



## **Transnational family networks:**

### **An analysis of caregiving arrangements within migrant families**

The TRANSFAM project focuses on the maintenance of family solidarity across borders, by examining the experiences of Dominican and Brazilian migrants in Belgium, and their relatives (ageing parents and siblings) in the home country. The specific question this study addresses is the extent to which transnational adult migrants are able to exchange care and support with their geographically distant parents, and the specific role that intra-familial dynamics play in the exchange of care between adult migrants, their siblings and their ageing parents. In order to grasp the diversity and complexity of family care within transnational families, the study focuses on three types of caregiving arrangements: long distance caregiving, that is, provision of financial, emotional and practical support from a distance ; aged migration, that is, permanent or temporary migration of dependent elderly parents in order to be cared for by their child(ren) in the host country and/or care for their grandchildren ; permanent or temporary migrants' repatriation in order to provide personal care to disabled parents. Of particular relevance here is an analysis of the processes by which family commitments are negotiated within families whose members are living in different countries. Particular attention is paid to gendered dynamics and power relations within the families, as well as other structural factors that impact on people's capacity to negotiate their contribution to the provision of care.

This research builds on a broad understanding of transnational families that involves multidirectional exchanges between several generations, with a specific interest in caregiving relationships between ageing parents and adult migrants. Research in this field has shown that, contrary to the assumption that geographical distance negatively affects kin relationships, transnational families exchange all the forms of care and support that are exchanged in proximate families (Baldassar et al. 2007). These not only include financial assistance, but also emotional and practical support that can be exchanged transnationally through the use of various communication technologies, and personal care and accommodation which require co-presence and can only be exchanged during visits. This perspective highlights the fact that, over the life-course, members of transnational family networks are passively and actively engaged in the reciprocal, though uneven, exchange of care that 'circulates' within *and* between home and host societies (Baldassar and Merla, 2014). These circuits of care thus involve both geographically proximate and distant family members, connecting local and transnational care circuits.

This project is mainly based on in-depth fieldwork conducted in Belgium, Brazil and the Dominican Republic with 20 transnational family networks. The main results can be

summarized as follows. Despite the geographical distance that separates family members living in Belgium and their relatives living in the home country and/or a third State, Brazilian and Dominican migrants in Belgium continue to play an important role in the provision of financial, emotional, practical and personal support to their ageing parents back home. However, they are facing a series of obstacles that makes meeting their transnational family duties particularly challenging. Their level of participation to the circulation of care is influenced by a series of interconnected factors, including their unfavourable positioning at the cross-section of Belgium's migration, care, welfare and employment regimes, which results for them in major difficulties in accessing a series of important resources: financial resources, but also work-family balance schemes that are adapted to their specific situation.

This is particularly problematic for Brazilian and Dominican female migrants who are mainly employed in the formal and informal care sector, but who are not recognized by employers and policy makers as having themselves family caring duties and obligations towards their geographically distant ageing parents. These women stand at the crossroads of two systems : the highly familialistic system of their sending society and the system of their receiving country, which is potentially more defamilializing in general, but not for them.

This creates a context in which it is essential to acknowledge that migrants' dependent family members in the 'South' do not have access to the instruments that support the externalisation of care for families in the 'North'. This calls in turn for the development of work-family balance policies that take into consideration the specificities of migrants' family situation.

This research is particularly relevant to policy makers and migrants' associations who are interested in promoting migrants' right to family life through the development of policies that facilitate the articulation of work and family life across borders.

For more information, see : [www.uclouvain.be/transfam](http://www.uclouvain.be/transfam)