

# WELFARE, WORK AND MIGRATION FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE: *Back to ‘family settings’?*

## Abstract

Since the collapse of the Soviet system, many significant changes have occurred, not only in the former socialist countries, but also in western societies. One remarkable change is the mass of post-Soviet emigration from the former Soviet Union. In this article, we analyse the everyday welfare experienced by the Russian immigrant women living in the border area of Eastern Finland. We study the interrelation of family relations, the experienced welfare, transnational care, and work in the lives of Russian migrant women in North Karelia. According to the analysis, we argue that the welfare of Russian immigrant women is mainly produced by their family networks and precarious work.

## Keywords

Migration • women • welfare • work • family • precarization

Received 21 December 2015; Accepted 16 December 2016

## 1 Introduction

The public debate about functioning of the welfare state in Finland concentrates on the process of hollowing out the welfare state, which means the diminishing role of the public policy. Consequently, the concept of the welfare state has been replaced by the idea of a welfare society. (Julkunen 2006, 2008; Jokinen *et al.* 2011; Kröger & Leinonen 2012) The theory of welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen 1990) presents the Social Democratic Nordic countries as an example of well-functioning states, where by the means of public policy, welfare is redistributed between all the members of society in a more or less equal way, according to the principal of universalism (e.g., Anttonen & Sipilä 2002). A similar kind of state regulation was implemented in the Soviet Union, where from the point of view of the individual, the state functioned as a welfare state. The Nordic welfare state is also seen as being women-friendly (Anttonen *et al.* 1994), whereas the USSR's family and social politics are often presented as paternalistic, and conceptualized as women's 'marriage with the state' (e.g., Zdravomyslova & Temkina 2007; Zdravomyslova *et al.* 2009).

Since the collapse of the Soviet system, many significant changes have occurred not only in former socialist countries, but also in western societies. The economies, power balances and welfare systems of the nation states have been witness to a process of continuous change. One remarkable change is the mass of post-Soviet emigration from the former Soviet Union, which continues till date. In Finland, this migration targets the biggest cities and the Eastern regions of the country close to the Finnish-Russian border (Eskelinen & Alanen 2012). In this article, we analyse how

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this migration is intertwined with changes in the welfare system in Finland. The perspective of our analysis is defined by our qualitative data. The aim of this article is to analyse the interrelation of family relations, experienced welfare, transnational care, and work in the lives of Russian migrant women in Finnish North Karelia region, situated close to the Finnish-Russian border. In order to do this, we first present our main theoretical concepts (welfare, precarious work, family relations and border area as a site of transnational living). Then we present classification which has resulted from the analysis of our qualitative data which was collected in the border area in 2000-2016.

## 2 Everyday welfare in the lives of Russian migrant women

In this article, we concentrate on the experienced welfare, which means the pursuing of a good life and the means through which the individual can reach welfare for herself and her family members (see Saari 2011: 55). Welfare has many dimensions, and the composition of welfare includes many areas of life (e.g., health, family relations, care and general social relations). Traditionally, the welfare of individuals is maintained by public policy (e.g., the state), family relations (private sphere), or by civil society (the so called third sector). We understand welfare holistically. The concept of welfare refers to a range of functions that enable an individual to be fully included in their society, and to be able to live a subjectively satisfying life, both economically

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and communally. Understood in this way, welfare comprises aspects such as health, material welfare and experienced welfare (Vaarama *et al.* 2010: 11-14).

Good life and the production of welfare involve both available recourses (communal and personal) and the experienced welfare. The experienced welfare consists of several components. As Martha Nussbaum (2003: 41-42) points out, the welfare lies upon the maintenance and promotion of human capabilities, which are: 1) being able to live a human life of a normal length; 2) bodily health; 3) being able to move freely from place to place; 4) senses, imagination and thoughts; 5) emotions; 6) practical reasoning on planning one's good life; 7) affiliation; 8) being able to live in interaction with animals, plants and nature; 9) being able to enjoy; 10) political and material control over one's environment. In sum, one's welfare is constructed in the interplay between the society and one's individual activities.

In this article, we scrutinize the welfare experienced by the Russian migrant women every day, based on individual's perspective. The everyday welfare is defined by Raijas (2011) as consisting of experienced welfare and available recourses. According to Raijas (2011: 248), these recourses are: one's income, property and wealth, time recourses, health, knowledge, abilities and social capital. The possibilities provided by society and social environment in different situations affect the amount of individual's recourses, the capability to govern them and also in the chances to take advantage of personal recourses (*ibid.*). The welfare state is the central societal mechanism, which affects the amount of individual's recourses and possibilities to use them. So, the welfare state conceptualization is involved in our way of analysing the experienced everyday welfare.

The classical theory of welfare states is based on Esping-Andersen's (1990) analyses of three different types of welfare state model. These models can be sorted as per their ideological backgrounds or according to their geographical essence. Conservative welfare states reflect the central European countries, where the social political system is based on a male breadwinner ideology. The term liberal welfare states refers to a North-American welfare state model, based on the ideology of everyone taking care of themselves and people insuring themselves against social risks (e.g., pregnancy, illness, unemployment, etc.). The Nordic welfare state system (which is also called a social democratic system) refers to the Nordic countries. The model is based on the ideology of universalism and a strong public sector as the active actor in emergency situations.<sup>1</sup> Later, feminist scholars have added the Latin Rim or Southern European welfare state model to this theory. The Southern European model refers to a system where both the Catholic church and family are considered to be strong actors in social problem situations; additionally, where the essence of the state or public policy is rather limited. (See e.g. Bettio *et al.* 2006; Bonoli 2000; Pau & Moreno-Fuentes 2013).

Welfare regimes (liberal, conservative and social democratic models) can also be looked at regarding their gender sensitivity. If we think of the basic idea of how welfare regimes are organized from the point of view of gender, then the most commonly perceived woman-friendly societies are those that follow the Nordic welfare state model. Liberal and conservative models are based on the idea of a male breadwinner and a female who takes care of the private sphere at home. In the Nordic model, care is commonly organized by public policy organizations. Welfare regimes also have influence in matters of parenthood and the system of family care, and in the Nordic welfare state model, the matter of parenthood is either publicly organized or at least supported by public actors (Anttonen *et al.* 2003; Anttonen & Sipilä 2002; Lister *et al.* 2007; Anttonen 1994).

In present-day Finland, welfare is more often organized as a so-called welfare mix model, which means that in addition to public policy, the responsibility for producing welfare is redistributed to the third and market sectors, and is also seen as a private matter (family and personal networks) (Anttonen & Sipilä 1993, 435-436; Anttonen & Sipilä 2002, 268-269; Anttonen & Sointu 2006). For example, in many municipalities, the adult children of elderly persons have the main responsibility for organizing the care of their parents or relatives. In many places, the waiting lists for municipal elderly care homes are so long that family members have to evaluate how much care for the elderly person they can provide themselves, and whether there are any services produced by the market sector available. According to Kröger & Leinonen (2012), the change of character of the services is connected to three recent trends in the organization of social services: the fusion of home-based social and healthcare services, the marketization and emerging privatisation of care and the integration of informal family care into the formal care system. These changes represent weakening defamilisation, which we call 'back to the family settings' – ideology. As Kröger & Leinonen (2012) point out, especially in the elderly care, this means decreasing public responsibility and increasing the reliance on family carers.

The argument of this article is that an individual's welfare can be produced in three different ways. It can be provided by the welfare state, by the individual's participation in the labour market, and also by their family relations (family setting). In many cases, these factors are intertwined and complicated in an individual's experience and everyday life. The welfare states produce welfare in two fundamental ways: social welfare (social services) and income security (unemployment security, pay security and pension security). In this article, we look at how the individual's capabilities to achieve a good life are combined with personal recourses (labour market position and family relations), and the societal welfare state recourses (payments and services).

Precarious work is seen as one of the key elements of adult life, and it both produces and enables welfare. In contemporary societies, work is changing its character. The form of work has shifted from life-time working careers towards projects and part-time, uncertain and unstable flexible forms of precarious work. These processes have been defined as the feminization of work, and are addressed in research in the theories of the precarization of life. (See, e.g., Jokinen 2005; Jokinen *et al.* 2011; Vähämäki 2011). Because of these processes, many groups of populations, especially women and migrants, have to face uncertain circumstances from an economic point of view. For example, single mothers and certain groups of migrants live in the situation of a constant shortage of finances, medical services and/or care resources, in general. (Könönen 2014; Kröger & Zechner 2001; Jokinen & Jakonen 2011).

In the context of this article, the concept of family relations becomes contradictory. On one hand, the social and migration policies of the receiving society (Finland) are based on the ideology of a nuclear family. On the other hand, Russian migrants are coming from a society led by an extended family ideology (Pöllänen 2013). In practice, this means that the obligations and responsibilities of family members in the process of providing welfare and well-being for each other are seen differently in Finland and Russia. Therefore, the questions of who is obliged to care, support or rear whom are becoming increasingly more conflicting and relevant for transnational families.

Everyday life at the border forms the actual context of this paper. North Karelia is a mainly rural area and the unemployment rate is high (approximately 17% in 2015 – one of the highest in Finland). Rural areas meet various regional challenges when considered as

peripheries: for example, long distances, a lack of public and private services, difficulties in transportation, etc. Population of the main city of North Karelia Joensuu is 75 000 inhabitants. Most of the work places and educational sites, as well as vocational training courses are situated here. For immigrant women who live in the countryside, it is not always easy to either take part in the labour market or attain additional education in Joensuu. Some live about 80–100 kilometres away from Joensuu, and from a rural village, where there is no regular public transportation and without a private car, it is impossible to travel to Joensuu for daily courses or work.

North Karelia has 302 kilometres of common border with the Russian Federation, and the crossing point of Niirala-Värtsilä is the fourth busiest check-point between Finland and Russia. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain at the beginning of the 1990s, the interactions between local people living on both sides of the border have grown constantly. On everyday basis, this can be seen in the increased number of intercultural marriages between Finnish men and Russian women, and migrants and remigrants from Russia form the biggest foreign-born population group in North Karelia (and in Finland, as a whole). In 2014, in North Karelia, there were over 2800 Russian-speakers registered, and over 1500 of these held Russian citizenship (Statistics Finland 2015).

On a daily basis, these migrants and members of their families cross the border between Finland and Russia with different purposes. Many women have care responsibilities on the Russian side, many migrants cross the border to buy groceries, tobacco and fuel, and to keep up with social networks on the Russian side. Despite the familiarity and everyday character of crossing the border, many obstacles for interaction across the border still exist. For example, crossing the border still requires valid visa and sending money (remittances or pensions) from Finland to Russia or vice versa is a very expensive and demanding process (Davydova & Pöllänen 2011; Pöllänen 2013). North Karelia, in the context of the transnational everyday life of migrant women, is a demanding surrounding: the population is scarce, distances are long, cities are small and also the prejudices towards Russians are overtly negative.

### 3 Research setting

Methodologically, our study is embedded in the tradition of ethnography of everyday life (see Vila 2003; Jokinen 2005; Passerini *et al.* 2007). We were interested in the everyday welfare of Russian migrant women living in the border area of Eastern Finland. Our study was both interdisciplinary and intersectional, but also multilocal and transnational (see also Marcus 1995; Bryceson & Vuorela 2002).

This article is based on three data-sets, namely: 1) ethnographic interviews conducted among Russian immigrants and local dwellers of Tohmajärvi municipality on the Finnish side of the border (2016), 2) ethnographical interviews with Russian women conducted in the beginning of 2000s and 3) group interviews with Russian migrant women conducted in 2009.

The most recent data was produced within our on-going research on the perceptions of Russia in the border area of Eastern Finland, in Tohmajärvi municipality. The data consists of 20 in-depth interviews with Russian- and Finnish-speaking dwellers of the border municipality of Tohmajärvi. Most of them are women, but the spouses of Russian-speaking women were also interviewed. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 3.5 hours.

The empirical data of PhD-project of Pöllänen (Transnational care in Russian immigrant women's lives, case North Karelia)

consists of 16 interviews conducted in North-Karelia with Russian speaking immigrant women who are/have been married to a Finnish man. Informants were 23–50 years old and had lived in North Karelia between 1–14 years at the time when the interviews were conducted (2003–2004). Four of the informants had been living in Finland for less than 5 years, seven informants had lived in Finland for 5–10 years, and five informants had lived in Finland for more than 10 years. In the area around the eastern border of Finland, Russian-Finnish marriages are relatively common. The phenomenon is well recognised in Eastern Finland. Women of Russian origin are the most common foreign-born wives of Finnish men, and especially common in the region. Most of the informants had moved to Finland from the Republic of Karelia or nearby areas of Russia, and many of them visited Russia on a regular basis.

The group discussion data consists of seven meetings held with ten Russian immigrant women during the spring of 2009. Each meeting lasted for about two or three hours. During the meetings, women discussed their work careers, family connections, relation with public authorities, transnational relationships, leisure time, and the peculiarities of life in North Karelia. The discussions were recorded, transcribed and translated from Russian to Finnish. The group participants were aged between 30 to ~50 years old, with different levels of education, most having higher education degrees. Many of them had re-educated themselves for new professions in Finland. All the women had families, and some of them were married to Finns, some to Russians, some divorced, and some had children. The women had lived in Finland from three to more than twenty years. All of them were in a precarious position in the labour market, although all of them spoke good Finnish.

The aim of this paper was to conceptualize the construction of everyday experienced welfare in the lives of Russian immigrant women, with special attention on the three elements: labour market position, family relations and transnational care. We particularly asked what was the significance of work in the production of welfare in Russian immigrant women's lives in North Karelia, and how did the actual production of welfare influence women's gender roles and their positions in the family setting and on the labour market?

### 4 Experienced welfare of Russian immigrant women

As a result of our analysis, we divided the experienced welfare of Russian immigrant women into four groups: 1) precarious work which provides a living; 2) family as a main source of welfare; 3) precarious work enabling transnational family care; 4) stable labour market position as a source of well-being. The division was based on different combinations of the main foundations of welfare, which are work, family and the welfare state. Welfare, in our conceptualization, reflects the material recourses of the person (e.g., their income level and care resources), and on the other hand their overall complacency with life (e.g., how satisfying the work is, the viability of human relationships etc.). This classification was based on our empirical data, although it should be noted that the actual situations of our individual informants did not consistently fit into distinct groups. The situations of some of the informants can be portrayed with the help of all four groups, whilst some fit into one or maybe two categories. The categorization was overlapping, but it was aimed at clarification of the central elements which produce experienced welfare, namely the interrelations of work, care and family in transnational border area context.

#### 4.1 Precarious work which provides a living

Informants who moved to Finland in the beginning of 1990s (almost immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union) had lived in the country for over ten years at the time of interview or group conversations. Typically, these women moved to Finland having the status of either remigrants (people of Finnish origin), or as spouses (wives of Finnish citizens). Most had an experience of the Finnish labour market, had attended Finnish language and integration courses financed by public policy, and acquired some level of Finnish language proficiency. Many also participated in updating their education or acquired vocational education.

These women have managed to participate in the Finnish labour market. Typically, they have been working in precarious jobs, for example, as cashiers in bigger department stores, waitresses in restaurants and hotels that have Russian clientele, temporary assistants for Russian-speaking children in schools, practical nurses in municipal health care centres, Russian language teachers, interpreters, and Russian-speaking assistants in companies. (See Könönen 2011; Davydova 2012).

As per our data, these women have developed their coping strategies to acquire a tolerable way of living and subsistence. Their work is usually temporary and is intertwined with periods of unemployment and vocational/updating training. The welfare of these women is however supported by the relatively low level and temporary salaries they receive, and is combined with earnings-related or basic unemployment allowances. This can be illustrated by one quotation taken from the group conversation:

*Interviewer: So, in your situation, it goes that when you are unemployed you get unemployment allowance?*<sup>22</sup>

*Elena: The trade union. Daily benefits.*

*Marina: But they pay it only for some given time.*

*Elena: 500 days.*

*Interviewer: Did it happen that you stayed at home for 500 days, or were you called to work earlier?*

*Elena: I stayed at home approximately one year. I probably never stayed the whole 500 days. Well, I managed to stay at home for a year.'*

The constant changes in the position on the labour market compel women to familiarize themselves with the Finnish social security system. During conversations, the experiences of Finnish social security (e.g., unemployment allowance, student benefits and subsidies) were extensively discussed. While talking about social security system and its exact forms, conversation participants used Finnish language terms (e.g., trade union = *ammattiliitto*, daily benefit = *päiväraha*). This also indicates that the migrant women in Finland experience and learn the welfare system. This situation was experienced as ambivalent, in the sense that on one hand it enabled family life and better child care, but on the other hand it felt humiliating.

*'Galina: It was enough for me to sit at home for four months. At the beginning, it was so nice, but then you have to do something. But I didn't go to the social benefit office.*

*Alla: Me too. That is probably what they mean [expect].*

*Irina: But why?*

*Alla: I familiarized myself with this office when I was working with Bosnian asylum seekers. The 'relationship' continued because of my parents. But otherwise I wouldn't go there. And I probably won't go till the end of my life. It is so humiliating.*

*Galina: It is so humiliating. I go there often, when I am on duty as an interpreter.*

*Alla: Yes, they say 'NO' smiling.*

*Galina: I understand.*

*Alla: It's not like in Russia, where they tell you off and that's it. Here they are smiling, but say 'NO'.*

*Olga: It's so unpleasant.*

*Galina: And they are happy with themselves [that] they have been able to tell you 'NO'. (Quotation from the group conversation)*

#### 4.2 Family as a main source of welfare

These situations can be defined in the lives of women whose spouses are working in well-paid professions. Typically, these women moved to Finland as spouses of their Russian husbands (specialists) and as wife-migrants. Their husbands are typically working in the research sector, in trade, and some are also entrepreneurs. Although the stable position of the husbands on the labour market provided a good standard of living for wives and families, the women were unhappy with their situation as being excluded or being on the margins of the labour market. Many women explained that participation in the labour market would mean an increase in self-confidence and more active social networks.

In most extreme cases, well-educated women who came to Finland as spouses of their Russian husbands were totally excluded from the Finnish labour market and educational system for immigrants because of their residence permit status (B-status). For instance, the husband of one participant of the conversation group was invited to Finland to work as a researcher from a research institute where they both worked and had the same level of education. The husband continued his research work in Finland, but the wife only received a residence permit of a family member without permission to work or attend any educational and integration programs provided by public policy. During the six years that she spent at home, her professional skills degraded:

*'We moved here in 1993 because my husband received a job here in 1992. In other words, he lived and worked here at the University for one year. Later, he received a contract for three years and there was a question, how we should live. So, either we live separately and he earns here and lives alone. Or, maybe the whole family will move here and live here as a family so to speak, and we are wasting all this money without saving anything (laughs). Yeah. First, we came to visit. The children were still small then: the youngest was 11 years old and oldest was 14. We came to visit, so the children could consider whether they would live here for three years, for that was the time that was planned at the beginning. We went to the school. They liked it that in the school everything was so good, compared apparently to a Russian school. They liked it, and they agreed that the whole family would move here. We came for three years. But, since then we were given the B-status, in other words, I had no opportunity to go on courses and go to work, nowhere. And so, we continued for six years, when we had the B-status.'* (Quotation from the group conversation)

Typically, these women framed their everyday lives around taking care of their family members. Many of them were explaining how they now had time to be with their children, cook for their husbands and run household matters (e.g., cleaning and gardening).



There were slight differences in the ways that those who were married to Russian and Finnish husbands expressed their own evaluations of the situation between them. Wife-migrants emphasized the importance of paid work as being the only avenue to gain functioning contacts with the Finns. Meanwhile, for the wives of Russian spouses, the situation gave the opportunity to carry out the housewife gender contract which has become one of the possible and desired ways of organizing family welfare among the more well-off social groups in Russia (Zdravomyslova *et al* 2009).

### 4.3 Precarious work enabling transnational family care

The data includes cases where women who were not permanently employed were intensively involved in the care of their relatives. Both intergenerational and transnational care can be identified in the data: some women were caring for or organizing care arrangements for their elderly relatives in Russia, and some were involved in the care of grandchildren in Finland, in Russia or abroad. In the most demanding cases, women were involved not only in the care of their elderly relatives, but they also had some responsibilities towards their children and grandchildren.

As per the data, many informants had care responsibilities for their grandparents (either their own parents or parents-in-law) (Pöllänen 2013). Wife-migrants cared for their parents in Russia, and also for their parents-in-law in Finland, for example, by helping with household work. Their relationship with Finnish parents-in-law was not evaluated as being reciprocal by Russian immigrant women. Women explained how they helped their Finnish parents-in-law, but felt that Finnish grandparents were not generally taking part in their grandchildren's lives. Of course, the data contains exceptions, and some Finnish grandparents played a key role in the childcare arrangements. However, in general terms, the informants experienced that it was not good manners to ask Finnish parents-in-law if they could take care of their grandchildren.

Many informants also helped (or cared for) their Finnish parents-in-law. Consequently, immigrant women were helping their parents in Russia more in the sense of economic well-being (e.g., by remittances), but their Finnish parents-in-law needed more help with social contacts (mental help) or with everyday care routines.

The precarious labour market position enabled one Russian immigrant woman who was married to an older Finnish man to care intensively for her husband. She told that her life had become more home oriented and framed with family care, due to her husband's illness. She didn't tell exactly how much older her husband was or what kind of illness he had. She explained that her husband had adult children, but there was not much help from them because they did not altogether approve of their father's Russian wife as being a member of the family. She explained that her position in the labour market (i.e., not working full-time) was perfect, and gave her the opportunity to take care of her husband. If she would be working full-time, then according to her, her husband could not survive a full day alone at home:

*'Interviewer: How do you see your working situation as influencing your family life?*

*Informant: Well, my situation at work has a positive influence on our family's life. Again, you see, even though I haven't got a lot of money which is of course a big minus, it is my own problem. But, now my husband has ill health, I should be at home. Well, he can of course, well no, no he cannot be alone there. Always I have to*

*watch if he took his medicine, and tend to him. He has also had an ischaemic attack, so he has had all kinds of things. So, that is how it is. For our family, it suits - despite money we can cope and I am at home.*

*Interviewer: Yes.*

*Informant: Now I couldn't be at work for whole day, because I cannot be away [from home] for a whole day.'*

One of our informants had to quit her participation in the conversation group because she had to fly immediately to Spain where her daughter lived with her husband and small child. The young family needed help and childcare to be provided by the grandmother, and a grandmother who attended employment courses in Finland was a desired care recourse for the young family.

Minna Zechner (2006) has clearly demonstrated how complicated and demanding transnational and intergenerational care networks can be. She shows that Estonian immigrant women living in Finland are involved in the everyday care of their relatives in many significant ways (either in Estonia or in Russia). For example, in her data there is a woman who goes to bathe her mother (takes her to the sauna) once a month in Estonia because the personal hygiene of her mother is not good enough. Consequently, Zechner (2006: 88-89) points out, that it is impossible to care daily from a distance, and therefore in transnational contexts, lower intensity of care has to be tolerated. A similar example was seen in our data, where a woman whose mother lived in Estonia visited her as much as possible to help with her household, and with taking care of her ill husband and older son (see also Jokinen & Jakonen 2011).

All these examples demonstrate the complexities involved in transnational and intergenerational care. These women would not be able to be involved in the care of their family members as intensively, if they were to be working full-time. However, a full-time salary would probably give them other opportunities to organize the care of their close relatives, for example by buying services for their elderly relatives in Russia or Estonia. However, as Zdravomyslova *et al.* (2009) point out, the organization of transnational care is extremely demanding, even if the organizer has enough money to pay for the care services, because finding suitable services and a reliable carer from a distance is a complicated undertaking. In Russia, there is a lack of care service providers (both public and private), and a lack of trust in them as well. As a rule, the care resources (i.e., carers) should be found using people's own networks. (See also Jokinen & Jakonen 2011).

Inevitably, care always involves emotions and feelings. Emotions are different if care takes place in the family context or in the form of professional work. Inside the family, people can expect care from each other. They also have a desire to provide care, sometimes feeling that it is their obligation or duty to care for someone who is a close relative. However, sometimes those who need help feel a sense of indignity about being the one who needs to be taken care of. So, emotions and strong feelings are inevitably present in the care networks which exist between relatives, also in transnational context (Pöllänen 2013, 2015; Tedre 1999; Zechner 2006).

The emotions involved in family care can be of different kinds, encompassing love, frustration, dislike, hate, missing someone and tiredness. In some cases, many of these feelings are present and connected to the situation of woman involved in the care situation. Their precarious position on the labour market enables women to take on the care of their relatives and to fulfil sometimes very important emotional connections and obligations, which exist between generations (intergenerational care).

#### 4.4 Stable labour market position as a source of well-being

In our data, there are women with permanent jobs such as medical doctors, expeditors, cashiers in supermarkets, or waitresses. These women can provide welfare and a standard of living for not just for themselves, but also for their families. All of them send remittances to their relatives in Russia, which can be seen as one way of providing transnational care. Even though the salaries of these women are not high, they still get along well and are equal breadwinners in their families with their husbands.

Some women worked in public administrative or research projects, and their welfare was produced by their relatively high salaries. Despite being in precarious work or being in an in-between stage between projects, these women had good standards of living, for example they could take a loan from the bank and buy an apartment. The salaries in their projects were good enough to save some money and be able to maintain a standard of living even in times of temporary unemployment.

The status of work of Russian immigrants has also been established in previous researches. As per Hanna Sutela (2005: 83-85), 72% of Russian immigrants who are in paid work in Finland say that their work holds a significant place in their everyday life. She points out that among Finns the men appreciate work more than women, but that immigrant women usually appreciate work more than immigrant men. Sutela assumes that the position of immigrant women is usually more unstable than the position of immigrant men in the labour market.

The meaning of work as a resource of everyday happiness is significant for Russian immigrant women living in North Karelia. Even those informants in precarious labour market positions pointed out in diverse ways how work is a natural and important part of their everyday lives. They reported that in their opinion, work makes everyday life meaningful and satisfying; in other words, life becomes worth living because of the independence gained through it. As one informant put it:

*Interviewer: Would you like to get paid work in Finland?*

*Informant: Of course, I would. And all the time I try to get work, and that is why I studied the language, studied computer skills, and I am presently studying.*

*Interviewer: Why would you like to participate in the labour market, what is the meaning of work in your life?*

*Informant: It is very huge, I cannot be without work. I was working in Russia. I worked for 17 years < - - >*

The meaning of work as a part of everyday happiness could be emphasized especially in cases where the immigrant woman had been working before moving to Finland in a profession that she felt to be suited to her own interests and abilities. For example, an informant who worked as a manager in a demanding commercial field was very satisfied with her career in Russia. Her job in Russia was meaningful to her. However, she suffered because she could not get a job in Finland despite re-educating herself, having excellent language skills and actively seeking employment. She occasionally worked in her husband's enterprise, but did not find it very satisfactory, mainly because her husband could not pay her a proper salary.

Paid work influences immigrant women's self-esteem and self-confidence. One informant felt that *'the value of one's self-esteem improves in that way in my opinion'*. Moreover, immigrant women's self-esteem and how happy they are with themselves can affect

the relationship they have with their partner in a positive way. Consequently, the status of paid work for migrants has been debated in previous researches from several viewpoints (e.g., Forsander 2002; 2003; Saarinen 2007; Pohjanpää *et al.* 2003; Jokinen *et al.* 2011). According to Forsander (2003; 2002), immigration has presented new opportunities for those Russian women who have re-educated themselves in Finland. Especially, women who have undertaken re-education for new professional fields see emigration as a new opportunity. Forsander (2003: 68; Forsander 2002) indicates that several immigrant women from the former Soviet Union have changed their career from technical fields to female dominated jobs (e.g., in the care sector), after moving to Finland. Re-educating for a job in the care sector is also not unusual among Finnish women. For example, the care entrepreneurs in the small town of Lieksa in North Karelia were predominantly women who had re-educated themselves for the care sector. For these women, re-education was both a path to a new job and a way of finding a second chance (Pöllänen 2002). The re-education of immigrant women and their willingness to change profession can be seen as their way of coping with the Finnish labour market. According to a study dealing with the lifestyles of immigrants in Finland, it has been shown that 65% of Russian and Estonian immigrants have changed their occupation after moving to Finland (Pohjanpää *et al.* 2003). According to our data, it seems that work has both emotional and economical meaning in the lives of Russian immigrant women in Finland, and the issue of employment also affects the well-being of the whole family, in regard to the couple's relationship and their children.

## 5 Conclusions

We started our article with a statement of hollowing out of the Finnish welfare state (Julkunen 2006, 2008; Jokinen *et al.* 2011; Kröger & Leinonen 2012). This has been accorded with the precarization of labour market and society (Jokinen *et al.* 2011). These processes have a strong impact on the lives of immigrant women (Könönen 2011, 2014; Davydova 2012). According to our analysis, this leads to the growing role of family networks and breadwinning men in the production of welfare of Russian immigrant women. In this light, it could be seen that welfare organization is in fact heading back to family settings, where family members are responsible for producing and organizing welfare for each other.

The data has clearly proved that the labour market position of Russian immigrant women is precarious, and this has an ambivalent influence on their everyday lives. On the one hand, precarious work enables their time to be used flexibly, so that they can produce welfare and care for their family members and relatives, even in transnational settings. On the other hand, many women lack financial resources, which complicates the production of material welfare for both the women themselves and their relatives (e.g., in terms of remittances). Regarding this precarious labour market position, the public policy (i.e., the Nordic welfare state) has a significant role in women's lives as a 'collective spouse'. So, despite the fact that the Finnish welfare system is hollowing out, the Russian migrant women value its role as an ultimate safety net (see also Pöllänen 2015).

The precarious life is accompanied by precarious emotions. Many of the negative sentiments expressed by the informants can be defined as porous, ambivalent, incomplete or uncertain emotions, and are caused by their precarious labour market position (Pöllänen 2015; Jokinen & Venäläinen 2015). Women are uncertain about many things: for example, their position in the labour market in North

Karelia is precarious, and in some cases, they are uncertain about their family lives and their happiness. Moreover, their uncertainty is actualised every time they cross the border to Russia (see Davydova & Pöllänen 2011). The precarious feelings have transnational dimension. The border crossing process from Finland to Russia and vice versa is unpredictable. Furthermore, in circumstances where migrant women have to cross the border in order to be able to take care of their relatives, it makes things even more uncertain and complicated if you do not know how long the border crossing process is going to be.

In our data, the Russian immigrant women who are featured are not living in total welfare poverty because if they are not working themselves, then most of them still have husbands to provide for the welfare of the family. Our data does however indicate that in Finland, there are Russian migrant women who are living in welfare poverty. The data collection methods that we have used cannot reach these women, so conducting research amongst the poor migrant women, unemployed migrant women and single migrant mothers is a challenge to be addressed by future researches.

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## Notes

1. Nordic welfare states are said to be woman-friendly. The concept of woman-friendly refers to the idea of Helga Maria Hernes (1988), who firstly invited the idea of a society which could be woman-friendly. She is skeptical about the idea that any social political system can actually be woman friendly, and one may become even more skeptical if we start thinking about Finnish society from the perspective of immigrant woman. However, Nordic welfare states are said to be very active in maintaining an equality policy (school systems etc.). In recent times, questions concerning the equality between genders have been raised, and that is why Nordic welfare states are also known as women-friendly states.
2. The underlined words are spoken in Finnish in the conversation held in Russian. The names of the informants are changed.

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