

Financial crisis and migrant domestic workers in Spain: employment opportunities and conditions during the Great Recession¹

Zenia Hellgren and Inmaculada Serrano

Introduction

Recent studies on the effects of the global financial crisis (Farris 2015; Ibáñez and León 2014) argue that domestic workers have fared better than migrants in male-dominated sectors such as construction and agriculture, since job destruction in the domestic sector has been cushioned by the indispensable character of private care services, particularly for eldercare. This article provides an alternative analysis, based on our study of employment opportunities and conditions for migrant domestic workers in Spain after the global financial crisis that started in 2008 and has been called the *Great Recession*. We argue that many workers in this sector have been in fact seriously affected by unemployment, underemployment, and worsened job conditions in the recession's wake. We claim that to fully assess the crisis's impact on migrant domestic workers, it is necessary to consider not only the comparably smaller decrease in demand for domestic services but also the simultaneous increase in the supply of available workers composed of unemployed migrants from other sectors and, to some extent, also native Spanish women. The role played by clients' preferences is relevant as well to understanding dynamics within the sector, which may also accentuate status hierarchies where some domestic workers are more disadvantaged than others.

The term 'domestic work' is used here to encompass all paid household services performed in the home environment, including cleaning, cooking, and laundry, as well as child-minding and home care for elderly or dependent persons. Based on our findings, we claim that the distinction between different types of private household services needs to be incorporated more systematically into analyses: while the demand for cleaning services in Spain decreased

¹ Cite as: Hellgren Z, Serrano I. Financial crisis and migrant domestic workers in Spain: employment opportunities and conditions during the Great Recession. *Int Migr Rev.* 2019;53(4):1209-29. DOI: 10.1177/0197918318798341

as households tried to save money, the demand for care work appears to have remained largely unaffected.

We use multiple sources to develop this argument: 60 in-depth interviews with migrant workers (conducted in 2013-2014) and 30 interviews with stakeholders in Madrid and Barcelona (conducted in 2013-2015), complemented by statistical data from the Spanish Labour Force Survey.² Migrant respondents were foreign-born women working or actively looking for a job in the domestic sector at the time of the interview. To ensure heterogeneity and representativeness of respondents, we (1) selected respondents from the largest migrant groups in Spain and/or the migrant groups with the largest proportions employed in the care/domestic work sector³ and (2) stratified the sample to include nationalities with different conditions of entry and rights to remain (EU migrants and non-EU migrants with and without visa requirements) and from a variety of regional and cultural contexts, including Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia, the Maghreb, and Sub-Saharan Africa (see Table 1 in Appendix 1).⁴

Migrant workers' personal experiences allow us to understand details that quantitative data do not cover, such as how domestic workers and employers negotiate their working arrangements or how job conditions changed since the crisis. Interviews with stakeholders representing migrants' and domestic workers' organizations, churches, trade unions, and public administrations provide a general account of how the crisis has affected such workers in Madrid and Barcelona,⁵ Spain's two largest cities and main migrant destinations.⁶ Though

² The empirical research was conducted within the framework of two international projects in which the authors participated: *Do Welfare Regimes Matter? Migration and Care/Domestic Work in two Institutional Contexts, Sweden and Spain: A Multi-Tier Design*, funded by The Swedish National Bank (2012-2016), and the delivery *Migration and Care* within the large, cross-country comparative project *FamiliesAndSocieties*, financed by the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme under grant agreement no. 320116. (2013-2017). The migrant workers' interviews have been fully anonymized.

³ According to the 2007 National Survey on Immigrants, Romanians and Ecuadorians have the largest presence in the sector (following native Spaniards), reflecting their larger presence in the migrant population overall. Migrants from Paraguay, Bolivia, Ukraine, and the Philippines concentrate the most in this sector (between 20 and 30% were working in domestic services) (Hellgren and Serrano, 2017).

⁴ We used a variety of sources to establish first contacts with migrant domestic workers: migrant associations, trade unions, intermediary organizations in the domestic sector, migrant hubs such as churches, and informal contacts among migrant/domestic workers' communities. We then used snow-balling, applying a maximum of one additional contact per entry contact.

⁵ Stakeholders in Madrid included ACOGEM, AESCO, AMO, Asociación San Juan Macías, Asociación Católica de Servicios a la Juventud Femenina, ASTI, Caritas Madrid, CEAR, CEPI Hispano-Búlgaro, CEPI Hispano-Dominicano, Colegio M^a Inmaculada, Parroquia Buen Espino, Parroquia Buen Suceso, Parroquia Monte Carmelo, and Pueblos Unidos. Stakeholders in Barcelona included: Parroquia Inmaculada Concepción de Castres, SAIER, Comisiones Obreras (CCOO), Anem Per Feina, Latinas sin Fronteras, SURT, FedeLatina, Ibn Batutta, Secretaria d'Immigració (Generalitat de Catalunya), Ajuntament de Barcelona, Oficina per a la No Discriminació de Barcelona. The ethic rules under which these interviews were carried out do not allow identifying the specific contributions of these actors, but the authors would like to express their gratitude to all of them.

⁶ We have also carried out participant observation in many of these organizations.

the qualitative interviews reflect subjective perceptions and interpretations, we find that migrants' and stakeholders' testimonies are consistent with the quantitative data available.

In the following section we first situate our work in relation to previous studies within the field. Next, we provide background information on the expansion of Spain's domestic sector and migrant workers' role in it. We then discuss recent research on how migrant workers are affected by the financial crisis in general and what the implications for the domestic sector are in particular, before proceeding to our main findings.

Migrant care/domestic work and the financial crisis in contemporary research

The first wave of research on migrant domestic work in Europe consisted mostly of ethnographic studies at the household level (e.g. Parreñas 2001; Anderson 2000). Since the early 2000s, the growing body of research on the topic has extensively discussed the expansion of private care/domestic services in European societies as the result of an increasing demand, following native women's incorporation into the labour force (e.g. Bettio et al 2006; Lutz 2008; León 2010, 2014). More recent research has situated the expansion of migrant domestic work within broader institutional contexts, analyzing how different types of welfare, migration, and employment regimes reveal different configurations of private household services markets (e.g. Van Hooren 2010; Morel 2015; Hobson et al 2018). Much has also been written about the care deficit generated by these dynamics in different contexts (e.g. Hochschild 1995; Williams 2012; Shire 2015). The expansion of paid labor in the domestic sector is largely explained by insufficient public provision of affordable child- and eldercare and the difficulties of native women (who still tend to perform the lion's share of unpaid domestic work) to combine such responsibilities with a demanding work life (e.g., Simonazzi 2009; Estévez Abe and Hobson 2015). This care gap is strongly felt in traditionally familist societies like Spain (e.g., Moreno and Mari-Klose 2016; Moreno and Bruquetas 2011; Recio 2010).

Within the literature there is recognition of migrant labour's role in the development of private domestic services markets in western European welfare states (Shire 2015; Williams 2012). Although the extent to which migrants dominate the sector varies by institutional context, in some cases, such as Spain, private domestic services sectors have expanded parallel to increasing female immigration in what appears to be a mutually reinforcing

process (e.g., Parreñas 2001; Anderson 2000; Bettio et al 2006; Lutz 2008; León 2010; Kofman 2007, 2012). This process reflects an increasing demand for migrant workers to cover low-paid, low-status jobs largely rejected by native workers (Cachón 2001; Amuedo-Dorantes and de la Rica 2008; Simonazzi 2009; del R o and Alonso Villar 2012; Williams 2010; Anderson 2014; Hobson et al 2015).

In short, the literature offers extensive coverage of the expansion of domestic services sectors across Europe and its underlying dynamics (e.g. Bettio et al 2006; Lutz 2008; Kofman 2012; Le n 2014). However, there is still a lack of research on how the global financial crisis has impacted this sector in general and migrant domestic workers in particular. The emerging literature on the effects of the global financial crisis on migrant workers in European economies, and in Spain specifically, underlines that migrant workers (particularly non-EU migrants from the Global South) suffer more than natives from the effects of the crisis in terms of unemployment, underemployment, increasingly precarious working conditions, and declining welfare coverage (Gonz lez-Ferrer and Cebolla 2013; Mar -Klose and Mart nez P rez 2015; Medina et al 2010; Torres P rez 2014).

The role that migrant workers filled in the Spanish economy during the years of economic growth, concentrating on low-skilled sectors, partly explains this situation. These low-skilled sectors, as is the case with construction work and agriculture, are the least protected and most affected by the recession (Gonz lez-Ferrer and Cebolla 2013; Mar -Klose and Mart nez P rez 2015; Torres P rez 2014). Sector effects, nonetheless, do not fully explain the differences between migrants and natives in times of crisis (Medina et al 2010). Ethnic discrimination and clients' preferences (which might be directly or indirectly related to ethnic or national background) are other possible factors which can neither be easily confirmed nor ruled out (ibid).

Some recent analyses suggest that female migrants in southern Europe, and specifically in Spain, have been less affected by unemployment and job destruction than have male migrants as a result of their concentration in the domestic sector (Farris 2015; Ib ñez and Le n 2014). In fact, the size of the domestic sector – in terms of number of people employed in it – has resisted job destruction better than other sectors where migrants concentrate. This is at least partially explained by the indispensable nature of care services themselves (Ib ñez and Le n

2014). However, we find that the domestic sector's relative resistance has also attracted additional workers into the sector, transforming it into a refuge activity in times of crisis. According to interviewees' perceptions, the increased supply of workers, in a context of relative contraction of the sector, has increased unemployment, as well as *underemployment*,⁷ and negatively impacted job conditions as a result of the increased competition.

Beyond these effects on the domestic sector's supply and demand mechanisms, scholars have highlighted the importance of client preferences for the sector's stratification (Williams and Gavanas 2008; Anderson 2007). Anderson (2007), for example, explores the preferences among domestic services clients in the UK and concludes that migrants may be preferred over natives even if the latter are available as domestic workers. The reason is that larger (cultural and racial) distances make the employment relationship easier to manage for white employers, who are more uncomfortable hiring a white British girl similar to themselves but in a disadvantaged socioeconomic position. Because her analysis is limited to the British context, however, it might not be transferrable elsewhere. In fact, as our analysis shows, in Spain, unlike the British case, native workers are often preferred over migrants, if available.

Female migration and the domestic sector in Spain before the crisis

The domestic sector's expansion in Spain (see Figure 1) is a tale of simultaneously increasing demand and supply. The massive incorporation of women into the labour market since the 1980s created a significant 'care gap,' due to the levels of public provision for child and elderly care (León 2010; Hobson et al 2015). In the decade preceding the financial crisis, a series of legal reforms sought to promote work-life balance (Benería and Martínez-Iglesias 2010),⁸ and there were attempts at expanding public provision of care services.⁹ Most significantly, a 2006 Law on Dependency aimed at providing long-term care services to

⁷ We define underemployment as any situation in which the person is working less than 40 hours per week and is looking for more work. The ILO defines people in underemployment as 'those who worked or had a job during the reference week but were willing and available to work "more adequately"' (<http://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/statistics-overview-and-topics/underemployment/lang--en/index.htm>).

⁸ The Law on Conciliation of Family and Work Life (Ley 39/1999) focused on maternity leaves and the possibility of a reduction of work hours. The Law for Effective Equality of Women and Men (Ley Orgánica 3/2007) raised conciliation mechanisms to the status of social rights

⁹ For instance, childcare provision for children under 3 years increased to 39.3 per cent of the total population in 2010 (Ibáñez & León, 2014; OECD, 2015).

elderly and dependent people.¹⁰ However, there is consensus that these measures and their implementation failed to facilitate work-life balance and cover existing care needs (Benería and Martínez-Iglesias 2014). The Dependency system also barely got off the ground, due to austerity cuts introduced in 2011 (Benería and Martínez-Iglesias 2014; Ibáñez and León 2014).¹¹

Figure 1 (Domestic workers in Spain) here

Simultaneously, the arrival of large numbers of female migrants in the late 1990s (see Figure 2) introduced a new alternative for families. Paid domestic work, traditionally a prerogative of the higher classes, became an affordable solution for an increasing number of middle-class families during a period of economic boom and growing prosperity (León 2010; Hobson et al 2015; Simonazzi 2009), as the supply of available (and affordable) domestic workers increased through immigration.

Figure 2 (Foreign born population in Spain) here

In Spain, the domestic sector is by far the most significant source of employment for female migrants from a broad array of sending countries in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe. In 2010, 20 percent of non-EU-15¹² female migrants in Spain were working in the household sector (Ibáñez and León 2014). In 2005, the proportion of migrant workers in the domestic sector surpassed that of native workers for the first time and has fluctuated around 60 percent ever since (see Figure 3). Some scholars even argued that the familist model of care was being replaced by a ‘migrant-in-the-home model’ in southern Europe (Bettio et al 2006).

Figure 3 (Domestic workers in Spain by place of birth) here.

As a result of these converging trends, Spain’s domestic sector expanded from the late 1990s until 2008, when almost 700 thousand persons were employed in it. By 2009, 14.4 percent of Spanish households had bought private domestic services. It is important to notice, though,

¹⁰ The Law for the Promotion of Personal Autonomy and Attention to Persons in Situation of Functional Dependence (Ley 39/2006).

¹¹ Moreover, although the law intended to prioritize public and subsidized formal services instead of cash provisions for home care, the latter constitute the majority of the assistance provided (SAAD/IMSERSO statistics). Half of recipients of cash allowances use it to hire care workers and the other half to fund a family member providing care (Ibáñez & León, 2014).

¹² This includes female migrants from outside the EU and from EU Eastern members (from the 2004 enlargement).

that only 16.6 percent of these households bought care services (eldercare, child-minding and care for other dependents) (INE 2012). Thus, the majority of jobs in Spain's domestic sector do not involve care tasks, but only household chores (largely cleaning, although other tasks such as cooking or ironing are also common) (INE 2012).

Moreover, despite the sector's expansion, hiring a domestic worker remained non-affordable for many families.¹³ The most common pre-crisis salary for a full-time care/domestic worker was around 700 to 900 Euros per month (interviews; INE 2012), and a disbursement of approximately 800 Euros required dedicating more than half their total salary for 60 percent of Spanish workers in 2009 (INE 2011). An alternative solution was hiring per-hour workers for a reduced amount of time, with hourly wages ranging between 8 and 10 Euros (interviews; INE 2012). Almost 80 percent of Spanish households who bought private domestic services in 2010 hired someone for less than 10 hours per week, whereas only 8.3 percent hired full-time workers (INE 2012). In other words, part-time and per-hour jobs – mostly cleaning services – represent the lion's share of Spain's domestic sector, with important implications for workers in the sector.

The expansion of the domestic sector – as well as the establishment of the ILO Domestic Workers Convention in 2011¹⁴ – increased pressure on the government to introduce significant improvements in the sector's regulation. The labour rights accorded to domestic workers have traditionally been (and continue to be) of less quality and comprehensiveness than those accorded to other workers (Díaz Gorfinkiel 2016; León 2013), although legislative changes introduced in 2011 and 2013¹⁵ were intended to improve access to these rights (León 2013). There is, however, a lack of control and implementation of these measures, whose actual results in terms of formalization and increased worker security are unclear (Hobson et al 2015). Most importantly, domestic workers employed by Spanish households continue not to be entitled to unemployment insurance.

¹³ The presence of domestic service is very much dependent on the household's income: 33 percent of households with a net monthly income of 3000 euros or more hire these services, while the proportion fluctuates around 8-14 per cent for lower-income households (INE 2012).

¹⁴ ILO Domestic Workers Convention in 2011, accessible at: http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C189

¹⁵ In 2011, legislation was introduced (Real Decreto 1620/2011) requiring anyone who hired a private domestic/care worker to offer a job contract and pay the worker's social security costs. The obligation to register the worker in Social Security was supposed to establish clear working and resting periods and improved rights to sickness leaves, etc. New legislation was introduced in 2012 (Real Decreto Ley 29/2012) that limited this obligation for employers hiring less than 60 hours per month.

The impact of the financial crisis on Spain's domestic sector

The financial crisis began in 2008 and rapidly had devastating effects on the Spanish economy. More than three and a half million jobs have been lost since then, particularly in construction, followed by other sectors (García Pérez and Jansen 2015; Marí-Klose and Martínez Pérez 2015). The destruction of jobs and growth in unemployment (which reached a historical maximum of 26.9 percent in 2013) are seen as the main causes of a significant impoverishment of Spanish households (Marí-Klose and Martínez Pérez 2015).¹⁶

The crisis has been most strongly felt among lower middle-class and working-class households (Fundación Encuentro 2014; Marí-Klose and Martínez Pérez 2015), helping explain its relatively weaker impact on the domestic sector to some extent. Still, the generalized loss in acquisitive power and high unemployment levels have impacted Spanish households' capacity and/or willingness to keep the private domestic/care services they were buying before the crisis. Statistical data from the Labour Force Survey confirm the sector's contraction after the start of the crisis, with slightly over 500 thousand persons employed in 2015, compared to almost 700 thousand employed in 2008 (Figure 1 above). According to survey data (CIS 2014), 11.4 per cent of Spanish households bought private domestic/care services in 2014, down from 14.4 per cent in 2009 (INE 2012).

Looking closer at what jobs in the private domestic sector have been most affected by the crisis, we find that job destruction primarily concerns cleaning jobs, largely sought by middle-class families on a per-hour basis (Spanish Labour Force Survey; interviews with stakeholders 8, 4, 12). In contrast, the amount of care jobs has remained stable, indicating the indispensable character of care services that families make an effort to maintain even in times of economic difficulties (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 (Domestic work in Spain by main task definition) here

The supply dynamics of available workers in the Spanish domestic sector are not readily visible in existing statistical data. We can, nonetheless, observe that the foreign-born population increased to 6 million during the crisis, between 2009 and 2013 (see Figure 2

¹⁶ Increasingly precarious work conditions (reduced salaries and reduced working hours), as well as limited welfare state coverage for those unemployed (particularly temporary workers), have also contributed to this impoverishment (Marí-Klose & Martínez Pérez, 2015).

above). As already discussed, migrant workers have been severely affected by the crisis, particularly in terms of unemployment. Among Spanish nationals, the likelihood of becoming unemployed increased from 2 to 4 percent between 2005 and 2010, whereas the probability more than doubled, from 4 to 10 percent, among foreign nationals (Medina et al 2010). According to the stakeholders we interviewed, high unemployment levels in the Spanish labour market transformed the domestic sector into a refuge activity for migrants who could no longer find a job in other sectors (interviews with stakeholders 1, 9, 12, 15, 17, 24). One stakeholder expressed the situation in these terms:

Whereas the domestic sector was a “trampoline” for many female migrants before the crisis [who then moved into more formal and protected sectors], the sector has now become a raft, since opportunities of employment in other sectors largely have disappeared. *Stakeholder 9*

Additionally, although migrants continue to be the majority of workers in this sector, the number of native workers has increased, resulting from their losing jobs in other sectors or their partners becoming unemployed (Benería and Martínez-Iglesias 2014). As is shown in Figure 3 above, the proportion of native workers in the sector has increased from 31 percent in 2010 to 40 percent in 2015.

The stakeholders and migrants we interviewed unequivocally pointed out that native Spaniards are entering the market, even if in comparably small numbers (e.g., interviews with stakeholders 5, 10, 12 and 15):

Most [of the workers coming to the agency] are still migrants, but there are more Spanish women now, about 4 or 5 per day. They used to work in shops and things like that, and now they lost their jobs. *Stakeholder 15*

In short, there is clear evidence that Spain’s domestic sector has experienced a contraction – even if smaller than in other sectors – and that it has become at the same time a refuge for migrant *and native* workers who were employed in other sectors or inactive before the crisis.

The impact of the crisis on migrant workers in the domestic sector

Consistent with the trends discussed above, both migrant and stakeholder respondents overwhelmingly perceived that the demand for domestic services had contracted, particularly

since 2010, as a consequence of more households no longer being able to afford them and/or as a result of more people staying at home due to unemployment (stakeholders 1, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12 and 15).

[The demand] has gone down so much, now I only get 2 or 3 jobs to mediate every day, and it used to be 20 or 30... The families mainly want someone to care for the elderly, not as much for cleaning. *Stakeholder 15*

Hiring per hours is almost gone. [Employers] ask for live-ins, full-time or part-time workers. Before they asked for a few hours, like 4 hours per month, just to lift the burden, and a worker could get a decent salary by accumulating houses like this. That is all gone. *Stakeholder 8*

There are so many without a job now: their employers have become unemployed or they are leaving for other countries. *Stakeholder 12*

I blame the crisis. It is true that a lot of people who used to hire someone by the hour now [...] cannot afford to pay for it anymore. *Venezuelan (unemployed) domestic worker, Madrid*

There was also general agreement that native Spaniards, migrants who have previously worked in other sectors, and newly arrived migrants were now competing over jobs in the domestic sector (stakeholders 1, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12 and 15). Several respondents were in such situations: migrant workers who had left the domestic sector for other jobs and returned, who looked for jobs in the domestic sector for the first time due to the lack of alternatives, and others who had recently arrived in Spain as irregular migrants. In the study's early stages, we also interviewed two native Spanish domestic workers. Although one had been working as a full-time domestic worker for almost two decades, the other had only recently entered the sector for the first time, after she lost her job in a clothes store due to the crisis.

Most respondents, including those who were working at the time of the interview, described a scenario of radically increased competition over the last years:

There is a lot of competition; there are so many of us... It is very complicated; there are those who insult or hit each other. It is very sad. People are getting desperate. I was

in that situation for a week, and thanks to God, I found a job. *Paraguayan domestic worker, Madrid*

Unemployment and underemployment

Migrant respondents and stakeholders unanimously agreed that unemployment had become much more widespread in the sector than before the crisis. Although approximately one third of migrant respondents had experienced unemployment before 2010, earlier unemployment spells were very short, generally lasting one or two months. All stakeholders and all migrant workers who had arrived before the crisis agreed that there were plenty of job opportunities and that it was easy to find new jobs when losing the old one. In contrast, at the time of the interviews (2013-2014), nearly one third of respondents were unemployed. Four had been unemployed for more than one year, and six had been in this situation for more than three months. This account by a Romanian worker is illustrative:

I have worked in domestic services for 7 years, but since last year, I am unemployed. It is very difficult to find a job now. It has changed a lot in the last 2 or 3 years. There are so many people looking for a job, even a lot of people with high education, but they cannot find anything either. *Romanian (unemployed) domestic worker, Barcelona*

However, unemployment was not the main concern of migrant respondents. Their main anxiety was over increasing *underemployment*, a phenomenon that is invisible when looking only at the sector size. Over half of currently employed respondents we interviewed were working less than 40 hours per week and over one third less than 20 hours (Figure 5).

Figure 5 (Hours worked per week) here

For many workers, underemployment meant that they were unable to earn a sufficient income to provide for themselves, as this example reflects:

I work per hour, cleaning different apartments. 9-10 hours per week, it is not enough at all. I am looking for more work, but there is very little... This month, I will make less than 400 euros. I pay my rent a little at a time. I cannot pay it monthly. I work three hours in a day and make 30 euros, and I have to eat, pay for electricity, water, school fees... I cannot do it. *Moroccan domestic worker, Barcelona*

Increasing stratification among workers

According to several migrant respondents in our study, the increasing presence of Spanish women in the sector has led to unequal competition, as many clients prefer to hire native workers if costs are comparable. This view was also shared by the two Spanish domestic workers we interviewed.

People prefer the Spanish women, and there are more of them now. Yesterday two Spanish girls came to look for jobs, and two gentlemen gave them their numbers quickly. They did not come back today, so I guess they got the jobs. I can see that the Spanish women get the jobs first. *Bolivian (unemployed) domestic worker, Barcelona*

People prefer Spanish girls to avoid problems with the immigrants. There are many of them who steal things in the houses where they work, I have heard. People don't trust them. Older people don't want immigrants in their homes, not for being racists but because they are uncomfortable with it, it is strange for them. The social services sent an immigrant worker to care for my grandmother, and she does not like that she cooks foreign food for her. She would love to have a Spanish girl. But immigrants usually charge less, and then they can get the clients. *Spanish domestic worker, Barcelona*

Employers' preference for Spanish workers is also confirmed by survey data (CIS 2014): 20 percent of households buying domestic services in Spain explicitly stated that if they were to hire someone new, the person should be a native Spaniard. Since such a statement might be perceived as politically incorrect, it is likely to be underreported. Overall, 78 percent of respondents who bought domestic services would want the person to be a native Spaniard, to 'be familiar with Spanish costumes,' or to 'speak the same language' (CIS 2014). This picture is in line with stakeholders' perception that cultural proximity is a major consideration among employers and that this can explain their preference for Spanish (or sometimes Latin American) workers.

Besides the apparently widespread preference for native Spanish domestic workers, employers' preferences also reveal hierarchies among migrant workers. Preferences may be based on previous experiences, so that one client may prefer hiring Romanian workers while another may discriminate against them. However, a pattern does emerge from interviews with workers and stakeholders alike, where migrants characterized as 'European' in their appearance and/or manners were generally preferred.

They don't treat a non-white woman equally. They say they want a white one. There was a lady asking for someone tall and blonde... a model, in short (laughs). There are things that I don't get... This is racism. I have been to agencies, and there too they were asking for Spanish appearance. In one agency the nephew of the lady came and asked for a Spanish worker. There were none at the time, so they looked at me and said, "You look Spanish." *Paraguayan domestic worker, Barcelona*

Migrant workers who perceived these biases attributed it to plain racism and/or negative stereotyping of specific ethnic groups. Overall, Latin American respondents with 'indigenous' appearance (mostly Bolivians) reported more instances of negative attitudes and mistreatment at their workplaces than other respondents. Stakeholders agreed on the importance of appearance (stakeholders 4, 10, 12, 14, 17, 22) but offered different interpretations of the reasons for it. Some stakeholders attributed these discriminatory practices to ethnic status hierarchies with roots in colonialism, while others explained them in terms of perceived cultural divides where cultural proximity was an important advantage for care/domestic work performance. Therefore, sometimes European workers were perceived as better prepared for the demands of a Spanish household, but many Spanish employers also preferred Latin Americans due to perceived cultural similarities based on the shared language and historical social ties (e.g. stakeholders 9, 22).

Another major factor of stratification within the sector is age, which was cited as a main selection filter in the sector by both migrants and stakeholders. According to respondents, this degree of selectivity was not salient in the pre-crisis period:

At my age, I am 46... It is becoming like in Latin America here. You can work between 20 and 30; then they take advantage of your youth. They offer you the minimum wage... Once you turn 40, there are fewer opportunities, and when you reach 50, it is over. *Bolivian domestic worker, Madrid*

When I arrived in 2007, all the women "went to war." We were all good enough, girls, elders... all of us... All of us were recruited "for the army (of domestic workers)"... But not now... I have talked with colleagues, and I have been told the same thing... that we are not all going to war anymore, we are already... not being discriminated, but selected.

There is a finer selection now. *Chilean domestic worker, Madrid*

It is very difficult now, first because of my age and because I think that it is very hard now in general... There are more Spanish women now, and they are well educated.

Ukrainian domestic worker, Madrid

One stakeholder respondent summarized how the crisis had altered workers' bargaining power with these words:

Some years ago, the women [workers] could choose among jobs. Now it's the other way around: the employers choose [the worker]. *Stakeholder 12*

Job conditions

According to interviews, the effects of the crisis on the financial situation of Spanish households have affected job conditions in the sector. Many households hiring these services were reducing salaries, ceasing payment of social-security coverage, or reducing hours – sometimes without diminishing the tasks to be performed.

They are cutting down in hours and days... We get along very well, and they don't want to throw me out... But you do the same work during fewer hours. *Georgian domestic worker, Madrid*

It's a bad moment. Before you didn't see many of the things you see now... There is a lot of exploitation, slave jobs for 5.5 euro per hour. We don't pass along many of the offers we receive because they are indecent, like 400 euro for a live-in. The employers complain that they only have an 800 euro pension. *Stakeholder 6*

Several migrant respondents also claimed that some clients simply took advantage of the crisis to justify lower salaries and worse job conditions.

Now people use the crisis as an excuse not to pay you what they should... They say, "The crisis, the crisis, I have no money," and you are working and see how they are buying things and go shopping all the time. It doesn't make sense. They say, "Look, I can only pay you 300€," and then you see them in the weekend buying clothes that don't cost 20-30€ but 80-100€... So you reach the conclusion that some people, not all, are taking advantage of the situation. *Bolivian (unemployed) domestic worker, Madrid*

The lack of jobs increases the vulnerability of workers who were left at the mercy of their employers, which in the worst of cases lead to situations of exploitation and abuse:

They say that if you are not interested, they will take someone else. And when you are inside the house, they also don't respect the law, they say, "If you don't do this, you're out." *Paraguayan (unemployed) domestic worker, Barcelona*

Before, when I got sick, it was ok. I stayed at home, or they sent me home... Now they no longer say, "Go home," and if I do, I have to return the hours. *Moroccan (unemployed) domestic worker, Madrid*

They insult me and despise me. They tell me things... They didn't use to do that, but now with the crisis they complain a lot and think that they are paying me too much. They threaten me and say they will find someone to do the job for half the pay... I cry... I cannot protest, of course. If I lose this job, it would be very difficult for me to find another one. *Ukrainian domestic worker, Barcelona*

Migrant workers in Spain depend on their jobs (and their employers' willingness to make a formal contract) not only to provide for themselves and their families but also to regularize their migrant status and renew their residence permits. Some may decide not to accept the poor conditions offered or eventually quit the job, only to be confronted with the problem of unemployment or underemployment.

When my employer cut my hours (in 2011), she told me: "I will let you work for 4 hours, but I will not pay for social security." And in just 2-3 months I had to renew the residence permit. I thought, after having worked for 8-9 years, I cannot become unemployed, and especially now (when the law changed)... and there are no jobs. Every day, there are fewer jobs. So I told her, "Ok, Mrs., you just give me the payment, and I will pay for social security myself." *Ukrainian (unemployed) domestic worker, Madrid*

The last employer told me, "If I want you to (officially) work half-time and work 7-8 (actual) hours, you will do it." But if I (officially) work "half-time," I will make 350 euro. With that money I have to pay for the metro rides, social security... It is impossible. [...] Then, I told her, no, the new law says that full-time is 8 hours and

part-time is 4 hours, and she didn't like it and fired me. *Bolivian (unemployed) domestic worker, Barcelona*

Concluding remarks

Although the literature has extensively analysed the dynamics behind the domestic sector's expansion across Europe in the last decades, there is still a lack of research on how the global financial crisis has affected the sector in general and its migrant workers in particular. Some recent analyses (Farris 2015; Ibáñez and León 2014) underline that the domestic sector, in which female migrants tend to concentrate, was relatively spared from job destruction and conclude that this is largely due to the indispensable nature of care services (Ibáñez and León 2014).

In this article we argue that to accurately assess the impact of the crisis on migrant domestic workers, it is necessary to consider not only the decrease in the demand for domestic services but also the simultaneous increase in the supply of workers in the sector, precisely as a result of its relative resistance to job destruction. In the case of Spain, we find evidence that unemployed migrants from other sectors and, to some extent, native Spanish women increasingly started looking for work in the domestic sector during the crisis, leading to increased unemployment and underemployment. We also call attention to the need to more systematically consider the distinction between care and non-care jobs in the domestic services sector. We find that the demand for care services remains rather unaffected, in line with the argument that these services are indispensable to the consumers, while per-hour cleaning jobs – which constitute the lion's share of domestic services in Spain – have suffered a significant contraction due to the worsened financial situation of middle-class households and to more people staying at home after becoming unemployed and performing these tasks themselves.

Based on in-depth interviews with migrant workers and stakeholders, we find that job conditions in the sector have also been affected by the worsening financial situation of households, which cut domestic workers' salaries, ceased payment of social-security coverage, or reduced the hours they hired, sometimes without diminishing the tasks to be performed. This trend is intensified by increased competition within the sector, which has diminished workers' bargaining power. This is particularly the case with migrants, who

depend on their jobs not only to sustain themselves and their families but also to obtain or renew their residence permits.

The extent of the ‘return of the natives’ to Spain’s domestic sector, and its consequences for migrant workers, needs to be further explored. However, our research suggests that in contrast to the UK context (Anderson 2007), Spanish households’ preferences further diminish employment opportunities for migrant workers in times of intensified competition. Even if native workers are not necessarily offered more pay or formal contracts, they are usually in a better position to select the offers they accept, leaving the jobs with worst conditions for migrant workers. In fact, the sector’s compression seems to have intensified the stratification *among* migrant workers as well, putting some of them in a more disadvantaged position based on their origin and age.

Overall, and in line with Díaz Gorfinkiel's (2016) conclusions, we find that the crisis impacted migrant domestic workers’ employment situation in Spain, in terms of both the quantity and quality of jobs, leading to situations of acute precarity. The realities described by respondents are ones in which fewer migrant domestic workers were able to get by on their earnings, while those with jobs were required to work harder for the same or less income than before the crisis. Among respondents, only a minority (around 40 percent) could manage on their incomes without help from family or friends.

The crisis, thus, apparently cemented and aggravated migrant domestic workers’ position as a ‘reserve army of labour’ at the bottom layer of the national labour market. It remains to be seen what will happen with this group of workers in times of a financial recovery. Immigration officials and NGO actors considered the situation created by the crisis alarming, with social exclusion radically increasing among this segment of Spain’s migrant population – similar to what happens in other low-skilled sectors but with the additional difficulty of domestic workers not being covered by unemployment benefits.

The situation analyzed in this article has potential repercussions for immigration trends and integration processes, which need to be further addressed in the literature. Potential and newly arrived migrants may find one of the few opportunities they had to gain their livelihood in Spain substantially reduced. And for many migrant workers who already had established themselves in the country, the difficulties in the domestic sector call into question the very sense of their migration projects. Half of respondents who previously sent remittances were

unable to do so at the time of the interview. Moreover, for migrant workers with plans to return after saving some capital – for instance, to start a business or buy a house – the current situation prolongs *sine die* the duration of their migration.

References

Amuedo-Dorantes, C. and S. de la Rica. 2011. ‘Complements or Substitutes? Immigrant and Native Task Specialization in Spain,’ *Labour Economics*, 18(5): 697-707.

Anderson, B. 2000. *Doing the Dirty Work? The Global Politics of Domestic Labour*, London: Zed Books.

Anderson, B. 2007. ‘A Very Private Business’, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 14 (3): 247-264.

Anderson, B. 2014. ‘Precarious Pasts, Precarious futures,’ in *Migrants at Work*, edited by C. Costello and M. Freedland, 29-43. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Benería, L. and M. Martínez-Iglesias. 2010. ‘The new gender order and reconciliation policies: The case of Spain,’ in *Work-family life reconciliation in comparative perspective: Towards gender equality in the labor market*, edited by Í. İlkaracan, 201–227. Istanbul: ITÜ BMTKAUM

Benería, L. and M. Martínez-Iglesias. 2014. ‘Taking advantage of austerity: the economic crisis and care in Spain.’ Working Paper Series on Work-Family Balance and Gender Equality: A North-South Policy Perspective. Istanbul Technical University Women’s Studies Center (ITU-WSC).

Bettio, F., A. Simonazzi, and P. Villa. 2006. ‘Change in care regimes and female migration: The “care drain” in the Mediterranean,’ *Journal of European Social Policy*, 16 (3): 271–285.

Cachón Rodríguez, L. (2001), ‘La formación de la “España inmigrante”: Mercado y ciudadanía’, *Reis: Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, 97 (2): 95–126.

CIS (2014), Survey 3009 ‘Cuidados a dependientes’. Available at:

http://www.cis.es/cis/opencm/ES/1_encuestas/estudios/ver.jsp?estudio=14078

del Río, C., and O. Alonso-Villar. 2012. ‘Occupational Segregation of Immigrant Women in Spain,’ *Feminist Economics* 18 (2): 91–123.

Díaz Gorfinkiel, M. (2016), ‘La Reconfiguración Del Empleo Doméstico En España: Impacto de Los Cambios Legislativos En El Funcionamiento Del Sector’, *Reis: Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, 155: 97–112.

- Estévez-Abe, M. and B. Hobson. 2015. 'Outsourcing Domestic (Care) Work: The Politics, Policies, and Political Economy,' *Social Politics* 22 (2): 133-146.
- Eurofound. 2015. 'Families in the economic crisis: Changes in policy measures in the EU,' Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.
- Farris, S.R. 2015. 'Migrants' regular army of labour: gender dimensions of the impact of the global economic crisis on migrant labour in Western Europe,' *The Sociological Review*, 63 (1): 121–143.
- Fundación Encuentro. 2014. *Informe España 2014*, Madrid. Available at: http://www.fund-encuentro.org/informe_espana/informeespana.php
- García Pérez, J. I., and M. Jansen. 2015. 'Assessing the impact of Spain's latest labour market reform,' *Spanish Economic and Financial Outlook*, 4 (3): 5–15.
- González-Ferrer, A. and H. Cebolla (2013), *Inmigración. ¿Integración Sin Modelo?*, Madrid: Alianza Editorial.
- Hellgren, Z., and I. Serrano (2017), 'Transnationalism and Financial Crisis: The Hampered Migration Projects of Female Domestic Workers in Spain,' *Social Sciences*, 6(1): 8
- Hobson, B., Z. Hellgren, and L. Bede. 2015. 'How Institutional Contexts Matter: Migration and Domestic Care Services and the Capabilities of Migrants in Spain and Sweden,' Working paper, MigrationAndCare/FamiliesAndSocieties Project, EU FP7/2007-2013, grant agreement no. 320116.
- Hobson, B, Z. Hellgren, and I. Serrano. 2018. 'Migrants, markets and domestic work: Do institutional contexts matter in the personal household service sector?' *Journal of European Social Policy*, published online: March 21, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928717753578>
- Hochschild, A.R. 1995. 'The Culture of Politics: Traditional, Postmodern, Cold-modern, and Warm-modern Ideals of Care,' *Social Politics*, 2(3): 331–346
- Ibáñez, Z. and M. León. 2014. 'Resisting Crisis at What Cost? Migrant Care Workers in Private Households', in *Migration and Care Labour: Theory, Policy and Politics*, edited by B. Anderson and I. Shutes, 110–129. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- INE. 2011. Nota de Prensa: Decil de salarios del empleo principal. Available at: <http://www.ine.es/prensa/np685.pdf>

INE. 2012. Boletín informativo: Hogares y servicio doméstico. Available at:

http://www.ine.es/ss/Satellite?L=es_ES&c=INECifrasINE_C&cid=1259936766685&p=1254735116567&pagename=ProductosYServicios%2FPYSLayout

Kofman, E. 2007. 'The knowledge economy, gender and stratified migrations,' *Studies in Social Justice*, 1 (2): 122–135.

Kofman, E. 2012. 'Rethinking Care through Social Reproduction: Articulating circuits of migration,' *Social Politics*, 19 (1): 142–162. León, M. 2010. 'Migration and care work in Spain: The domestic sector revisited,' *Social Policy and Society*, 9 (3): 409–418.

León, M. 2013. 'A real job? Regulating household work: The case of Spain', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 20 (2): 170–188.

León, M. 2014. *The Transformation of Care in European Societies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lutz, H. (ed). 2008. *Migration and Domestic Work: A European Perspective on a Global Theme*, Avebury: Ashgate Publishing.

Marí-Klose, P. and A. Martínez Pérez. 2015. 'Empobrecimiento en tiempos de crisis: vulnerabilidad y (des)protección social en un contexto de adversidad,' *Panorama Social* 22 (2): 11–26.

Medina, E., A. Herrarte, and J. Vicéns. 2010). 'Inmigración y desempleo en España: impacto de la crisis económica,' *Revista de economía*, 584: 37–48.

Morel, N. 2015. 'Servants for the knowledge-based economy? The political economy of domestic services in Europe.' *Social Politics*, 22 (2): 170 – 92.

Moreno Fuentes, F.J. and M. Bruquetes Callejo. 2011. 'Immigration and the Welfare state in Spain.' *Social Studies Collection*, 31, Obra Social La Caixa. Barcelona: La Caixa.

Moreno Fuentes, F.J. and P. Marí-Klose. 2016. *The Mediterranean Welfare Regime and the Economic Crisis*. London: Routledge.

OECD. 2015. OECD Family database. Available at:

<http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>

Parreñas, R. 2001, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Recio Cáceres, C. 2010, 'Familismo, Asistencialismo y Precariedad. La configuración del empleo en el sector de atención a las personas en España,' *Alternativas. Cuadernos de Trabajo Social*, 17 (2): 19-43.

- Shire, K. 2015. ‘Family Supports and Insecure Work: The Politics of Household Service Employment in Conservative Welfare Regimes,’ *Social Politics*, 22 (2): 193-219.
- Simonazzi, A. 2009. ‘Care regimes and national employment models,’ *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, (33) 2: 211-232.
- Spanish Government’s Official State Gazette (2015), Number 124, Sec. III, pp.43809-10, available at: <http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2015/05/25/pdfs/BOE-A-2015-5736.pdf>
- Spanish Labour Force Survey, INE (Statistics Spain), available at: http://www.ine.es/dyngs/INEbase/es/operacion.htm?c=Estadistica_C&cid=1254736176918&menu=resultados&idp=1254735976595
- Torres Pérez, F. 2014. ‘Crisis y estrategias de los inmigrantes en España: el acento latino’, *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Internacionals*, 106-107: 215–236.
- Van Hooren, F. 2010. ‘When families need immigrants: The exceptional position of migrant domestic workers and care assistants in Italian Immigration Policy.’ *Bulletin of Italian Politics*, 2 (2): 21–38.
- Williams, F. 2010. ‘Claiming and Framing in the Making of Care Policies. The Recognition and Redistribution of Care,’ Gender and Development Programme Paper 13, UNRISD
- Williams, F. 2012. ‘Converging Variations in Migrant Care Work in Europe,’ *Journal of European Social Policy*, 22 (4): 363-376.
- Williams, F. and A. Gavanas. 2008. ‘The intersection of childcare regimes and migration regimes: a 3-country study,’ in *Migration and domestic work: A European perspective on a global theme*, edited by H. Lutz, 13-28. Avebury: Ashgate Publishing.

Appendix 1. Descriptive statistics of in-depth interviews sample

Table 1. Nationalities of domestic workers interviewed

	Barcelona	Madrid	Total
<i>Latin America</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>27</i>
Honduras	4	1	5
Bolivia	4	5	9
Ecuador	3	1	4
Venezuela	0	1	1

Chile	0	1	1
Paraguay	1	4	5
Dominican Republic	2	0	2
<i>Eastern Europe (EU and non-EU)</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>23</i>
Georgia	1	2	3
Ukraine	4	4	8
Romania	4	6	10
Russia	2	0	2
<i>East Asia</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>6</i>
Philippines	3	3	6
<i>Africa</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>4</i>
Morocco	1	2	3
Nigeria	1	0	1

Table 2. Year of arrival

	Barcelona	Madrid	Total
2000-2002	1	3	4
2003-2005	15	7	22
2006-2008	9	12	21
2009-2011	4	6	10
2012-2014	1	2	3
Total	30	30	60

Table 3. Current migrant status

	Barcelona	Madrid	Total
Spanish nationality	2	3	5
Permanent residence permit	7	5	12
Residence permit	15	9	24
Does not require residence/work permit	0	4	4
No residence permit	6	7	13
No work permit	0	2	2
Total	30	30	60

Table 4. Relevant characteristics for the selection of domestic workers into jobs

	Proportion of respondents mentioning it (among 3 top ones)
Speak the same language	0.60
Female	0.45
Familiar with our costumes	0.38
In good physical shape	0.31
With residence/work permit	0.24
Spanish	0.20

Pays herself/himself social insurance	0.04
Does not request social insurance	0.03

Source: CIS 3009. Percentage among respondents hiring domestic workers

Appendix 2. Interviews with stakeholders representing the following organizations

1	NGO dedicated to intermediation in domestic service
2	NGO dedicated to migrant support
3	Civic association
4	NGO dedicated to migrants' support and integration
5	NGO dedicated to intermediation in domestic service
6	NGO dedicated to migrants' support and integration
7	City council's office for new arrivals
8	NGO dedicated to social and labour integration
9	NGO dedicated to migrants' support and integration
10	Municipal integration centre for refugees I
11	Municipal integration centre for refugees II
12	NGO with intermediation in domestic service
13	Trade union
14	Federation of migrant associations
15	Semi-official employment agency for domestic workers
16	Moroccan association
17	NGO for domestic workers
18	Anti-discrimination office
19	Immigration Department of city council
20	Parish with intermediation for domestic service and migrant community I
21	Parish with intermediation for domestic service and migrant community II
22	Parish with intermediation for domestic service
23	NGO dedicated to migrants' integration with intermediation in domestic service
24	City office for immigrant assistance

Note: with some of the stakeholders two interviews were conducted to cover different perspectives within the organizations, adding up a total of 30 interviews.