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The deeper meaning of making pierogi online

This special (and especially rich) issue of CMR Spotlight is devoted to... you guessed it: migrants in times of Covid-19.

Much has been said in Western Europe about the shortage of seasonal migrants. Our authors present the perspective of a sending country (Poland), which also simultaneously happens to be a receiving country (for Ukrainian migrants) (article by Kamila Fiałkowska and Kamil Matuszczyk - page 2).

We also look more broadly at what the pandemic may mean for Ukrainian migration to Poland (article by Marta Jaroszewicz - page 7), as well as for the internally displaced within Ukraine (article by Kateryna Krakhmalova - page 12).

Last but not least, the epidemic has influenced the family and community lives of us all. A group of CMR researchers who focus on Roma migrations looked at the transnational practices of the Roma since the lockdown and community-building online. Would you like to know how an e-Easter may be superior to a traditional one? (article on page 16).



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CENTRE OF
MIGRATION
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Essential ~~workers~~ hands for work

Kamila Fiałkowska and Kamil Matuszczyk

The almost immediate closing of the borders in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in panic mobility of those returning home to Bulgaria, Moldova, Poland, Romania and Ukraine. Many of them work in so-called unskilled jobs (which usually ties in with low wages, long hours of work, high precarity due to often informal work arrangements, and many more intersecting factors which impact the temporary migrant workers' position) in the EU-pandemic hit countries. The migrants' sudden departure, and their enduring absence due to closed borders, instantly de-invisibilised them and rendered valued, important and essential to certain sectors of the economies of Germany, Austria, France and the UK. For now, we observe that amid the strict closure of the borders to minimise mobility and the spread of the pandemic (but also delimiting who is eligible for state protection, that is the citizens and limited groups of non-citizens) exemptions were made for those who are deemed essential, yet seemingly can afford to take the risk of mobility. For instance, [the seasonal farmworkers are listed among workers who are critically important](#) to the everyday functioning of otherwise pandemic-paralysed economies. This is why (and we are not able to tackle all of the reasons) there is an inherent paradox in the discourse on essential workers, which makes us wonder how much it really is about the essential

workers per se and how much it is about essential hands for work.

“Help feed the nation” – which nation?

With the borders becoming an obstacle (a nouveau thing for a generation/s of EU born citizens, even those in the Central and Eastern Europe), countries well known for their reliance on migrant labour especially in agriculture were considering various solutions – from engaging gastronomy employees, who otherwise were major recipients of home grown produce, to employing refugees and asylum seekers and finally to relying on home-grown labour. [“Help feed the nation”](#) in the UK or [“The country helps. Together for the agriculture and us all”](#) (Germany) platforms were established where volunteers were registering with the local farms and declaring their willingness to work during the harvesting season. The dramatic appeal of the German farmers caused some to start a petition on [avaaz.org](#) aimed at the decision makers who [closed the border for seasonal farmworkers](#). The line of reasoning clearly demonstrates that, although grateful for some 16,000 volunteers who signed up for work, the farmers annually need some 300,000 workers. In fact, not just workers. The petition clearly states that the agriculture needs 300,000 commodified Eastern Europeans to the rescue of endangered harvests, for which, as it estimates, some 600,000 to 800,000 Germans could substitute. These farmers quickly realised

they cannot count on home-grown “hands for work”. The “Help feed the nation” call was rather futile. Not only is the local population unaccustomed to hard physical labour on asparagus or strawberry plantations, and even with their good will could not be considered core labour for harvest time. Farmers have also gotten used to a pool of cheap, undemanding and hardworking (also easily exploitable) workers from Eastern Europe.

When this was realised (and it was even before it was said out loud), the race with time, for the workers but also against other countries, began. The petition’s authors urged for a re-opening of borders to seasonal farmworkers since that would best serve the wellbeing of the nation by ensuring food security during the pandemic. It would be unsustainable to import food which could be locally grown, and also impossible, because countries that Germany most likely would import produce from are also lacking workers for the very same reason. Therefore, it was important that Germany, out of patriotic duty, reopen the border for farmworkers, to manage their recruitment before other countries do a similar thing.

Germany did open the border for seasonal farm workers. As of the end of March, the [Polish Embassy](#) informed that Poles were exempt from the restrictions on entering the country. The Polish internet is full of job adverts “no skills necessary, no German necessary, work in agriculture available, start as soon as possible”. Soon after, we saw hundreds of people in [Romania boarding planes from Cluj-Napoca](#) to Germany. In April and May, some 80,000 workers will be allowed to enter the country. Seeing the arrivals of people from Eastern Europe, the farmers are relieved – “hands for work” have arrived to “help feed the nation”, in what has

been labelled by some farmers, a “[corona-free operation](#)”.

Out of sight, out of mind

The new arrivals are supposed to undergo a quarantine – half of the housing capacities can be used and teams of workers should work in separation (already, there are voices from the workers about the fictitious character of these measures), so that the newly arrived do not mingle with those who arrived earlier. It is unclear what will happen in case of Covid-19 infections, as health insurance for seasonal migrants is limited. The workers are tied to one employer without right to change, the duration of the contract also depends on the employer, as it is up to them to organise a return journey for the workers. In light of all that, and knowing that agriculture is work-intensive and exploitative to migrant farm workers under regular circumstances, with fewer workers on the fields the working conditions are likely to be even more exploitative, with increased pressure on workers to intensify efforts, work longer hours with no days off.

All of this is possible and is normalised on a regular basis because migrant farmworkers are not performing their work in view of the host population. On the contrary, their long hours of work, physical pain, exhaustion and oftentimes poor living conditions and exploitation at the workplace are invisibilized, as they take place in the peripheries of rural communities, on the plantations far from the everyday commutes of the average citizen. The only moment when “hands for work” are in touch with hands of customers are in the greengrocery, where the freshly picked fruits are available to customers, who usually know little about the process of agricultural mass food production. The other moment are the rare days during the week when

farm workers arrive at the local supermarket for grocery shopping. Then only the local population meet the seasonal farm workers, see them walking across the aisles in a hurry. Their de-invisibilised presence is ambiguously welcomed by the locals.

It is not uncommon to live in an overcrowded rusty living container, where the workers' only asylum is a mattress, giving them some 2 square meters of privacy. Showers and bathrooms do not provide that, water is usually cold and there is a queue so one needs to rush and make space for the next person. During the high season, the day starts as early as 3.30-4.00 am and ends at 9.00 pm. There is no time to lose as strawberries are ripping on the field. If the farm does not provide meals, one needs to remember to prepare food every day in advance, for the whole day at the plantation. Workers also must remember to buy bottled water or carry the drinking tap water with them because employers all too often do not provide it, even during the heat waves. All the farm workers on the asparagus or strawberry plantations know this, internalise it, deal with it on their own terms and count the days to the contract's end when return to normality is possible ([more on everyday life of strawberry pickers here](#)).



Housing containers in Germany © Kamila Fiałkowska

As the asparagus season is fully fledged and the strawberry about to begin, the would-be workers in Poland exchange doubts and opinions on the internet whether to go or not to go. Most of the voices come from people who are supposed to start work in the beginning of May, so their anxiety is huge. They complain about vague information from the intermediaries regarding working and living conditions on the farms during the pandemic. Some know people who are already employed, who convey messages about the current situation on the farms which import "hands for work" from Poland and Romania. A driver, who operates on address-to-address basis, informed us about his planned route to Germany with the strawberry pickers, but he was unsure if this would not be cancelled as the plantation he was heading to allegedly had three people with Covid-19 symptoms.

New immigration country – no immigration country?

While Polish workers head to Germany (among other countries) for seasonal labour, there is an enduring shortage of farm workers in Poland. Polish farmers, for at least a decade now, know that their harvests, similarly to their counterparts in Germany, depends on seasonal migrant farmworkers, [mainly from Ukraine, whose presence in Poland has intensified after 2014](#). Only in 2017, there were over 525,000 temporary migrants (many of whom worked in agriculture), much more than in the US, Canada or Australia, which are typically seen as exemplary in recruiting seasonal migrant workers.

As of the end of March, the data of the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy states that 13,640 persons were thus far granted a seasonal work permit, with over 108,000 applications submitted. As the farming and harvesting season slowly

begins, these (and many more in forthcoming months) are the people awaited by the Polish farmers. However, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the closure of the borders, introduced in a somewhat chaotic manner by both Ukrainian and Polish authorities, resulted in panic mobility of many thousands of Ukrainian citizens heading home. Meanwhile, [dramatic appeals appear every day in the media and on the websites of local food producers](#), who face the prospect that their crops will rot in the field and are desperate for hands for work. Phone conversations with farmers growing strawberries and apples in the “orchard heart of Europe” (near Warsaw) clearly show that the problem is serious. The uncertainty about this year’s harvest is related to the (non)arrival of employees from across the Eastern border and is compounded by a severe drought.



Strawberry plantation in Poland © Kamil Matuszczyk

According to the Polish government anti-crisis shield, only those Ukrainians who return to Poland as their habitual place of residence, to join the family, who already have the documents stating their right to work or those having the Card of the Pole can enter Poland. The problem now lies in the fact that would-be workers cannot get their documents, confirming their future employment.

Until recently, these were sent to Ukrainian workers through the bus drivers, who were acting as informal brokers in finding job offers for Ukrainians in Poland. What is more, Polish consulates in Ukraine are not operating; thus visas are not issued, and without valid documents stating their right to work in Poland they cannot enter the country under pandemic mobility-restriction measures. Additionally, as of 28.04.2020 the Ukrainian foreign Minister, Dmitry Kuleba, apparently pressured by the major Ukrainian migrants receiving countries, made a statement that Ukraine will not facilitate the organization of charter flights for the migrant workers. Until now such planes were scheduled to depart to Finland, Germany, and England (and perhaps more locations) and it is uncertain if they will take off. This position may be reconsidered, depending on the development of pandemic in respective countries but also the economic situation in Ukraine. The uncertainty among farmers, who now have to do all the work themselves, is compounded by the lack of proposals for government solutions. While the farmers’ plea seems not to be heard, the coming weeks are crucial, as it is the key time to complete formalities for seasonal workers and commence work on the plantations. With the absence of seasonal migrant farm workers, one farmer managed to attract some local women (i.e. Poles living in the area) to work on weeding the strawberries, but they are not interested in harvesting the fruit, which will take place in a few weeks.

In the run for the cheap foreign hands for work under the pandemic, Poland is clearly losing, as Czechia, Germany or the Scandinavian countries are opening up to these employees more and more clearly. There are no “hands for work” to

“help feed the nation”. The home-grown are helping another nation, and the foreign are not here.

The crisis was here, but we chose not to see it

Although some countries are attempting to activate certain groups of native workers (e.g. retirees, the unemployed, students, industry workers most affected by pandemics) to work in agriculture, one should not expect a sudden reshuffle among seasonal workers. Work on harvesting fruit or vegetables is rightly referred to as 3D (dirty, dangerous, degrading) and, as one of the owners of the strawberry plantations said, "it is only hunger and the need for quick income that causes Ukrainians to decide on taking up such exhausting work". In a pandemic-accentuated economic crisis, for many Eastern Europeans this clearly is survival mobility, and the earnings in Poland and further West, while not attractive to the local populations, are meaningful income for them. Work, however, comes with increased, yet often neglected, risks to life and health (physically exhausting work from dawn to dusk, at temperatures reaching over 40 degrees Celsius in

the sun) currently with the Covid-19 infection at the forefront of a work hazard. Conversations with migrants clearly show that they, regardless of the state of the pandemic, are still interested in coming to work in Poland.

The conditions of employment of foreign farm workers under the pandemic only reveal the long existing structural inequalities illustrating the divide between the old and new EU member states (while the EU and non-EU disparities are even more accentuated). The migrant farm workers are now (and every year) crucial for maintaining the agricultural food production, yet their position proves more precarious than ever – with limited health security, excessive work demands, minimum wage, severe restrictions and dependence on the employer. The very fact that the core workforce of the European agri-food production is based on the undervalued, overworked and underpaid seasonal migrant workers, often with limited legal rights and difficulties in regularizing their temporary migrant status, should signal an endemic crisis to the mechanisms of food production in much of the EU member states. It is not a new crisis, it was here long ago, but now this crisis is even more acute.

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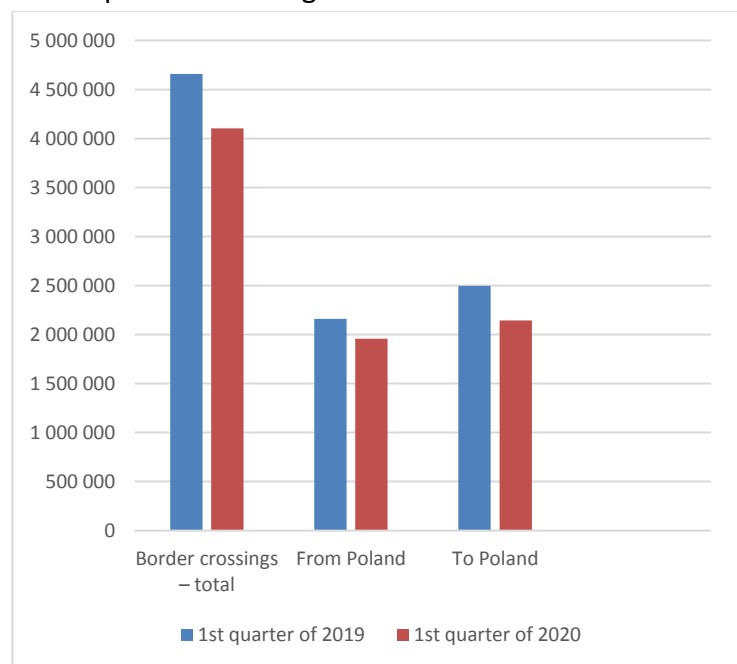
Ukrainian migrants in Poland and the Covid-19 epidemic: problems at the border, economisation versus securitisation?

Marta Jaroszewicz (collaboration: Jan Grzyski)

The eruption of the Covid-19 epidemic in Poland and the EU, but foremost new restrictions on mobility have created unprecedentedly altered conditions of stay and travel for Ukrainian migrants in Poland. They have also formed essentially new research questions and dilemmas for studying migration. Among them the most fundamental in the Polish context are: whether circular migration can endure harsh border crossing restrictions; to which extent economisation will remain the dominating discourse narrative in speaking and acting about Ukrainian migrants in Poland?

Never in recent history have EU member states closed their borders so drastically, never have they imposed such restrictions on internal mobility. The outbreak of Covid-19 has largely rendered mobility of people the main vector of spreading the infectious coronavirus, and subsequently securitized it to an incomparable degree. This has led to governments prioritising their own citizens in protecting against Covid-19, at the expense of other nationalities. All those factors have put populations at large at different risks, with migrants sharing the risks of general populations, but also encountering specific ones like: difficulties in reaching their country of origin, higher risk of losing their jobs, hindered access to legal assistance or medical care, difficulties in

extending the legal stay and work, discrimination on the part of receiving societies.



Border crossings of the Poland-Ukraine border, comparison of 1st quarter of 2019 and 2020. Data of Border Guard of Poland.

First of all, in EU countries we can observe a de facto suspension of asylum seekers' admission on the EU territory, which has put many migrants in a security vacuum (Litzkow 2020). On the other hand, a majority of EU member states still require foreign labour, and automatically extend their residence and work permits and even organise new channels of entry. However, EU countries often do not guarantee migrants equal safety conditions as those experienced by nationals. Recently, media have widely reported about the

new regulation of the German government confirming that German food producers will not be obliged to cover social security benefits of short-term migrants, which puts this category of labourers at a high health risk (the Guardian 16.04.2020). The Portuguese government's decision to grant provisional citizenships rights to all migrants and asylum-seekers in the legalisation procedure, to ensure they have access to health care, is one of very few examples of providing immigrants with a more complex offer.

It is very problematic to look at the historic analogies that could at least give some hints to forecast how Covid-19 may affect immigration in the longer term. The speed of the spreading of the Covid-19 epidemic and the far-reaching restrictions on mobility adopted by governments makes the exiting literature, both the theoretical and empirical ones, only partially relevant to study the case of Ukrainian migration in Poland. Since a majority of the epidemics studied so far occurred in the countries of global 'South', the publications have mainly taken the perspective of sending states. Several studies conducted in Africa, but also in countries of the global 'North' to which migrants from epidemic-affected countries travelled, demonstrated the occurrence of a widespread securitisation of migrants, as well as a rise in xenophobia. They have also reported cases of temporary migrants being "stuck", either in their country of origin or in destination countries which deprived them of possibilities of earning a living. Vulnerable migrants were also more prone to fall into irregularity or semi-legality; they also often fall victim to abuses by intermediaries or employers (Peak 2018, Onoma 2016). The articles related to the SARS and HIV epidemics also argued that migrants may be potentially more at risk of getting infected, because some of them live

outside the state's control and the support system (Gushulak and McPearson 2006).

As of today, we may argue that, overall, the eruption of the Covid-19 epidemic has created additional sources of vulnerability for Ukrainian migrants working in Poland, albeit so far not dramatically. This is due to the fact that Ukrainian migrants either work in sectors that still have not experienced an economic downturn, or they moved to the sectors that have started booming because of the lockdown like outdoor trade, transport or logistics. Nevertheless, the media are reporting many cases of bankruptcy or closing of businesses where migrants used to work. Particularly vulnerable are migrants working in construction or domestic care (Gazeta Prawna 25.03.2020; Onet.pl 28.03.2020). It is also too early to assess whether and to what extent female migrants are more prone to lose their jobs due to the Covid-19 mobility constraints, particularly those employed in household-related services. Overall, it appears quite realistic that if restrictions to mobility continue, it may cease circular migration, and a large number of migrants may be confronted with the question whether they are prepared for a permanent migration to Poland.

The Ukrainian community in Poland is quite diverse, with varying access to the information and the types of information sources they use. However, most Ukrainians stay within ethnic social networks and receive information through them (Kindler & Wójcikowska-Baniak 2018). A preliminary analysis of the Ukrainian social media sources, conducted by the author in March this year, has shown that Ukrainians were most severely concerned in the first two weeks after the epidemic reached Poland. In particular, it pertained to the decision of the Polish authorities

to close the borders as of March 15, which was followed by the analogous pronouncement of the Ukrainian authorities. The decisions of both governments were not coordinated, and the relevant information campaigns lacked clarity, therefore causing widespread anxiety. Some migrants were afraid they would not be able to return to the home country, some were not sure whether they would be able to extend the permits enabling them to further stay and work in Poland. Initially, on March 13, the Polish Border Guard issued a statement informing that they would not be punishing foreigners for extending their legal period of stay. However, all decisions would be made on an individual basis. This communication was supplemented on March 18 by the decision of the Office for Foreigners that foreigners who could not leave Poland, could ask for the prolongation of stay by sending the relevant letter via post. Finally, the automatic extension of the residence permits and visas happened at the beginning of April. Those provisions are included in the “anti-crisis shield” put forward by the Polish government. There were, however, two versions of the crisis legislation pertaining to foreigners. Initial provisions adopted at the end of March, which applied only to long-term migrants, were expanded on April 7. Currently, they cover foreigners who as of March 14 were staying in Poland based on: all types of residence permits, Schengen visas, national visas, visa-free regime, but also visas and residence permits issued by other EU member states. New provisions also pertain to foreigners who remain in the asylum procedure. All those categories of foreigners can stay in Poland to up to 30 days after the end of the state of epidemiological threat (Chancellery of Prime Minister of Poland 2020).

So far, the “riskiest” space for Ukrainian migrants is the Polish-Ukrainian border. The queues remained long after the initial decision by both governments to close the border. Apart from special transport organised by the Polish and Ukrainian governments, as well as local authorities, no public transport has been operating at this border. The pedestrian border crossing point is not available either. Nevertheless, many migrants wishing to cross the border gathered there and tried to catch private cars to depart for Ukraine. Travelers often did not possess personal protection means. The longest queues, totaling 30-40 hours, were reported at the end of March. According to the press release prepared by the Polish Ombudsman office, while on the 26th of March 4,000 persons went through border checks at the Hrebenne border crossing point, the next day this number rose to 9,000 (RPO 01.04.2020). Since March 28th new regulations further restricting operation of the border crossing points at the Ukrainian section of the border entered into force.

According to the data of Ukrainian border guards as of April 7th, as many as 145,000 Ukrainian migrants have returned from Poland since the outbreak of the Covid-19 epidemic (IOM 2020). Since April 7th, only two border crossing points operate at the Polish-Ukrainians border, and all travelers who return to Ukraine are subject to a compulsory 14-day quarantine. I hypothesize that most likely all those barriers efficiently limited possibilities for Ukrainian migrants to leave Poland, and the current dynamics of outward migration is smaller than the initial one. On the other hand, some migrants wish to return back to Poland, which may actually be possible since media are reporting that Polish government is in

the process of reopening Polish consulates that would issue labour visas.

The data presented above allows us to argue that the pre-COVID modes and patterns of Ukrainian migration in Poland (apart from circular migration, which is hampered) remain in force. The most important factor that may further influence them is the long-term condition of both the Polish and Ukrainian economy and their respective labour markets. Nevertheless, many migrants left Poland already and it requires further investigation whether they plan to return at all.

When it comes to the public and political narratives in Poland that have accompanied the Ukrainian migrants so far, they also appear to be a continuation of previous discourses and social perceptions. The underdeveloped border used to be one of the weakest points of Polish-Ukrainian relations – the Covid-19 related restrictions only perpetuated the existing imbalance. When it comes to the public discourse in Poland, Ukrainian migration after 2014 was trapped between “economisation” and “securitisation” discursive narratives. We are currently investigating this case in a National Science Centre financed project “Securitisation (de-securitisation) of migration on the example of Ukrainian migration to Poland and internal migration in Ukraine” being run at the Centre of Migration Research (CMR), University of Warsaw. Overall, regardless of the unprecedented scale of Ukrainian mobility to Poland after the Russian aggression against Ukraine, Ukrainian migrants were not depicted in the public discourse as a threat to security in 2014-2019. Moreover, the Polish authorities implemented many provisions aiming at rendering this labour mobility to Poland as frictionless as possible. There were largely no explicit ‘speech acts’ directed against Ukrainians in Poland apart from

far-right parties and organisations. However, everyday ethnic-based discrimination and hate speech prevalence as well as hate crimes rate appear to be much higher than those recorded by the official sources. According to the study conducted in 2019 by ODIHR and the Ombudsman’s Office, around 18% of Ukrainians living in Poland reported that they had experienced ethnic-based violence (ODIHR/RPO 2019).

So far, it appears that both “economisation” and “securitisation” approaches were also present in the first phase of the Covid-19 epidemic. However, the economic justification of looking at the Ukrainian migrants foremost as foreign workers seems to dominate. The securitisation moves (by which we understand discourses, practices and other intersubjective artefacts applied to justify that a certain issue is an extraordinary problem that requires special measures) introduced in Poland pertain to the general population, rather than to migrants. Those moves include among others overall restrictions on human movements, the widespread application of surveillance techniques, usage of army for civilian purposes and others. On the other hand, some hard-right politicians, including an official candidate for a president (for the Confederation) have stated that in light of the Covid-19 crisis, the Polish government should close immigration channels to Poland, as this may threaten Poland’s economy and social cohesion (Kresy.pl, 27.03.2020). It is certainly premature to argue whether this trend will remain stable. We still do not know which phase of Covid-19 we are in, whether it is already a mobilisation phase (where a whole range of various extraordinary discursive methods and practices are used), or whether we are just in an identification phase.

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Coronavirus test for Ukraine: mobility restrictions, IDPs and social payments

Kateryna Krakhmalova

Introduction

While Ukraine, as the majority of countries in the world, tries to implement policies which would contain the spread of the Covid-19 epidemic and shield the most vulnerable groups, it in addition faces challenges of the ongoing war and resulting mass internal displacement on its territory. The epidemic exacerbates all the social hardships that displaced people have already been facing. It also makes the decisions to close the borders and checkpoints more difficult to reach and implement: part of the external border with Russia is uncontrolled and therefore cannot be closed effectively. At the same time, closing the internal checkpoints between the controlled by the government and uncontrolled territories inevitably leads to questions of how it would affect the internally displaced persons, some of whom have been, by virtue of a legislative solution, forcefully mobile.

All-state mobilization as the context of the measures taken

The response of the Ukrainian state to Covid-19 may, arguably, in general be characterized as gradual, relatively open in terms of information-sharing with the public, and based on the less restrictive alternatives in terms of the chosen applicable legal solutions.

Currently, an “emergency situation” has been introduced in Ukraine (until 24th of April 2020) which has been declared at first at the local level, in places where ill people have been identified and more mobilization was necessary, and only then

at the all-state level. In the Ukrainian legal system the “emergency situation” differs from the “state of emergency”, both in terms of its main addressees, mechanism and consequences for the population: the former relates to the functioning of the state civil protection system and aims to achieve better coordination between different levels and power-holders involved in it. The latter, the “state of emergency” would be much more limiting in terms of interference in the rights and freedoms and requires a different procedure for its introduction. It is also worth mentioning that while introducing the measures, state officials were trying to reach out to and explain their meaning to the public via several communication channels (in print, video, Facebook), both to a more general audience and specific target groups, like entrepreneurs (for whom a special platform was created).

The evolution of the measures taken in response to the spread of the coronavirus may be best followed when conducting an analysis at the level of legal acts: from the first decision of the State Commission on Technogenic-Ecological Safety and Emergency Situations to more and more restrictive Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine resolutions on 12th, 17th, 26th and 31st of March and on 6th of April, and two respective laws, discussed in detail in the next section.

Mobility restrictions, IDPs and social payments

Amidst the mobilization to fight the epidemic, Ukraine, similarly to the rest of the world, began to close borders and other checkpoints. On 14th

of March the Order on temporarily limited crossing of the state border was adopted (which together with similar measures taken by other countries has caused turmoil for the Ukrainian migrants returning home) and temporarily stopped the crossing of the checkpoints with the occupied Crimea (with a few exceptions). In addition, already from March 7th, movement on the checkpoints between the uncontrolled and controlled territories of Ukraine in Donbas has been limited due to fears of the coronavirus spreading.

The reason why closing of the checkpoints put the internally displaced persons in a very difficult situation is twofold. First, they have already been more dependent on the state social benefits and payments (including pensions) than the rest of the population, because the group of IDPs is made up predominantly of children, the elderly and women. It is also more difficult for IDPs to find employment. It was possible for them to travel to the uncontrolled territories from time to time, but all social payments (including pensions) were paid out only on the territory controlled by the government of Ukraine. Absence from it for a certain period of time could cause losing the payments. This is why in the “normal” situation many of the internally displaced persons were, in fact, regularly travelling between the controlled and uncontrolled territories.

Closing of/restrictions on crossing the checkpoints were thus met with the civil society’s resistance: at least on two instances, on 14th and 17th of March NGOs issued petitions on the matter. On 17th of March the Law „On Introducing Changes to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine, Aimed at Prevention of Appearance and Spread of Coronavirus Illness (Covid-19)” was adopted. Its provisions foresee, inter alia, that the IDP

certificate cannot be cancelled and operations on the IDP’s bank account cannot be stopped even if the displaced person would be absent in the place of residence for more than 60 days, has returned to the uncontrolled territory or there is no possibility of physical identification of the person in the bank. These rules have to apply for the period of limitations or quarantine connected with spread of the Covid-19 and during the next 30 days after its end/cancellation. Therefore, the final closing of the checkpoints in Donbas, from the Ukrainian side and by the so-called “Doneck People’s Republic” and “Luhansk People’s Republic” after this law has already not changed much in the matter of social payments.

Additionally, the newest Ukrainian socio-economic support legislation in connection with the coronavirus illness – the Law No. 540-IX (in force on 2nd April 2020), restated that there will be no factual checks of place of residence of the internally displaced persons and no certificates of material and living conditions of IDPs’ families would be necessary. All types of social benefits granted before the quarantine or limiting measures in connection with coronavirus illness will continue to be paid out - during the whole time of quarantine and anti-epidemic measures and 30 days after its/their end.

Therefore, based on the available information, it appears that obstacles to IDPs’ access to social benefits posed by the anti-epidemic closures of check points have been successfully (and with active IDPs involvement) resolved in legislation for the period of the epidemic. They became one of the vulnerable groups for whom special solutions have been foreseen. However, these solutions are only temporary and after the end of the emergency situation the core structural problems with the provision of the social benefits to the

internally displaced persons still have to be addressed. Besides that, closing the checkpoints between the controlled and uncontrolled parts of Ukrainian territory also opens the questions of humanitarian and medical aid access.

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Transnational e-Easter at the time of pandemic. The case study of the Polish Roma families in Poland and abroad

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Introduction: pandemics, community life and cyberspace

Historically speaking, epidemics and pandemics have always impacted culture, the economy, modes of governance and – since the association of the disease with death – religion. In this respect, Covid-19 appears as no different than for instance the mediaeval Black Death which has been deeply imprinted in the collective European memory (Bedyński 2020; Goudsblom 1986). It is therefore not surprising that among thousands of images from the coronavirus-hit world, there are also those of religious ceremonies: live streamed prayers, the Pope delivering Angelus on an empty square in the Vatican City, sanitation workers on the empty Grand Mosque square in Mecca, Orthodox Jews standing two metres apart at their prayers by the Western Wall in Jerusalem, icons covered with cloths to prevent them from being kissed, and countless other examples (also from the non-Biblical religions).

The epidemics also reshape family and community life and everyday practices. Under the Covid-19 pandemic, social (inter-household) relations have almost entirely switched to online mode. That was the case with the Easter and Passover celebrated in April 2020. Social media blossomed with pictures and screen-shots of distant gatherings and various forms of “digital kinning” (Baldassar and Wilding 2020). It is quite likely that some of our readers also took part in these kinds of family meetings. Below, we present initial findings from

the “Transnational lives of Polish Roma” a research project undertaken at the Centre of Migration Research. In the following short piece, which is a teaser for an upcoming research paper, we analyse the online practices accompanying Easter celebrations under the Covid-19 pandemic. As the project is devoted to Polish Roma (and three of us identify as Roma), we focus on that group noting that: first, one needs to bare in mind that this group is by no means homogenous; second, these kinds of actions and performances are not limited to Roma. Nevertheless we claim that in time of increased uncertainty, everyday references to mortality and potential rupture of social bonds due to lockdowns restrictions on mobility and physical contact, these online interactions become more imperative and are increasingly used to maintain Roma culture, language and identity in the migratory and transnational context.

Following Carol Silverman’s study on adopting the use of modern means of communications by Roma in order to transgress the dominant culture and maintain the minority one (Silverman 1988), we point to the ways culture is maintained and transformed with the use of new technologies. The broader point links with modernity driven transnational being and maintaining group ties on-line that strengthens, not weakens certain traditional codes of behaviour and meaning making practices.

The use of internet and communication platforms has long been recognized as key to maintain transnational social fields in which migrants and their families and friends interact. The current lock-down has turned them into a kind of global trend-setters in this respect. What is novel to the non-migrant global majority, had long been the norm among the migrants and their kin (Baldassar and Krzywowski 2020). So has been the case with Polish Roma communities in the UK and Germany. **Polish Roma and the internet, “at home” and “abroad”**

Cyberspace is an important, or rather the main communication platform for Roma leaders and celebrities who want to reach Polish Roma in Poland and abroad. We identify several persons (all of them males in their 50s - 60s) who can be described as Roma leaders and celebrities particularly active on that front. They very often combine their roles of community leaders, moral authorities and NGO leaders and (in at least one case) policy advisors to the state administration, with a career in entertainment and sport. One of them (to secure his anonymity, let us refer to him as The Celebrity) is particularly active on social media, building his position not only as a Roma leader but also an intermediary between Roma and non-Roma (*Gadje*) in Poland. The Celebrity combines his stage charisma with policy advising which makes him a popular (though controversial and not necessarily admired by everyone) figure among Polish Roma in Poland as well as in England, Sweden and Germany. Aiming at both Roma and non-Roma, he manages to simultaneously perform his message as a kind of “respectful elder” of the Roma community and also a noble citizen and religious Pole.

The internet is a vital space of communication and social/family life for migrating and non-migrating

Polish Roma. It enables the maintaining of regular contact with relatives, meeting potential spouses and serves as a means of social control regarding traditional, common-law code of conduct (*romanipen*). It is also the space for an unbound use of the Romani language. Incomprehensible for the non-Roma, it contributes to the creation of online safe-spaces for the minority. Names of particular applications, *mesendžeris*, *fejsbukos*, *skejpos*, *wotsapos*, have long settled into the Romani language. Rituals due to important live events (baptisms, weddings, feasts, funerals) or calendar celebrations (All Saints, Christmas, Easter) are very often shot, live-streamed and shared on social media and thematic internet



"Keep calm and stay home" – says this sign published on Facebook by the Aresel organization from Romania. ©Aresel

forums. Food consumption among relatives and friends is an important part of Roma culture as it reinforces group solidarity, family structure and hierarchy. Due to the popular practice of live streaming of feasts, it is also a way to show other Roma (in Poland, UK and other countries) that everything during the ritual goes according to the custom; an appropriate quality and quantity of food and drinks is placed on the table, proper toasts are made, traditional music is played, men and women are dressed properly – and also that people behave themselves. The presence of all these elements in place, live streamed to numerous Roma households through Facebook between England, Germany and Poland is a way to strengthen the groups bonds, but also, to demonstrate mutual respect.

Following the coronavirus outbreak, Polish Roma leaders supported the #stayhome campaign, encouraging everyone to follow the instructions of doctors and the authorities. All of them retreated from any meetings and non-internet public activity. The Celebrity launched a fund-raising campaign to support public institutions. This campaign was to show (or perhaps break the stereotype of Roma as a recipient of social welfare) that the Roma can contribute to the nation-wide cause instead of being dependant on the state (i.e. ethnic majority) support. Another leader (The Musician) started to sell his stage-clothes and musical instruments to raise funds for the hospitals. It was also The Celebrity, who started popular “nominations” on social media., where the nominees were asked to sing songs or play music. Nominations were launched before Easter celebrations and continued ever since. They were picked-up by professional musicians and amateurs alike.

In general, since the pandemic outbreak, the streaming of feasts has gradually declined and been replaced by other forms of activity such as competitions, nominations and challenges. The words *nominineł*, *nomininaw*, *czelendźos* and *czelendźo* have quickly settled into the Romani language becoming highly popular in online activity. In one of the short movies, we can see a Roma man from Cracow send greetings to his family in Poland, UK and Germany. He also nominates his online peers to toast to the end of *koronawirusos*. This task was performed mostly by men, however women could also be observed filming or assisting in the language, for example in finding the Romani equivalents of Polish and English words related to social media.

The pandemic related online activities of Polish Roma, also demonstrate a subtle, but visible, shift in gender dynamics of the usage of social media, particularly Facebook. Broadly speaking, among conservative Roma, Facebook is regarded as mainly a platform for findings partners for amorous relationships and in a patriarchal family structure, female use of Facebook is sometimes condemned on moral grounds as wrong. This resulted in many women actually hiding their online presence. We find that currently, females are less shy about their Facebook usage, as if the importance of social media in maintaining social bonds in times of crisis overrides any gender inequality in that respect.

Online celebrations and festivals

The International Romani Day is celebrated world-wide every year on the 8th of April and Easter (this year celebrated by Catholic and Protestant churches on the 12th and 13th of April) contributed to the general festive atmosphere. This festivity though, even if apparently joyful, was suppressed by the forced immobility, grief and anxiety

deriving from the contradiction between the state of exception and the attempts to live the usual way. In our ongoing observation of the online activities of Roma families, we found that both men and women picked up public online challenges related to food preparation. Female nominees were baking cakes and other sweet snacks while men were encouraged to make dumplings. The dumpling challenge was introduced between Roma families living in Poland and in the UK. In one of the movies, a man in his forties living in England can be seen making the so called Russian dumplings (*pierogi ruskie*) – one of the most popular Polish dishes. The man is wearing a traditional Tatra-highlander hat (which points to part of his family's origin from Podhale region in the south of Poland), chef's apron and rubber gloves (supposedly contributing to the safety measures under the pandemic). The performance was filmed by his wife who was also giving him some practical tips with music playing in the background. In another movie, a young man in Cracow, who used to live in England, made dumplings accompanied by his daughter who was also responsible for filming. In both cases, the people involved were mixing Romani and Polish languages. These kinds of live streams and videos serve as a message sent to friends and relatives, showing that "we" are fine, healthy and that "we" stay at home and you should to. As stated in the introduction, the whole world (or at least the parts which honour Easter) celebrated distant, online festivities. It was also our experience and presumably some of our readers had similar ones. Below, we would like to portray the Easter Sunday experienced by one of us. For this particular part, let us switch into first person narrative.

The family meeting took place in the form of a video-call and was attended by my aunts and

cousins living in and calling from two towns in England and two towns in Poland. The atmosphere was festive and familiar. There were jokes, toasts and the showing and sending of old pictures. Some people sang and danced; one cousin played the accordion. Another cousin was simultaneously present on three different calls using two telephones and one computer. After a while, the older generation left the video-call leaving more freedom to the younger generation. One of the aunts kept dropping by in order to check if everything was fine. Another auntie appeared for "inspection" and suggested that it was late and that the call could be continued the next day. It is to be stressed that these kinds of video-calls are not a new phenomenon in my family. What is new is the online meeting around the table. It was for the first time in my life that we didn't visit each other for Easter. It was a conscious isolation driven by the fear of the disease. It is quite common among the Roma to fear diseases and hospitals. And this fear made them stay home.

Conclusions

Obviously, these kind of activities have been present over the years but we argue they seem to gain additional strength caused by the pandemic and subsequent rules of social distancing and lockdowns. They are characteristic not only for the Roma, and they are not limited to transnational communities as people living in the same town and people living in other countries have turned equally distant (and in online communication the time zone appears more crucial than the physical distance). What can be observed among the Roma families we interact with, is the need to create an own niche and safe space for languages and customs. The internet enables to stay in contact with the loved ones and to maintain language and

culture, even if both of them undergo certain modifications.

Our research shows how within diverse and territorially dispersed family networks, the internet appears as a highly functional tool for cultural reproduction, social control and group integration. In de-territorialized and transnational conditions, it facilitates maintaining tradition and strengthening interpersonal, social relations.

The ease of the internet's fitting-in the Roma social lives suggests that we are dealing here with a vital element of this culture, with some key elements of *romanipen* showing an ability to mobilise group integrative agency in times of crisis. *Romanipen* refers to the values and norms shared by the group and these – as in many others – are recreated in a ritual. Online meetings, feasts, challenges and nominations are not only about entertainment and the way to spend time. They function as important community rituals where people meet, do things together according to certain script and feel a sense of togetherness. Normally, people will meet and feast in person with an additional live stream from other feasts their families in England or Germany would organize. But these abnormal times require the on-line feast taking centre stage, becoming the main arena of Roma social and cultural expression. These rituals that reproduce key meanings of a group through the use of social media, may be termed *e-romanipen* rituals (term coined by Monika Szewczyk).

What's crucial in our findings, is that the festive 'feel' of these on-line interactions gave way to more sombre and serious tones. Epidemics are associated with death and human vulnerability. It may be said that the messages of *e-romanipen* rituals have gained some characteristics of anticipation of grief, since they deal with an

unusual situation of crisis where the group cannot get together to perform the usual – in these cases rituals of closure. The anticipation of inability to get together to reinforce group bonds – no matter whether it is for a funeral, to meet parents or grandparents, or elders to discuss important things of family politics – generates deep anxiety linked not just to individual, but family bonds' survival. The creative, invented ad hoc, highly popular *nomininaw* and *czelendzos* on *skejpos* are therefore not just a fun way to spend time during lockdown-induced boredom. They are underpinned by an existential fear for group survival and a need to make sense of it and contain it. They show the powerful human agency designed to take control using its own cultural resources in order to collectively deal with the potential crisis of a community for whom family bonds are a supreme value.

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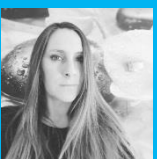
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