

Dynamics of families  
navigating the  
challenges of  
globalisation and  
transnationalism

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# Transnational Families

Transnational or multisited families refer to “families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely ‘familyhood,’ even across national borders” (Bryceson & Vuorela, [2002](#), p. 3).

Greschke and Ott (2020) have shown that the transnational family as a research topic holds great promise as an exemplary entity for understanding global society (...).

Strategically, this means that transnational family studies now stand as a central perspective in research on migration and global society, not only as a subfield of the sociology of migration and of transnational sociology, but as an exemplary field of study in the sociological as well as normative (rights-oriented) sense.



# Challenges of transnational family research

- the rights perspective in these families: especially the rights of vulnerable people
- the elderly and children less involved in this research
- agency of those left at home



# Reference

Ducu, V., Telegdi-Csetri, Á. (2023). **Transnational Relationships between Romanian Grandparents and Grandchildren: Materiality, Cultural Identity, and Cosmopolitanism**. In: Cienfuegos, J., Brandhorst, R., Fahy Bryceson, D. (eds) Handbook of Transnational Families Around the World. Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-15278-8\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-15278-8_6)

The study focused on observing the relationships between zero–second generation transnational family members—irrespective of which were the ones abroad—through the mutual exchange of physical objects—comprising mostly gifts, pictures, books, and food (65 multi-generational interviews - grandparents/partens, children)



# Types of Materiality Circulating between Transnational Family Members

## Food Items

Those at home (grandparents or grandchildren) through physical objects with the significance and aim of reinforcing elements associated with being Romanian

*... traditional food: jam, pickles, cheese, sausages, all made at home.*

*(Mariana, grandmother, Romania)*

*... I [usually] send him, [and specifically] now for Easter I have sent him [my grandfather] sweet bread, egg paint, since they had none there in England, and I sent him 'pasca'...*

*(Maria, granddaughter, Romania)*



# Types of Materiality Circulating between Transnational Family Members

## Food Items from the destination areas

Migrant family members - offering those at home an openness to other lifestyles:

*... [I send food] in order for my grandmother also to taste English dishes.*

(Nelu, grandson, abroad)

*... I send more stuff with an Italian character, since it is normal ... but also things of strict necessity that they need.*

(Vasilica, grandmother, abroad)



## **Meanings Transmitted through Materiality: Rights**

Through the materiality of transnational relations, children and the elderly as transnational family members exercise their right to family, as stated in Article 8 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), along with the right to access their own culture as stated in Article 30. Furthermore, within the transnational relationships between grandparents and grandchildren, the obligation of grandparents to provide direction and guidance to their grandchildren, as stated in Article 5, is also tentatively fulfilled.

These rights exercise is evidenced, first, through family relations maintenance across generations; second, through grandparents' rect access to the dominant culture of the child's environment. Thus, a bridge is created between those in Romania and those living or born abroad.



# Reference

Ducu, V., Hărăguș, M., Angi, D., & Telegdi-Csetri, Á. (2023). **Asserting children's rights through the digital practices of transnational families.**

Family Relations, 72(2), 458–477.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12828>

CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND BY LABOUR MIGRATION: SUPPORTING  
MOLDOVAN AND UKRAINIAN TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES IN THE EU:  
2021-2023

(102 semistructured interviews and 10 focus group discussions with adults and children in transnational families and caregivers, and 24 interviews with experts)





# Asserting children's rights through the digital practices of transnational families (UA and MD)

Parents in transnational families fulfil their parental responsibilities, even from a distance (Article 27 of the UNCRC), thus giving priority to the best interests of their children (Article 3).

**External rights:** how the virtual environment facilitates or hinders the actions of migrant parents in their relationship with institutions and authorities (Article 18).



# Asserting children's rights through the digital practices of transnational families (UA and MD)

**Internal rights** at the level of the family itself, i.e. how parents and children act cohesively in managing transnational life.

How interactions between migrant parents and children left at home are shaped by access to communication technologies and by parents' working conditions and schedules: these processes affect the exercise of children's right to family integrity and to maintain relationships with family members (Article 9) and children's right to maintain contact with both parents, even if they live in different countries (Article 10).

In this vein, the limits of online communication for family-making are observed in Moldovan and Ukrainian transnational families.



# Transnational families' awareness of legal matters: Online and offline information tools

Often, for various reasons such as lack of skills or perceived unreliability of internet information sources, parents do not use the online environment to learn about the obligations or rights resulting from their status as migrant parents, preferring to go and ask directly, or to call the relevant authorities and verify the information:

*“I am not so [used] to the Internet, I’d rather call the City Hall or connect with people. On the Internet, I can only look up some new food, but what is linked to documentation – no. ... No, I haven’t communicated, maybe I skimmed through the existing rules [i.e., online], like in a rush. But I called Social Services or the City Hall ... and went there in person.”* (caregiver, woman, Moldova)



# Transnational families' awareness of legal matters: Online and offline information tools

Access to internet and technology Ukrainian and Moldovan labor migrants, not being EU citizens, do not enjoy free roaming services and mobile internet from the home country, and the entitlement to an advantageous internet subscription in the destination country is not easy to obtain. Some of them are dependent on the Wi-Fi networks in their accommodation, a fact that restricts the migrant parent's availability to their children at home. In order to speak with his child, a Ukrainian parent used to run from work to the hostel where he lived, because it was the only option for online access. Another Ukrainian parent, who also relies on the Wi-Fi provided by his accommodation, reports,

*“I can't afford mobile Internet, because I am saving money”*  
(migrant father of a daughter aged 14, Ukraine).



# Labor, temporalities, and digital interaction

The nature of their work, the working schedule, and time differences hamper the permanent connectivity between migrant parents and their family members back home:

*“We spoke once every 2–3 days, depending on his schedule. If he worked until late at night, we could speak to each other once every 3–4 days. If he worked the second shift, we spoke a little in the morning or evening. Not very often.”* (caregiver, mother of a daughter aged 14 and a son aged 17, Moldova)

However, even in conditions of changing working hours, migrant parents make efforts to ensure a permanent communication with their children back home:

*“[We speak] generally every day or the day after, necessarily. Here we work in three shifts and sometimes I work from morning to evening, or from noon until the night or all night. I call them before I go to work if it is a normal hour to call. If I call and they don’t answer, they are sleeping.”* (migrant mother of a son aged 14 and an older daughter, Moldova)



# Limits of online communication for doing family

Virtual communication, especially when it does not rely on a solid history of good relationship, cannot fully replace face-to-face interactions and might create distorted expectations and representations of the other. For a migrant mother, the reunion with her son after a 6-year absence meant

*“a new start in getting to know each other because, in the meantime, we both grew, me as a mother, he as a child, so it was a bit hard because we needed to know each other as two strangers, although we spoke regularly on the phone, but it is a different thing to hear on the phone than living together”.* (migrant mother of a son aged 5 at the time of her departure, Moldova)



# Limits of online communication for doing family

When children know their parents exclusively from virtual communication, as they were very young at the time of migration, the reality of a face-to-face encounter may create negative feelings. One caregiver told us about a conversation between a girl in the first grade and her teacher:

*“‘Why are you crying?’ ‘Because my mother is coming from Israel (or Turkey I think).’*

*‘But why are you crying, you should be happy?’ and she responded, ‘But I don’t know my mother!’”* (caregiver, woman, speaking about a girl aged 7, Moldova).



# Recommendations

Family togetherness, exercise of parental responsibilities, and support for children's participation in digital communication should be enhanced on both ends as well as within and without the family. On behalf of state authorities, reliable and up-to-date online information and consistent openness for digital communication are necessary preconditions. Further, families' capacity for digital communication should be supported by such measures as free online communication centers in areas in need, provision of communication kits, and investment in the telecommunication infrastructure. Employers could offer convenient phone and internet access packages and more connectivity between working hours to migrant parents. Most importantly, periodic mutual visits must be supported to ensure regular physical togetherness. In addition, campaigns for the promotion of child participation, trust building with state authorities, and enhancement of digital skills of family members are advised.





# Reference

Ducu, Viorela, Áron Telegdi-Csetri, and Mihaela Hărăguș. 2024. **“Local and Transnational Participation of Families with Stay-Behind Children in the Hybrid Transnational Social Protection Nexus.”** *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*: 4279–4297.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2024.2357829>.



# Source of Social Protection

Levitt and collaborators (2023): four foundations of social protection in a transnational context:

1. the logic of citizenship,
2. the logic of personhood/humanity,
3. the logic of market
4. the logic of community.



# Citizenship-based social protection

Because states fail to ensure an acceptable quality of life, indeed survival, migration for work remains the only viable solution in the short term, especially for families with children:

*We all work, but the salaries are small, that's the biggest problem. [...] to talk is one thing, but when you live it, it is different. When your child asks [for things] and you don't have things to give, this is painful. (Migrant father, MD)*

*The fact that our parents were going abroad to work ensured our financial security. In case something happened, we had somewhere to take [money] from. For many parents, financial security is above feelings. (Girl, 17 years old, MD)*



# Personhood-based social protection

In several cases of crisis, especially due to the war, but also others, such as the COVID pandemic or individual situations, migrants resort to social protections such as human rights; however, this is otherwise a remote possibility (since they see themselves as functional agents). One good example is the temporary protection status within the EU granted to citizens after the outbreak of the war, which sets an example and an expectation for Moldovans, too.

*We don't claim to be refugees, we don't want to stay here. Not here, not in Europe, in another country. We really want to go home. And therefore, for me personally, this temporary protection is enough. It gives me the opportunity to be here, not to hide, not to hide my children, but just officially stay until I can go home to a peaceful Ukraine. I don't know, for me, this is the only thing that [lets me] safely move around here and not be afraid that I am illegal. (Caregiver, woman, UA Refugee)*



# Market-based social protection

The acquisition of market-based social protection is one of the main and most common rationales of labour migration

*Our eldest son [...] always has either a leg fracture, or something else ... , with his things, with football. [...] I took out private insurance for them and if there was an emergency, they went to [a private clinic] or other clinics. (Migrant mother, MD).*

*The parents themselves told us that they were planning to go abroad, and they consulted with us about whether we wanted to stay with our grandparents. As a family, we had financial problems, so they left. We stayed here because school, medicine, and food are cheaper. (Boy, 14 years old, UA).*



# Community-based social protection

Transnational families use ‘informal networks, family and friends, NGOs, churches or religious organisations, in both home or migration country’ (Levitt et al. 2017; 2023). However, transnational families in Ukraine and Moldova rarely receive support from NGOs, churches or religious organisations in their home country.

*In France, there are associations that help you with food and clothes [...] which can help you save money when you first arrive here. [...] Foreigners should, on their arrival, be given these ads from associations that help people arriving in France. (Migrant father, MD).*



# Conclusions

- The relational functioning of transnational family practices shows that the family is a platform of co-agency of family members (Ducu et al., 2024).



# Conclusions

- [Advocacy Video : How can we tackle the problem of the rights of children "left behind" by migrating parents](#)
- <https://youtu.be/QGL-okbvYFY>

