

# **Policing gender mobilities: interrogating the ‘feminisation of migration’ to Europe**

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## **1. Introduction**

In the last 25 years, the number of migrant women in the world has been rising – from 75 million in 1990 to 117 million in 2015 (United Nations 2015). Women migrate under family reunion schemes, as single migrants, to pursue studies or as active agents of trade and as labour migrants, but women are also increasingly trafficked to work in the sex industry, exported as suitable wives under arranged marriage schemes and exploited as undocumented domestic workers with no legal or social protection (see Kofman et al. 2000). They also flee from wars, violence and conflicts as refugees (e.g. Franz 2003) often crossing the EU borders in life-threatening conditions, which turn out to be fatal for many of them.

This quantitative increase of female migrants, generally labelled under the slogan ‘feminisation of migration’, conceals complex and ambivalent dynamics and does not necessarily translate into concrete and clear opportunities for women’s empowerment (Kabeer 2003). In some cases, the migratory experience is a chance to overcome vulnerabilities and for seeking autonomy. But in other cases, migration reinforces the gender normative roles which position women in subordinate positions both in the countries of origin and of destination. A feminist perspective demands a carefully analysis not only of how women and men differently participate in migration phenomena, but especially how these transform gender roles and expectations for migrants and in society at large (Silvey 2004, Parreñas 2009).

Migration policies are of particular importance in this respect, being at the same time the result of consolidated beliefs and gendered assumptions about women’s roles in the society, the family and the economy, but also a possible tool for their transformation. We thus talk about ‘policing’ gendered mobilities to draw attention to the migration regimes that shape and channel movements across Europe’s borders. We look at how migration and gender regimes interact and reproduce each other. It is from this perspective that we look at women’s migration across the southern and eastern borders of the European Union and at the impact of EU migration policies on gendered mobility patterns.

The focus of our analysis is women migrating towards the European Union from the geographical area concerned by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), i.e. the policy framework in place between the European Union and the following neighbour countries: Armenia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.<sup>1</sup> The framework entails several measures from the side of the EU with the aim to support these countries in their political, economic and social development, and of strengthening economic relationships with them (see

European Commission 2003, 2004, European Parliament 2006). Importantly, this policy framework foresees agreements that facilitate the mobility of migrants from the neighbouring areas to the European Union. It is at this level, and with specific attention to a selection of countries of origin and destination, that this article investigates the 'gender ambiguities' of the European Neighbourhood Policy that might explain the discrepancies in the proportion of female vs. male migration from these areas to the European Union.

We argue that such EU policies carry an ambiguous gender bias which seriously hampers migrant women's opportunities in their destination countries, in Europe. While a strong gender sensitivity permeates the analysis produced by the European Union<sup>2</sup> on the impact on women of political and socioeconomic reforms undertaken by neighbouring countries,<sup>3</sup> the policy documents on the mobility between these countries and the EU remain astonishingly gender blind (see European Commission 2003, 2004, European Parliament 2006). In the latter there is no mention of which specific measures enhance or curtail mobility in gendered ways, nor there is no assessment of the ways in which this policy framework channels and reproduces specific gender roles and gendered mobility. For example, the framework reproduces gender discrimination in feminised labour sectors (e.g. domestic work). This policing of women's mobility stands in striking contrast to the aim publicly declared by the EU to promote the general socioeconomic improvement of the neighbouring areas. Paradoxically, while it blames women's countries of origin for institutionalising gender discrimination in their laws and practices, the European Union is short of measures to promote the conditions for autonomous female mobility and an improvement in their socioeconomic position in the country of arrival.

Whether this reflects an unawareness by the EU of gender dynamics within migration flows, or whether it is the result of an ad hoc political-economic and demographic strategy, we argue that this mobility framework operates a selective and strategic use of gender equality and women's autonomy but fails blatantly to enhance opportunities for women's autonomous migratory projects.

The article opens with an overview of the literature that argues for the relevance of a gender perspective in migration studies. Thus, starting from the analysis of United Nations' data on migration, we discuss the dynamics of women's regular migration from countries on the eastern and southern borders of Europe towards Poland and the EU15 countries (Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Sweden, UK, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, and the Netherlands). Data on migration from neighbouring countries will be cross-examined and compared in order to identify the main corridors for female migration to the EU. The article then illustrates in more detail the case of four specific groups amongst them by comparing their personal reasons for migrating (family, labour, study, etc.), their mobility patterns (permanent vs. temporary), and finally the general cultural and socioeconomic forces that are at the background of their experience, in relation to gender roles and expectations in their countries of origin and destination. We will look at women migrating from (a) Algeria to France, (b) Morocco to Spain, (c) Ukraine to Poland, and finally (d) Moldova to Italy. These groups have been selected for the numerical relevance of female migrants from these emigration countries and also because they shed interesting light on the different kind of forces at work in shaping women's movements and social roles.

By drawing on these four case studies, we try to assess the ways in which gendered socioeconomic and cultural specificities in different destination and origin countries, in the framework of migration policies, impact on women's mobility towards the EU. In so doing, we hope to contribute to the aims of this special issue by highlighting the ambiguities of EU policies when it comes to gender and migration.

## 2. Gendered mobility

Since the mid-1990s, the gendered nature of migration flows has become the object of growing attention among scholars, policymakers and practitioners. This growing body of scholarship has crucially shed light on the gendered dynamics of mobility and explored the relationship between the feminisation of migration, migrants' integration and the development of migrant women's societies of origin (Oso and Ribas-Mateos 2013, Piper 2013).

Mainstream approaches to people's mobility present limitations in that they either concentrate exclusively on push and pull factors understood as resulting from structural frameworks, such as relations of production and new systems of accumulations under neoliberal market arrangements, or they focus predominantly on individuals' agency and reasons for migrating. A gender approach shows the inadequacy of the 'push and pull factors' model. The difference between male and female migratory patterns cannot be seen as the result of an individual choice resulting from a rational economic calculation, taking place independently from structural factors. In countries of origin as well as of destination, gendered norms, influenced by cultural and religious beliefs, shape, hinder or prevent individuals' subjectivities and ability to exercise their choices.

However, women's migration can neither be understood solely from within a political economy approach whereby mobility is the inevitable outcome of an unequal distribution of economic and political power on a worldwide basis. Against this background, Sylvia Chant and Sarah Radcliffe (1992), for example, propose a household strategy approach in order to understand gender selectivity in migration patterns, which focuses both on economic factors, such as the gendered division of labour and of relations of production, and on reproductive roles and hierarchies within the household.

In that light, and as previously argued in Ruba Salih (2011), in order to fully understand contemporary forms of women's migration and their gendered nature, there is a need for a meso-level of analysis where migration is analysed as the result of a dialectic relation between structures and agency. Three levels have to be unfolded to understand the gendered dynamics of contemporary migration:

- (1) the migratory regime that includes the relations between countries of origin and destination, as well as the existing policies that regulate the conditions of entry and residence;
- (2) the migratory institutions, both the formal and informal institutions and networks through which individuals negotiate their own migratory trajectory; and
- (3) individual migrants whose migration choices are influenced by their personal histories and the realities of their households, in cultural and socioeconomic sense.

This last point brings our attention to the importance of the material conditions as well as the weight given to the cultural and social roles women are expected to perform in both the society of origin and that of destination. Ultimately, we need to grasp the concurrent action of economic and political structures, of cultural and normative gender norms and regulations, and of individual strategies and agencies for an understanding both of migration and its gendered nature.

Another important perspective for an analysis of the transformative potential of mobility stems from the work of Naila Kabeer (2003), who defines women's empowerment as their capability of living the life they want, whereby access to resources represents a crucial element for exercising choice. From a gendered analysis, however, these resources are often distributed through institutions, families and communities according to asymmetric power relationships.

Therefore, agency in relation to empowerment implies not only actively exercising choices but also 'doing this in ways that challenge power relations' (Kabeer 2003, p. 172).

From this perspective, migration can be an important strategy for accumulating resources at the subjective and household level, and thereby improving women's conditions. In other words, migration is an important livelihood strategy. One of the most desired effects of migration, especially for women (and their families) who have invested in their education prior to the emigration, is upward social mobility, in terms of income and social status if and when they can determine the distribution of the resources they have contributed to produce and accumulate. Yet for many migrant women, economic improvements do not go hand in hand with improvements in their social roles and emancipation from traditional expectations attached to their mothering and caring commitments assigned to them in their countries of origin (Parreñas 2001).

Gendered expectations are also determinant for the social position of migrant women in the societies of origin and destination, as well in the formation of diasporas and national communities abroad. It is important to consider that migrant women's experiences and possibilities are particularly important in the context of nation-building practices and discourses, again both in origin and destination countries, which are shaped by a repertoire of common cultural, historical and moral legacies which set a 'Us vs. Them' dichotomy (Anderson 2013). A gendered view of society assigns women a contradictory position for being, simultaneously, the reproducers of the national offspring and values, and the minority subject in it.

### **3. The importance of labour migration for women**

Migrant women's participation in labour markets in Europe shows their concentration in jobs which are considered too humble, too tiring, too dirty or too dangerous, and at the same time not remunerative enough, by the residents or by previous migrants (Anderson 2000). At this level, migrant women's labour participation is shaped by the interaction between processes of ethnic and of gendered segregation. Migrant women's work in host societies is equated with 'cheap labour'. Mirjana Morokvasic (1984, p. 886) has long ago explained how this is related to their general representation as vulnerable, flexible and undemanding:

[women] represent a ready made labour supply which is, at once, the most vulnerable, the most flexible and, at least in the beginning, the least demanding work force. They have been incorporated into sexually segregated labour markets at the lowest stratum in high technology industries, or at the 'cheapest' sectors in those industries which are labour intensive and employ the cheapest labour to remain competitive.

Historically speaking, between the 1950s and the 1970s, the segregation of migrants at the lower level of segmented labour markets was often seen as 'beneficial' by policymakers inasmuch as it increased opportunities of social mobility for nationals and residents. In addition, as demonstrated by Stephen Castels and Alastair Davidson (2000, p. 74), migrants tended to concentrate in similar jobs also as a 'result of both racism in employment practices and a lack of "human capital"'. This pushed them mainly into factory work, construction work, small trade and private service. The increase in migrants' segregation in labour niches, and their enduring permanence in it, is also reinforced by their tendency to settle in the same neighbourhoods, which creates communities of people living and working in close relations. For Castels and Davidson this picture applies, in particular, to the labour segregation of migrants arriving from the former colonies of European states.

Migrant women have been, since the 1970s, increasingly filling the gaps left by the crisis of the welfare state in post-industrial societies through their (often irregular) jobs in the domestic sector and in care-related occupations. This is a consequence of the fact that, especially in the southern-Mediterranean countries of the EU, the broadening participation of women in the labour market has not brought about changes in the traditional division of roles within their families. Thus, migrant women seem to substitute for European women in their reproductive roles. This is what Jaqueline Andall (2000) called ‘the racialization of the live-in sphere’ and which means that an old system can be maintained with a new supply of gendered labour. The situation is worsened by the context of increasingly fortified boundaries, with domestic work (and sex work) being one of the few viable options for undocumented women workers. The ‘crisis of care’, triggered by neo-liberal turns, aging societies, and unchallenged patriarchal norms in many parts of the world, exacerbate the gender and racialized dynamics of international migration (Andersen and Shutes 2014).

In conclusion, a process of racialising and gendering is at work in this transnational form of circuit migration, which allows the cost of reproduction to fall on the country of origin, while simultaneously minimising welfare costs of this flexible, easily exploitable contingent of female workers.

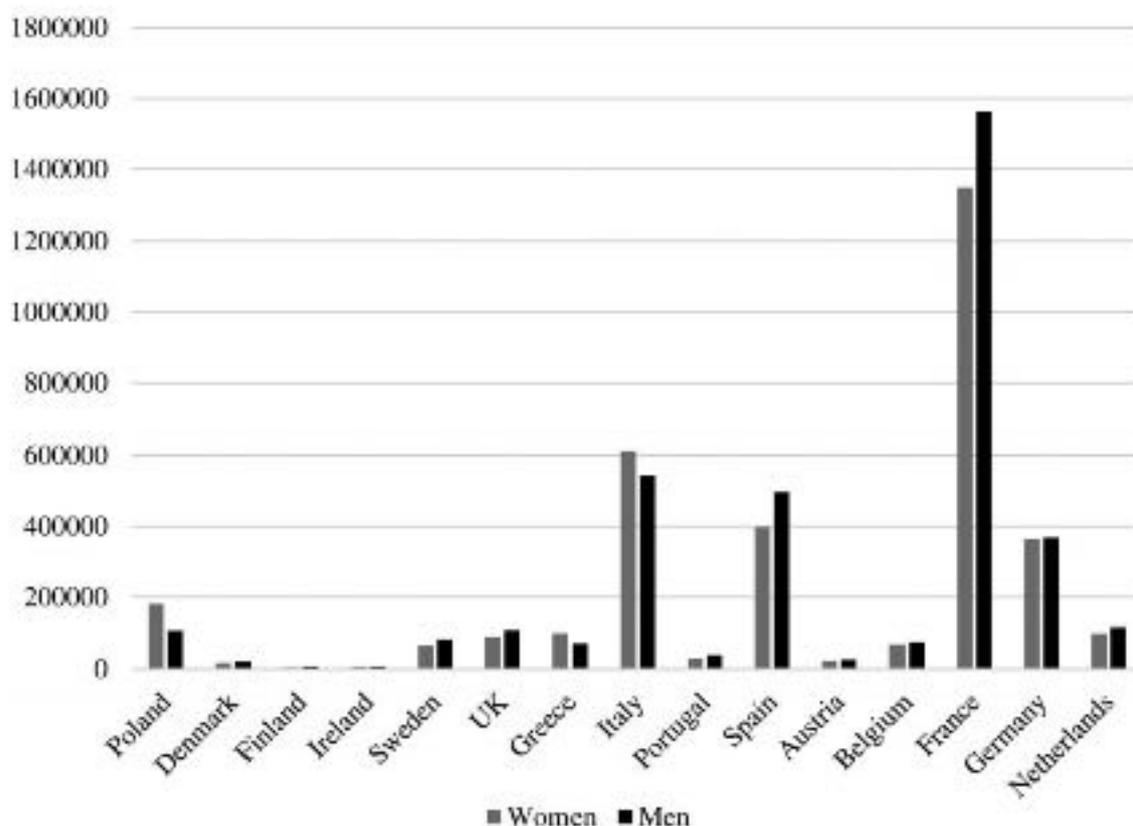
#### **4. Women migrants to the EU from the East and South**

This article elaborates on the dataset released by the United Nations in 2015 on migration in order to assess the amount and the shape of female migration from countries of the Eastern and Southern Partnerships to the European Union. As mentioned already, we focus on the European countries of the EU15 group, with the addition of Poland. Poland represents a very telling case of the East to West migration of women, being a transit point to Germany, or representing a destination of circular movement of women workers across the Ukraine–Poland border, as we will further illustrate.

As a premise it is important to mention that our data is based on the UN definition of ‘migrant’, namely a person who resides in a country that is different from the country of his/her birth for more than a year. In some exceptional cases, the UN also counts as ‘migrants’ those who stay abroad for a period shorter than a year (e.g. seasonal workers). However, the data accounts only for official migrants, excluding all those who, for different reasons, are in the European Union without having a regular residence permit.

The first data we discuss concerns the official number of men and women who live in the EU, for each nationality, and are born in the neighbouring countries (Figure 1). Data from 2015 show that the number of migrant men is still predominant in all EU15 countries (3,531,443 men vs. 3,231,567 women). France, in particular, is the country where official presences from ENP countries are most numerous (1,562,914 men and 1,348,266 women). Following France, Germany, Italy and Spain are the countries that

**Figure 1. Men and women migrating from the ENP area to the EU15 and Poland (2015).**  
**Source: United Nations 2015.**



in 2015 received most ENP regular migrants. In all cases, the number of men surpasses the number of women. Poland together with Italy are exceptional cases, receiving more women than men, for reasons that, as we will further explain, have to do with relatively more porous borders crossing and employment opportunities in the domestic sector.

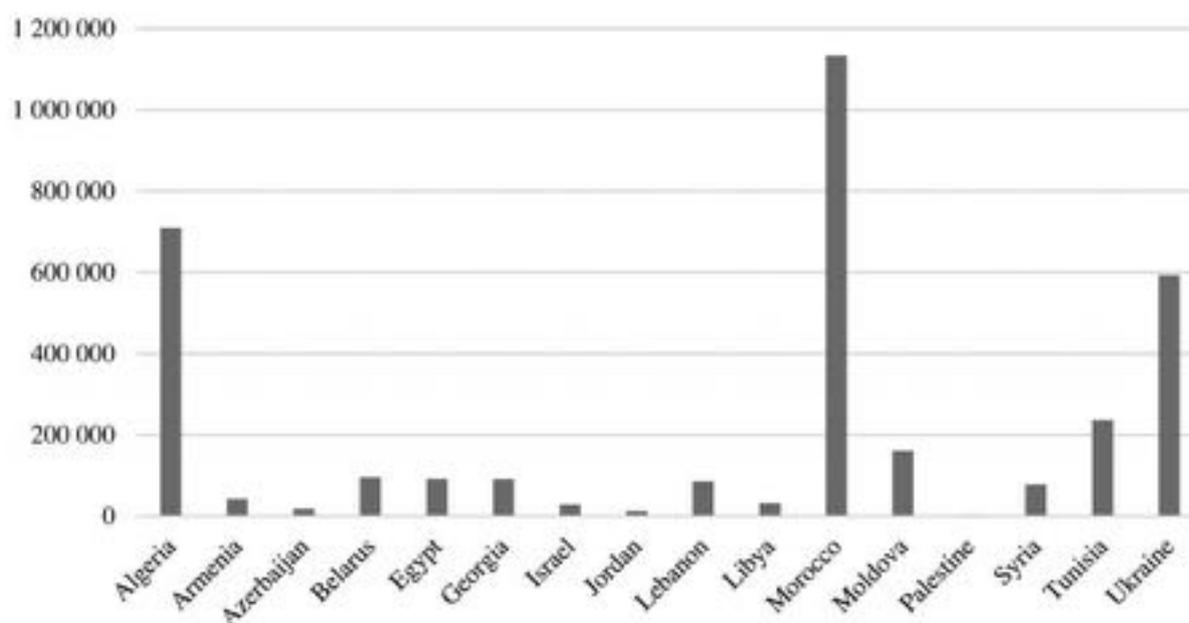
It is important to consider therefore not all EU countries are relevant destinations for migrant women at the southern and eastern borders. Only France, Germany, and Spain receive significant numbers of women – whereas only Poland and Italy actually receive more women than men. Thus a gap in the official numbers of men and women living in the EU is recognisable in all the destination countries of Figure 1, which suggests that the ENP does not represent a framework that offers equal opportunities for regular migration to women and men.

This gender imbalance might be explained by the different access to residence permits for women in the country of destination. Women are inserted into strongly gendered labour sectors such as home care and domestic work, sex work, nursing, and agriculture, which are regulated differently in each EU country. For example, the feminisation of migration is predominant in Italy where paid domestic work is a preferential channel for obtaining a residence permit, whereas it is a far more limited phenomenon in countries such as the Netherlands where this opportunity is precluded since these jobs do not entitle workers with a permit to stay (Van

Walsum 2011). This issue will be further discussed when illustrating the case of Moldovans in Italy and Ukrainians in Poland.

If we move our focus to the countries of origin of the women officially migrating to Europe (Figure 2), Morocco comes into sight as a very important country of departure with 1,133,855 Moroccan women residing in the EU15 countries and Poland. It is followed, although with lower numbers, by Algeria (709,411), Ukraine (593,242), Tunisia (236,362) and Moldova (161,236): all these figures are based on data from the UN Population Division from 2015. Other countries from the eastern and southern borders show significantly fewer numbers. In short, on the basis of UN data, female mobility from this area to the EU primarily concerns women from the Maghreb and, to a lesser extent,

**Figure 2. Women migrating from the ENP area to the EU15 and Poland (2015). Source: United Nations 2015.**



women from Ukraine and Moldova. Great differences, however, exist between these groups as we discuss in the final part of this article.

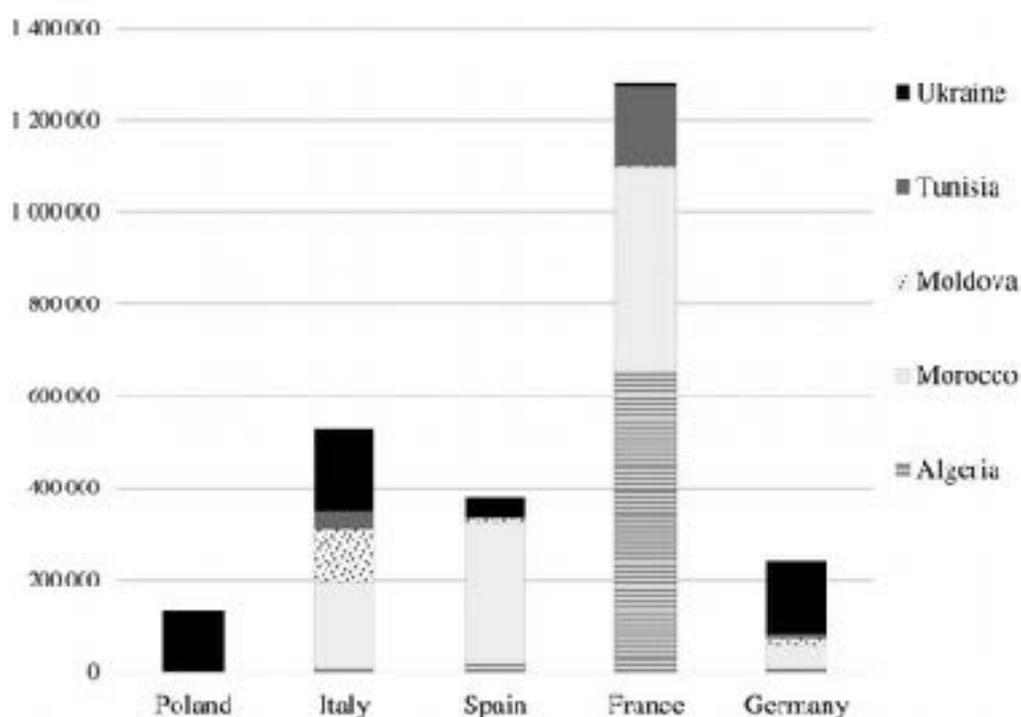
Let us thus focus on a selection of countries to sharpen the analysis and explore the case studies. Figure 3 shows the distribution of the five women's national groups that are predominant in Europe (Moroccans, Tunisians, Algerians, Ukrainians and Moldovans) in the five EU countries which are in general the most common destinations of women from their area, i.e. France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Poland.

From this figure, we see that these groups are not equally distributed across the five destinations. France, the largest recipient of these migrant women, shows very high numbers of, first, Algerian and then of Moroccan women. Interestingly, Algerian women do not migrate to

European destinations other than France, while Moroccans are more widespread, with big numbers also in Italy and Spain. Equally, the distribution of Ukrainian women is widespread; there are large numbers in Italy, Poland and Germany but also smaller numbers in France and Spain. It is also worth pointing out that Ukrainians make up almost the total number of women arriving in Poland from the five selected countries of departure. In this scenario, Italy stands out as the country that receives good numbers from all the selected national groups, with the exception of Algerians. This is partly in line with the diverse types of flow that have characterised migration to Italy since the country became an immigration country in the 1980s. France, on the other hand, has traditionally been a destination predominantly for former colonial populations. Lastly, it can be noted that Moldovan women are present only in Italy – for reasons that will come clear in Section 6 below.

In the light of the distribution shown in Figure 3, we are going to illustrate the case study of women who migrate:

**Figure 3. Women migrating from the ENP area to Europe (selected countries). Source: United Nations 2015.**



- (1) from Algeria to France: given their very high numbers and their exclusive relationship with France as a destination;
- (2) from Morocco to Spain: for their prominent role in the national context since they are 4/5 of the total number of women who reside in Spain from the selected countries of origin;
- (3) from Ukraine to Poland: in the light of the astonishing central position that they seem to have, in comparison with the other four groups, in this country; and finally

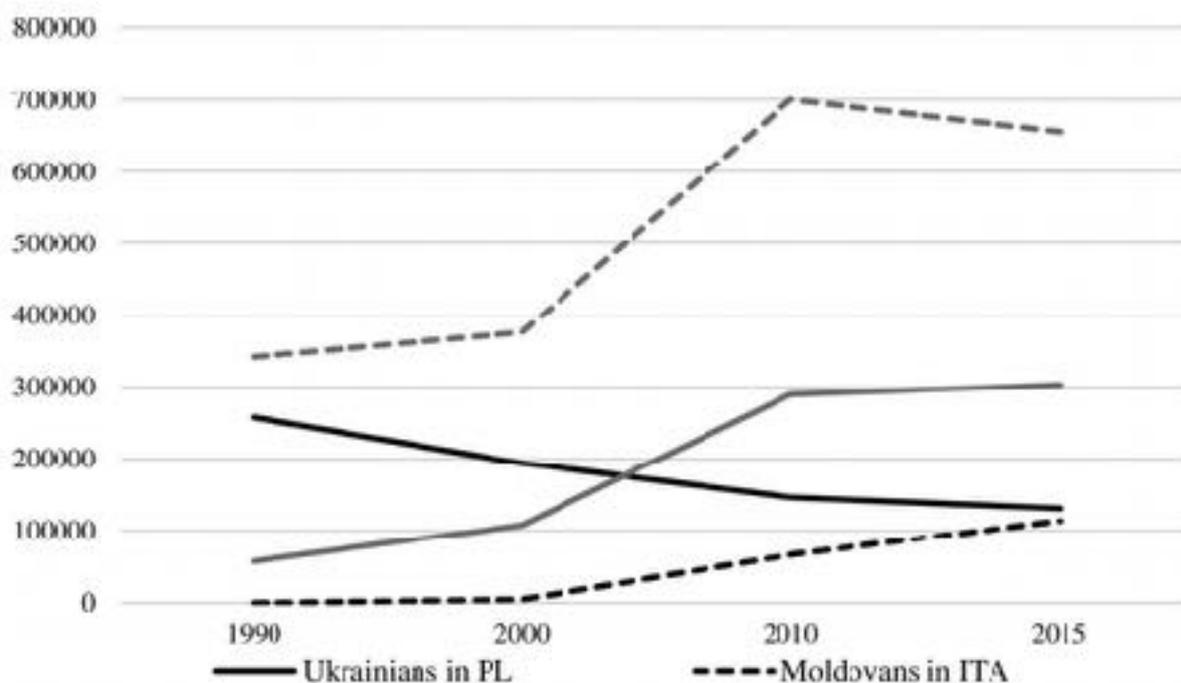
(4) from Moldova to Italy: in order to understand what are the specific reasons of their almost exclusive relationship with Italy as their western European destination.

As will become clear, these four case studies are relevant to our overall argument for different reasons: numerical (given their growing visibility in official numbers during recent years), but also on the basis of the specific gendered normative and socioeconomic opportunities or limitations that affect migrant women in the countries of origin and destination, especially in determining the labour participation and mobility patterns.

Figure 4 compares UN data from 1990, 2000, 2010 and 2015. This further confirms the high number of Algerian women present in France: although already the most numerous group of women amongst the four in 1990, their number steadily increased over time. Likewise, the number of Moroccan women in Spain has increased. In fact, just as Morocco and Algeria have longstanding histories of emigration, so France and Spain have been receiving consistent numbers of migrants since the mid-1990s.

This is different from the case of Moldovans in Italy: there were almost none in 1990 and immigration started to increase only during the 2000s. This is line with the periodisation of the arrivals from countries of the former Soviet Union to Italy that have developed during the 1990s to become visible in the 2000s, and also due to specific migratory policies, as we will further elaborate. Finally, the presence of Ukrainian women in Poland

**Figure 4. Selected cases, 1990–2015. Source: United Nations 2015.**



has a very special feature: it was quite consistent in 1990, but decreased in the following years until 2015. This striking data is due to the fact that, for historical reasons, many of those

counted today as Ukrainian migrants are actually people that until 1991 were counted as Polish because they were born in territories that in 1991 passed from the Polish to the Ukrainian government. The actual migration of Ukrainians to Poland started only in the mid-1990s.

In what follows, we elaborate on these four cases on the basis of secondary literature and considerations based on the authors' original research. We examine the extent to which the figures above described illustrate wider and significant ways in which gender and migration regimes intertwine in shaping regular migration from the neighbouring countries, to the EU. In particular, we compare the patterns of female mobility from the most relevant sending countries in the south (Morocco and Algeria) and from the east (Ukraine and Moldova) of Europe. The geography of the neighbourhood is also of some importance: Italy, France, Spain and Poland are differently positioned at the borders of the EU (Italy and Spain facing south, and Poland facing east), France is located in the heart of Europe and yet is destination to the highest figure of women migrants arriving from the neighbourhood. Thus, while migration from Morocco to Spain and Ukraine to Poland happens between two geographically close areas, movements from Moldova to Italy and Algeria to France show that factors other than proximity enter into the picture.

## **5. From Algeria to France**

The pattern of Algerian emigration as a whole has changed starting from the year 2000 (Labdelaoui 2011). Along with the traditional emigration of intellectuals and students, there is now increasing emigration of women: women represent 42% of the 1.4 million people who were born in Algeria and are resident in France in 2015. As Figure 4 shows, Algerian women in France outnumber other women's presences from the ENP area in the EU, with a sharp increase in numbers from the year 2000.

The feminisation of migration from Algeria can be explained in the face of the changing understanding of emigration in Algerian society, which is no longer seen as motivated exclusively by economic reasons but reflects also the desire to pursue other goals, within a context of social mobility, and cultural and economic transnational interconnections. For women as well, reasons for migrating may go beyond the simple need for work, stemming from the desire to fulfil a variety of projects. Examples include female university students who increasingly participate in scientific networks, and members of civil society associations taking part into Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. Women are also involved in transnational trade circuits, such as *trabendo*, popularly called the 'Biznasiates', that is the 'business women' (Salih 2011).

From the point of view of diaspora and national discourses, Hocine Labdelaoui (2011) shows how Algerian women in France are increasingly taking on the role of 'identityreproducers' within the Algerian national community living outside the national territory. This is part of a wider political attempt to promote a moral discourse that encourages the incorporation of the diaspora into the homeland and, thus, to increase their investments back home. Migrant women therefore have a pivotal role in the symbolic and physical reproduction of the nation's identity and collectivity abroad.

The reproduction of certain gender ideologies, and the perpetuation of specific gendered roles within the communities abroad, are then also part and parcel of keeping the Algerian diaspora linked to its country of origin, which is at the background to apparent contradiction in the gendered migration laws enacted by the Algerian government. For example, the government has eased patriarchal control over the migration of women by, for example, making sure that women no longer require the authorisation of their male guardian to leave the country.

However, at the same time the Algerian state has kept the clause that fathers, not mothers, have to authorise a child's passport registration, thus perpetuating the principle that citizenship rights are predominantly male prerogatives and enhancing the cultural construction of women as legal minors (Bouliia-Hassane 2011, Mebroukine 2011).

The large number of Algerian women in France thus reflects a dynamic and complex situation. Beyond the classic pattern of women's migration as reunification with a husband who migrated earlier, this data reflects the increasing erosion of the patriarchal orders that limit women's ability to exercise their desires and choices.

## **6. From Morocco to Spain**

Moroccan women are by far the largest number of women migrants from the ENP area to the EU (Figure 2), residing mainly in France, Italy and Spain (Figure 3). In particular, the numbers of women born in Morocco and who live in Spain has significantly increased from the year 2000, accounting in 2015 for 303,555 women, compared with only 57,000 in 1990 (see Figure 4). This tendency can be inscribed in a more general feminisation of the long history of international migration among the Moroccan population. While in the 1950s and 1960s Moroccan migration was predominantly masculinised, the economic crisis of the mid-1970s and the closing of borders brought a structural change in migratory flows and in the composition of the Moroccan diasporas abroad. Already in the year 2000, a survey by the Fondation Hassan II pour les Marocains résidant à l'étranger revealed that about 65% of Moroccan men abroad lived with their spouses and children, which is strikingly different from the situation in the 1970s when 90% of Moroccan migrants were men living alone (Belguendouz 2010).

The reasons of this feminisation of Moroccan migration towards Spain are manifold, and often are related to the changing socio-economic realities of Moroccan women. While reunion with their husbands remains a predominant reason of regular migration, there are increasingly single women who are the sole responsible for supporting their children and households at large. These women face increasing levels of poverty and consider migration as a way to support their households (Elmadmad 2011). Migration is one of the few available survival strategies for this category. Finally the younger generation of Moroccan women, due to higher levels of education achieved and the relative improvement of their legal status, are more inclined to consider migration as a viable exit from a oppressive and conservative environment.

Moroccan women in Spain find employment primarily in the paid domestic and service sectors, in hotels or restaurants, and in the agricultural sector (Khachani 2011). In the framework of the mobility partnership between Morocco and Spain, since 2006, Moroccan women have been employed in Spanish seasonal work as fruit pickers (Arab 2010). These women are generally recruited in the areas of Fès, Mohammedia, Agadir and Dakhla; at the condition to fulfil the following requirements: they have to be between 18 and 40 years of age, and have be mothers of young children (which is considered to be a warranty that they will wish to return home at the end of season). The number of women joining this scheme has grown from 1,800 in 2006 to 17,000 in 2009. In the Spanish province of Huelva, where the cultivation of strawberries is concentrated, Moroccan women represent 60% of all pickers. In the words of the coordinator of this employment scheme, employers seem to prefer Moroccans to other foreigners because they are 'docile, good workers and submissive' (Khachani 2011, p. 8). On the Moroccan side, instead, such opportunities for seasonal work are perceived as a further exploitation of the already pretty vulnerable Moroccan youth, especially in the case of young mothers, by the side of European multinationals which operate transnational recruitment on a temporary basis (Paciello et al. 2016).

This is indeed a clear example of how bilateral arrangements are far from enhancing the empowerment of women, and rather respond to since they rather respond to a transnational demand for cheap flexible work. Although they do offer opportunities for female migration that go beyond the traditional scheme of family reunification, they still do not offer an empowering alternative for working women. Moreover, from the economic point of view, given the temporariness and the low pay that characterise seasonal pickers' employment, these schemes promote labour migrations that can only partially support the needs of migrants' households, thus are also ineffective in changing women's conditions in their countries of origin.

Moroccan women who wish to find more permanent and remunerative jobs in Spain are still predominantly directed towards the domestic and service sector, where exploitation tied to and reinforced by undocumented migration is very widespread.

In conclusion, in this case, bilateral arrangements do little to improve women's social position in countries of both origin and destination. Rather, the promotion of this type of circular migration contributes to perpetuate a process of racialising and gendering, where migrant women easily turn into an exploitable workforce.

## **7. From Ukraine to Poland**

While Algerian and Moroccan migrant women live mostly in a few EU countries – France, Spain and, in the case of Moroccans, also Italy – Ukrainian women are present in a wider spectrum of destinations in the EU15 countries and Poland (see Figure 3). Their numbers are particularly high in Italy (177,202 in 2015) as well as in Germany and Poland (158,781 and 130,812 respectively). However, we decided to take the case of Ukrainians in Poland to allow for comparisons with the other three cases under study.

Migration of Ukrainian women to Poland has a long history, and it has often taken the shape of temporary migration, facilitated by historical ties, geographical proximity and favourable policies for border crossing (Grzymała-Kazłowska et al. 2003, Górny et al. 2010). These movements need to be understood against the background of the economic decline of the Ukraine since the 1990s. In this context, women have taken the role of breadwinners required to support often unemployed husbands and school-age children (LaFont 2001, True 2003).

From the policy point of view, the present situation is the last stage after a complex evolution of different arrangements. Between 1945 and 1989, women participated like men in mobility schemes that were promoted by the States, within the COMECON framework (e.g. tourism, student exchanges, cross-border employment, military dislocations, etc.) During the 1990s, and especially after the non-visa agreement of 1996, the women's mobility between Ukraine and Poland has further increased (Iglicka and Weinar 2008). Cross-border mobility was also typical of the so called 'suitcase traders', namely small merchants who earned money by selling and buy products on one side and the other of the border – a quite common activity also for Ukrainian women from the 1950s on (Stola 2001). These temporary continuous movements between the two countries were virtually halted in 2003, when Polish migration policy had to adjust to the standards of the European Union which required the introduction of visa requirements for non-EU nationals.

At present, the legal framework for the entrance of Ukrainians is relatively open: in 2006 Poland decided to gradually liberalise the legislation on employment of third-country nationals. This was achieved, on the one hand, by facilitating the issuing of work permits, and, on the other hand, by expanding the catalogue of nationalities who, under certain conditions, are

allowed to take employment in Poland without necessarily holding a permit, as in the case of EU eastern neighbours including Russia. In 2008, the Agreement on the Local Border Traffic with Ukraine was concluded, which facilitated the mobility of people living on the Ukrainian border, including the many women who were seeking employment in the expanding domestic and care sector of Polish cities. The reduction in the number of those counted as Ukrainians (although born in what was formerly Poland), together with the fact that the entrance of these Ukrainian workers was not registered after 2008, might explain why the official number of Ukrainian women migrants is decreasing (see Figure 4). Yet it is a matter of fact that their presence in the domestic and care sectors, as well as in Polish society more generally, has increased.

In relation to the temporary migration, which characterised the mobility pattern of Ukrainian women in Poland, scholars have argued that migrants from Ukraine have little interest in, or the possibility of, settling in Poland because of economic, legal and cultural constraints. Their aim is, rather, to improve their living conditions at home. For this reason, Ukrainian migrants perceive their migration as a temporary activity, additional to their work at home, which has resulted in a lasting phenomenon of temporary trips and repeated mobility. Thus, Ukrainian circular migration has been defined as 'incomplete migration', characterised by short-termism and the unstructured departure of individuals in search of immediate profit rather than being a structured project (Okólski 1998). Along the same lines, Kindler and Szulecka (2013), in a comparative study of Ukrainian and Vietnamese women's migration to Poland, have emphasised the importance assigned by Ukrainians to the ties with their country of origin in the face of the obstacles that they face in the host country.

For the case of the many Ukrainian domestic workers in Poland, it is important to notice that they are often circular migrants who make use of tourist visas in order to enter the country and work irregularly (Iglicka et al. 2011). They generally live out and do cleaning jobs. Polish scholars point to the risks related to the undeclared character of this work, the structural conditions of the sector and the limited opportunities for mobility within it (Kindler 2009).

The case of Ukrainian women going to Poland is an example of the negotiations taking place around women's role as breadwinners and transnational mothers, which pushes them towards entering a gendered and ethnicised labour force such as the one of domestic and care workers, which is in great demand at the lowest strata of the EU labour market. Importantly, while Ukrainian women engage in temporary and permanent migration to Poland, Polish women are doing the same in Germany, the United Kingdom and other western European countries where they also take up domestic and care work in private households (Palenga-Möllenberg 2013). The overlapping of these different circuits of women's mobility denotes the increasing stratification of labour market opportunities for migrant women. If gendered occupations such as domestic work still play a major role, this is however split into jobs with different entitlements from the point of view of rights and labour conditions. Women on the borders of the EU, as in the case of the Ukrainians, are included in a hierarchical way in this market compared with women holding citizenship from a member country, by being allowed to enter into it only in the most precarious and invisible way, namely as flexible, undocumented privately hired service workers.

## **8. From Moldova to Italy**

Figures 3 and 4 show how Moldovan women's presence in Italy, although not the most significant in terms of numbers (fewer than Ukrainians or Moroccans), offers some interesting elements in support of the argument of this article. In 2010 Moldovan emigrants were estimated at 21% of the country's population, with about 20% of them in Italy (ETF 2011, World Bank

2011). Italy is today the most important destination for women from Moldova: since the early 2000s their numbers have steadily grown, going beyond the 100,000 mark today (see Figure 4). This is an interesting case of highly gendered migration which, contrary to the example above of Ukrainians in Poland, is mainly based on permanent migratory projects and the opportunity for formal access to the labour market.

The permanent character of this migration finds evidence in the work of Pia Pinger (2010) who emphasised how the persistent poverty of Moldovan families and their traditional mind-set are deterrents for migrant women who want to return, given the lack of opportunities open to them back home. For Pinger, it is important to consider that Moldovan women migrating to countries such as Italy need longer periods of work before they are able to compensate for the economic efforts that have served to finance their initial emigration, especially when we compare this with the movement to Russia usually performed by their male counterparts who tend to work on a seasonal basis (see Görlich and Trebesch 2006).

It goes without saying that the expansion of the private market for home care service has had a deep impact on labour opportunities for Moldovan women in Italy and so on the level of immigration (Marchetti and Venturini 2014). Italy is one of the European countries where the private market of home-based elderly care provided by migrant women has been established for the longest time – since the end of the 1970s – and where it has grown extensively: today, 88.6% of the Italian private service sector is made up of women and 81% by migrants (Ministry of Labour 2012). It is relatively easy for foreigners to access this job sector, in comparison with what happens in other countries. Regularisations are the main gate of access in the context of Italian migration policy, and indeed domestic and care workers have received special treatment in the regularisation of 2002, with the extension of the applications deadline. In 2009 the government took further special measures to favour these workers with an ad hoc regularisation has resulted in a general increase in the official numbers of foreigner workers in this sector. Finally, it is important to consider that, in the yearly allocation of quotas for migrants, the government always assigns a relatively high number of permits to prospective care and domestic workers from specific countries of origin, included Moldova.

More generally, the arrival of Moldovan women in Italy has been clearly facilitated by specific government provisions. Indeed, official data on Moldovans' presence in Italy have boomed after the government's launch of a regularisation process for undocumented migrant workers in 2002: with 29,471 applications, their (official) presence in Italy has multiplied five times (ISTAT 2004). Again in 2009, at the time of a regularisation directed only to undocumented workers in the care and domestic sector, Moldovans have been incredibly active by submitting 26,605 applications (Ministry of Interiors 2010). Furthermore, Moldova and Italy have established a bilateral agreement for workers' recruitment, which was signed in 2003 and renewed in 2011 (EMN 2012). There is therefore an ad hoc quota for Moldovans in the yearly state decree which regulates the quotas for new foreign workers in Italy. Between 2002 and 2010, more than 27,000 Moldovans entered Italy through these quotas, without counting those that, as domestic workers, could also apply for the 290,000 vacancies in the quotas for this sector (Marchetti et al. 2013, p. 67). More recently, in 2008, Moldova signed a visa facilitation agreement with the whole European Union which was followed by a visa exemption for Moldovans entering the Schengen area for short stays, starting from 28 April 2014. It is thus an open question as to how this last facilitation will affect the movement of Moldovan women to the EU and Italy in particular.

The case of women's migration from Moldova and Italy thus stands in opposition to the three cases that we have previously illustrated. Without forgetting the ample margins of undocumented migration that still persist between Moldova and Italy, as well as the difficult

conditions in which regular migrants perform their jobs in the home care and domestic sectors, it is nevertheless important to reflect upon the way this case can serve as an example for other countries.

There is no doubt that legal and permanent employment in the domestic sector offers women opportunities for an autonomous type of mobility, in which they can potentially engage in an activity independently from their husbands' or fathers' will. It allows them to earn a living and take on the role of breadwinner for their transnational households, which they are often able to reunite in Italy. The less precarious legal conditions allow for better conditions of employment, and, under these conditions, domestic work may provide a working and living space that can be relatively safer for women than the conditions they face in factories or agriculture. However, the field of domestic work in Italy is still often low paid, with precarious working conditions, a lack of rights and, in some cases, subject to sexual and physical abuse. Moreover, workers complain that such work does not allow them to climb the social ladder towards more rewarding occupations, more in line with their educational backgrounds, while it easily turns into a long-term occupation with negative consequence in terms of psychological distress due to the specific characteristics of this job.

## **9. Conclusions. Policing gendered migrations in the ENP framework**

After this excursion through different models of gendered mobility between ENP countries and the EU, we now come back to our initial question. How do policies impact on women's migration across the eastern and southern Mediterranean? And on gender roles in society at large? To date the ENP framework does not seem to have taken significant steps to promote a safe and autonomous migration specifically for women, which would allow them to improve their social and economic positions. The cases of Moroccan fruit pickers in Spain and Ukrainian domestic workers in Poland show how women's labour opportunities are predominantly characterised by temporariness, difficult working conditions and poor legal protection. Mainstream policing of gendered mobility keeps promoting the confinement of women to care and domestic work, or to the seasonal agricultural sectors, which are all variably located across a continuum of illegality, exploitation and invisibility, which becomes more striking at the further end of the EU borders.

Here, women are not seen as 'labourers' in their own terms by their countries of origin, but rather are flexible and transnational figures who both take advantage and reinforce a cheap (agriculture) or gendered and racialised (domestic and care work) labour market. At the same time, they are far from becoming prospective full citizens in the countries of destination, being destined to short periods of stay and invisibility from the point of view of their social and political rights. In addition, from the perspective of the ENP framework and categorisation, migrant women do not generally fall into the category of the working migrant 'who sends remittances', nor into that of the entrepreneur who facilitates trade across the borders, nor finally into the one of cultural mediators who spur innovation amongst his/her fellow Diaspora members.

The case of Moldovans in Italy might be seen as the exception to this overall view, but the specific connotation of the employment available to these working women in the Italian home care sector (thus very isolated, badly remunerated and socially stigmatised) prevents them from becoming transformative social actors, in either the country of origin or of destination. It is also a sector where migrant women cannot generally fulfil their aspirations by capitalising on their education and the work experience they have accumulated in the country of origin, resulting in their gradual deskilling. Domestic work, in general, comes into sight as a significantly double-edged job opportunity for migrants, as far as it offers employment on the fringes of an EU

labour market, in a sector characterised by lack of rights and by a scarce economic and social mobility.

In conclusion, looking through gender lenses at the mobility taking place between EU and neighbouring countries, there appears a striking gender blindness and gender biases in migration policies. The effect of this gender blindness is that migrant women find themselves positioned along a geographical and gendered hierarchy of care and domestic work, or low paid and gendered and racially constructed seasonal agricultural work, which reifies their roles as 'carers with extra work burdens' rather than workers. More work is needed to dismantle the gendered (and racialised) material and discursive devices that structure women's mobility across the east and the south of the Mediterranean.

## **Notes**

1. For updates on the status of the negotiations between these countries and the EU, see [http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/index_en.htm) [Accessed 31 March 2017].
2. See reports published at [http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/documents/progress-reports/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/documents/progress-reports/index_en.htm) [Accessed 31 March 2017].
3. See Debusscher 2012 for a critique of the gender mainstreaming approach in these interventions.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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