



# Ge.M.I.C.



## Gender, Migration and Intercultural Interactions in the Mediterranean and South-East Europe

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- University of Cyprus (UCY), Cyprus
- University of Bologna (UNIBO), Italy
- "Dunarea de Jos" University of Galati (UDJG), Romania
- Institute of Childhood and Urban World (CIIMU), Spain
- "Euro-Balkan" Institute (EU-BAL), FYROM
- Bilkent University (BILKENT-U), Turkey

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Gender, Migration and intercultural Interaction  
in South-East Europe  
(www.gemic.eu)

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# Thematic Workshops Report on “Transnational and Mixed Families”(WP9)

Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey

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## **1. Purpose of the research**

The work package studies transnational and mixed families in three selected countries: Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey. The main focus of the research are the positive intercultural exchanges and hybrid practices that arise in such families in relation to issues of identity, belonging, power, language, religion, and children's upbringing. Attention is also given to the gendered conflicts and tensions, which appear in the daily lives of transnational and mixed families.

These family practices are critically assessed against the background of family and migration policies that reinforce and legitimize informal gendered practices within mixed and transnational families. At the same time, the potential of mixed or transnational families to become sites of intercultural interaction and to produce hybrid identities is also examined.

## **2. Starting points of the research**

- To undertake research on the intersections between gender, migration and the family, with particular emphasis on relations between spouses of mixed and transnational families.
- To study the gender dynamics of mixed and transnational families in specific national settings, motivation for spouse selection (for mixed families), family relations and changing gender relations within the family as well as the families' position in a broader social context.
- To study the mixed families as meeting point of different religions and cultures and explore zones of contacts and congruence, and of conflicts and tensions from gender and ethnic relations perspective,
- To explore gender related changes in transnational families and women's experiences as migrants or as wives who remain in their country of origin,
- To assess family and migration policies that reinforce and legitimize gendered and discriminatory practices among the mixed families

## **3. Thematic Workshops**

### **3.1 The first thematic workshop: Istanbul (February 12-14, 2009)**

The meeting was organized and hosted by the Bilkent University team. The main purpose of the workshop was to present the findings from the pilot interviews made before the meeting, discuss the specific features of the cases the participating teams planned to study during the fieldwork phase, and to finalise the interview guides.

The national case studies:

Turkey:

The Turkish team explained that they would focus on the mixed families consisting of a Turkish male partner and a female partner from one of the Soviet Union successor states. Such families/couples are the most common and typical mixed family type in Turkey. As for transnational families, they would study the cases of women from the former Soviet Union, who came to Turkey to work as domestic aid, leaving their families behind.

Greece:

The Greek team shared that they would focus on mixed marriages in which a Greek citizen is married or lives in cohabitation with immigrant from Albania or Bulgaria. Most typical case study for transnational family would involve a female immigrant – a live-in domestic worker.

Bulgaria:

The Bulgarian team explained that they would focus on mixed families consisting of a Bulgarian woman and a man from a Middle Eastern Muslim country. A few interviews with families where male partner was from a Western European or an African country would be added to provide a different perspective. As for transnational families, the Bulgarian team would study the family members who have stayed at home and are relying on remittances sent by the partner who has emigrated.

The partners agreed on the following decisions:

- Interviews with both partners have to be taken separately, but at the same time; a male researcher should talk with the male respondents, and female researcher with the female respondents.
- Regarding the transnational families, Greek and Turkish teams would make 8 to 10 interviews with female live-in domestic workers living in Athens and Istanbul, while the Bulgarian team would make 8 to 10 interviews with respondents residing in small towns or villages and whose partners have emigrated from Bulgaria for economic reasons and who support their families from abroad.
- Regarding the mixed families, all partners would interview 8-10 families. Respondents should be from the lower middle class (economically and socially). Turkish team would focus on "foreign brides" (from the former Soviet Union), Bulgarian on "foreign husbands (Middle East, Africa and Western Europe), while the Greek team would study both types.
- Focus groups should ideally include 4 to 6 people and last from one to two hours. Maximum five focus groups will be organized (depending on the type of respondents each team will work with). The participants in the focus groups must not be the same as interview respondents, but should have similar demographic characteristics.
- Interview guides should be divided into the following sections: background on family characteristics; integration into the host country; contacts and experiences with the official institutions; intercultural aspects of mixed / transnational family life; gendered dynamics in mixed / transnational family life

At the end of the meeting, the participants decided that the Bulgarian team should revise the interview guides on mixed families and one version of the interview guide for transnational families (for respondents who stayed in their home country), while the Turkish team would prepare the second interview guide for transnational families (for family members who are immigrants). The revised interview guides were to be finalized before the end of February.

The participants also discussed and agreed upon the time frame. The fieldwork should start in March and conclude by June 2009. The period between July and September 2009 would be devoted to transcription of the interviews, organization of focus groups and analysis of focus group discussions. This was only a recommendation and participants were free to choose their own pace of work, but should conclude all the work before the next WP meeting to be held in October in Sofia.

### **3.2 The second thematic workshop: Sofia (October 22-23, 2009)**

The meeting was organized and hosted by the IMIR team. The venue was IMIR's office in Sofia.

In the first part of the meeting, all three participating teams presented the specific features of their fieldwork and shared the main preliminary findings and observations from the interviews they have conducted. During the second part of the meeting, the participants discussed the changes to the WP9 research design and prepared its final version. They also discussed and agreed on the structure and content of the national reports.

The national case studies:

Bulgaria:

Prior to the meeting the team made interviews with mixed couples (Bulgarian women – foreign men). The Bulgarian team in general had many problems in finding interviewees from the main target group – couples consisting of a Bulgarian woman and a man from a Middle Eastern country. In most cases, only one of the family members was willing to participate, while the other declined for various reasons. For this reason, the team did not conclude its fieldwork in the envisaged time and planned to continue with the interviews until the end of December. Some interviews were taken in the homes of the respondents, and some in IMIR's office.

During the Bulgarians research on transnational families interviews were made – 2 with respondents who emigrated themselves and 9 with those who remained in Bulgaria while their partners work and live abroad (mostly in Spain, Portugal and Italy). The interviews were made in one smaller town and in 7 villages.

Greece:

The Greek team made interviews with 11 mixed couples – 5 in which a Greek man was married to a foreign woman (Romanians, Bulgarians) and 6 in which a Greek woman was married to a migrant man (4 Albanians, 1 Kurdish, 1 Turk – all Muslims by religion). One more interview was planned – a couple Greek man / foreign woman. Finding couples where

both partners were willing and able to participate in the research was much more difficult than expected and took much time and effort.

Regarding the transnational families, the Greek team has made 7 interviews and had 3 more planned. The respondents were domestic workers from different countries (mostly Georgia, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria).

The Greek team has also conducted one focus group (with migrant women), held in the office of the Greek team.

Turkey:

The Turkish mixed family cases were 10 couples consisting of a Turkish male partner and a female partner from Moldova, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, or Hungary. All interviews were conducted in Istanbul, some at the homes of respondents and some in their workplace. The Turkish team also had problems to find couples willing to participate.

For the transnational family cases, they interviewed 9 female domestic workers from Moldova, Ukraine, Turkmenistan, and Bulgaria, and did additional 7 interviews with women working in sex industry. Interviews with the domestic workers were recorded, while during the interviews with sex workers, only notes were taken.

The workshop participants discussed and agreed on the following issues:

- It was decided that only the Greek team would organise all five focus groups. The Bulgarian team should organise three groups: transnational families, Bulgarian women and migrant men, while the Turkish team should organise the following three groups: transnational families, migrant women and Turkish men. In this way, the focus groups will reflect the characteristics of the interviews.
- One page interview profiles in English will be prepared and distributed to teams from other countries. The profiles might also be attached to the national reports in the annex. They would include the basic information on the respondents and the main findings (a paragraph per section).
- The WP9 Research Design was reviewed and certain changes were made. The final version of the WP9 Research Design was thus produced to be sent as a deliverable to the European Commission.
- The structure and content of the national reports was discussed.
- The partners also discussed the dissemination and possible publications. Publications should focus only on certain issues, not on all topics which were covered by the research – for example gender relations or multi-cultural aspects of the mixed family life.

The most important conclusion taken dealt with the structure of the national reports. All reports should have a common introduction and conclusion – covering both family types. However, the main part of the report should be divided into a section on mixed and a section on transnational families. The common introduction should explain why there are two separate aspects and outline the main objectives of the report. The theoretical part of the report should focus on gender and migration processes and power relations in the

family for each of the three countries. The introduction should include also some relevant statistical data on the mixed and transnational families in each country (as much as such data exist and can be collected) and the short analysis of the relevant legal texts dealing with mixed and transnational marriages.

The main two chapters of the national reports would roughly follow the structure of the interview guides – Background on family characteristics; Integration into the host country; Contacts and experiences with the official institutions; Intercultural aspects of mixed / transnational family life; and Gendered dynamics in mixed / transnational family life. The length of the reports should be from 8,000 to 12,000 words. The conclusion needs to include the relevant policy recommendations.

After receiving the national reports, the Bulgarian team would produce the first draft of the thematic report, which should be presented at the next steering committee meeting on April 15-16 in Athens.

Based on the fact that all partners needed to conduct additional field research, they reviewed the timetable and agreed on the following deadlines:

- January 31 for the draft national reports
- February 28 for the final national reports
- April 15 for the draft thematic report
- May 31 for the final version of the thematic report.



## **4. Appendix: Agenda of the meetings**

### **4.1. The first thematic workshop: Istanbul (February 12-14, 2009)**

Meeting venue: Easy Home Istanbul, Beyoglu district, Istanbul,  
<http://www.easyhomeistanbul.com>

Thursday 12 February

Arrival of the participants

Friday 13 February

09.30-10.00 Welcome coffee/tea; Welcoming address

10.00-11.00 Presentation of case studies – characteristics of families/respondents, concepts, objectives, methodology for Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey

11.00-12.00 Presentation and discussion on pilot interviews for mixed families

12.00-13.00 Presentation and discussion on pilot interviews for transnational families

13.00-14.00 Lunch break

14.00-15.00 Discussion and finalisation of interview guides for mixed families

15.00-16.00 Discussion and finalisation of interview guides for transnational families

16.00-17.00 Presentation of and discussion on the Research Design for Work Package 9

17.00-17.30 Closing discussion -Any other Business (Next meeting of WP9 participants)

19.30 Dinner (offered by Bilkent University)

Saturday 14 February

Departure of the participants

## **4.2. The second thematic workshop: Sofia (October 22-23, 2009)**

Meeting venue: office of International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations, Antim I, 55, Sofia.

Thursday 22 October

Arrival of the participants

Friday 23 October

09.30-10.00 Welcoming address and introduction (Marko)

Presentation of case studies, fieldwork details and of preliminary fieldwork results:

10.00-10.30 Bulgaria presentation

10.30-10.45 Comments and questions

10.45-11.00 Coffee break

11.00-11.30 Greece presentation

11.30-11.45 Comments and questions

11.45-12.15 Turkey presentation

12.15-12:30 Comments and questions

12:30-13.00 General discussion of the fieldwork; what has been achieved, what still needs to be done?

13.00-14.00 Buffet lunch in IMIR office (hosted by IMIR)

14.00-15.30 Discussion on the country reports (structure, content, deadlines for drafts and final versions) and the final thematic report

15.30-15.45 Coffee break

15.45-17.00 Future planning; Dissemination activities and publications

17.00-18.00 Any other business and wrap up

19.00 Dinner (hosted by IMIR)