

Biscuits in the Bread Basket of Europe: Gender implications of Ukrainian remittances during the global financial crisis

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Introduction

The process of transition to free market economy in Ukraine, as in other post-socialist societies, was accompanied by unprecedented growth of the mobility of the work force and out-migration of the population for external employment. The transition has put a large number of women on the move. Statistics evidences that females predominate in migration flows from and within Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). For example, in 2004 in Germany alone there were 10 Polish women immigrants for every 10 Polish men. The ratio was the same for Slovaks, 13 to 10 for Romanians, 18 to 10 for Czechs and 23 to 10 for Estonians and Latvians (Morokvasic, 2008). Currently there are grounds to speak about an increasing ‘ukrainization’ of migration taking place in Europe, which in many cases is accompanied by a tendency toward a “feminization” of the migration stream (Chaloff, 2005; Kindler, 2008; Tolstokorova, 2008, 2009a). This process may be accounted in a twofold way: first, the transition from state socialism to capitalism has had a huge impact on the lives and the position of women all over CEE; and second, the costs of transition were not evenly distributed among the population. Impoverishment had a clear gender and age dimension as women, young and the elderly turned to be more vulnerable and more affected by the consequences of transition to market economy and therefore faced a higher poverty risk than other groups of population (Tikhonova, 2003).

Hence, the study is grounded on the assumption that nowadays not only the issue of feminization of migration is gaining currency, but that “migration itself is a gendered phenomenon that requires more sophisticated theoretical and analytical tools than studies of sex roles and of sex as a dichotomous variable allowed in the past” (Donato et al, 2006, 4). Taking this stance into account the paper departs from a **theoretical framework** that looks at feminization of migration as a part of a new international division of reproductive labour crafted by globalization. Within this framework “feminization” refers less to an increase in numbers of migrant women, but more to the qualitative change in their role as providers.

Basic concepts and definitions. In this paper the concept of *gender* is understood in compliance with the OECD definition, referring to “economic, social, political and cultural attributes and opportunities, associated with being male and female” (OECD, 1998). There is considerable authority to the effect that gender affects every aspect of migration: its causes, patters, process, and impacts at every level, including the subjective personal experience of migrants (UN-INSTRAW, 2007 a). Hence, a gender-sensitive analysis is indispensable for understanding labor

migration as a complex socio-economic phenomenon as well as for efficient policy-making in this domain. *Transnational family* is conceptualized here following Bryceson and Vuorela (2002: 3) as the one whose members “live some or most of the time separated from each other but yet create a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely ‘familyhood’, even across national borders”. The paper follows a classical definition of *remittances* as “monetary funds sent by individuals working abroad to recipients in the country that they came from”, combined with theoretical considerations informing what monetary flows are included in it, particularly in what concerns *who sends the resources* and *who decides how the resources are used* (Roberts, Banaian, 2004: 3). Furthermore, remittances are presented here in line with a UN-INSTRAW approach (2006a) as going beyond the monetary dimension of “migradollars” (Massey, Parrado, 1994) and covering social aspects of migrant transfers. It is assumed that social remittances have an impact on gender relations within the household and community, challenging traditional views on gender roles and images of women due to “gender equality remittances” (Tolstokorova, 2010a).

Drawing upon this framework, the **main purpose** of the paper is to make a gender-sensitive analysis of the role of remittances for economic security and social sustainability of the Ukrainian family during the global economic downturn. To reach this broader goal, the research will pursue the following **narrower objectives**:

1. *Conceptually*, it uses a gender sensitive analysis to link into a holistic approach the diverse debates about Ukrainian transnational migration and remittances, low-paid employment and household coping strategies during the global economic crises.
2. *Methodologically*, the research is designed to employ “soft” research methods of data selection, procession and analysis to produce an account of the financial aspect of Ukrainian migrant labour, incorporating gendered views and experiences of migrants themselves .
3. *Empirically*, it is aimed to develop important new data sets outlining the experience of Ukrainian low-paid migrant labour employed in the EU during the global economic crisis, highlighting a gender dimension of their coping strategies via varying remitting patterns. Special emphasis is placed on the role of remittance for poverty alleviation in the Ukrainian migrant households and such key aspects of family sustainability as health-care issues, children’s education, employment of home-staying family members, gender and family equality.

A gender-sensitive analysis is essential for understanding the impact of remittances on wellbeing of the family and household, community and society and allows to develop a new, sustainable policy model that could recognize the evolving complexity of economic mobility in conditions of accelerating globalization. Furthermore, it is argued that integrating a gender perspective into migration policies and programs increases their efficiency and sustainability

(Sørensen, 2005). Nowadays the need for implementing sustainable development policies and practice in migration management is more pressing than ever in view of new risks and challenges created by global economic crises and demanding global solutions. In Ukraine, however, the research on the financial aspects of labour mobility, both internal and international, is generally gender blind. The few works, wherein gender sporadically emerges, this category is used mainly as an accidental by-product of a quantitative research and is applied within the so-called “women and migration” paradigm, also known as the “add and stir approach” (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003). Meanwhile, the focus on gender implications of remittances for the family and community is obliterated in the academic discourse. This defines the it applies to the study of Ukrainian transitional migration the qualitative methods and techniques as “a unique, and often the only, way to access migrant experience, sensitivities and identities” (DeRoche, 1996). Although it is highly productive in the study of a gender dimension of human mobility, it is largely obscured not only in Ukrainian migration studies, but in the national social sciences overall. *Second*, it foregrounds the role gender plays in remitting practices, including its impact on the sending patters, allocation, investment and management. *Third*, it looks at how economic coping strategies of migrants during the financial crisis translate into the social sustainability of the Ukrainian transnational household both in the short- and in the long-run. **Methodology.** The paper is grounded on the materials of a research project, which involved a complex approach implemented across *the following stages*: participant observation; data collection and analysis; semi-structured interviews (pilot study, work in progress), procession, analysis and interpretation of the filed research data.

Participant observation was based on the generalization of the personal experience of the authors in the extensive short- and long-term (up to one year long) academic travels across Europe, which enabled the socialization with compatriots of diverse social backgrounds and in a wide range of social settings. The informal mode of communication with informants and absence of social distance in the inter-personal interaction allowed for a deeper immersion into the migrant’s milieu, facilitated a wider perception of their conditions, work, life styles and the opportunities and enabled a broader conceptualization of issues under study.

A *semi-structured questionnaire* with open-ended questions was developed with the aim to cover different stages of the migration cycle and various financial strategies employed. It was designed as an indicative research necessary to examine the following issues:

- gender patterns of accumulation, sending, receiving, management and utilizing remittances (investments and saving): who is the remitter, the pattern of sending remittances; who receive the funds, who decides what they are used for, who uses them effectively, what are they used for;

- what is the socio-economic effect of remittances for the well-being of transnational household members and how they benefit by remittances in the intragenerational and gender perspectives;
- the role of remittances in the transformation of gender roles, gender contract and the decision-making process in the transnational households, etc.
- the impact of the economic crises on the remitting patterns and economic strategies of migrants and their families;

The *interviews with migrant families* were made through a pilot project, which covered 6 transnational households (work in progress) including both circular migrants themselves and their family members. They were taken in spring 2010 in the town of Chortkiv in Ternopil oblast (Ukrainian West-border region), which is the one most highly affected by labour migration. The interviews started with existing contacts with migrant families and followed with a snowball sampling method whereby new respondents were contacted through preceding respondents. Furthermore, the project assistant Olexander Ryndyk contacted representatives of the Service in affairs of family and minors of the Chortkiv district state administration to request contacts with migrant families. In the course of an informal interview there, he was referred to a deputy principle of a local secondary school, which enrolls many migrants' children. Conversations with these officials gave an interesting and instructive material for our project which was reflected in the fieldwork discussion. The interviews were recorded by means of dvf software and then transcribed. They were taken under the condition that real identities of the responders would not be disclosed in order to maintain their privacy since the earlier experience showed that many migrants were reluctant to discuss financial issues in the fear that the confidential information might be disclosed to outsiders.

Role of remittances in economic sustainability of Ukrainian transnational household

Remittances are crucial for many Ukrainian households and regions, although Statistics on migrants' remittances in Ukraine are fragmentary and data from different sources are difficult to reconcile (Atamanov et al, 2009: 28-29). As was discussed earlier (Tolstokorova, 2010b), the pull of remittances Ukraine receives from the citizens working abroad, by analysts' assessments, may amount between 0.7% to 25% of GDP (GFK, 2008, p. 5). Thus, according to the National Bank of Ukraine, in 2006 alone Ukraine received \$5.6 bn of remittances from its migrant workers (taken from Gajducky, 2007), the IFAD statistics for that year was \$8.47 bn (IFAD, 2007, p. 12). Meanwhile, by the estimates of Ukrainian experts the real sum may reach up to 10-20 bn (taken from Fedorak, 2007), considering that Ukrainians do not trust the national bank system and prefer unofficial means of credit transfer. By contrast, the foreign direct investments Ukraine attracted throughout 16 years of the state independence, did not exceed \$24 bn (Kyiv Post, 2007). In the most

economically disadvantaged oblasts, as for instance Ternopil and Chernivcy, this contrast is even more remarkable: the ratio between foreign investments and informal migrant remittances into the national economy amounting 1 vs 40 (Parkhomenko, Starodub, 2005, p. 20). The dynamics of remittances throughout 2000-2006 is reflected in table 1.

Table 1. Remittances dynamics in Ukraine, 2000-2006.

<i>(US\$ million)</i>	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Inward remittance flows <i>of which:</i>	33	141	209	330	411	595	595
Workers' remittances	-	84	133	185	193	236	-
Compensation of employees	33	56	74	145	218	359	-
Migrants' transfer	-	1	2	-	-	-	-
Outward remittance flows <i>of which:</i>	10	5	15	29	20	34	34
Workers' remittances	-	-	-	-	-	34	-
Compensation of employees	2	-	4	4	6	10	-
Migrants' transfer	8	5	11	25	14	22	-

Sources: World Bank (2008)

The analysis of available literature shows that in most Ukrainian transnational households remittances serve as an efficient tool allowing to increase family budget and advance material well-being. As was shown elsewhere (Tolstokorova, 2009b), savings made through international employment are used mainly for family consumption and for investments into children's education and housing. By estimates of Ukrainian realtors, around 60–80 % of remittances are invested into real property estate. To a much lesser extent, they are invested into small family businesses, mainly because Ukraine has few economic incentives for such enterprise (Malynovska, 2006). According to sociological self-assessments of external migrants' households held in 2002, 41,1% of responders reported that emigration allowed them to increase their family welfare tangibly; 43,1% considered their material and financial status to be “somewhat improved” and mere 8,8% acknowledged that their well-being did not change notably. At the same time, 63,4% of families acknowledged that labour migration allowed them to reach high economic status, while only 13% estimated their material situation as poor (SIFY, 2004: 19). Statistics confirms that consumption patterns in translational families are more varied than in families with similar social and educational status

working in Ukraine. For example, their households are better equipped with modern furniture and electronic appliances, they own more automobiles and commodities of durable use, etc. (Malynovska, 2004: 14). Thus, if in 2003 in Ukraine average there were only 13 videotapes per every 100 families, in transnational households this index raise up to 55. Similarly, there were 2 microwaves vs 25 respectively, 2 vs 24 computers, 16 vs 36 automobiles per 100 families. Responders of sociological polls acknowledged that 55-60% of these goods were purchased for remittances (SIFY, 2004: 19). Results of an all-nation sociological survey were consisyntent with these findings. The evidences that migrant households owned more modern commodities as compared to non-migrant in such proportions: every-day ware – 2,3, computer equipment - 2,5, stereo and video appliances - 1,8 times more (Pribytkova, 2003: 112).

At the same time, as was discussed earlier (Tolstokorova, 2010b), remittances became a sort of “development mantra” (Kapur, 2004), seen as a panacea against economic hardships in migrant families and source societies at large, and a key “silver lining argument” against those who are mindful of negative repercussions of outsourcing. Yet, what is often silenced is that remittances accelerate inflation in the recipients societies, and therefore, shrink the consuming potential of the population (SIFY, 2004, p. 21). Additionally, the benefits of remittances “may not offset the losses of the local social protection systems and/or budget deficits resulting from the fact that the migrant workers do not pay taxes in their home countries, but their families use public goods (healthcare, education and other public services” (Góra, Rohozynsky, 2009, p. 11). Equally, while foregrounding the financial benefits of labour export for the source societies, this approach often neglects the social and human costs of migration, especially in the medium and the long run

Remittances, gender and family development

Although there is now some recognition that migration is a gendered process, the relationships between remittances and gender are under-researched. Despite there is some consensus about the economic benefits of transnational labor migration for labor-sending societies at large, there is far less understanding of the long-term impact of remittances on labor-sending communities, especially at the level of the household, marital and intergenerational relations within the family. Empirical research showed that the spatial separation of migrants from their families entails that issues of resources use and management are taken outside the confines of the household. This leads to the separation of an earner from a manager, and creates spatially separated parallel power centers within the transnational family space with the manager of income as the center of power in local family/household space and earner of income (woman migrant) as the center of power in the new livelihood space (Pinnawala, 2009). Hence, gender is an important factor in determining the remitting strategies in transnational families and in shaping supportive social networks to bolster the basis of financial security and wellbeing of the transnational household.

Furthermore, research findings evidence that women play a leading role in remitting, as both their recipients and managers and as their senders. Thus, the participants of a UN-INSTRAW virtual discussion on gender and remittances (UN-INSTRAW, 2008) (the author of this project being one of them), evidenced that in their research women were found to be more reliable as senders and managers of remittances than men. Research from Peru showed that women are more prone to invest remittances in productive enterprises, such as tailoring, producing handicrafts, commercial agriculture and raising cattle. A case study from the Dominican Republic found that when migratory flows first began, women remitted money to their husbands, but as a result of men's poor management of remittances, women chose to send money directly to mothers or sisters but not to men (UN-INSTRAW, 2006) which is also true for Philippina women-migrants (Parreñas, 2005). Men, it was found, spent their remittances irresponsibly, whereas women invest them more effectively. This is why men are those not entrusted by migrant women with their remittances. The experience of Tajikistan showed that the longer migrant men stayed away from their families, the more likely they were to start a second family; when this happened remittances gradually decreased (Crisis Group Interviews, 2009). The research among Ghanaians in London evinced gender differences in remitting patterns, in particular, that while men send remittances in larger amounts and not so regularly, women send more regularly and respond more positively to calls from the country of origin in periods of crisis. Therefore, women are seen by the UN as critical actors in the remittance-to-development paradigm, and for that matter, understanding differential gender characteristics in remittance use, savings and investments becomes a major prerequisite for the success of local development programs (Ribas-Mateos, 2008). This is why, as argued by the UN-INSTRAW, in search for a framework through which the complexities of global migration may be understood at its best, the connection between *gender and remittances* emerges as a *key factor* in this global phenomenon that demands further examination (UN-INSTRAW, 2007).

Analysis of field research findings

The financial aspect of labour migration is a relatively new area of research in Ukraine. It accounts but few occasional papers (Gajducky, 2007; Atamanov et al, 2009). At the same time, the gender dimension of economic activity of migrants has never before been placed in the focus of attention of Ukrainian scholarship. Therefore, the project was designed as an indicative study, aimed to better understand the various forces underlying the dynamics of foreign employment and its economic aspects in gender perspective and mapping the key transnational stakeholders of migration and remittances in the selected geographical areas.

Interviews with members of Ukrainian transnational families showed little or no effect of the GFC on migrant households in Ukraine. Of all the responders only two mentioned having some short-term break-ups in the remitting pattern. In one case it was due to the deteriorated employment

situation of the remitters (a migrant couple working in Cyprus) and in the other case it was caused by suspense in wage pay-outs to a migrant worker (a divorced man working in Portugal).

***Interviewer:** Did the global financial crisis, whereof they speak so much nowadays, make any impact on the regularly or amount of remittances in your family?*

***Responder (1):** Yes, it did, because for some time there were no jobs for them there... So, they could not send money... And it depends on the availability of jobs and what kind of job they have. (Interview with Ganna, retired, works part-time, mother to a migrant couple, Chortkiv, Ternopil oblast, April 29, 2010, translated from Ukrainian).*

Yet, in this case the negative effect of GFC may be explained by the undocumented status of migrants and, therefore, precarious employment situation overall, not only during the crisis. Due to that, even before the crisis the pattern of remitting in this family had not been regular, depending on the availability of job placements for remittance senders.

***Responder (2):** No, it did not... Well, may be just slightly, only at the onset of the crisis. For some time salaries were suspended, so my son could not send money, because he did not receive his salary. But he had to pay for his rent and needed some money for his daily expenditures. So, he did not send money then. But it was not for long. (Interview with Dina, retired, works part-time, mother to a divorced migrant son, Chortkiv, Ternopil oblast, April 29, 2010, translated from Ukrainian).*

***Responder (3):** No, or maybe, even if so, then just a little bit. You see, my mom works there for quite some time, so she is quite settle there and her salary neither increased , nor decreased (Interview with Olena, an unmarried adult daughter of migrant parents, whose brother also works abroad, Chortkiv, Ternopil oblast, April 29, 2010, translated from Ukrainian).*

All other informants in our pilot study reported that they did not experience any tangible impact of the GFC on money transfers from abroad and therefore, on family wellbeing. This may signify that the situation of their relatives working abroad during the crisis did not change dramatically.

However, this result could be predefined by some objective limitations of our pilot study. First of all, due to financial and organizational constraints of the project we could not afford a considerable research sample. For that reason this section of the project managed to cover only 6 households for a preliminary study. Indeed, this was insufficient to make plausible conclusions, but at the same time it allowed to map the general trends and tendencies in the lives of migrants households during GFC. Secondly, the selection of responders for the study turned to be a challenging venture. Among our key constraints were the following:

1) Despite the fact that Ternopil oblast is affected by labour migration more than others¹, the selection of responders for the study turned to be a challenging venture. Thus, the project assistant

¹ See data in (MLSPU, TSAT, 2002).

Olexander Ryndyk contacted representatives of the Service in affairs of family and minors of the Chortkiv district state administration (Ternopil oblast) to request contacts with migrant families. In the course of an informal interview there, he was referred to a deputy principle of a local secondary school, which enrolled many children of migrant parents. The latter had a list of migrant families, which comprised 20-30 names. Among them, 10-15 were claimed at once to be unreliable interviewees because, it was noted, “there is no use talking to them”. This phrase referred to dysfunctional families, where guardians of migrants’ children, primarily alcoholic fathers, neither managed to find a place for themselves in the market economy, nor acquired social skills necessary to support family integrity while their wives were working abroad. Among the remaining 10-15 names in the list, only four persons responded to the call, while only one among them agreed to give an interview. Others refused to discuss migratory experiences of their families with the interviewer. Hence, those who eventually agreed to participate in the interviewing were, indeed, representatives of efficient households with strong kinship ties between family members and a sense “familyhood” (Bryceson, Vuorela, 2002). They decidedly benefited by the economic mobility of their relatives and, therefore, were ready to expose their achievements to interviewers. At the same time, the largest share of potential responders turned to be beyond the reach of our research team. These were mainly people with a negative experience of labour migration, who, as evidenced by participatory observation, made the core of “movers”.

2) The subject-matter of the project, i.e. the financial dimension of the transnational family space, especially if seen through a gender lens, is a specific field of study, involving very delicate, vulnerable aspects of life of migrant households. It is connected with issues of privacy and confidentiality, complicated interpersonal relationships in the family, which are not always consciously conceptualized by informants, and therefore, are not readily intimated to outsiders. It was brightly illustrated by a deeply hesitant tone of one informant, who responded to a question about impact of remittances on power relationships in the family in the following way:

Responder: *You see, I had never thought of it before. Yet, now that you’ve asked me... I tried to give it a thought. And you see... I am not sure what to answer. Probably no... I don’t think that... Well, at least not much... No, I don’t know... Although, probably yes. Well, probably just a little bit. But generally, I am not sure (Interview with Olena, an unmarried adult daughter of migrant parents, whose brother also works abroad, Chortkiv, Ternopi oblast, April 29, 2010, translated from Ukrainian).*

Hence, to obtain more objective findings about the impact of GFC on family and care arrangements in the household, the next stage in the research might be aimed at involving a wider audience of respondents, including those with a negative, non-rewarding experience of labour migration. This might involve unconventional methods of gathering research information. For example, it might be useful to resort to anonymous communication with potential informants, for

instance, via random telephone calls, communication via ICQ or SKYPE programs, or particular internet blogs and web-pages, which might provide to responders a greater freedom for expressing opinions and sharing experience, while at the same time preserving confidentiality.

Conclusions

As followed from the interview with members of transnational households, migrants' relatives left behind in Ukraine did not experience particular financial hardships even despite the turmoil of financial crisis. This is probably due to the fact, that, as was shown by our earlier interviews with migrant women (Tolstokorova, 2010c), migrant workers were well aware of emerging challenges exerted by the global economic downturn and managed to develop specific "gendered mobility strategies" (D'Ottavio, 2006) to respond to them. But it became possible not because they received timely support from the Ukrainian government, which usually benefits by foreign currency arriving from migrants workers, or because emergency allowances were provided to them by the state, which makes a considerable share of GDP due to remittances. None of these aids were available to Ukrainian migrant women when the economic crunch engulfed the world. It was mainly due to their individual human qualities that they managed to preserve their employment abroad and did not allow the resilience of remittances to decrease tangibly (Delo, 2010).

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