

24

Hours

Presskit



**A film by
Harald Friedl**

With **Sadina Lungu** and others
Camera **Helmut Wimmer**, Sound **Tong Zhang**,
Editing **Philipp Mayer**, Translations on location
Laura Balomiri, Assistant director **Jola Wieczorek**,
Production management **Susanne Berger**
Written & directed by **Harald Friedl**,
Producer **Ralph Wieser**

LOGLINE

Around 62,000 Eastern European carers currently work in Austria providing live-in care – caring for someone 24 hours a day. Harald Friedl accompanies one of them on her daily care routine far from home. A film about providing day-to-day care and ageing in dignity. About leaving and letting go.

“Harald Friedl's documentary portrait is characterized by the diligence with which the story of care workers is told. The director captures Sadina's everyday life with great cinematographic restraint, but at the same time with particular intimacy. It succeeds in making her appear not as a victim of circumstances, but as a person who, against all odds, manages to look after herself.”

Eva Königshofen, Diagonale Graz 2024

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SYNOPSIS

50-year-old Romanian Sadina Lungu works as a live in carer. For years, she has been looking after 85-year-old Elisabeth Pöschl in Bad Vöslau with dedication.

Sadina's life is monotonous and draining. Daily personal care and hygiene, cleaning, cooking and shopping, companionship ... Sadina provides caring support at the same time as friendship – around the clock and regardless of her own emotional state.

Sometimes, it seems, she is also the antagonist. For example, when Elisabeth has a bad day and refuses to eat. But the two get along well and like each other. They are used to each other and have learnt to joke as well as quarrel.

Sometimes, Sadina misses her home and feels lonely. Exercising, smoking and video calls with friends and family in Romania help her through. She has been working like this for 14 years – three to five months away, then one month at home to be with her loved ones, who she supports financially. With such long stints, Sadina is a rare phenomenon in the industry.

How does she manage her life far from home without becoming estranged? How does she take control of her own life under the intense mental and physical pressures?

In calm observation, the emotional strength of the documentary feature *24 Hours* arises from the protagonist Sadina Lungu. Through her online conversations with colleagues, it speaks of the dangers and exploitative practices in the care sector, which can only persist so tenaciously through the extreme social imbalance within Europe. The film conveys the social and political relevance and urgency of the situation. Sadina's story does not stand alone in this film: she is one of an estimated 62,000 Eastern European carers working in Austria.



HARALD FRIEDL

Interview

Around 60,000 Eastern European care workers are employed in Austrian households. When did your interest in 24 hour carers begin?

The trigger was the lockdown and the closing of borders in 2020. At that point, Romanian care workers had to fly to Vienna airport in Schwechat and stay quarantined there for ten days before going on to the people they were caring for. It was evident how urgent, how important this work and these people were. And despite this, they had never been courted like this before.

At that point, there was applause from the balconies ...

Exactly, that was just it: the applause for those, who were continuing to do their work throughout the pandemic. The appreciation of the ones who were previously invisible – it suddenly appeared and disappeared again almost as quickly. I wanted to dedicate a cinematic portrait to an everyday hero, and a portrait which would last.

How did you get into contact with your protagonists, the 85-year-old Elisabeth Pöschl and her Romanian care worker Sadina Lungu? Was it easy to find them?

The director Jola Wiczorek assisted me throughout the whole project and posted our search onto a platform, where 11,000 Romanian care workers are registered, mainly women. Some women got in touch, we met them, and were impressed by all of them. Sadina Lungu seemed secure, confident and at ease, which inspired us. She has a longstanding relationship with the woman she cares for, Elisabeth Pöschl. Elisabeth enjoyed the filming – when she was still in good health, she was used to having a lot of guests around. As a film crew, we brought life into the quiet house. Her legal proxy also agreed with the film shoot, which was essential. Elisabeth's attention varies greatly. At times, she is mentally not present. But she can assert herself when she disagrees with something. You can see that in the film. Had Elisabeth ever seemed to object to our presence, we would have packed our things and left. But she was always very relaxed and became an important character in the film.

You told us that this is also connected to Sadina's and Elisabeth's story.

Sadina was already working as a carer for Elisabeth when she was still mobile and was still mentally present most of the time. Six or seven years ago, they even went on small trips together. Now, Elisabeth doesn't leave the house anymore, unless she has to go to hospital. Sadina and Elisabeth know each other very well and like each other.

How much time did you spend with the two of them?

We met again and again over the course of a year. Then we did the filming between January and June 2023. Sadina usually stays for six to eight months with Elisabeth in Bad Vöslau. You can't really call that a rotation. Sadina is basically always there and interrupts her works for a few weeks. In such an interruption, we went with Sadina and shot the part in Romania, which shows her home, when she is together with her family and friends.

How did you develop the documentary work on the ground in Elisabeth's house?

It happened organically, dynamically and at the same time with caution. Sadina has the same tasks to do each day, but the challenges change. Elisabeth's moods are very changeable, and getting her

ready in the morning can be quite challenging. Elisabeth knows how to defend herself and she protests when she doesn't like something. But we as the crew were spared from this.

And it doesn't feel like Sadina is downplaying emotions, just because the camera is there. Or did the presence of the camera have an impact on the care situation after all?

No, not at all. Sadina did what she had to do everyday and did not let us disturb her. From their personal relationship, a feeling of cinematic closeness emerged, which determines the atmosphere of the film. *24 Hours* shows an authentic image of reality.

A stroke of luck then.

Yes. In December 2022, I met the people in Romania who Sadina is close to. Through the video calls with Sadina, they should also become part of the film. They seemed to me as open as Sadina.

How did you have to adapt the shooting plan while you were filming, to accommodate the daily routine of the care work?

Hardly at all. The filming went ahead as planned. I knew what Sadina was doing, how she operated, communicated and I knew a bit about what she longed for too. The filming was supposed to be purely observing her. It was clear from the start however, that there were

taboos: I did not want to show nudity and trespass boundaries of intimacy.

The film is not just about the care work on site, but about being away, going away. How did you think about the relation between the two?

The basis for this is the start of the film in Vulcan. The city is about 230 kilometers south of Timișoara in what used to be Transylvania. Although the film is set in Lower Austria throughout, it never leaves Romania for long. The film is structured through the parallel stories about the routine care work and how Sadina manages – through the pressures and despite the loneliness – to get something out of life. The phone calls with her relatives and her best friend have an important dramaturgical role. Through them, we get to know Sadina from a different side, more about her values, her interests and her emotions.

To what extent was it important to you to depict the failings of the live-in or 24-hour care system? For example the zoom call between Sadina and her sister Livia, who vents her frustration.

We knew about Livia's desperate situation in another household in Lower Austria. Sadina speaks to her on a day, when her sister was

doing particularly badly. Livia knew that we were filming of course, but she still expressed her emotions freely. This conversation reveals a particularly insidious form of exploitation: the lack of respect towards a woman who is undertaking extremely important work – work which none of the relatives of the cared for woman wants to do. Sometimes I asked Sadina to introduce certain topics that I thought were particularly important. Such as for example, in a video call with her sister Petronela, who holds the function of 'family's minister of finance'. I wanted Sadina to talk to her about money. And out of this developed a scene which became especially meaningful – about being able to help others. You can tell how much it means to Sadina to be able to be generous, through the fact that she makes more money in Austria than she would in Romania. To be generous towards the whole family. She wants everyone to benefit from her work in Austria.

Maybe we could go back to the failings.

The failings are addressed in the film through the demonstrations that took place during the time we were filming (note: on 26 June 2023, Eastern European care workers demonstrated in front of the ministry of social affairs in Vienna in support of care reform). It was clear that Sadina wouldn't be able to leave Elisabeth at this point. Otherwise we would have gone to the demonstration with her.

So Sadina watched the demonstration online. At the heart of the protest is the fact that 24-hour-carers are classed as self-employed – obviously wrongly, because they cannot come and go as they like. The Austrian Economic Chamber does not represent them, because it already represents the agencies. A constant conflict of interest. On top of this comes the low pay. Those are themes that aren't discussed in depth in the film. This is better covered in a magazine article. I wanted to be as close as possible to the protagonists and show everything from within Sadina's horizon of experience. She stands in for all Eastern European 24-hour-carers.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the often invisible 24-hour-carers suddenly became a topic of discussion. Have you observed any improvements in the system since then, or a change in public perception?

Care work has been a theme of discussion in the last year, at least within the Austrian Social Democrat party, as far as I can tell. Many things are still going wrong. Overall, all topics that concern people and their needs are not getting enough attention.

What changes would it need to adapt the system to future needs?

This question could be answered in more detail by the IG24 (the body representing the interests of 24-hour-carers): it is about better pay. Approximately 80 euro per day is not enough. The carers have two hours of free time in their day, many of them have to get up several times in a night. Often the women are not treated with respect. From time to time, I hear people talk about 'our Romanian', when they talk about the carer of their grandmother – as if this woman did not have a name. There are 60,000 Eastern European carers in Austria and not many people ask themselves how these women live, what their accommodation in their clients' house looks like and what type of food they get. Distrust and arrogance are widespread amongst the families of clients. There are cases of sexual exploitation, which women in the IG24 talk about. Fairness, respect, recognition and dignity should become a normal part of this whole system.

At the end of the film, we see a paraglider flight and hear a song by Clara Luzia. How did this unconventional ending happen?

Sadina told us right when we met her that her dream is to fly a paraglider. Jola and I knew at once that we had to make this happen. But Sadina only wanted to fly with the runner up in the paragliding world championships, the Romanian Toma Coconeana (laughs). He didn't ask for compensation, as a sign of his support of care workers from Eastern Europe. Sadina's nephew filmed the scene with his phone. This part was supposed to look different to the rest of the film. The fact that we were able to get a song by Clara Luzia for this has real emotional value for the film, and I am very grateful to Clara Luzia. I cannot imagine a better song for this scene. The dualism of the composition – between the 'being under pressure', 'being weighed down' and 'take off', 'fly away'. And Clara's voice with it! A great fit for Sadina.

What do you want to achieve with the film?

I would like as many people as possible to be interested in Sadina Lungu as a person, and in what she stands for. As an emotional experience, I want the film to invite, invigorate, challenge and at the same time be enjoyable. I would like people to feel the weight and the ease. Despite the severity of the film, there is also a lot of humor. It's supposed to be a foundation for social and political debate. And ultimately as what it was always meant to be: a tribute. I see the film as a tribute to the care profession, to these women, to Sadina.

Interview: Sebastian Höglinger



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Harald Friedl

While the needs of the elderly are respected in this country, the needs of those who care for them are given little consideration and the question of who and what they leave behind at home is not asked. In Sadina's case, this is her own mother, a family dependent on her and her closest friend. While we are able to respond reasonably responsibly to increasing life expectancy and changing family structures in this country, elsewhere we are creating new social problems as families are torn apart and neighborhoods become deserted.

I am outraged that many of these women, who take on this mentally and physically demanding work, are also materially exploited. Due to the widespread national chauvinist mentality, many of them often do not even experience recognition of their individuality and their own name, but are only referred to as 'the Romanian woman' in conversations. The carers should be shown great gratitude, respect and appreciation.

Austrian politics is partly responsible for all of this. The Chamber of Commerce sees itself as the representative of Austrian agencies, so they obviously accept the current practices. But no one wants to make a big deal out of the problems. After all, it speaks volumes for the quality of care in Austria if the best specialists are available.

“The topic, its subject matter, the story concerns us all. About our relatives who need care and about ourselves, who will need it one day. That’s why there can’t be enough discussion about this topic.”

Because of Covid, it wasn't easy to do research in this field. So I am all the happier that we have found a great protagonist in Sadina Lungu. Her strength, sincerity, tenacity and readiness to deal with conflict inspire me.

She criticizes the situation with great joy and sharpness and encourages her contacts at IG24 and D.R.E.P.T. to be more self-confident and critical themselves.

Thanks to Sadina, this film about 24-hour care is an exciting female portrait and socio-political debate in one. The film should inspire admiration for women like her, nurture respect for them and prompt us to think differently about care. And I am sure that the film will be of great interest to festival directors, the media and the public because of its socio-political subject matter, because of its immediacy and truthfulness, because of the human qualities, the emotions it shows and because of Sadina as the protagonist.

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BIOGRAPHY

Harald Friedl

Born in 1958 in Steyr, Upper Austria. After graduating from high school in 1976, studied German and English at the University of Salzburg.

Community service at the supported living home 'Lebenshilfe in Wals', then guest lecturer at the University of Kingston upon Hull, England. From 1987 active in social and cultural research at the Institute for Everyday Culture. 1991–1993 Director of the newly founded Literaturhaus Salzburg (house of literature). Since 1994 Friedl has worked as a freelance filmmaker, writer and musician. Lecturer at several US universities since 2000.

He is author, director and producer of documentary films for cinema and television, author of several books and numerous stories published in literary anthologies and on Radio Ö1.

Harald Friedl lives in Vienna and Mitterretzbach.

FEATURE FILMS (SELECTION)

STEYR (90', 2023), BROT (94', 2020), What Happiness Is (88', A 2012), So schaut's aus. G'schichten vom Willi Resetarits (72', A 2008), Aus der Zeit (80', A 2006), Africa Representa (76', A 2003). TV documentaries and short films.





PRODUCTION DETAILS

24 Hours, AT 2024, 100 min

TECHNICAL DATA

Shooting format	Digital
Mastering	2K
Master/final format	DCP
Sound	Dolby 5.1
Aspect Ratio	1:1,85
Untertitel	German, English (international version)

CREW

Written & directed by	Harald Friedl
Camera	Helmut Wimmer
Sound	Tong Zhang
Editing	Philipp Mayer
Assistant director	Jola Wieczorek
Translations on location	Laura Balomiri
Production management	Susanne Berger
Design	Christian Thomas Brand Inspiration e.U.
Producer	Ralph Wieser

PARTICIPANTS

Sadina Lungu, Petronela Her,
Elisabeth Pöschl and others

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