



TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES AND THE IMPACT OF ECONOMIC MIGRATION ON FAMILIES

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Executive Summary

Transnational families are “families [where family members] live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely ‘familyhood’, even across national borders”. The formation of the notion of ‘transnational families’ has emerged acknowledging that migration does not end with settlement and that migrants maintain regular contacts across borders. Moreover, it is more and more common to see a member of the family moving to another country and leaving their family members (including partner, children, elders...) in the country of origin. In these cases, family ties continue to exist but the migration dimension needs to be added and families become social units “à géométrie variable”.

Each family lives and approaches migration differently. However, very often the main motivation behind the choice of moving to another country, is the willingness to improve living conditions for the whole family and, if children are there, to offer them a better future. This is done at the price of separating from family members who will stay in the country of origin.

However, EU migration and integration policies are designed as “migrant-centred”, based on the single individual who is moving and considering his/her specific features (woman, child, worker...) but do not reflect on the family dimension of migration. However, even if a person moves alone, family expectations and family members’ involvement in the migration decision making process is fundamental. Very often, migration is seen as only way to improve family standards of life and assure a better future for children. Not taking into account this family dimension means, therefore, to have a partial view and understanding of the migratory process and may lead to a partial or not focussed policy making.

While being an EU citizen is of a great advantage for transnational families, many of the issues which will be presented in this paper are common to both EU and non-EU families.

The way migrant can access or stay in employment and the type of employment are crucial determinants. Labour market and regulations often limit the possibilities for amelioration of employment conditions of migrants, including difficulties in accessing stable jobs. Current EU migration policies are designed to favour the EU labour market and tend to consider the individual migrant only as a worker, in a utilitarian view.

One sector where transnational families are overrepresented is the care sector. Indeed, a large share of the care work which is externalised outside the family is covered by the employment of migrants, often migrant women, despite the increasing number of men starting working as carers. This movement of care workers may correspond to a care drain in the country of origin and it has consequences on the family members left behind. However, the lack of data on this phenomenon is alarming.

In the same way, being remittances a key factor, they are widely explored and researched. However, too often remittances become the main focus of research, while social consequences and costs are underestimated or not at all taken into account by policy makers.

Last, families living apart do exchange care which is normally exchanged in families living in the same place but they may arrange it differently. In particular, the mobile phone expansion and the development of internet-based platforms of communication have radically improved the possibilities of communicating for transnational families.

1. Framework

The European Commission has recently stated that "migration is now firmly at the top of the European Union's political agenda"¹. However, EU migration and integration policies are designed as "migrant-centred", based on the single individual who is moving and considering his/her specific features (woman, child, worker..) but do not reflect on the family dimension of migration. Nevertheless, even if a person moves alone, family expectations and family members involvement in the migration decision making process is fundamental. Very often, migration is seen as the only way to improve family standards of life and assure a better future for children. Not taking into account this family dimension means, therefore, to have a partial view and understanding of the migratory process and may lead to a partial or unfocused policy making.

a. What is a transnational family?

Transnational families are a new family model which can be characterised by the geographical dispersion of a family because of the migration of one or more of its members who, nevertheless continue to keep tight relationships across borders². Bryceson and Vuorela say that transnational families are "families [where family members] live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely 'familyhood', even across national borders"³.

The formation of the notion of 'transnational families' has emerged acknowledging that migration does not end with settlement and that migrants maintain regular contacts across borders. Moreover, it is more and more common to see a member of the family moving to another country and leaving their family members (including partner, children, elders..) in the country of origin. In these cases, family ties continue to exist but the migration dimension needs to be added and families become social units "à géométrie variable"⁴. Plus, State policies and international regulations influence the maintenance of transnational family solidarity. It is therefore of key importance that family organisations are involved in the discussions around this topic.

b. Why is it linked to (economic) migration?

Each family lives and approaches migration differently. However, very often the main motivation behind the choice of moving to another country, is the willingness to improve living conditions for the whole family and, if children are there, to offer them a better future. This is done at the price of separating from family members who will stay in the country of origin.

Life course events influence and often change initial plans and expectations:

- Temporary residence and separation, which were thought to be short-term, can become long term. In these cases, some families can opt to prolong the separation and to live for longer periods a transnational family life, or they may decide that the best interest of the family is to be reunited in the host country and, therefore, to apply for family reunification.

¹ COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS - The Global Approach to Migration and Mobility {SEC(2011) 1353 final}

² Josiane Le Gall, *Les Cahiers du Gres*, vol. 5, n°1, 2005, p.29-42. <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/010878ar>

³ (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002: 18) in Kilkey and Merla "Transnational Families' Care-Giving Arrangements: towards a situated transnationalism"

⁴ Ambrosini, Bonizzoni, Caneva "Ritrovarsi altrove. Famiglie ricongiunte e adolescenti di origine immigrata" (2010)

- Family expectations and needs are also very influential and may impact on the migrant's decisions to prolong or interrupt his/her employment abroad.
- Possibilities or obstacles of integration in the country of destination can also have a major impact and support decisions such as applying for family reunification or not. If good chances for integration are present and offered, it is more likely that the migrant will consider to bring his/her family members to the host country. On the contrary, if he/she faces constant barriers and obstacles, he/she will tend to prefer to consider his/her migration temporary and not foresee family reunification in the host country.
- Expectations and information at departure about the country of destination play an important role since the real possibilities which are offered there are often unrealistic and the information misleading.

c. Migration and internal mobility

Transnational families may be formed by non-EU citizens who enter the EU but also by EU citizens who move to another EU country to seek employment. Being an EU citizen or not has a strong impact and influence on the existence and formation of transnational families. For EU citizens living in another EU country there is no formal barrier to visit their families in the country of origin or to have their family members joining them in the new country of residence because they can enjoy the EU freedom of movement. Mobility is one of the core EU freedoms and therefore legitimately fostered by EU policies. This however limits the possibility of keeping records and assessing how many transnational families are currently present in Europe. For non-EU citizens, there are a number of conditions that influence choices and ways in which transnational families live their family life. These include: the migrant status (entrance and /or residency with a legal visa or as irregular migrant, meaning having or not the legal possibility of returning to visit family members in the country of origin and/or applying for family reunification), legal employment, administrative and material conditions in order to apply for family reunification.

While being an EU citizen is of a great advantage for transnational families, many of the issues which will be presented in the following pages are common to both EU and non-EU families.

Recommendation 1: Include the family dimension in EU migration policies and agreements the EU establishes with non-EU countries. The EU policy is currently based on the individual migrant and separated families are largely ignored by policy-makers.

Recommendation 2: Long term social consequences of migration should be taken into account and specific policies should be developed. As first step, a research at EU level that would present a clearer picture of the phenomenon of transnational families and provide quantitative and qualitative data, must be initiated and supported.

2. Families and economic migration

a. Migrants' expectation from migration

Why do I come here? What do I expect to find? What are the expectations of my family? I go, make money and come back or I try to establish a new life in the new country? Is it a matter of survival because I am not safe in my country?

Family expectations and the involvement of family members in the decision making process, which varies from culture to culture, influences the approach and the type (permanent/temporary) of migration (or not), and therefore also integration. Information received in the country of origin or by informal sources can be incomplete, inappropriate and misleading.

b. Possibilities of employment are crucial

The EU strategies on migration, including the recent Global Approach on Migration and Mobility - GAMM (2011) clearly indicates that temporary migration, including circular migration shall be supported. The Commission Staff Working Paper published in 2011 explains that "the concept of *circular migration* can thus be defined as repeated cycles of back-and-forth mobility over a period of time for the purpose of economic activity or study, which takes place within a legal framework allowing facilitated re-entry between two or more countries." While clearly stating the willingness to foster temporary and circular migration, especially of high skilled professional, the European Commission recognises that "the risks include separation of families, dependence on foreign labour markets and the lack of long-term integration in the destination country and reintegration in the source country."⁵

Nevertheless, while more and more policies and legislations are put forward in favour of temporary, circular and seasonal workers and workers of the health sector to fill the labour market shortage in the EU, no specific policies are put in place to prevent risks and to protect families.

Labour market and regulations often limit the possibilities for amelioration of employment conditions of migrants, including difficulties in accessing stable jobs. Current EU migration policies are designed to favour the EU labour market and tend to consider the individual migrant only as a worker, in a utilitarian view. Changing their status from temporary to long-term worker is surely not a straight-forward process. As a consequence, many workers who wish to stay in the EU when their temporary contract expires are paradoxically forced into illegal status by the difficulties of changing status.

Temporary workers are also excluded from the possibility of applying for family reunification. Many women migrate and enter the labour market as care workers, caring for children, elders or dependent persons. While their employment can be more stable, other material conditions often limit their possibility to apply for family reunification⁶.

Finally, there are difficulties in adding irregular migrants in to this framework, even though they are often the most marginalised, socially excluded and poor and /or victims of abuse.

⁵ COMMISSION STAFF WORKING PAPER Migration and Development *Accompanying the document* COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE CONCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS The Global Approach to Migration and Mobility {COM(2011) 743 final}

⁶ Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, "Protecting migrant women in the labour market", 24 March 2011

c. The case of care workers: gender, care and "global care chains"

Despite the increasing number of men entering the labour market in the care sector, the vast majority of carers are still women. The care sector has been recognised, in the recent European Commission Communication "Towards a job rich recovery" (2012) to have an important job-creation potential and that "demand for care and household services is expected to increase due to an important trend of population ageing in all Member States, combined with the expected decline of the number of potential carers within the family circle."⁷

The European Commission recognises that a large share of the care work which is externalised outside the family is covered by the employment of migrants, often migrant women⁸. In particular, it shows the importance of the phenomenon, while admitting to the lack of data: "Germany is one of the Member States with the highest level of informal employment in private homes as it is assumed that 90-95% of these activities in private homes are rendered informally. This figure includes informal employment of irregular migrants as well as informal work performed by neighbours, friends and acquaintances. [...] Italy has also a large share of informal employment in private households where most of the domestic work is carried out by irregular immigrants. The actual number of migrant care workers (called "badanti") is unknown, due to the nature of the phenomenon. However, their number is estimated between 0.7 and 1 million which is far higher than the workers in the formal care sector"⁹.

Care workers often live in their place of employment with the person they care for and sometimes also other members of the family. This can make it a "safer" job but expose workers to higher levels of stress (sometimes abuse) and increase difficulties in integrating into the host society.

This movement of care workers may correspond to a care drain in the country of origin and it has consequences on the family members left behind. Many of these carers are women who leave their children and elders behind, trying to provide for them via a job in another country.

The children and elders left behind are often left to the care of other family members (usually mothers, sisters and other women in the family circle)¹⁰ but it is not rare, especially when the family lives in an urban area, that another woman from a rural area is employed to care for the children or elders. This woman who is hired may also be a mother and have left her children behind to the care of someone else. This concept, which was first developed for countries such as the Philippines where migrants are often already mothers, is known as "global care chains"¹¹.

d. Transnational families and family reunification

Leaving family members behind in order to work in another country is mainly seen as a temporary solution. The initial migration plan however can change for a variety of factors, including the possibilities of integrating in the host society for the migrants, the type of work and its stability, personal and family reasons.

⁷ COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT on exploiting the employment potential of the personal and household services *Accompanying the document* COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS Towards a job-rich recovery (2012)

⁸ For a critical analysis of the Commission Staff Working Paper, please refer to the COFACE response to the public consultation, available at: <http://www.coface-eu.org/en/Policies/Family-Social/Policies/>

⁹ See note 5

¹⁰ Ambrosini, Bonizzoni, Caneva "Ritrovarsi altrove. Famiglie ricongiunte e adolescenti di origine immigrata" (2010)

¹¹ Hochschild (2000) in Madianou, Miller, "Mobile phone parenting: reconfiguring relationships between Filipina migrant mothers and their left-behind children" (2011)

During separations, families develop in their own way. There could be a decision to go back home or to bring the rest of the family into the host country. Families, however, can also break down, and new ones can be formed.

In the case of a migrant wishing to reunify with his/her family in the country of destination, there are, as mentioned above, a few issues concerning material and housing conditions, stability of employment etc. which increase difficulties.

Another aspect that is worth considering is, once again, the individual-based approach of family reunification policies.

Legally, the right to family reunification is assured in the EU¹², however, its application is more controversial and what has been designed to be a standard or measure to assure quality life and integration may often be transformed into a real barrier to reunification itself. Therefore there is the creation of a paradox: instead of being considered as a human right and a condition supporting social inclusion of migrants, the possibility to reunify with the family is granted to those migrants who already achieved by themselves a high level of integration¹³. Moreover, these policies do not have a family approach but are based on the material and economic capacity of the individual to sponsor the entry of one or more family members.

Family members are dependent on the person who sponsored them and it may take a long time before they become autonomous (including being able to work).

Integration measures, such as language courses for example, also have an individual approach and do not take into consideration family life. Schedules, timing, attendance requirements are based on the individual and do not have a family friendly approach or take into account family needs (e.g. looking after children, employment..)

Good practice

In Austria, the city of Graz offers special language classes for migrant women and mothers, mainly arriving in Austria for family reunification, where mothers are offered free childcare services while taking the class. This allows women to attend more regularly and have no extra costs for the family. It also serves as an integration support measure as mothers can exchange views, doubts and questions about public services in the host country.

e. Reconciliation of work and family life

Migrants have more specific difficulties in reconciling their work and family life, firstly because when they move for economic reasons they are in their working age, the quality of the employment they are offered is often low and/or with irregular working hours, with sudden changes in workloads (and subsequently sudden increase or decrease of worked hours), they must juggle between multiple part-time jobs and finally, they often do not have social nets to rely on.

For migrant mothers who have their children with them it becomes very difficult to reconcile their work (plus the need to fulfil all integration measures and follow up with the complex administrative procedures linked to their status) with their family life. A research shows that, in Italy, the percentage of women who work full time and have at

¹² For a critical analysis of Family Reunification policies, please read COFACE's response to the Green Paper issued by the European Commission in November 2011 (<http://www.coface-eu.org/en/Policies/Family-Social/Migrant-families/>) and the common statement signed by 75 NGOs on the most critical issues (http://coface-eu.org/en/upload/10_Press/PressreleaseIDF2012COFACE-75NGO-statement.pdf)

¹³ Ambrosini, Bonizzoni, Caneva, "Ritrovarsi altrove: famiglie ricongiunte e adolescenti di origine immigrata" (2010)

least one child with them is about 10% lower than mothers who left their children behind¹⁴.

Finally, it is worth to remind ourselves that supporting reconciliation of family and work life will support and increase the integration of these families and ultimately this will be beneficial for social cohesion and growth.

f. Migrant families and social security

It is very common to see the "abuse" of social benefits by migrants in the public discourse. A recent study on active inclusion of migrants (2011) commissioned by the European Commission and prepared by a team of researchers from the Institute for the Study of Labour (IZA) in Bonn and from the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) in Dublin concluded that "contrary to what many may believe, there is no clear evidence that migrants are particularly welfare prone. In addition, the statistical evidence in most of the studies remains weak or suggests only a tiny magnet-effect of welfare generosity on an inflow of migrants. Based on the data used in this study, when we consider all types of social supports together, the descriptive analysis suggests that migrants do not use social supports more excessively than natives. Migrants are, however, more likely to be in receipt of unemployment related supports in a wide range of countries and also of family-related payments. However, they are less likely to receive old-age and sickness and disability payments. The most clear-cut result to emerge from this element of the analysis was the greater likelihood of migrants being in poverty."¹⁵

Reasons for migrants to be more likely to use employment support include the non-recognition of their diploma from the country of origin, language barriers in accessing a more pertinent job (this being the reason of being able to access only low profile, low quality, low paid and temporary jobs). Access to information and awareness about what their rights are, through formal and informal channels and social nets also contribute to the (non)application of social support.

Good Practice

In Spain, the Association Salud Y Familia has several projects to support migrant families in accessing basic services, including education and health. Lack of and difficult access to information have a huge impact on access to health and education for migrant children and women. Among its projects, Salud Y Familia works on "Care for maternity" a project that involves over 6000 families per year and provides women with support, orientation and counselling and on "Mothers in two countries", especially directed to transnational families.

g. Remittances

When discussing transnational families, remittances represent a key element, due to the fact that earning money to be sent home is for many of these families the reason for being transnational in the first place. However, too often, remittances become the main focus of research, while social consequences and costs are underestimated or not at all taken into account by policy makers.

Being able to provide for the needs of family members at home is of major importance for the migrant. However, this can have some important consequences, including on the role and perceptions of the migrant by his/her family (e.g. impact and symbolic meaning of presents on transnational motherhood), on the level of integration of the migrant in the country of origin and on the economy, both of the country of origin and in the country of destination. The impact of remittances in some countries is so important that

¹⁴ Ambrosini, Bonizzoni, Caneva, "Ritrovarsi altrove: famiglie ricongiunte e adolescenti di origine immigrata" (2010), p.56-57

¹⁵ "Study on Active Inclusion of Migrants - Final Report" Prepared by Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA) and The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) Contract Reference Number: VC/2009/0009 (2011)

it entered the national political debate. In 2010, remittances towards Tajikistan, for example, reached up to 31% of GDP¹⁶. The European Commission highlighted the need of regulating remittances in its recent Global Approach on Migration and Mobility¹⁷.

It is also interesting to consider the differences in remittances between transnational families and a family who reunified. A research in Italy showed that 83% transnational families send back money regularly to the country of origin, whereas in reunified families the percentage goes down to 41%. Those declaring to never send back money are only 5,8% among transnational families and 24% of reunified families. The amount of money sent, the research shows, is also significantly lower¹⁸. Regarding these data, it has to be taken into account that not all members of transnational families would prefer to reunify and bring their family in the host country (because of late age of migration, personal and family projects of being abroad only temporarily). However, it is striking that when families are able to be reunited, they tend to lower the amounts of their income which is sent out of the country. Their income would be used for their lives in the host country, contributing to the local and national economy, and ultimately to the economic growth.

h. Role of employers, local authorities and civil society organisations

Very often when public services are not available or sufficient, civil society organisation are the ones filling the gap, providing services (including counselling, information on visa and administrative procedures, professional orientation..). Local authorities can be the counterpart and may sometimes be able to initiate pilot projects. Employers play a key role as well, considering that transnational families are often a consequence of economic migration.

Recommendation 3: Informed choice. Realistic information should be provided to future migrants in their country of origin. In order to avoid political interference and to ensure credibility and neutrality, official services (embassies, consulates..) should work together with local civil society and family organisations. Referral to and collaboration with local NGOs should be systematic and /or info points could be hosted in official premises to enforce collaboration between public authorities and civil society.

Recommendation 4: Implementation of the Family Reunification Directive should be ameliorated, in order to eliminate barriers. Specific attention should be paid to care workers and to integration measures, which should take into consideration the family life and possibilities for reconciling work and family life. At least one event on transnational families should be organised to raise awareness during 2014: European Year for Reconciling Work and Family Life.

Recommendation 5: Recognition of diplomas and skills acquired through informal and non-formal education (especially in the care sector) must be enhanced. Priority should be given in the allocation of structural funds, especially European Social Fund, and specific action grants to projects aiming to develop migrants' competences. Employers and local authorities should be involved in such actions since their contribution could bring an extremely important added value.

¹⁶ The World Bank, Outlook for remittance flow 2012-14

¹⁷ COMMISSION STAFF WORKING PAPER Migration and Development *Accompanying the document COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE CONCLIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTE OF THE REGIONS* The Global Approach to Migration and Mobility {COM(2011) 743 final}

¹⁸ Ambrosini, Bonizzoni, Caneva, "Ritrovarsi altrove: famiglie ricongiunte e adolescenti di origine immigrata" (2010), p.76

3. Transnational Family Life

With the migration of one of the family members, family life inevitably changes. Communication, decision making, exchange of ideas and feelings may take different forms and go through different channels.

Education, ICT literacy and financial means influence, among other factors, the way that a new communication is shaped. Infrastructure of the country of origin, both means of transport, roads, phone and internet infrastructures have a significant weight in the way the migrant is able to keep in contact with his/her family.

a. Transnational solidarity & transnational motherhood

Recent research shows that the assumption that geographical distance negatively affects kin relationship is not accurate. Transnational families, indeed, exchange all forms of solidarity which are normally exchanged in families living in the same place. However, out of the five dimensions of transnational solidarity, it is recognised that only financial, emotional and practical support can be exchanged transnationally, while personal solidarity and accommodation can only be offered during visits¹⁹. Moreover, four types of involvement in solidarity provision have been identified: (1) direct provision with physical co-presence, (2) direct provision at a distance, (3) coordination of support and (4) delegation of support.

This opens to a vision of care for family members, which is not only limited to direct provision and proximity. In particular: “*Coordination* is essential to the functioning of family networks, and people’s involvement can range from participation in coordination activities (e.g. exchanging information with siblings about institutional care options for a disabled nephew), to taking on the main organizing role for the provision of a particular type of support. Family members can also *delegate* the provision of care to a third person (relative, friend or paid-carer). Delegation can range from complete withdrawal to ‘caring about’ (Fisher and Tronto 1990) the dependent person; staying informed of the level and quality of the care that s/he is receiving.²⁰”

The role of women is particularly important and complex as in many cases they can be care givers and care receivers at the same time (e.g. grandmothers who take care of the grandchildren in the country of origin but become with age in need of care themselves). Another aspect to be taken into account on the gender roles is the perception and emotional behaviour of men joining wives who already work in the destination countries. Traditional division and definition of roles of men and women (men as breadwinners and women as taking care of the house and children) may create difficulties for some men to accept the inversion of roles and them being dependent on their wives, showing that gender equality in the family still needs to be fostered.

Geographical differences exist and they influence the transnational relationships. For example, considering migration towards the EU, long distance migrants such as people coming from Latin America or Asia are more prone to apply for family reunification, while people migrating from eastern Europe (i.e. Ukraine, Moldova..) might keep the transnational relationship for longer periods, mainly because they can visit their country of origin more often and easily²¹.

¹⁹ Merla, “Familles salvadoriennes à l'épreuve de la distance : solidarités familiales et soins intergénérationnels” *Autrepart*, 2011/1

²⁰ Kilkey and Merla “Transnational Families’ Care-Giving Arrangements: towards a situated transnationalism”

²¹ The reasoning is limited to regular migrants. Irregular migrants due to their status may stay for prolonged times without visiting the family even if they come from Eastern Europe.

Another gender dimension: When mothers are the ones moving, they tend to rely more on their own mothers and other female family members for caring for their children, even if the husband or partner is still at home. In the reversed situation, when the migrant is the father, the main caregiver of the children is the mother²².

b. Children's rights and children left behind

The departure of one or both parents clearly affects children and their development. Therefore, this will affect a whole future generation of adults and citizens, Europeans (for east-European moving to other EU countries) and non Europeans. Long term social consequences have to be urgently explored.

The European Parliament recognised this need already in a resolution on "migrant children left behind in the country of origin"²³ which reminds of both the positive aspects of migration but also of the social consequences and calls on the European Commission and the Member States, among others: (1) to undertake a study to assess the extent, at EU level, of the phenomenon of migrants' children left behind in the country of origin and to collect EU-wide data on this phenomenon; (2) to take steps to improve the situation of the children left by their parents in the country of origin and to ensure their normal educational and social development; (3) to set up cooperation mechanisms to prevent the detrimental effects on families (and especially children), of living apart and of the distances they have to bridge; (4) to inform migrants better about their rights and the rights of their family members concerning free movement and about the information available at national and European level on living abroad and the terms and conditions of working in another Member State; (6) to actively involve the social partners and NGOs in actions targeting the improvement of migrants' children.

Up to date, the phenomenon of children left behind is growing and no specific measures have been taken at European Level. In this regard, when considering measures to favour children and their families, all three dimensions of the UN Convention of the rights of the child should be taken into account. Therefore, not only survival and development rights (often called provision) and protection rights but also participation rights. It is, indeed, fundamental, that children are informed and can participate in the decisions that concern them.

Specific attention has, therefore, to be paid on:

- a. The impact of migration on children and their psycho-social development. This includes the risk of identification of parental care with purchase of presents, relationships with the carer in the country of origin, emotional development..
- b. Consequences on education (attendance, performance and risk of dropping out..), health (check-ups and hygiene..) and security
- c. Participation to migration choice /understanding of parents' choice
- d. The small children and teen-agers. Small children may have more difficulties in bonding with a geographically distant parent, but if the parent(s) wish(es) to bring the child abroad, he/she may have less difficulties integrating. On the contrary, reunification is more difficult when a teenage-child is involved²⁴.

²² Ambrosini, Bonizzoni, Caneva, "Ritrovarsi altrove: famiglie ricongiunte e adolescenti di origine immigrata" (2010), p.74

²³ P6_TA(2009)0132 European Parliament resolution of 12 March 2009 on migrant children left behind in the country of origin (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2009-0132+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>)

²⁴ Ambrosini, Bonizzoni, Caneva, "Ritrovarsi altrove: famiglie ricongiunte e adolescenti di origine immigrata" (2010),

e. In some countries children left behind may be institutionalised.

c. ICT /Media parenting

The mobile phone expansion and the development of internet-based platforms of communication have radically improved the possibilities of communicating for transnational families. Communication among family members, including mothers and their left-behind children has always been very dependent on the country of origin's infrastructures (including communication infrastructures such as landlines but also roads and transports for letters) and therefore, very rare and expensive. With the booming of lower-cost and more accessible means of communication such as mobile phones and internet, communication among family members changed considerably. First of all, mothers have the possibility to have constant and regular contact with each family member, thanks to text messages, emails and social networks, increasing privacy in the conversation and fostering day-to-day intimacy and bonding. However, while reaching family members and left-behind children is easier for migrant mothers, the contrary is still quite difficult because in several countries it is still very expensive to call and contact someone in EU member States²⁵.

There are factors which determine the success of transnational communication for the left-behind children, as found in a recent research based on Filipina mothers in the UK: the age of the child during the mother's migration; the quality of the pre-existing relationship; and the media that are available for communication²⁶.

Mobile phones and internet are particularly important for un-documented migrants since mobile phones are easy to buy and this allows them to keep regular contact with their family members, especially because, due to their status they can not afford or risk to cross borders.

The possibility of communicating more often and more personally can influence the migratory project and change the initial plan: mothers who thought of moving only for a few years to earn some money to provide for primary needs of the family left behind may decide to stay longer since they are able to keep good contact with their children and parenting them.

Interviews with children show that they may feel an asymmetry in the possibility of communication. They can be reached at any time, but cannot reach their parent when they wish²⁷. In addition, distance communication may be enough for day-to-day communication, but does it allow mothers to understand that their children are growing, changing? What their environment and challenges may be? Interviews report some examples in which some mothers continue thinking of their children as unchanging and offer them present which are adapted for younger children, often of the age they were when the mother left.

²⁵ Madianou, Miller, "Mobile phone parenting: reconfiguring relationships between Filipina migrant mothers and their left-behind children" (2011)

²⁶ Madianou "Migration, ICTs and the transformation of transnational families (RES-000-22-2266) – Impact Report". Swindon, UK: Economic and Social Research Council (2012)

²⁷ Madianou, Miller, "Mobile phone parenting: reconfiguring relationships between Filipina migrant mothers and their left-behind children" (2011)

Recommendation 6: COFACE fully supports and calls for the implementation of the European Parliament Resolution of 12 March 2009 on the matter of children left behind. A specific research on children left behind, their rights and specifically on their right to live in a family, focussing on parenting support and long distance parenting, should be started as soon as possible with the collaboration of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and EuroFound.

Recommendation 7: COFACE calls on the Commission and Member States to support, including through funding, of projects of local civil society and family organisations and local authorities working with transnational families both in the country of origin and of destination. Specifically, projects offering counselling, information, ICT literacy and access to communication tools...

Recommendation 8: COFACE calls on the Commission and Member States to develop and offer specific training modules on transnational families and their specific issues to immigration officers, social workers, etc.

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