

Proposal for a Thematic Issue of *Transfer- the European Review of Labour and Research*

“Transforming Care Work within an Era of Changing Priorities of Care Policy”

Valeria Pulignano (KU Leuven) and Mat Johnson (Manchester University)
(Guest Editors)

Theme. Through a focus on *care work* this proposed thematic issue of *Transfer* will explore how institutional and market-driven capitalist transformations, reflecting changing priorities of care policy, impact upon the quality of care services and the quality of work in contemporary European care services. The COVID-19 pandemic illustrates that sustainability in society requires the reinforcement of social bonds of which health and care as public values are central. Investigating changing priorities of care policy and its implications for care work plays a crucial role to guarantee societal sustainability. Thus, this special issue will discuss the drivers, processes and dynamics underpinning the transformation of care work. It will also explore how labour unions can protect and enhance the position of care work and care workers through a mix of traditional and innovative strategies at the interface of the institution, the market, the workplace and the community. Moreover, it also looks at the conditions underpinning these strategies in the way in which to extend theoretical debates around the varied union responses to precariousness and the degradation of the quality of care work in Europe.

Context and rationale. Care work in Europe is adversely affected by several challenges. Demographic shifts with regards to families and aging population, increasing international migrations, the restructuring of welfare states and the marketization of care. All of this have implications for the social relations that care is shaped by, and it contributes to shape. On the one hand, the rise of privatization and marketization forces have arguably disrupted the quality and stability of care services. On the other hand, processes of de-institutionalisation, decentralisation, rationalisation and market-driven organisational changes overall have had a negative impact on the quality of both work and care. For example, work in nursing home has become increasingly predefined, standardized and fragmented, and the workload has become particularly heavier for care workers. Moreover, family and informality in feminised home care is increasingly characterised by no or low pay and reduced social rights and labour standards. This encompasses analyses of transnational family relations, drawing particular attention to how migrant women care for family members ‘from afar’ and how care relations in family and community in country of origin are affected.

Aims. Due to the multi-faceted nature of factors, forces and levels at which challenges enduring transformations in care work takes place, in this special issue we propose to study the transformation of care work at the interface of the institution, the market, the workplace and the community and to explore labour unions’ different degrees and variegated forms of success as well as difficulties in protecting and enhancing the position of care work and the working conditions of care workers by referring to this interface.

This special issue has three main aims. The first aim is to outline and explore the way in which change at the interface of institutions (reductions in welfare spending), the market (privatization, marketization and cost-competition), the workplace (fragmentation and standardization of work within and across organisations) and the community (informality of feminised home care) affects the quality of care services and care work. The second aims is to

explore how trade unions both resist the fragmentation and marketisation of care, how they engage in the regulation and governance of care work in different forms and at different levels, and how they seek to represent and give voice to care workers as well as the difficulties they encounter in doing this. The third aim is to identify a range of policy recommendations that could lead to better care work, in terms of reducing economic risk, enhancing control over work routines and rhythms, and supporting the expression of skills, gender and voice at work and in communities.

Coordination. The issue will be coordinated by Valeria Pulignano (KU Leuven – Belgium) and Mat Johnson (Manchester University – UK)