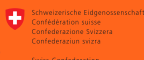ACP **OBSERVATORY ON MIGRATION**
OBSERVATOIRE ACP SUR LES MIGRATIONS
OBSERVATÓRIO ACP DAS MIGRAÇÕES

Transnational families and the social and gender impact of mobility in ACP countries

Background Note

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ACP Observatory on Migration

The ACP Observatory on Migration is an initiative of the Secretariat of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States, funded by the European Union, implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in a Consortium with 15 partners and with the financial support of Switzerland, IOM, the IOM Development Fund and UNFPA. Established in 2010, the ACP Observatory is an institution designed to produce data on South–South ACP migration for migrants, civil society and policymakers and enhance research capacities in ACP countries for the improvement of the situation of migrants and the strengthening of the migration–development nexus.

The Observatory was established to facilitate the creation of a network of research institutions and experts on migration research. Activities are starting in 12 pilot countries and will be progressively extended to other interested ACP countries. The 12 pilot countries are: Angola, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Kenya, Lesotho, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Senegal, Timor-Leste, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United Republic of Tanzania.

The Observatory has launched research and capacity-building activities on South–South migration and development issues. Through these activities, the ACP Observatory aims to address many issues that are becoming increasingly important for the ACP Group as part of the migration–development nexus. Documents and other research outputs and capacity-building manuals can be accessed and downloaded free of charge through the Observatory's website (www.acpmigration-obs.org). Other upcoming publications and information on the Observatory's activities will be posted online.

ACPOBS/2012/BN06

ACP

Transnational families and the social and gender impact of mobility in ACP countries

The intraregional phenomenon of transnational family formation and reunification across African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) States reflects a global issue that has not been addressed much on the migration and development agenda. In overall migration policies and debates, the social impacts of migration have received limited attention so far. In particular the positive and negative social effects of mobility on families whose members are based in more than one country need to be taken into consideration.

The most striking observation is the **little existing research on transnational families in the South, with most literature on transnational family migration focusing on South–North** movements. This phenomenon remains largely unknown due to limited data on its scope coupled with a lack of an adequate policy and legal framework in many countries. There is also a possible link between South–North and South–South transnational family migration.

Transnational families and ties are constantly established, maintained, re-configured and curtailed over time and borders. This background note therefore starts by discussing the definition of 'transnational family' and 'transnationalism'. The second part presents some general types of social impacts of mobility on different members of a transnational family and tries to discuss the possible application in a South–South and ACP migration context. The brief then provides some conclusions, recommendations and good practices for policy makers in ACP countries. No generalizations are possible, as the social impact depends on different factors, such as social class, gender and access to legal entry, cultural practices, the integration into the global economy, political changes and geographical distance (Orellana et al., 2001).

In South Africa,
- **1 out of 4 households had one member working abroad**,
- **4 out of 10 in rural areas** (SAMP, 2004)

This number is even higher for
- **rural households in Tanzania (50-60%)**
- **and Mali (80%)** (Tacoli, 2002)

Transnational families in the South are largely neglected in research and policy, calling for an increased focus on this perspective

1. Definition and data on social impacts of mobility on 'transnational families'

Families in western societies are understood as at least two members of a household living in the same residence, related by blood, marriage or adoption (see for instance Bauman, 1997). This can therefore include small units such as (single) parents and their children, or wider relatives living in the same dwelling or being generally related to each other. Those members of the household not related to the other members are not considered as being part of the family.[1]

> **Definition of 'transnational families'**
>
> **"Families [whose 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"**
> (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002: 3)

Whereas a **Western concept of family** tends to include only small, nuclear units centered on the married couple, in **many African societies, communities and cultures 'family' may extend to a large kinship network** in the same village or community.

In West Africa, for instance, families are built around descent, thus brothers and sisters living together. Once married, the spouse moves in with the bride or groom, depending on the prevailing rule of lineage. They do not constitute separate households per se but may represent relatively autonomous units of production and consumption. **Spouses are often not considered to be part of the family** (Oyewumi, n.d.) yet are often still bound by kinship ties, which makes the distinction family/non-family sometimes rather difficult.

These larger families can also exist across borders. The definition of '**transnational families**' developed by Bryceson and Vuorela (2002:3, see text box) indicates the need for a **common link and bonds** between members of a family that are dispersed in more than one country.

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1   This traditional conception of 'family' thus leaves out more contemporary forms such as cohabitation as well as non-family living arrangements, which are consequently not covered by this Note. Studying changing family compositions in ACP countries due to potentially lesser marriage rates would need to be covered by more research. The note equally does not cover 'astronaut' parents developed by Skeldon (1994) as it mostly relates to South–North migration of Asian families with one parent staying behind in the origin country.

'**Transnationalism**' in itself is defined as 'the process whereby people **establish and maintain socio-cultural connections across geopolitical borders**.' (IOM, 2011 in ACP Observatory, 2011) 'Transnational families' can then be understood as collective kinship relations with 'residential nodes' (Bjeren, 1997: 237) in at least two countries. These residential units are not static but may change over time in terms of composition through family members immigrating, emigrating and returning. In addition, the households may change due to family formation and changing working arrangements (Zontini, 2002, cited in Zontini, 2007). The element of **transnationalism** of these families **therefore challenges the notion of shared residency in families** being separated geographically, but **maintaining social, cultural, reproductive and income links** across borders (Zontini, 2007). The following are some examples of transnational families:

- Fathers leaving families behind to work abroad and unite with wife and children later on;

- Children and young people going to (boarding) school abroad and/or studying abroad (sometimes referred to as 'parachute kids'; Ong, 1999) and for instance their mothers accompanying them, such as in East and Southeast Asia[2] (Huang and Yeoh, 2005);

- (Single) women working abroad, for instance as maids, having to leave their children behind;

- Family reunification;

- One family member returning to care for the elderly;

- A child being sent away to live with relatives,[3] etc.

An important element of families, the sharing of material and financial resources such as income (Bauman, 1997; Schmalzbauer, 2010), becomes transnational in families residing in more than one country. One or more family members, be it a parent(s), siblings or adult children, may be earning income abroad and send parts of it as remittances to family members in other countries. These recipients may focus on the functions of reproduction, socialization and consumption (Parreñas, 2001).

Transnational families is a dynamic phenomenon in ACP countries but the **lack of reliable data on family migration** disaggregated by sex and age continues to be a challenge

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2 The United Nations definition of South–Eastern Asia includes Timor-Leste, a Pacific ACP country.

3 For the case of children in West Africa, please see a case study on Senegal (Coulibaly-Tandian, 2012).

Migrants, in particular women, are **often engaged in both reproduction and income earning activities**, which is an **important element of maintaining transnational families**. Kinship and care work circulating in the families are supporting factors in this regard (Zontini, 2007). **Creating, keeping these ties alive** and breaking with other members of the family are the basis of transnational families (Bryceson and Vourela, 2002). Geographical distance does not preclude the subjective maintenance of close family relations in terms of emotions and trust (Zontini, 2007).

2. Background and types of social impacts of transnational family life

Transnational families are a common feature of migration, not just in ACP countries. They range from global professional elites to poor migrant workers and are linked to the increase in migration worldwide, but also overall globalization of production (Zontini, 2007). While it was long believed that migrants tend to take a unilateral decision to migrate, this has been complemented by a family perspective over the past years (GFMD, 2010).

Transnational families in the South are also linked to the global care chain – be it by generating **new South–South or internal migration** in ACP countries

Transnational families in the South are also linked to **men migrating for work, alone or with parts of the family.** The tasks in the household may then be passed on to the wife.

Among transnational families, the largest and less privileged group is represented by migrant workers, in particular low-skilled ones. In this group, the development of transnational families is a phenomenon among others **closely linked to the global care chain** and growing business competition under globalization. The demand for cheap and flexible caretakers in developed countries is often filled by women from developing countries (Gagnon and Khoudour-Castéras, 2011; Zontini, 2007). As these workers most of the times live with the family they work for and due to increased immigration restrictions in many destination countries, including developing countries, many of these care workers have to leave their families in the origin country (Hochschild, 2001; Parreñas, 2001).

The chain does not only include passing domestic tasks from western women to migrant women from the South. The 'global economy of care' (Parreñas, 2005) also includes migrant women then needing non-migrant women to take care of their own family (Zontini, 2007; Kofman and Raghuram, 2009; Hujo and

Piper, 2010). This is an **important South dimension**. Women from poorer ACP countries may work for families in better situated families and countries, such as African immigrant women in South Africa and migrant care workers in other emerging countries in Asia and Latin America (Gagnon and Khoudour-Castéras, 2011). This **link between South–North entailing repercussions on possibly rural-urban and South–South migration** has not been extensively looked at yet. It seems an important phenomenon to analyze, in particular given the rising importance of a class of 'newly rich' and the middle class reported in many African and emerging countries creating demand for migrant domestic workers both from within countries and abroad (Gagnon and Khoudour-Castéras, 2011).

Changing values and identity issues

Migrants' values may change, and their return or diaspora activities may alter traditional culture and norms (Chappell and Sriskandarajah, 2007). New cultures and customs at destination can lead to a reassessment of the migrant's own ideas and life style, which can affect the interaction with other family members, both at destination and other countries that family members may reside in. The effect of transnational family life can also include **changing norms**, such as considering a transnational lifestyle as normal (IOM, 2010b). **Socialization** may take place based on at least two socio-cultural contexts – those of the origin and destination(s). Children that may never return to their parents' country of origin may grow up in a context where the ever-present culture, people, values and (nostalgia) goods are from the origin country of their parents (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004).

This can lead to **issues related to 'identity'**, being the 'immigrant' and 'other' at destination despite considering themselves part of the society and 'those that left' in the origin community. This 'kind of doubled otherness' (Vuorinen, 2003: 71) is being defined as 'different' everywhere and often based on ethnicity, mother tongue and other criteria. This **'forced otherness'** (Vuorinen, 2003: 72) may be quite a challenge in particular for middle-aged migrants who do not fully feel they 'arrived' in the host society. Younger children, who often learn new languages a lot faster and are thus harder to distinguish as immigrants by language may not consider it as a problem, despite the possible difficulties of defining who they are and where they belong (Vuorinen, 2003).

Changing family structures and social networks

The decision to migrate can be based on where members of the family or community or circle of friends migrated to. Migration can be part of the **resource and security strategy of a family**, **where different family members are assigned different tasks.** These can range from taking up higher education (often young men) to taking care of children of migrants or other family members that migrated (often women), as in the case of Somalis in Egypt and North America, thus combining South–South and South–North migration within a family. Resources, such as income, legal status and education of individual family members are factors that can be taken into consideration in collective decisions to determine 'which family member lives with whom and where' (Al-Sharmani, 2007: 5).

Migration may **impact on traditional social networks**, by altering both the **actual composition** of groups and networks, and by **altering the power** which each member holds. 'Broken' households may lead to new social problems (Chappell and Sriskandarajah, 2007). **Care regimes** within households and wider family networks may change from parents to grandparents or relatives, from children to parents taking care of children of adult migrants.

The social impact of migration on members of transnational families

- **Families as a whole**

The **impact of migration depends on the member of the family** and **can differ** substantially through gendered differences in power, status and age (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004; de Haas and Fokkema, 2009). The decision of who will migrate may be taken jointly by the family, only the head of the family or the migrant without consulting the other members. Tasks are being re-negotiated within the family and possibly based on changed power positions of the different members. Those with financial resources or parental authority may have more to say than others (Al-Sharmani, 2007). While **some members may arrive at greater freedom and empowerment** from family and wider social constraints through migration, others, for instance if assigned the care of children, the sick or the elderly, can **feel that obligations were shared unevenly** between those that migrate and those that do not (Al-Sharmani, 2007). This difference can even amount to exploitation, when the more affluent members of a family rely on an extended kinship network for cheap labour at destination (Bagwell, 2008).

Parental power can diminish when children know the local language better and often speak like native-speakers faster than their parents (Orellana et al., 2001; Vuorinen, 2003). This often also leads to faster integration and can represent a notion of changing and new power for children *vis-à-vis* their parents by acting as mediators and interpreters in the public (Vuorinen, 2003).

The impact of transnational family life can also be tense in the case of remittance-receivers. Those remitting may feel a certain **'social obligation to remit'** (Melde and Schicklinski, 2011: 6), while those on the receiving end may feel **dependent** on (an)other family member(s). In some cases recipients may **lose incentives to engage in productive work**, as has been reported anecdotally for husbands of female migrants from Cape Verde in Italy. Although this migration does not concern South–South mobility, it highlights an important economic dependency on the performance of one migrant for the well-being of an entire family.

- **Migrants at destination**

Social effects on migrants and their family members in the host country may be quite frequent due to the **feeling of loneliness, depression, exclusion and missing of emotional contact** with family and friends. **Prolonged separation** from other family members is a factor often underestimated. Transnational contacts can help to sustain mental and psychological health as they can play an important role for the psychological well-being, social support and identity of migrants (Mahalingam, 2006; GFMD, 2010).

Undocumented migrants often endure hardships to ensure their children are offered a better life (style), education and health care and relief them from the burden to support the family through work, for instance subsistence farming

Care of family members is achieved despite being dispersed in different countries and extends to 2nd and 3rd generation-migrants.

Care can be **cross-generational** (between adult children and ageing parents; parents and children; and grandparents and grandchildren) and **intra-generational** (among siblings, for instance)

(Zontini, 2006)

Transnational families can show a remarkable resilience to the challenges of migration as a socio-economic strategy:

- **they can offer both emotional and financial support for its members**
- **keep close ties and**
- **reproduce despite physical separation**

(Pribilsky, 2004). **Often migrants do not expect any problems and sacrifices** when settling in the destination country, which can complicate the integration process (Huang and Yeoh, 2005).

Another aspect of migrating is the possible increase of **social power** due to a privileged status among the family members by providing income, having been chosen to migrate or migrating in itself which can always entails losses in income and (work) status. These personal gains and losses directly influence the social status within a family.

The factors **race, class and gender may change** through the migration process. Gender roles may be changed through changing heads of households, reinforced or reinvented or create tensions with the predominant ones in the host country (IOM, 2010c). A migrant may suddenly find him- or herself being part of the ethnic minority or majority in the host country. Those carrying out low-skilled work may in fact by highly skilled in their home countries (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004).

- **Partners/couples**

From the existing evidence of South–North migration, partners are often affected in a gendered way by transnational family experiences. Some find that families where mothers emigrated are more affected by negative stress than when the father migrates. In the latter couples redefined roles and arrangements for the family life and the **relationship of the partners improved** due to the increased need to cooperate and coordinate despite the hardships throughout the process (Pribilsky, 2004). However, when men migrate, wives often assume the care role, which hardly ever occurs the other way around. Mothers often rely on alternative care networks, most often consisting of other women (Schmalzbauer, 2010).

Spouses moving without their partners may also have to **re-adjust to the life of a *de facto* 'single',** despite only for the period abroad. Whether the man or the wife migrated, this may include taking on domestic chores traditionally by men seen as female roles. Women would take on the extra responsibilities of the head of household such as ensuring the farming production and other income generating activities and managing income, including remittances (Pribilsky, 2004). Thus the **phenomenon of transnational families questions the material inequalities between men and women** predominant in many societies, including ACP countries (Parreñas, 2005). Poorer and land-less family members may be asked to substitute for the emigrant partner. The redefinition

of roles can lead to exchange between the couple on these new roles, such as men calling for advice on cooking and washing clothes (Schmalzbauer, 2010). This however may entail negative feedback from others from the society at origin, considering men cleaning, cooking and doing the laundry as having lost the 'respect' of their wife and children (Pribilsky, 2004: 318).

These processes of negotiating (gender) roles in the family are by no means easy, but could lead to greater freedom of women and men from traditional gender roles (Zontini, 2007). Transnational family life can present a means to **leave an unsatisfactory and abusive relationship** (Zontini, 2002 cited in Zontini, 2007).

To which extent gender roles in South–South transnational families change would need to be studied

The **challenges** of transnational space include **keeping the marriage alive** despite living apart from each other and **remaining faithful to the partner** during the long absences. Migration can be a factor for **spousal abandonment, separation and divorce**. Fear of abandonment can be an issue related to the stigma around losing a husband and not being able to provide economically for children. An absent partner can lead to feelings of loneliness, depression and loss of motivation for partners staying behind (Pribilsky, 2004; Huang and Yeoh, 2005). Polygamous marriages, where for instance men take a new wife in the destination country or reunite in the destination country with another wife only, can lead to resentment among the other wives.

Providing better for children is often how success of a transnational family is judged for both parents

How affected one is by transnational family life varies as well. Those at destination may be busy with settling in and understanding a different way of life, where at origin remaining in touch may be a lot more cumbersome (such as by trying to establish a phone connection or traveling a long ways to receive remittances). **Deliberately not communicating** with the partner is a way of **pressuring the other or reacting to behaviour** by the spouse that is being disapproved that way (Pribilsky, 2004). The other partner often takes on the role of mediator between the absent parent and the children, explaining the absence abroad and its reasons. Therefore, often not the amount of power changes, but more its manifestations (Pribilsky, 2004).

- **Mothers/women**

'Transnational motherhood' (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997) is especially **draining for mothers who have to leave their children behind** in the origin country. This may be due to immigration restrictions or the nature of the work, such as living with a family in the case of maids, which also applies to a South–South context. Many of these mothers need to get used to the painful family separation and the **feeling of not 'being a good mother'**. Most societies stress the key link between mothers and their children, which increases the burden of mothers migrating as single breadwinner (Parreñas, 2001; 2005; Schmalzbauer, 2010).

However, by children being one of the main reasons for their migration to support them economically, offering them better education, health care and a higher life standard in general, some mothers **question the conventional idea of 'mothering'** (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997; Parreñas, 2001). Contrary to many migrant fathers, Filipina domestic workers are found to still provide care and take on responsibility for their children from across thousands of kilometers away, including destinations in the Middle East, the Americas and Asia (Parreñas, 2005). At the same time they can realize their own aspirations, an important aspect of the increasing 'feminization' of migration.

- **Fathers/men**

Just as women, many men migrate to support their children. '**Transnational fatherhood' becomes difficult** as the **common cultural notions of the relationship between fathers and children being built on respect**, and not a very close bond, is difficult to uphold over long distances. This is the case of Filipino transnational families, including in the South (Parreñas, 2005). Some may try to enforce a rather patriarchal relationship, which proves difficult in light of long absences and when children hardly or do not know their father at all prior to emigration. This complicated relationship may then last until adolescence. Other fathers may distance themselves from their children, also in light of not knowing how to best approach them (Pribilsky, 2004).

Yet transnational family life can also offer men to **break-out of the traditional discipline-based relationships to care and establish an emotional bond with their children**. This could be considered more modern and progressive than traditional father-children ties (Pribilsky, 2004). However, Parreñas (2005) found in Filipino transnational families the patriarchal conventions were more often reinforced than contested.

- **Children/following generations**

The separation of the family across transnational space can particularly **negatively affect children staying behind** (GFMD, 2010). This can include psycho-social difficulties such as feelings of abandonment, low self esteem, anger, depression and/or material obsession that could result in behavioral problems (Bakker, Elings-Pels and Reis, 2009). If children, in particular adolescents, are not involved in the decision-making process of who migrates and where, feelings of resentment towards their parents or father in particular may be the consequence, especially when the education goals for them did not materialize or were devaluated due to high youth unemployment (de Haas and Fokkema, 2009). Missing their parents may be a very painful experience for children of an emigrant(s) (Pribilsky, 2004).

Other challenges include inadequate **nutrition, shelter, clothing, proper adult supervision** and care (IOM, 2010a). Children may also feel obliged to adapt to the 'host family' they are staying with, in particular when these do not receive any material reimbursement from the children. The children may however contribute to the housework and other labour. Reactions and **coping mechanisms also differ by gender** as boys tend to externalize their feelings, while girls internalize their pain, such as in cases in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. Some children may also have to take on the role of parents for other siblings, the so-called '**parentification**' (Bakker, Elings-Pels and Reis, 2009:10). Children staying behind may also have to drop out of school to work to make up for the missing income by parents who migrated and which cannot be offset by remittances, as observed in Haiti (Bakker, Elings-Pels and Reis, 2009). Migration can also be used as a **disciplinary measure** by parents or communities in transnational families, threatening or using the threat of sending children back to the origin country (Orellana et al., 2001).

Lower school performance, even **losing the right to education** in case of undocumented migrants, **no access to health care** and the inability to register newborns are also noticeable effects of migration on children (GFMD, 2010). According to ippr (2010), the evidence on the effects of absent parents on school attendance of children is not conclusive as the lower school enrollment of younger children in Jamaica is not clearly attributable to migration as the only cause.[4] A higher vulnerability to sexual abuse and exploitation once one

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4 Another interesting effect is the large out-migration of care workers on the ability to care for the children staying in the origin country. With high emigration rates of tertiary educated as in the Caribbean not enough care workers remain to supervise children (Gagnon and Khoudour-Castéras, 2011).

or both parents are absent has been found for cases in the Caribbean[5] (Bakker, Elings-Pels and Reis, 2009).

If **family reunification** takes place at a certain point, it can be perceived as both a **gain and loss** as the relationship with the person who took the place of the parents in the care for the child(ren) can be lost in this process or become transnational as well (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Transnational childhoods of moving back and forth between countries are a phenomenon to take into consideration, while few may actually have the resources to do so and many may only be able to stay in contact via phone or electronic communication (Orellana et al., 2001; Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Parreñas, 2005).

However, as usually the context matters and generalizations run the **risk of stigmatizing transnational family arrangements**. 'Broken' families and migrant parents, especially mothers, are often blamed for behavioural and educational problems of children, which may have occurred without the migration process as well**. Ending the transnational character of family life is often not an option due to the dependence on remittances** as an income. The poorest often also do not have the means to reunite the family and are thus more affected by family disintegration (Gagnon and Khoudour-Castéras, 2011). 'Abandonment' may also be a very strong word in situations where children are **provided emotional support** through regular phone calls, letters, audio tapes, video recordings and care packages, in addition to remittances which are often the primary reason for the migration in the first place. The **role of the extended family** in care arrangements and assuming parental roles and responsibilities should not be underestimated (Pribilsky, 2004; Parreñas, 2005).

Children in families where the mother emigrated seem to be affected more than in transnational families were the father is away. This can be attributed to the **difficulty to accept the changed role of mothers as more of an economic provider and less of a caretaker** (Parreñas, 2005; Schmalzbauer, 2010).

In contexts of large out-migration, **mobility in itself can become a social benchmark in adolescence**. The formation of transnational families can therefore influence others as well as children of transnational families in aspiring to migrate themselves as the realization of a dream. This can include marrying and having children themselves first (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004;

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5   This impact is gendered as well. In the Caribbean, it was found that when the mother emigrates, the rates of abuse of a physical, emotional or sexual nature are higher for the children staying in the origin country.

Pribilsky, 2004). In other cases it can include **second or third-generation transnational migrants** who never migrated but after marriage or when having children may **activate the links to their transnational past** (IOM, 2010b). This can include looking for a spouse or teaching certain values to their children (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004).

• **The elderly**

Grandparents, in particular grandmothers, can take on a **care role in nurturing their grandchildren** until they are reunited with their parents. Depending on their availability, health and work they are engaged in, grandparents may in some cases be of support to both parents, in particular if the father stays behind, and grandchildren (Cheianu-Andrei et al., 2011). Grandparents may also play an important role in hosting grandchildren during the summer or take care of them while the parents are at work (Vuorinen, 2003). It is however not studied if they also have to migrate for paid work in the case of death of parents, including through HIV/AIDS, or in case of care for grandchildren with the disease (Kofman and Raghuram, 2009).

Migration may impact the elderly and other family members staying behind psychologically as well. The migration of their children exposes the elderly to a wide range of emotions generated by **loneliness and helplessness**. However, **taking care of their grandchildren may make them feel better and compensates for their feelings of loneliness**. In societies where children are considered a provision for one's old age, the emigration of children can lead to a loss of trust and confidence by their elderly parents. Nonetheless, new information technology can facilitate transnational caregiving.

The elderly are often forgotten, yet take on roles as both caregivers and receivers in transnational families (Kofman and Raghuram, 2009)

Migrants abroad may also worry about their parents who stayed in the origin country, wanting or not to move to the destination country as well. The rural/urban divide may play a role, such as parents having lived in the country side all of their life may not be ready to move to a city apartment in another country when they are old (Vuorinen, 2003).

- **The social impact of modern telecommunication**

Migration may also lead to the strengthening of social networks through information technology, including keeping in touch with family members residing in other countries. Whereas a few decades ago information and communication technology (ICT) was rudimentary and expensive, today many transnational families can benefit from phones, computers, internet-based tools such as digital cameras, video chat and international phone cards. Skype is probably the most common means to virtually connect in lieu of geographical proximity. **ICTs** and **social networks help to overcome geographical distance, national boundaries and time by reinforcing (emotional) connectivity and identities** of individuals and family members.

Bacigalupe and Lambe (2011) **go as far as calling ICT's 'a new family member' in transnational families, a source of social capital, fostering discourses and helping to create a sense that loved ones are present. This can include messaging between cell phones creating a feeling of co-presence and transnational caregiving.**

Despite the majority of migrants being lower-skilled and thus economically not the most affluent, they adopted ICT means of communicating early on. This can be linked to the fact that **new phone technologies have overcome access barriers that other technologies**, such as radio, newspapers, land phone lines and the internet faced. Cell phones are nowadays widespread, even in remote locations where often cell phone stands exist for the use of whole villages and communities, including in many ACP countries (Bacigalupe and Lambe, 2011). However, still not every family has access to phones and internet in many ACP countries as it concerns a question of access/coverage and available resources.

3. Recommendations and good practices

3.1   Research

Despite being a global phenomenon, **transnational families and social policies in the South are under-researched.** As South–South mobility takes place in very different framework, studies are needed to shed light on this important dimension (Hujo and Piper, 2010; IOM, 2010b)**.** Whereas the topic itself merits more evidence from ACP countries, a few subjects should be prioritized:

- The topic of **child migration** and **children staying in the origin country** while their parent(s) emigrated has received increased attention in the Caribbean, but not in other ACP regions yet.

- **In addition to children**, **the elderly should be focused on in studies** as in many ACP societies children are an insurance for the retirement age and by migrating they may be able to provide remittances and transnational care, but feelings of loneliness may be difficult to overcome. The elderly may also migrate themselves, but little is known about their experiences, identity issues and choices and dilemmas of where to live. Due to the rapid changes in ICTs, their access and use of them may also be hampered if not supported by younger family members. How care regimes work for them at an old age should also be the topic of research.

- **Second generation** immigrants may not have visited or lived in the origin country of their parent(s), but may continue to be involved in transnational family life.

- This also applies to **transnational relationships** where partners originate in different countries and when language and the sense of belonging may become difficult (Zontini, 2007).

- Whereas **contemporary forms of 'family'**, such as cohabitation, are common in many western countries, the understanding and structure of families in ACP countries may have very well changed as well. These 'new' forms of 'family' could be studied with a view to determine changing compositions and needs

3.2   Use of ICTs

- The price of the use of the internet and cell phones has fallen dramatically over the past years. Nonetheless, some regions are still not covered by signals (such some island parts in Cape Verde) and some people in ACP countries still do not have access to ICTs in remote locations. To ease communication in general, and with transnational family members, the **cell phone and internet coverage in remote locations** could be increased through innovative and new technologies.

3.3   Support of different transnational family members

- **Children** should be considered as **actors in the migration process.** After a 'feminization' of migration, the participation and agency of children should be promoted in research and policies (Orellana et al., 2001; Hujo and Piper, 2010). Children of transnational families can be supported by programmes, including volunteer organizations, both inside and outside school.

Psychological and social services are particularly important (UN GA, 2011) as is the **protection of their basic social and economic rights irrespective of their status**. This applies to **both children staying in the origin country, those reunited with their parent(s) and those migrating alone**. Access to education and health care for migrant children is of particular importance (IOM, 2010a) as is support to child-headed households (Bakker, Elings-Pels and Reis, 2009).

A **national system to register children and the elderly staying behind** was recently recommended in a study on Moldova (Cheianu-Andrei et al., 2011)

Mexico and the Philippines offer language training, information on remittances, health and risks of migration, cultural orientation and protection to migrants, in particular domestic workers, and at the same time supporting their families staying in Mexico and the Philippines, including through family counseling and IT training to ease communication (GFMD, 2010)

- **Working immigrant parents** can be supported by providing **childcare services and other social services**. This can allow family reunification and thus support the psychosocial well-being of the family. In addition, contact with and the support of the local community at destination can help to support the integration process. Female headed households should receive particular attention.

- **Migrant parents** should stay in contact with the school of their children to reinforce their educational and supervisor role and to strengthen the support role of the institution and teachers. **Schools** could develop extra-curricular activities for children staying behind (Cheianu-Andrei et al., 2011).

- Parents should also **appoint legal guardians** to allow for the protection of their children and the elderly in medical emergencies (Cheianu-Andrei et al., 2011).

- **Elderly migrants** and the elderly staying behind may also need **counseling and other supportive social services** (Zontini, 2007). Having a 'neutral' third party to seek advice from may support any member of a transnational family, home or abroad. In addition, their care work should be supported by governments to avoid stigmatization and assist the many transnational families, which are part of the world of today.

- **Countries of origin** should develop **comprehensive policies to support families and caregivers of children of migrant workers** in their child-rearing responsibilities.

3.4   Migration legislation and social policies

- Whereas most countries support family reunification, many immigration laws, including in the South, may contribute to the establishment of transnational families. Therefore **immigration laws** should be assessed towards **their impact on families** (Zontini, 2007; IOM, 2010b). Some temporary work programmes favour mothers with children staying behind to ensure their return, which may underestimate the social costs for the families involved.

- In addition, **the demand for care workers in developed countries entails significant repercussions not only on their families in the South**, but also **generates further South–South migration** of migrant domestic workers. Therefore family and labour legislation should be assessed with a view to its implications as well (Zontini, 2007).

- Enabling **visits and return** as well as protecting the human right to **family reunification** is important for the individuals' well-being (UN GA, 2011). This can ease the strains of being separated geographically. Travel restrictions do not only exist towards developed countries, but also among ACP countries. The reduced stress by access to their usual family structures may also increase their health, productiveness and psychological well-being (GFMD, 2010).

- **Legal frameworks** should be developed to ensure every child staying behind is assigned a legal representative (Cheianu-Andrei et al., 2011).

Mexico introduced a work permit for cross-border workers from Guatemala and Belize, which allows spouses and children to receive their own card, thus supporting the family unity. A local visitor card supports visits among transnational family members (GFMD, 2010)

The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families is a useful guide to action that could be used by states to strengthen migrants' ability to make different forms of contributions and protect transnational family life

As part of its _National Action Plan on the Protection of Children without Parental Care (2010-2011)_, Moldova created a Child Rights Information Centre (GFMD, 2010)

3.5   South–South cooperation

- South–South cooperation is needed to **harmonize policies and institutional approaches** in ACP countries:

- Promoting **partnerships**, in particular at the subregional and bilateral level (GFMD, 2010);

- **Sharing of experiences**, evidence and social protection mechanisms;

- **Strengthening the legal protection of migrants, children, the elderly and other family members** (Bakker, Elings-Pels and Reis, 2009).

4. Further Reading

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