

Value of care: How foreign live-in elder care workers in Germany bargain wage and working time

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Abstract

An estimated 4 million, elder people in Germany need care, and three-quarters receive this care at home. With shrinking families and boosted labour market participation of women, the care gap is filled by foreign, primarily Polish mobile care workers. A growing number of new companies operating in Germany and Poland offer a legal alternative to informal arrangements. This paper scrutinizes this qualitative new system of transnational elder care. It argues that, unlike the well-researched systems of domestic elder care which involves direct formal or informal agreements between care receivers and care givers, this brokering system results in a disjunction between wage and working hours. Wage, bargained between the care worker and the brokering agency in Poland, relates to certain tasks. But working hours are rarely set by a contract with an agency, and the care worker negotiates them directly with the care receiver. In turn, as we can show using survey data, care workers often earn less when working more hours. The paper concludes pointing to the need of future research which considers the new heuristic which we proposed based on our mix-method study.

Biography

Magdalena Nowicka is professor for Migration and Transnationalism at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and Head of Department Integration at the German Centre for Integration and Migration Research, DeZIM, in Berlin. She holds a doctoral degree in Sociology from the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich (2005), a Master of Arts degree in Cultural Studies from the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland (2001) and a Bachelor of Arts degree in International Relations from the University of Warsaw, Poland (1999). She worked previously at the Institute of Sociology at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich (2006-2013) and Max-Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Göttingen (2010-2013). Her most recent book published by Palgrave/Springer in March 2022 is [Revisualising Intersectionality](#) (co-authored with Elahe Haschemi Yekani and Tiara Roxanne).