even in countries with strong unions and collective agreements, such as Sweden, one of the cases in this study. The work is gender coded, dominated by women, something naturalized, what women have always done and continue to do that is undervalued and often unpaid, despite the attempts of reformers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to recast domestic work as scientific management (Cowan, 1983; Graham, 1999). In the post war-era, there was a feminist campaign for wages for housework, but it was contested among feminists because the domestic wage demanded was neither commensurate with the tasks performed nor a living wage (Himmelwait and Crowley, 1992). In some European countries, care/domestic work has been exempted from state labor laws. For example in Spain, they were placed in a special labor regime for domestic workers that set them apart from the statutes regulating the working conditions and social provisions that covered other employment (Leon, 2010).

The precariat are not a homogenous group in terms of income, and levels of insecurity and marginality (Vosko, 2009; Standing, 2011). Precariousness can cut across class, occupation and skills (Thornley et al., 2010; Standing, 2010). Though care/domestic work is low-waged work, migrant workers in the sector are not a homogenous group. Therefore they provide an interesting case for studying the diversities within a precarious sector of work (Kilkey et al. 2010; Doyle and Timonen, 2009). They also allow us to consider if and how institutional contexts matter in the employment conditions they encounter in the host country. The standard narrative of the migrant care/domestic worker is personified by the concept of the global care chain in which migrants from the global South leave their own children behind

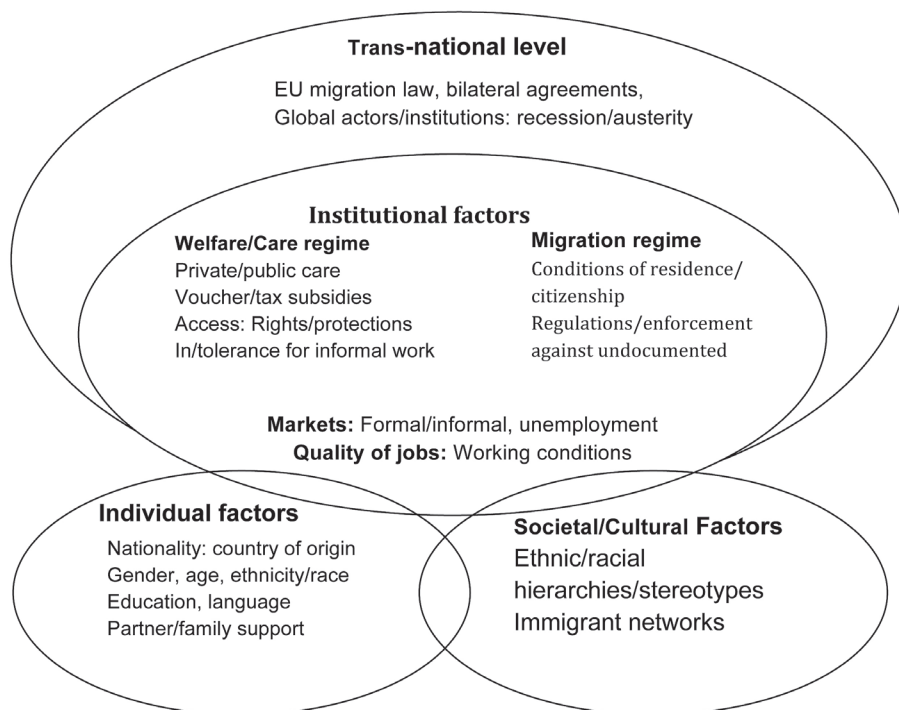
to be cared for by others in order to do the carework for children and elderly of richer nations (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003). However, there is diversity in the who, where and why of migration in the care/domestic sector. European migrants have tended to be younger and may not settle in a country (Williams, 2012). They have different motivations for migrating: not all are labor migrants; they can be asylum seekers, they can migrate with families or enter a country to be re-united with family members. They can come as legal migrants or as undocumented. They have different expectations and aspirations about the future, which often depends on their experiences, life course phase and the networks and family relations who have already settled in the receiving country. Migrant care/domestic workers provide an ideal case to consider the effects of precariousness within the framework of capabilities: how does this form of employment affect quality of life, wellbeing and possibilities for making change among a diverse group of migrants? Comparing two welfare states, Spain and Sweden, we ask: To what extent does the institutional context matter in shaping the sector and the capabilities of those employed within it.

### Conceptual framework

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We employ Sen's capabilities framework in our comparison of migrant care/domestic workers in Sweden and Spain. We use the concept of capabilities in the broadest sense: the means and resources individuals have to achieve a decent standard of wellbeing and quality of life as well as the scope of alternatives they have for making change (Sen, 1992). For our research on migrant care/domestic workers, Sen's approach provides a multi-dimensional and dynamic framework for capturing the differences in institutional context and the diversities among our population. The figure below illustrates the different levels in our capability set: the individual, institutional and societal/culture factors that shape the potential of an individual (agency) to achieve wellbeing and quality of life. Sen (1993) makes a distinction between wellbeing achievement and agency achievement. However, considering the migrant care/domestic sector, distinguished by its precariousness, these two dimensions often work in tandem as is true in our case. Their education and skills are devalued, and their low incomes and poor quality of jobs hinder their possibilities for change, including developing new networks or furthering their education, or becoming more proficient in the language.

Figure 1: MULTI-DIMENSIONAL MODEL OF CAPABILITIES ADAPTED FOR  
MIGRANT CARE/DOMESTIC WORKERS



Our adaptation of Sen's framework places institutional factors at the heart of our model (Hobson, 2014). The trans-national level is crucial for understanding the capabilities of migrants beyond the institutional context at the state level. First, global inequalities are driving the trans-national political economy of care. Second, trans-national actors and institutions have had a direct impact in shaping the migrants and markets in the private care/domestic sector. The EU for instance paved the way for the free flow of migrants across member states. Not to be forgotten is the role of global institutions igniting the global financial crisis and the role of global actors in implementing subsequent austerity measures. Both of which have had an effect in the widening inequalities across and within societies, such as high levels of unemployment, greater precariousness and cuts in services.

In the model individual factors encompass gender, age and ethnicity and human capital, standard dimensions in capabilities (Hobson, 2014). We also include relational dynamics: Partner and family support can increase capabilities; alternatively, commitments to family support in the home country,

involving remittances, can weaken capabilities. Social/cultural actors, such as civil society actors, e.g NGOs and unions can enhance the capabilities of migrant workers in the sector. In Spain churches are often quasi employment agencies for migrant workers in the care/domestic sector. NGOs in both countries have campaigned for access to health care and schooling for all migrants, benefitting migrant care/domestic workers (Hellgren, 2015 forthcoming).<sup>2</sup>

In the model, the different levels; individual, institutional (at transnational and national levels), and societal factors are nested within each other highlighting the inter-relatedness and overlapping aspects of these dimensions within capabilities. Institutional factors in our model are patterned after the standard configurations in welfare/care regime and migration regime frameworks (Mahon et. al., 2012; Korpi, 2000; Anttonen and Sipilä, 1996; Williams, 2012), with some modifications. We have included specific policies that are pertinent to migrant care/domestic private markets, government tax subsidies, quotas and vouchers<sup>3</sup> (welfare/care regime) and migration quotas for those working in the sector. Markets and employment conditions, key dimensions in our analysis, are dependent upon the characteristics of the welfare and migration regime (spanning both in the model: see Figure 1).

Williams (2012), Lutz (2008) and Bettio et al. (2006) have set the agenda arguing for the importance of looking at the interactions among different regimes or policy domains when analyzing variations in welfare states and migration care work. However, how these policy domains shape markets and employment of those working in the sector is not explained. Do they follow or deviate from the standard employment practices in a particular welfare state?

Most relevant to our analysis is Simonazzi's (2009) concept of National Employment models, which revolves around differences along three dimensions; formal and informal, private and public care and the proportion of migrant and native. In the model, our dimensions of employment reflect our focus on expanding private markets in the sector and their impact on the capabilities of those working in the sector: considering markets and quality of jobs, which encompass levels of unemployment and precariousness, and employment conditions considering formal vs. informal work contracts; whether one is employed by a firm or private household, and the differences in situation between hourly wage workers and live-ins. In

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<sup>2</sup> The civil society dimension is analyzed in other published work. Hellgren who is part of the project team, has dealt extensively with the role of civil society actors: see: Forthcoming, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Migration quotas have been used in our Spanish case, though not extensively. Vouchers have been introduced in Austria and Germany.

applying our multi-level model, we are asking what shapes this precarious sector (Simmonazzi, 2009) but also, what are the scope alternatives or possibilities for making change for the migrants who are working within it.

## Two Institutional Contexts

In this study we compare migrant care workers in two institutional contexts, Spain and Sweden, which represent different welfare and migration regimes and these differences are reflected in the numbers of undocumented migrants in the two countries. Consider one dimension of the migration regime, the regulations and enforcement of who can enter a country. Based on register data in Spain, there are 1,257,000 of undocumented immigrants: for Sweden the estimates of irregular migrants range from 50.000–75.000 undocumented migrants, one government commission report maintains that there are not more than 35,000 (SOU, 2011: 48, 62). Whereas in Sweden, there is greater governance and laws are enforced more stringently; irregular migrants are hidden and face deportation, in Spain, there is little enforcement of the laws against illegal migrants. In Spain, the informal economy comprises a 20–25% share of the economy (Fuentes-Moreno and Callejo-Bruquetas, 2011; Hellgren, 2014); the estimates are much lower in Sweden, about 5% (Skatteverket, 2011).

Within the framework of Varieties of Capitalism (VOC), Sweden typifies the *Coordinated economy* with greater governance of employment practices, wide union coverage and rights and protections for workers (Hall and Soskice, 2001). Spain has been characterized as a segmented market economy (Banylus et al., 2009), a hybrid type between Coordinated and Liberal economies in the VOC literature (Hall and Soskice, 2001), with protected jobs and rights (for insiders) and a large segment of outsiders who lack employment rights (Guillén, 2010).<sup>4</sup> Gallie (2007) incorporates these dimensions from VOC in his conceptualization of the variants in employment regimes: the role of organized labor and employment regulations for integrating the most vulnerable groups. Comparing Sweden and Spain, along these dimensions, we can see significant differences in the two countries: Whereas the union density in Sweden is 68%, (2013), in Spain it is 18% (2012) ([http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=UN\\_DEN](http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=UN_DEN)). The levels of temporary precarious work are much higher in Spain than in Sweden (22,9% compared to 14,6%) (Eurostat, 2013). Collective agreements in Sweden cover most employees, even those who are not union members.

<sup>4</sup> Countries in the Mediterranean ring have been placed in this category in the VOC literature (Soskice and Hall, 2001).

In both countries foreign born workers are more likely to be in precarious work than those born in the country, though in Spain foreign born comprise a higher share of the temporary workers (see Table 1 below). The gap between foreign born and those living in the country is wider among men than among women, which is in line with the studies of precariousness that underscore the gendering of temporary work (Vosko, 2009). As shown in Table 1 below, women between the ages of 20 and 64 are employed as temporary workers more often than men. Over 30% of foreign born women in Spain are temporary employees, of which a significant proportion are working in the migrant care/domestic sector. The institutional contextual differences in these two societies affect the supply of low skilled migrant workers; lax versus stringent migration regulation, and tolerance versus intolerance for informal work.

Table 1: TEMPORARY EMPLOYEES

% of the total number of employees			
SEX	Country of birth	Spain	Sweden
Total	Foreign country	34.1	21.5
Total	Reporting country	20.9	13.2
<i>Total</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>22.9</i>	<i>14.6</i>
Males	Foreign country	37.8	19.5
Males	Reporting country	19.4	11.1
<i>Males</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>22.0</i>	<i>12.5</i>
Females	Foreign country	30.8	23.5
Females	Reporting country	22.6	15.3
<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>24.0</i>	<i>16.6</i>

Ages 20–64, year 2013. Source: Eurostat

Regime differences are also reflected in the demand for migrant care/domestic work in Sweden and Spain. Sweden, like other welfare states placed in the Social Democratic regime, has extensive public childcare and elderly services and policies for combining employment with family, though, there has been some reductions in resources for the elderly and outsourcing of services to private markets (Meagher and Szebehely, 2009). Driving the increase in demand for private services is a generous tax subsidy for services, mainly used for domestic work, extra childminding and services for the elderly. Spain is typical of the Mediterranean Welfare Regime, often referred to as the familialist model, with low levels of female labor force and little public provisioning, and with a preference for care in the home (Peterson, 2007; Cáceres, 2010). Increases in women's labor force,



without social investment in public provisions for children and elderly, lay behind the surge in migrant care/domestic workers in Spain who are filling the care deficit.

Though path dependencies continue to shape policy architectures in regime types, they are no longer as stable, a reflection of pressures in the global economy and trans-national institutions (Bonoli & Natali, 2012; Hemerijik, 2013). In both of these countries, changes in the political climate resulted in new laws and policies shaping the care/domestic sector: in Sweden, the Conservative coalition put into effect (1) a generous tax subsidy for households to purchase private services for domestic/care work (2007, known as the RUT) (Skatteverket, 2011); and (2) a law in 2008 that allowed the entry of labor migrants from outside the EU who had work contracts (Riksdagen, 2008). In Spain legislation was passed by the Socialist government to end the special domestic regime, requiring those hiring domestic/workers to have formal contracts (2011) with the same rights as other workers except that they were still not covered by unemployment benefits. At first, employers were expected to pay the social costs, but two years later, it was amended by the Conservative government, so that the employer is not responsible for paying social security costs if she employs someone for less than 60 hours per month. Hence now migrant care/domestic workers with formal contracts have to pay the Social security cost of 150 euros per month if they work less than 60 hours per month for one employer (<http://www.empleo.gob.es/es/portada/serviciohogar/>).<sup>5</sup> Another contingency, the global crisis and recession, especially in Spain, has to be taken into account considering both the demand for and supply of migrant care/domestic workers and the conditions of work, wellbeing and scope of alternatives migrants have for changing jobs and sector.

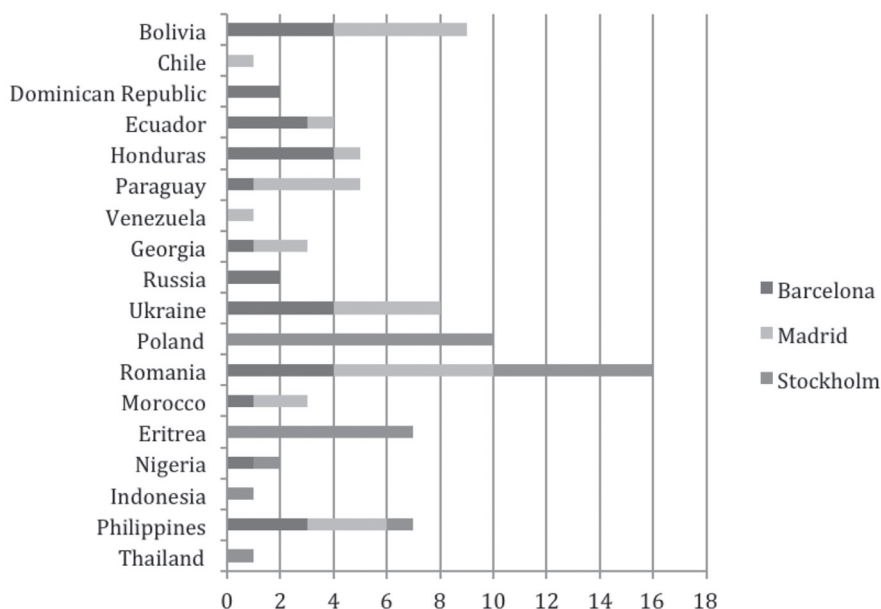
Given these differences in policy and institutional context, we should expect to find differences in private markets for care/domestic services and the quality of jobs and working conditions of those employed in the sector, that migrant care/domestic workers would fare much better in Sweden than in Spain. There is also an assumption in the literature that formalizing the sector will result in better working conditions and less precarity in the sector (Simonazzi, 2009; Ruhs and Anderson, 2010). The data analysis below allows us to engage with these assumptions.

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<sup>5</sup> The amendment was in effect starting April 1, 2013 before we began the interviewing.

## Data

Figure 2: COUNTRY OF ORIGIN AND CITY OF RESIDENCE



Source: Project Data, Madrid, Barcelona, Stockholm

The data for this article is based upon semi-structured qualitative interviews of migrant care/domestic workers that we conducted in three cities: Madrid, Barcelona and Stockholm during 2013–2014; in total 90 interviews.<sup>6</sup> Based upon statistical analyses, including Register Data, Census data, the European Social Survey, and Labor Force Surveys, we established which were the largest migration groups in the country within the migration population and the largest within-group proportions employed in the care/domestic work sector. The latter was our main selection criterion along with migration period, which included only those who migrated between 2000 and 2013. In addition we sought to reach groups representing different socio-cultural backgrounds and geographic regions, within our main selection criterion, those with the highest proportions working in the sector. Our interviewees are from countries encompassing Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa. We distinguished between those who are visa-exempted, and

<sup>6</sup> The questionnaire contains 39 questions and covers topics on the respondents work situation and conditions of work, family situation, social networks, and future plans. The average length of the interviews is one hour. All interviews were completed between August 2013 and February 2014. The data was coded into Dedoose, a software package that allows for a mixed method approach.

those who require a visa for entry (see Figure 2 below for immigrant groups by country of origin).<sup>7</sup>

Our interview groups does not represent the range of work situations in the care domestic sector as we are looking at private markets only. Differences in institutional contexts are reflected in levels and types of services purchased: hence in Spain the size of the private market for care/domestic service is larger; in Sweden, care services for children and elderly are provided mainly by municipalities and even those outsourced are funded by taxes. Nearly all our respondents are providing household services in Sweden, including some extra childminding and elderly services. In Spain the respondents were the main carers for the family, both childcare and elderly care, sometimes in the same household. In Spain over one third of our respondents are live-ins, whereas in Sweden, this type of care/domestic work is extremely rare. We do not have one live-in in the Swedish sample.

## Data Analysis

### *Employer*

We found that the domestic sector in Stockholm is dominated by firms who employ workers and provide their services to households. The generous Swedish tax subsidy policy (the RUT)<sup>8</sup> led to an expansion in markets for household service firms in Stockholm; the number of firms increased by 24% during the first five years after the reform. Among our Stockholm interviews two-thirds work for firms and only eight respondents are directly employed by households. Nearly all our respondents in Spain were employed by private households. Few firms exist in the care/domestic sector in Spain; they provide services for publically subsidized care services, which are very limited ([http://www.seg-social.es/Internet\\_6/Pensionistas/Derechos/Servicios-sociales/index.htm#33501\\_6](http://www.seg-social.es/Internet_6/Pensionistas/Derechos/Servicios-sociales/index.htm#33501_6)). Two thirds (17/28 & 19/30 respectively) of the respondents in Madrid and Barcelona have only one employer/buyer and a significant portion are live-ins. Firms are the middlemen in Sweden, linking workers with buyers and setting wages and tasks. In Madrid often NGO's and Catholic churches act as informal employment agencies. Care/domestic workers who are employed directly by households negotiate their working conditions with the household who employs them.

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<sup>7</sup> *Migrant care/domestic workers were located through immigrant associations, NGOs, churches (acting as employment agencies in Spain), immigrant group websites and networks: we used referral sampling sparingly, (limited to one contact per interviewee).*

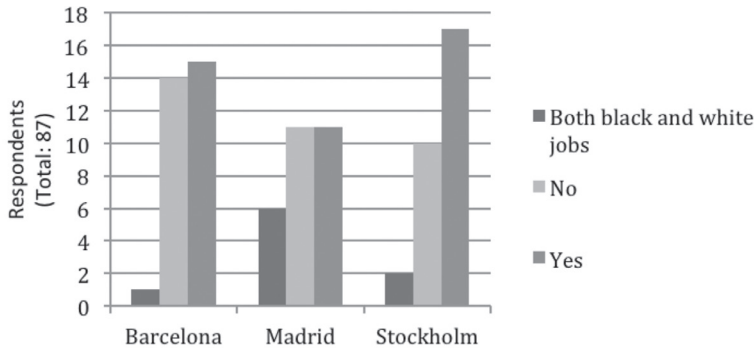
<sup>8</sup> *The RUT entitles the buyer to a 50% deduction of the service price (including tax) with a maximum of 50,000 SEK (approx. 5,300 Euro) per year each person in the household (Skatteverket, 2014).*

## Formal/ Informal

We would expect a great deal of variation in our two cases when considering formal and informal contracts in the care/domestic sector with significantly more informality and less job security in Barcelona and Madrid compared to Stockholm. Underlying this assumption is the fact that most domestic workers are employed through firms in Stockholm compared to Spain where they are employed directly through households, a form of employment that allows room for discretion without interference from outside actors and it is easier to ignore regulations.

Surprisingly, in our sample we found levels of informal employment to be almost as high in Stockholm as it is in Madrid and Barcelona. Forty percent of the respondents in Stockholm were at the time of the interview working informally, and the vast majority have had previous experiences of informal work in the domestic sector. More than half (32/58) of the respondents in Barcelona and Madrid work informally.

Figure 3: FORMAL CONTRACT



Source: Project Data, Madrid, Barcelona, Stockholm

The explicit purposes of the RUT, the Swedish tax subsidy was to formalize the sector, nevertheless, the respondents in Stockholm maintained that firms are able to claim the tax deduction while hiring workers informally and avoid paying social contributions, which is confirmed by Swedish trade union representatives and stakeholders (Gavanas, 2010; Hellgren, 2015 forthcoming). Informal work in the domestic sector is not confined to any one migrant group; it cuts across different nationalities and migrant statuses. We found instances of both irregular and documented migrants working at the same firms well as documented migrants working partly formally and informally. These practices are more likely to be found in small firms, which comprise a large proportion of the sector.

Considering the different migrant statuses and informality, in Stockholm, we found that half of EU migrants (8 out of 16) at the time of the interview were working informally, at least partially. This is contrary to expectations since they have the rights to enter Sweden and find a job contract while they are here, which would then give them access to a personal ID number and a temporary residence permit (skatteverket.se). One explanation we found from our respondents is that many employers demand an ID number before making a contract with a worker. Consequently, EU-labor migrants who don't have a personal ID-number are often forced to accept informal work for lack of other alternatives. It is a catch 22 situation: you need a personal ID to get a formal contract, but you cannot obtain an ID number without a work contract. As one migrant care/domestic worker who has been in Stockholm for three months described:

*I: This is circular reasoning, you cannot find any legal work, only black, because everything is about the PN [personal number] you cannot go to school, you cannot have a legal work. Everybody is asking for PN. Everything starts from it. (Polish migrant worker, Stockholm)*

In Sweden, migrants awaiting their refugee status sometimes work informally (although they have the right to formal work) and those who have not been granted refugee status accept informal work because they have no other alternatives. Finally, non-EU labor migrants who no longer have their contract lose all entitlements including their right to remain in the country. Informal work is a risky option, particularly for non-EU migrants with uncertain migrant statuses (including labor migrants, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants). The risk of deportation makes them more vulnerable to exploitation by their employers, compared to EU-migrants who come under the Schengen agreement.

In contrast, undocumented migrants in Spain have been able to work and had access to health care and education for their children until a law was passed in 2013, but even during that period some regions such as Catalonia continued to allow migrants to have access to these entitlements (Hellgren, 2014). The national law has recently been repealed. Our study, however, suggests that migrant status has become more salient in the care/domestic service market; several respondents say that job mediators (nuns, NGO's) are reluctant to offer potential positions to undocumented migrants. However, some of our respondents claim that there are employers who prefer this, since they do not have to pay for their social security costs.

Despite the aim of the Spanish legislation to formalize the sector and improve the employment security of domestic workers, little has changed even though many more have formal contracts (<http://www.empleo.gob>).

es/es/portada/serviciohogar/; Government's report Afiliados Ocupados). One result of the reform that stipulated employers were only responsible for paying social security costs if the employee worked for them more than 60 hours per month has meant that most employers can avoid paying the social security costs, which our interviewees confirm. Furthermore, we found several cases where the social security fee is deducted from the workers' salaries (150 Euros per month), even when it is the employer who is legally responsible.

*It's hard because people do not want to make a contract. They do not want to because it gives you a lot of responsibility: you have to pay Social Security. She [the employer] told me: "I can give you the contract but I'm telling you, I'm not paying social security".* (Georgian migrant worker, Madrid)

As our data suggests, it is problematic to formalize this sector and regulate it, that is, to ensure decent employment conditions.

### *Employment Conditions*

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The domestic care sector has become highly competitive in Sweden with the exponential expansion in firms competing for a small market. In Spain the recession has decreased demand, which has enabled employers to lower wages and increase work tasks and hours. Migrant care/domestic workers lack capabilities to resist these conditions.

Two thirds of our respondents in Stockholm are employed on an hourly basis; these employments are characterized by their lack of job security and unpredictability in number of work hours. Employers can fire workers without any motivation and without notice. To keep their jobs they are often expected to be constantly available and work unpaid overtime; many of the respondents claim that the hours contracted do not allow them to finish their tasks within the time allotted, which means working without pay.

Standard practice in the sector is unpaid transportation time, which is very time-consuming since the commuting distances between jobs are often long. Consider the experience of a respondent who works between 20–30 hours/week, and does not have time to have an extra job.

*Now, for the road, we don't get paid. Now, I only worked for 6 hours, and 6 hours, I spent on the way ... the time that disappears, when you look at it through a money perspective, right, there is ... Time is gold, right. Since time is gold – to not get paid for 6 hours, to work for 6 hours. 12 hours,*

*that means I'm at work the entire day. In that way, it's hard.* (Eritrean migrant worker, Stockholm)

Nearly all (27/30) respondents in Stockholm work less than 40 hours per week. The largest share, one third, works 31–40 hours per week, and one fourth work 19 hours or less. We found no respondents in our Stockholm sample who had full time employment (40 hours per week) working only in the domestic/care sector.

Half of the respondents in Barcelona and Madrid are either per hour or part time workers, half of this group (14) are working less than 19 hours/week. In total, 75% of our Spanish sample (including the unemployed) state that they are looking for more work, and should be considered as under-employed. Live-ins have the most predictable employment, many have contracts, but they work long hours. All live-ins in our sample were working more than 40 hours per week. Live in care/domestic work is employment without boundaries, working from morning until night.

*You cook, clean, iron... no shopping. And the kids. They brought the eldest to school, I used to leave and pick up the younger. I worked from 7 am until 8 pm, but during the summer they prolonged my schedule until 10 pm without paying more.* (Honduran live-in migrant worker, Madrid)

A dimension of capabilities in working times is whether individuals can refuse extra hours (Hobson, 2014). In Stockholm, workers said that they did not turn down paid/unpaid extra hours or even call in sick for fear of not being called back to work. Our interviewees in both Spain and Sweden, particularly those without contracts had weak capabilities. They could not refuse extra hours or tasks. They could be fired at any time, and moreover in Spain, the working conditions and salaries of migrant workers could be changed at any time at the discretion of the employer.

The effects of the recession in Spain can be seen in the dramatic decline in the already low salaries of migrant care/domestic workers, which has not been met with a corresponding decline in what is expected of them, and in fact many of them state that the demands have increased in pace with the competition.

*I worked there for 5 years, they paid 700 Euro per month for 12 hours per day. That is very little. Then on October 15<sup>th</sup> I went to work and she said, 'today you will start working half-time'. 'Ok, that is from 8 until 12' I said. She answered 'What?' She wanted me to work 8 hours for 350 Euro, and I had to pay train tickets and social security...that is*

*impossible. [...] I have to pay for social security because otherwise I lose the papers, but for a domestic worker there is no point, I prefer to work without a contract.* (Bolivian migrant worker, Madrid)

We found evidence of specific preferences or ethnic hierarchies in the Spanish private market for care/domestic services, where employers were open about their preferences for ethnic groups or age. With the recession and the numbers of unemployed, this is more prevalent. (Hellgren, 2015)

*Now there are so many people looking for work... [The ones hiring] come to agencies and say "I want a 25 year old girl, a girl like this and like that..." As they told me in an interview: "but I wanted a blonde, tall, slim and smiling girl..."* (Romanian migrant worker, Madrid)

In our Stockholm sample, the workers rarely meet clients because they are hired through firms, except for extra childminding and elderly services. A crucial divide in the Swedish private care/domestic market is between those who have good skills in the Swedish language and those who do not. Those who do have possibilities to find the best jobs in larger firms with better conditions as this account by a Polish immigrant suggests

*...my friends who do not speak Swedish nor English; they cannot work in the company where I'm working. You have to be able to communicate...I have some friends that are working in Polish companies, but I know that they are forced to do more extra work than I do. Sometimes the client asks me to do something extra and I do it. But if it is a bigger job, then everything has to go via the company. I know that the girls who don't know any other language have no choice but to work for Polish companies. I am not saying that all Polish companies are the same. Still, I know that some of those working for them have to lift things or use ladders. For me, I see this kind of work as dangerous work.* (Polish migrant worker, Stockholm)

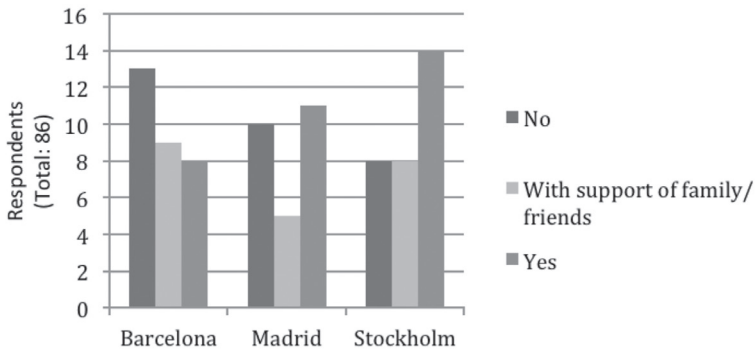
### *The scope of alternatives*

One indicator of capabilities for making other choices is whether one can manage on one's income, make ends meet in one's economy. Care/domestic work is low paid in both countries and underemployment makes managing difficult. The high rates of unemployment and the drop in salaries in Spain are shown in Figure 4 below; only a minority of the respondents in Madrid and Barcelona can manage on their incomes. Less than half of the respondents in Stockholm independently manage on their incomes,



though most do manage their economy with the support of family (partners and husbands) and friends. Only 13/59 of the respondents in Barcelona and Madrid live with their partners, while the corresponding number for the respondents in Stockholm is 21/30. This difference reflects migration regime differences in the two countries. The vast majority of migrant care/domestic workers in Spain are economic migrants who are undocumented or come with temporary residence permits and do not have any legal rights to family reunification. In contrast, most non-EU migrants in our Stockholm sample obtained their resident permits through family reunification or as asylum seekers.

Figure 4: MANAGES ON INCOME



Source: Project Data, Madrid, Barcelona, Stockholm

Compared to Barcelona and Madrid a larger proportion of Stockholm migrant care/domestic workers manage on their income (see figure 4); although the wages are low in both countries and the distribution of work hours is similar among the employed, respondents in Spain more often work more than 40 hours per week (15/40 compared to 3/24 in Stockholm). While all those working less than 40 hours/week in Spain (25/40 employed) state that they are looking for more work, this was only the case for one third of those in the same situation in Stockholm (8/24 employed).

There are several reasons for this difference in our Stockholm interviewees. First they are actually working full time: 30 hours per week may in practice mean 40 hours spent at work, due to the unpaid commuting time. Moreover, many of them are combining work with language studies and they simply do not have the time to work more. These underemployed workers in Stockholm are able to live on their incomes and combine language studies because they share expenses with their partners or receive some benefits from the state as asylum seekers or when they enroll as students.

The effects of the recession in Spain are visible in the loss of jobs among

our respondents. About one third of the respondents in Madrid and Barcelona were unemployed at the time of the interview, compared to only two unemployed in Sweden who at the time of the interview were studying. The competition for jobs has increased in Spain reflecting the decrease in demand since families hit by recession cannot afford to buy their services. At the same time, they now must compete with Spanish born women who have entered the sector because of the scarcity of jobs. Begun at the end of 2008, a response by the Spanish government to alleviate the severe labor market situation of migrants has been to offer them assistance to voluntary return to their countries of origin, since the end of 2008 ([mipex.eu/spain](http://mipex.eu/spain)). However, for many respondents it is not a viable option since they do not have anything to return to nor do they have savings after living years in Spain.

## Conclusion

Beginning with the assumption in the literature on migration and care/domestic work that formalizing the employment contract will result in better working conditions and less precarity in the sector (Simonazzi, 2009; Ruhs and Anderson, 2010), our results suggest that this is not always the case. First, a formal contract in which the employee and not the employer is responsible for social costs can depress even further the low wages that characterize this sector, which has been the effect in Spain. Moreover, since migrants are dependent on having a contract to maintain their regular status and have access to health benefits, the families who hire them are in stronger position to dictate conditions. In Sweden, firms now dominate the sector with the passage of the tax subsidy (RUT), for which the main purpose was to formalize the sector. Yet the practices show that a formal contract in the official register does not always translate into formal work for the migrant. Smaller firms who are most common in the sector are difficult to regulate. Even within the same firm, we found cases in which migrants were working both formally and informally. Still most Swedes prefer to hire formal domestic/care workers and most likely the informality in the sector is more common in Spain than in Sweden. Nevertheless, the question of whether this results in better working conditions is more debatable.

We found forms of exploitation and poor working conditions in both countries and within different employment situations: formal/informal, employed by firms and households, live-ins and hourly workers. In Spain the lack of social investment in care has placed the burden of care costs for children and elderly on individual families. The Familialist care regime assumed that mothers would do the unpaid care work for children and the elderly. With women's increased labor force, a private market emerged to fill the void, but without any subsidies or state vouchers; it can only exist

because of the low wage work (often migrant's) labor (Leon, 2010). In Sweden the intense competition in the sector has meant keeping costs low and underpayment for extra hours worked over contract or travel costs. Of course, in both of our cases, there are differences among household employers and firms (good employers and bad). Where firms dominate the sector (Sweden) the size of the firm matters in that large firms are covered by collective agreements. Less job security and worse conditions are reported at smaller and/or immigrant owned firms (Hellgren, 2015). We expected to find greater differences in employment practices, given the differences in general employment regimes. The private care/ domestic sector mirrors the employment regime in Spain, with its low levels of union density and weak regulations; migrant care/domestic workers are therefore part of the large segment of "outsiders," in unprotected and precarious jobs. However, in Sweden employment practices in the sector deviate from the general employment regime, which reflects less tolerance for informality, the vast majority of all Swedish employees are covered by collective agreements<sup>9</sup> and union membership is high. In contrast, union membership is much lower among migrant care/domestic workers in the private market sector (around 15%), and mainly in the large firms. They are a vulnerable group who lack employment protections and rights, since most are employed on an hourly basis.

Despite similarities in working conditions, we found that migrant care/ domestic workers have diverse situations that shape capabilities. These include migrant statuses, having a partner, family and support networks. The migrant care/domestic workers varied by ethnic backgrounds and education, all of which can influence how well they manage on their income, their conditions of work and their possibilities for alternative choices, for finding other jobs outside the sector.

Migrant status has been a key divide for the best and worst jobs within care/domestic employment. This is more true in Sweden where there is less tolerance for informal work and more governance over undocumented migrants (Hellgren, 2014). Hence, irregular migrants are more likely to have informal contracts and lower job quality, pay and work conditions. There are, however, other hierarchies within the sector that affect pay and working conditions, that reflect ethnic prejudice and stereotypes which are more blatant when the household are the direct employers. Private markets leave space for violating laws (EU and national) against ethnic and racial discrimination. The discourse on choice, embedded in neoliberal policies

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<sup>9</sup> In Sweden 89% of Swedish employers are covered by collective agreements (84% in the private sector): Medlingsinstitutet, yearly report 2014: [http://www.mi.se/files/PDF-er/att\\_bestalla/arsrapporter/AR14\\_20150219.pdf](http://www.mi.se/files/PDF-er/att_bestalla/arsrapporter/AR14_20150219.pdf)

of deregulation and welfare state retrenchment, has fostered private markets in care and empowered buyers of services to express openly their preferences and prejudices (Shutes and Walsh, 2012), such as preferences for native born, white, European, young, or specific groups considered to be more hard working or better carers (Williams and Gavanas, 2008). This was more transparent in our Spanish interviews in which those employed more often had direct contact with families who employed them.

In both Sweden and Spain, those working in the private care/domestic sector have weak capabilities to make claims for better working conditions. The recession in Spain has meant a loss of jobs for many in Spain (still at 24%); it has had a devastating impact on migrants who tend to work in the most precarious sectors. As revealed in our interviews in Barcelona and Madrid, those working in the sector are not only unemployed or underemployed, but have weak capabilities to react against wages being reduced alongside demands for increased hours of unpaid work. The classic formulation of exit and voice (and loyalty), standard mechanisms in bargaining power relations between employees and employers (Hirschman, 1970; Hobson, 1990), are not options available to the vast majority of migrant care/domestic workers across Europe. Their lack of bargaining power reflects their weak capabilities. They are not unionized and have little voice in the political arena to challenge the precarious work conditions that are intrinsic to the sector.

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**Barbara HOBSON and Luwam BEDE: PREKARNOST IN ZMOŽNOSTI: MIGRANTKE V SKRBBSTVENEM IN GOSPODINJSKEM DELU V DVEH INSTITUCIONALNIH OKOLJIH**

Teorija in praksa, Ljubljana 2015, letnik LII, št. 3. str. 327–349

Po vsej Evropi je vse več prekarne delavcev in delavk. V tem besedilu se osredotočamo na migrantke, ki opravljajo skrbstveno in gospodinjstvo na domu. Te delavke so arhetipski primer za študij prekariata v dejavnosti, za katero sta značilna neformalnost ter pomanjkanje dostopa do pravic iz zaposlitve in v kateri delavci/-ke pogosto doživljajo izkoriščanje in zlorabo. Primerjali smo situacijo migrantskih delavk v dveh institucionalnih kontekstih, v Španiji in na Švedskem, ki predstavljata dva različna blaginjska/skrbstvena sistema. V analizi posledic prekarne dela z uporabo koncepta zmožnosti nas je zanimalo, ali obstajajo podobnosti in razlike v naših dveh primerih glede blagostanja in kakovosti življenja migrantk in obsega alternativ, ki so jim na voljo za spremembe. Analiza temelji na rezultatih polstrukturiranih intervjujev migrantk v dejavnosti skrbi in gospodinjstva, opravljenih v Madridu, Barceloni in Stockholmu. Ugotovili smo manj razlik, kot bi bilo pričakovati, glede na to, da smo primerjali situacijo v dveh okoljih z različnim blaginjskim sistemom in prakso zaposlovanja. Kljub temu so migrantke v Španiji v slabšem položaju, kar lahko delno pripišemo recesiji.

**Ključni pojmi:** migranti/-ke, skrbstvene in gospodinjstvo delavke, prekarne delavke, blaginjski sistemi

UDC: 331.102.12:331.5

**Aleksandra KANJUO MRČELA, Miroljub IGNJATOVIĆ:  
FROM FLEXIBILITY TO PRECARIETY: ESCALATION OF NEGATIVE  
CHANGES AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21st CENTURY**

Teorija in praksa, Ljubljana 2015, letnik LII, št. 3. str. 350–381

Ten years ago the analysis of the situation on the labour market in Slovenia and in other countries notified the increasing flexibility of labour and employment and the need of flexicurity. Recent analyses suggest that changes in the last decade in many European countries, including Slovenia went in the opposite direction – fewer workers have the perspective of flexicurity, while for most, and especially the youth working lives are characterized by an increasing precariousness. This article has two purposes: to contribute to the current conceptual debate on the flexibility and precariousness and