

# What changed? Labour market experiences of Ukrainian migrant and refugee women in the Czech Republic

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## Abstract

Inspired by critical studies in migration governance (Hess 2012, Tsianos and Karakayalı 2010) and associated theoretical approaches of “doing migration” (Amelina 2021) and autonomy of migration (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013, Scheel 2019), this paper will analyze mechanisms that shape labour market opportunities of migrant and refugee women from Ukraine in the Czech Republic. The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, based on policy content analysis, the paper investigates state policies, institutional arrangements and practices that contribute to the reproduction of inequalities through the construction of specific categories and whose main characteristics are flexibility, temporariness, low-wage or lack of skill, both pre- and after the beginning of the war. Second, this paper captures how migrant and refugee women themselves cope with the complexity of their social positioning in terms of gender, ethnicity and skill. The paper draws on twenty qualitative interviews with Ukrainian women that work in the cleaning and care sectors. Among the participants are both women who arrived in the Czech Republic before the full scale invasion in February 2022, and those that fled Ukraine after February 2022.

Extant literature on institutionally embedded social categories of migrants suggests that social categorisation through institutional arrangements and policymaking is not static or ahistorical (Amelina and Lutz 2019). Indeed, the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the wave of refugees that followed had a crucial impact on the social context in which policymaking occurs. The Temporary Protection Directive granted women fleeing the war, together with their children and other dependent members of their families, social security and access to European labour markets, which was previously conditioned by work permits. This paper, however, questions the extent to which a distinct legal status helped refugee women escape previously constructed (and deeply embedded in social structures) categories of precarious labour. A growing role of commercial subjects such as recruitment and temporary agencies, combined with the gendered structure of the labour market, lead to a persisting segmentation based on access to social and health insurance, decent wages, employment stability or labour protection. In this sense, the paper suggests that we should predict the real effect and capacity that policymaking has on moving or removing axes of inequality with great caution. Instead, a prevalence of market-led forces over attempts at political control is noted, which results from a tacit reliance on migrant labour, women labour, or the combination of both.

## Biography

**Olga Gheorghiev** is a social scientist with a strong track record in researching the labour market integration of migrant workers, with experience as both researcher and coordinator within a

number of projects at the national and international levels. She investigated the integration of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in European labour markets as part of SIRIUS, an Horizon 2020-funded project in which the Czech Republic partnered with four other European countries. She also analyzed the disparities in accessing social rights for posted mobile European citizens and third-country migrant workers as part of TransFair, an international European project financed by EaSI. During her postdoctoral experience at the University of Jyväskylä, Olga joined the international team of researchers that worked on SMUG, an EaSI-financed project that investigated precarious working conditions and barriers in accessing social protection for mobile Europeans and third-country nationals.

Currently, Olga is a researcher at the Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences, where she investigates the gender aspects of the labour market integration of Ukrainian workers and refugees. Her focus is on specific institutional settings that migrant and refugee women from Ukraine must navigate and on the effects of the commercialization of migration governance. Her work on “Economic migrants in the Czech segmented labour market: Covid-19 as a magnifying glass” was recently published in *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*.