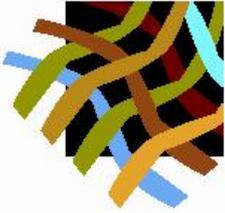


Gender, Migration and intercultural Interaction  
in South-East Europe  
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# Ge.M.I.C. WP9 National Report

## MIXED AND TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES IN TURKEY

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Structure of the report**

The following report is composed of four main parts that are introduction, analysis of the fieldwork results on the mixed families, analysis of the field research on the transnational families, and conclusion. The introduction provides information on the main objectives of the report; the description of the methodology used during the fieldwork; the profiles of the respondents; the definition and explanation of the basic concepts and terms; and some relevant statistical data and background information on the mixed and transnational families in Turkey.

In the second part we present our findings and analyze the field research on the mixed families (interviews and two focus groups). In this part first we provide the main characteristics of the respondents; then their integration into the host country; and their contacts and experience with the official institutions; finally we provide some intercultural aspects of the mixed family life; and gender dynamics in the mixed families.

The third part of the report on the field research on the transnational families (interviews and two focus groups), is constituted of the following sections: the main characteristics of respondents from transnational families; aspects of the transnational family life; and gender dynamics in the transnational families.

In the conclusion we summarise the main findings of the research, evaluate the potential impact, explore further possibilities for the use of the research, and propose some relevant policy recommendations.

### **1.2. Goal of the research**

The goal of the present research is to investigate the relationship between gender and migration, and explore their influence on the relations within the mixed and transnational families. The report will analyse the ways in which gender dynamics within mixed and transnational families are conditioned by the existing national policies and institutional frameworks dealing with immigrants, the prevailing traditional patterns of gender relations in families, and by the interactions between people with different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds.

The challenges faced by mixed and transnational families reflect a certain set of challenges which emanate from their experiences within the extended mixed family, mothering, the attitudes in the receiving society and the framework provided within different institutions in the receiving society. These challenges impact the integration process as well as gender roles and dynamics of the mixed families. This report also examines the mixed and transnational families as spaces of intercultural interaction. How do these spaces become a space for dialogue and conflict, and whether these spaces might be pointed to as microcosms for understanding the conditions under which intercultural dialogue, cross-cultural respect and a peaceful context might be promoted.

### **1.3. Research methods**

The field research was conducted relying on qualitative research methods. It was organized in three main parts: interviews with the mixed families (in Istanbul), interviews with the transnational families (in Istanbul), and focus groups (two with participants from mixed and one with participants from transnational families). The qualitative research was based on semi-standardized in-depth interviews. The interview guides were prepared in advance in cooperation with the research teams from Bulgaria and Greece. Pilot interviews were conducted to test the draft interview guides. The results were analysed and the final versions were prepared and used during the fieldwork stage.

Altogether 26 in-depth interviews were conducted: 10 interviews with respondents from transnational families, and 16 with the mixed families (interviews with both spouses from 8 families). The interviews with the mixed families were pre-arranged – the first contact was established over the telephone or through a mediator, and the time and place for the interview were agreed on. The interviews have taken place in the offices of the couples, homes of couples and coffee shops. The interviews lasted from one hour to one hour and 45 minutes. All were recorded. The questions in the interview guides were divided in the following sections: Background on family characteristics; contacts and experience of mixed families with the official institutions; intercultural aspects of mixed family life; and gendered dynamics in mixed family life.

The first section focused on respondents' personal data, the history of the relationship, and their social and demographic profile. The second section investigated their interactions and possible conflicts with the official institutions, and the issue of (potential) discrimination. The third section studied the levels of adaptation and the forms of integration in the Turkish society of the immigrant spouse, the social environment (including wider family, friends, migrant networks, professional surroundings), religious beliefs and practices, and identity and language issues of the mixed families. The last part focused on the gender relations and identities, social and gender roles, division of labour at home, family decision making, various potentially problematic areas of family life, and the upbringing of children.

The 10 interviews with the members of transnational families were conducted in Istanbul. The respondents were found through mediators or snow-balling. The interviews have taken place in the homes that they work and coffee shops. They lasted from 30 minutes to a bit over an hour.

The interview guides for the transnational families were divided into the following sections: Background on family characteristics and migration history; aspects of transnational family life; and gendered dynamics in transnational family life. The first section aimed at collecting data about the respondents' personal and family life, and some basic data about the migration experience of their partners. The second section focused on the experience of the transnational family life: the ways and frequency of maintaining contacts, the changes in the lifestyle and workload, family decision-taking processes, consequences for the children and predictions for the future. The third part sought answers to the following questions: the changes in the traditional family gender roles and duties, the emotional consequences of the transnational family experience, the issues of trust and jealousy, the role of the wider family, and the advantages and disadvantages of transnational family life.

The questionnaires for the focus groups were designed, consisting of about 8 most relevant questions (each providing space for additional sub-questions if needed). The two focus groups for the mixed families were organised at a research office in Istanbul. The profiles of the focus group participants are provided in a separate table right after the profiles of the participants of the mixed families interviews.

The focus group for the transnational families was organized in Istanbul at the same office. Similarly the profiles on the participants are provided in a separate table after giving the profiles of the transnational families' participants.

#### **1.4. Respondents' profiles**

The mixed families consisted of Turkish husbands and foreign wives. The interviews for transnational families consisted of women from the former Soviet Union

**Mixed families:**

**Interviews:**

**Women**

1. Olesya, 51, Russia, Christian, married for 6 years (second marriage), 1 child (from the first marriage), vocational high school, not working.
2. Alona, 29, Moldova, Christian, married for 1 year (second marriage), 1 child (from the first

marriage), secondary school, working.
3. Maria, 56, Moldova, Christian, married for 2 years (second marriage), 3 children (from the first marriage), secondary school, not working.
4. Elena, 30, Ukraine, Christian, married for 4 years (second marriage), 2 children (1 from the first marriage and 1 from the second), secondary school, not working.
5. Katrina, 32, Moldova, Christian, married for 3,5 years (first marriage), no children, high school, working.
6. Katinka, 57, Hungary, Christian, married for 19 years (first marriage), no children, collegeiate school, working.
7. Olga, 30, Georgia, Muslim, married for 4 years (second marriage), 1 child (from the first marriage), university, not working.
8. Tatyana, 32, Ukraine, Christian, married for 13 years (first marriage), 2 children, university, working.

### **Men**

1. Mustafa, 53, Turkish, Muslim, married for 6 years (first marriage), 1 child, primary school, working.
2. Mehmet, 65, Turkish, Muslim, married for 2 years (second marriage), 6 children (from the first marriage), primary school, working.
3. Hakan, 26, Turkish, Muslim, married for 4 years (first marriage), 1 child, high school, working.
4. Tuncay, 47, Turkish, Muslim, married for 3,5 years (second marriage), 1 child (from the first marriage), secondary school, working.
5. Cevdet, 58, Turkish, Muslim, married for 19 years (first marriage), no children, university, working.
6. Hasan, 54, Turkish, Muslim, married for 4 years (third marriage), 3 children (from the first marriage), primary school, working.
7. Kemal, 32, Turkish, Muslim, married for 13 years (first marriage), 2 children, primary school, working.
8. Seckin, 40, Turkish, Muslim, married for 6 years (second marriage), 1 child (from the first marriage), secondary school, working.

### **Mixed Families**

#### **Focus Group**

##### **Women:**

Natalia, 36, Russia, Christian, Married, 2 children
Suzan, 32, Moldova, Christian, Married, 2 children
Valentina, 48, Armenia, Christian, Married, 1 child
Carmen, 36, Romania, Christian, Married, 1 child
Irina (Irem), 42, Russia, Converted from Christianity to Islam, Married, 4 children
Dalina, 33, Moldova, Christian, Married, 4 children

### **Mixed Families**

#### **Focus Group**

##### **Men:**

Ahmet, 36, Azerbaijan, Married, 2 children
Hakan, 31, Turkmenistan, Married
Muzaffer, 41, Azerbaijan, Married, 2 children

Ihsan, 45, Ukrania, Married
Fatih, 37, Russia, Married

## 1.5. Mixed and transnational families in Turkey– background information

Turkey has been considered mainly as a migrant sending country. Sending labour migrants to Europe has started in 1961 with the signing of an Agreement between Turkish and West German governments. Turkish emigration to Europe slowed down in the 1970s with the closure of European countries' borders as the result of the economic recession. However, Turkish emigration continued through family reunification and family formation.<sup>1</sup>

Turkish workers also immigrated to the Middle East in 1970s. This time receiving countries were Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq due to growing economy in these countries. In addition to that, starting from the early 1990s Turkish workers also migrated to the Russian Federation and to other places in the Commonwealth of Independent States due to the construction and industrial contracts of Turkish companies won in these places.<sup>2</sup> Between 2001-2005 time span, it is estimated that around two million people migrated from Turkey to many destinations. 49 percent of the current destinations are to Common Wealth and Independent States, whereas 31 percent of people emigrate to Arab Countries, and only 9 percent to Europe.<sup>3</sup>

From 1990s onwards Turkey is identified increasingly as a "transit" and "receiving" country in addition to its traditional role of "sending" country. Asylum seekers, aliens marrying Turkish nationals, professionals, retirees and students constitute the bulk of the migrant population legally residing in Turkey. There are also increasing numbers of illegal migrants from countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq and Pakistan as well as many African countries. These immigrants usually aim at transiting from Turkey towards Europe though they usually remain in Turkey. Additionally, nationals of the former Soviet Union, Balkan countries, the Middle East, Morocco and Tunisia arrive in Turkey. Official figures indicate that the entry of persons from Russia, Central Asian states, the South Caucasus and the Western (NIS) hover around 1.5 million to over 3.5 million in the post-2000 period, which also identify our sample of the group of mixed marriages. Entry of persons from the neighboring Balkan and Middle East countries hover around 3.5 million as well, which also correspond to our sample of transnational families as well. The general total of persons amount to over 17 million people which include entries for touristic purposes from European countries. In the 2001-2006 time period, Turkey received 942,000 applications for residence permit (for work, study and other purposes).<sup>4</sup>

## 2. The mixed families in Turkey – analysis of the field research

### 2.1. The main characteristics of the respondents

The Turkish team focused on the women from the former Soviet Union, Central and East Europe and Central Asia who are married to Turkish men. The respondents were aged between 26-58. The women were between the ages of 29 and 57. They all had fairly liberal opinions on selecting their

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<sup>1</sup> Kemal Kirisci, 2007, "Turkey: A country of transition from emigration to immigration". *Mediterranean Politics*, 12, 91-97.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Icduygu, A (2008) "Circular Migration and Turkey: An Overview of the Past and Present- Some Demo-Economic Implications", CARIM Analytic and Synthetic Notes 2008-10, Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies, Florence, p.15

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

spouses including a spouse with a different national, religious and cultural background. Most of the female respondents suggested that sharing their decision to marry a foreigner has not caused much friction in their families or among their friends. Most of the women cited that their mothers were worried that once they marry they would live in a very far country, and cited emotional reasons such as longing rather than cultural differences concerning their decision to marry a foreigner. Majority of the female respondents were Christians and only some of them had converted to Islam after their marriage. None of them cited themselves as deeply religious though they noted that they pray occasionally. It seemed that marrying a Muslim man did not make them more religious though most of them cited a sympathy toward Islam, or at least no obvious reservation about the religion itself. For some of them having to wear a modest dress or having to hide their crosses in public seemed to be the only drawbacks in the social environment which constrained their behaviour.

The majority of the respondents (both from the interviews and the focus groups) have education at the level of secondary school or higher. Most of the Turkish partners have less education than their wives among the respondents in the interviews. In the focus groups, some of the husbands had equal or higher education than the women. The selection of spouse is an individual act hence not influenced by their families or social environment. The majority of couples met in Turkey through friends or social settings. Only a few women in the focus groups had met their husbands in their country of origin where the partners were working.

The duration of the marriage or cohabitation of the interviewees and focus group participants ranged from 1 year to 19 years at the time of the interview. Almost all couples, as noted above, met in Turkey. Almost all the couples had a legal marriage at some point in their relationship. Some couples married a few years after they had courted and one female respondent noted she married her partner after they had children together.

Some of the male respondents had previous relationships with foreigners. This was mostly related to socio-economic status of men. The higher the socio-economic status of men, the more they had relationships with other foreigners previously. More than half of the respondents had failed marriages in their country of origin, with possibly a child from that previous marriage. Both male and female respondents cited their first marriage as constituting a negative experience. The female respondents characterized their first partners as irresponsible and abusive. Most of the previous partners in the case of the female respondents had become unemployed during the collapse of communism or even before, and were cited as abusive and lazy. The male respondents in the mixed marriages cited their previous marriages as a negative experience, mostly because of the embedded nature of their marriage within the extended Turkish family. These male respondents referred to their previous female partners as being influenced by their families substantially, mostly their mothers, and being very demanding of their husbands (e.g. concerning purchase of household goods, clothes, jewelry, etc.) when compared to their current foreign partners. Therefore most of the male respondents characterized their current marriage as a very positive experience because of the absence of these family ties and also the absence of a demanding attitude by their foreign partners. The female respondents characterized their current marriage very positively as well and they identified their Turkish partners as dedicated and committed towards their family duties and responsibilities, particularly when compared to their previous partners.

Most men named outer appearance (face, body, exotic appearance, exotic otherness) as a factor of attraction for their partners. Most men and all women identified moral and individual qualities: kindness, modesty, sincerity, responsible attitude, cheerful attitude, smartness and respectfulness. All the respondents emphasised mutual understanding and respect as contributing to their happiness. Some of the respondents also highlighted how they were able to share common interests and experiences in a more harmonious manner particularly when compared to their first marriage.

The courtship between the two partners lasted on average about a year. This period was used for familiarizing themselves with each other and in some cases merely as a waiting period for acquiring the proper documentation for the foreign partner since the distance prevented any meaningful courtship for reaching a decision to marry another person. All couples live in their own households. Some live with the children from the previous marriage of the husband, and in the case of one couple

the daughter from the previous marriage of the female lives with the couple. The main resistance to marriage seems to have originated from the parents of the male partners who fear the consequences of their son marrying to a foreign woman for their relationship with their son.

## 2.2. Integration into the host country

All of the female respondents noted that when they arrived in Turkey they have encountered a very different context than their country of origin. They have acquired the language through informal ways such as watching television, talking to acquaintances and their partners or self-teaching. Most of the respondents had acquired Turkish citizenship, some had residence permits which they renewed every year while waiting for a decision on their citizenship.

Most of the respondents are educated beyond secondary level. Most of the respondents did not work at the time of the interview or the focus group. A few of the respondents who worked were working with their partners in their own offices, and another few who were interested in being employed were looking for work at the time of the interview though they cited that it was very hard to find a job because of the economic crisis. The income levels of the couples were mostly in the lower middle class level and lower. Male respondents perceive their marriage to a foreign partner to have improved their status in terms of their quality of life in general and social life in particular. Male respondents also note that when in public their partners and themselves are sometimes subject to stigmatisation of their partners possibly being viewed as 'Natashas', a pejorative nickname attributed to the women from the countries under study who are in the sex sector. Female partners occasionally note that they have contributed to the quality of life of their partners, who most of the time have less educational status.

Most of the male respondents noted negative reactions from their parents to their marriage to a foreign woman. In an extreme case, the parents refused to see the daughter-in-law until she gave birth to a grandchild with her son, and only after the arrival of the grandchild, the parents of the male partner accepted to meet their daughter-in-law and then the relationship between the couple and the parents of the male partner became more cordial.

Most of the mixed couples live in their own households (either own apartments or renting). In some cases, female respondents noted that they have a positive relationship with their mother-in-law whereby the couple visits her occasionally, and she also sometimes stays with them. The male partners mostly noted that they like their in-laws and though they visit them very rarely in their country of origin, and they usually do not come to visit the couple in Turkey. The male respondents also had positive comments and perceptions about their in-laws particularly in contrast to their Turkish in-laws. The main point most of them highlighted is that the parents of the female partners did not intervene in the couple's family affairs, and or decisions. The female respondents maintain a close relationship with their own family through phone most of the time. The female partners' phone contacts are more frequent if they have left a child behind under their care.

Most of the couples identified very little socialization with their friends or their own families. Most of the couples seem to lead a very isolated life as a mixed couple. The female respondents do not socialize with their neighbours either but sometimes with very few friends from the same country who also live in Turkey. Both couples cite their neighbours as inquisitive, interfering in each others' affairs and interested in each others' lives with not so good intentions. The female respondents mostly cited their encounters and socializing with neighbours as not meaningful and not entertaining, which gradually distanced them from the neighbours. Some of the female respondents also cited some discrimination due to mainly stigmatisation due to the negative image of the women who arrived from these countries before. None of the couples cited any discrimination toward their children in school or in any public space.

### **2.3. Contacts and experience with the official institutions**

All the mixed marriages are civic and some of the couples also had the Islamic religious ceremony performed in addition to the civic marriage. The Turkish authorities only in the last five years or so have introduced more strict legislation and implementation toward marriages with foreigners. In the last few years, the couples cited that the officials are more engaged in performing regular checks for proving whether the marriage is genuine or a marriage of convenience. This is due to perceptions of previous abuse of the system for citizenship acquisition which was relatively less complicated to marry a foreigner and afterwards for that spouse to acquire Turkish citizenship. The laws on citizenship acquisition have changed in May 2009, which currently brings about more stringent rules and regulations for acquiring citizenship through marriage. Overall both partners did not cite any substantial difficulties with authorities. Only in a few cases, they had cited delays in the process of acquisition of citizenship, and frequent checks in the homes to ensure the genuine nature of the marriage.

### **2.4. Intercultural aspects of the mixed family life**

All respondents, male and female, characterize mixed marriages as a challenge though they mostly emphasize positive aspects of the mixed marriage. All respondents, male and female, note that they both make an effort to make the marriage work. Some of the women spoke Turkish when they met their husbands. These women had already been in Turkey before they met their husbands mostly to work here. Other women did not speak Turkish well but they learned it through informal ways such as watching television or self-teaching. Most of the male partners do not speak the language of the female partner except very few who might have been in the country of origin of the female partner for a little while for reasons for work. None of the couples mentioned bilingualism or an effort for bilingualism for their children. In all cases, the female spouse learn Turkish and characterizes this as natural since they are living in Turkey.

Neither the female respondents nor the male respondents mention any fear of loss of national identity by marrying an individual of another nationality. The female respondents visit their families once or twice a year depending on their visa status (whether their visa or residence permit expires soon) and financial status (whether they can afford the journey). The female partners try to maintain ties with their family through regular communication with their families by phone, or less frequently by mail or internet. The female respondents did not mention much of an effort to attach themselves to a community of co-nationals or a religious community in Turkey. They maintain their ties to their network in the country of origin and do not establish social ties in this country. Some of the male respondents have noted that their partners are integrated into the ways of life in Turkish society particularly pertaining to how family affairs need to be conducted (for example, respect and cordial interaction with the husband, attending all household duties timely), or guests need to be received with hospitality and service. None of the spouses mentioned any pressure to change national identity although the female partners cited learning the language, adapting the ways of behaviour as natural processes to continue to live in another country. Some of the female partners cited that they have been able to find a common ground with their partners for all questions concerning religion and culture. Among the interviewees, there was only one woman who was from Turkmenistan and married to a Turkish man. She has noted that the Islam in Turkey and Islam in Turkmenistan were different. She noted the differences concerning the practices in weddings (for example, food, gifts, clothing, longer time for celebrations, more elaborate wedding parties), differences in practicing Islamic dress code for women and other rituals which according to her were relatively different.

Of the female respondents interviewed who were Christian, almost all of them had already converted to Islam. They did not mention any pressures to do so and mostly spoke of their conversion as a natural consequence of their marriage. Some of them were actively practicing the religious duties within Islam with their husbands such as daily prayers or reminding their husbands to attend to special prayers during the religious holidays. Their children in the current marriage were also Muslims. Most of

them again mentioned that this was also very natural in the sense that these children would grow up in a majority Muslim society. The very few women who had not converted to Islam themselves still were raising their children in the traditions of the Islamic faith. The way these women described their religious practices suggested that they had a considerable ease with religions (both Islam and Christianity in this case). These women's perception was mostly that there was one God and it did not really matter with which religion or at which religious temple (mosque or church) one prays. One woman would even occasionally cover her head in public. The female respondents did not mention celebrating any of the Christian holidays such as Christmas or Easter. Most of the female respondents do not drink alcohol and note that their husbands do not drink alcohol either. Most of the respondents pointed to "*God is one*" and that they would pray to God and it would not matter if it was the Christian way or the Muslim way.

None of the spouses mention a large social network of friends and colleagues. The couple usually socializes with close friends and even then those are in most cases these friends are of the male partner. The mixed families in our sample have either no children together, or one or two from the current marriage. Some were expecting to have children in the future. None of the couples cited any specific economic or social reason for not having children from the current marriage.

The names of their children were noted to have been selected by mutual consent and they all have Turkish names. In raising the children, none of the partners note much mention of trying to teach the children about the country of origin of their mother. The respondents who had children noted that they were raising them according to Islam since they would live in Turkey.

In the mixed couples in the case of Turkey, it seems that women mostly adapt to the social and religious practices in Turkey. The rationale behind such behaviour is cited as becoming part of the country where they settle for the time being. The data collected does not signal any intercultural exchange around language acquisition for the children or the Turkish partner, or the cultural traditions of the foreign partner within the context of the mixed family. To the contrary, the women seem to aim to conform to the practices in the receiving country and society. In the case of male partners, not having to interact frequently with the parents of their spouses seems to be a source of tranquillity for the marriage. Citing their experience with Turkish in-laws and wives (from their previous marriages), they note that the current in-laws and wives are less "demanding" and more "giving". This might be a consequence of the wives feeling less established in the receiving country hence devising strategies to sustain the stability and continuity of their marriage, and also a way to appreciate the respect and understanding they receive from their current partners compared to their their husbands in their first marriages. Therefore it is possible to discern that the intercultural aspects of mixed marriages in Turkey are heavily influenced by the willingness and attending behaviour of the female partners to integrate to the perceived norms of the receiving society so as to maintain a happy marriage, however this does not necessarily indicate integration to the receiving society at large.

## **2.5. Gender dynamics in the mixed families**

Most of the female respondents in the interviews and the participants in the focus groups were not working. Only three of the female respondents were working and two of those were helping their partners in their small business. All the couples mentioned that they were sharing the household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, washing, ironing and shopping for the household. The female respondents noted that Turkish men were helping with housework while men in their country of origin were disinterested in those activities and would also engage in domestic violence "Moldovan men do not do work...you work and come home and they are drunk, they beat you..." (FM interview 5, 32). A few of the female respondents noted that they would naturally do the housework and that they enjoyed doing it. Some of the male respondents noted that they do help with the housework. All the male and female respondents noted that decision-making was through negotiations and mutual respect, and the decisions taken were common decisions. All of the respondents characterized mixed marriage as a very rewarding experience based on mostly "respect" and mutual understanding.

On the question of what their advice would be to their children on mixed marriage, all of respondents were positive about their children marrying someone of a different culture/nationality. All the respondents emphasized that the happiness and tranquillity of their children was paramount when they make their decisions to marry someone of a different culture/nationality.

### **3. The transnational families in Turkey – analysis of the field research**

#### **3.1. The main characteristics of respondents from transnational families**

The Turkish team conducted 8 interviews with respondents who worked in Istanbul. The interviews have taken place either at the workplace of the respondent or a place which they found more convenient such as a coffee shop. The age of the respondents varied between 23 and 53. Out of the 8 interviewees, three of them were Muslim and five of them were Christian.

The main reason for migration of all the respondents was economic need. The educational levels of the respondents also differed in the following way: secondary school (3), high school (2), university (2), vocational degree (1). They were from different countries (Bulgaria, Moldova, Turkmenistan). In all of the cases their spouse had become unemployed and they had decided to look for a job abroad. The spouses in the home countries are mostly unemployed. There are only a few who work in low paid job and the respondents noted that they were extremely low paid, for example, only sufficient for the food expenses. Some of the spouses of these women continue to live in rural areas and are doing agricultural work.

The respondents had one or more children, only one had no children. Some of them had children who were over eighteen and hence were leading their own lives. Some had very young children who were being taken care of mostly by the mother of the respondent.

#### **Transnational Families Interviews**

<b>Women</b>
1. Aksana, 26, Muslim, separated, 1 child
2. Maria, 36, Religion N/A, divorced, 2 child
3. Nadya, 45, Christian, married, 1 child
4. Roza, 27, Muslim, married, 1 child
5. Sacha, 23, Christian, single, no child
6. Sev 1, 53, Muslim, married, 2 children
7. Tanya, 42, Christian, married, 2 children
8. Terzi, 40, Christian, married, 1 child

#### **Transnational Families Focus Group**

Tamara, 52, Georgia, Christian, Married, 2 children
Irma, 41, Georgia, Christian, Widow, 1 child
Oha, 41, Mongolia, Christian, Divoced, 2 children
Alona, 39, Russia, Christian, Married, 1 child

### 3.2. Aspects of the transnational family life

The respondents used social networks for their decision to migrate to Turkey whereby a close friend or relative supported this decision. The families, especially husbands, mostly were hesitant to support this decision. The respondents noted that they have negotiated this decision with their husbands before they decided to move. The respondents also noted that their own mothers and mother-in-laws have been supportive of this decision, and mostly continue to take care of the spouses and the children who are in the country of origin. None of the respondents knew Turkish before they arrived in Turkey. They have learned it through interacting with the employees in the households where they work as maids or care givers.

All the respondents view their migration as temporary although some of them have been in Turkey as long as eleven years. Most of them do not have a clear idea of when their situation will change and when they will return. Only one of them noted that she had one and a half more year of legal resident status, and that she aims to return afterwards since her husband would also retire within a year of when the interview was conducted. Most of them had hopes of saving for their children's education or buying a home in the country of origin if they have not already been able to do so and/or paying of their debts. Some of the respondents visit their families once or twice a year. Others need to leave Turkey because of their visa status for three months hence they maintain a cycle of three months in Turkey and three months in the country of origin. Only one of the respondents had arranged for travelling to her home relatively frequently since she had a legal work permit and she noted that she had excellent rapport with her employee whereby she at times would even go home for a few days for a grandchild's birthday.

Women working as live-in maids expressed their gratitude towards their bosses by calling them with family related terms such as "sister", "mother", "aunt". They emphasized how much they appreciate the kindness, closeness and consideration which their bosses are providing for them and how comfortable they are in those households. Given the fact that there is a growing need among the upper middle class homes in İstanbul for full time care givers, the job market is lucrative and the homes that they are working at right now are actually the ones that they picked along the way as the best.

The association of Russian women with the task of prostitution is very common. Some of the first wave of migrant women to Turkey from former Soviet countries were employed, occupied or trafficked in sex work. The contemporary informal sex work industry in Turkey is still predominantly occupied by this group of women who have distinguished physical features much different from the average Turkish women. The respondents touched upon this phenomenon when they talked about the attitudes of the men in Turkey and the attitudes of the men and women in their home country. Because of the fact that migration to Turkey is associated with sex work, the respondents noted that the society in the country of origin may also stigmatize these women as having engaged in sex work. They were concerned about this matter though did not bring this up much in terms of their reflections on their relationship with their husband in the country of origin.

The respondents note that they maintain regular communication with their immediate family (spouses, children, parents) in the country of origin. The spouses call each other fairly regularly through landlines or mobile phones. In one case, the woman mentioned that they had been married for over thirty years and being abroad had been relatively good for their marriage as they miss each other. The respondents always send money to their spouses and children who remained in the country of origin. They almost never spend any money in Turkey. The spouses consult with each other on major decisions over the phone concerning the children and decisions to spend money.

As far as the views of the close relatives and the wider community (usually in the village) is concerned, the respondents note that their situation is viewed negatively. They are viewed as challenging the tradition in their community and leaving their children behind. However, some of the respondents characterized this attitude more as originating from envy because those individuals (who view them negatively) would not be able to pursue such a life as the one they are able sustain and to provide for their families by working abroad. Overall the prospect of sending remittances to the family

in the home country by means of which their children might receive better education and they might purchase their own home are the main reasons why these women decided to migrate. The decision to act upon this prospect is mostly pursued when there is an abusive, unemployed husband and there is the mother of the woman who is supportive for taking responsibility for the child/children left behind in the cases where the women have to leave their children behind.

### **3.3. Gender dynamics in the transnational families**

Transnational family life had several consequences for the gender dynamics in these families. The first transformation is observed in the mothering practices. All of our respondents had at least one child left in the country of origin. Almost all of them left these children in their young ages to their own mothers. By sending most of their salaries to their mothers, these migrant women perform a social welfare agency not only to their children but also to the economically disadvantaged parents and their siblings. Interesting point though is not that these women are performing “bread winning” activities. To the contrary even though these women perform bread winning activities for their children and the elderly in the family, they experience overwhelming guilt from not performing “classical sit-at-home” mothering. They note that they do not fulfill the proper requirements of mothering and that they experience a large void in their lives. In the cases in which the fathers are expected to perform the care-giving function, the main bread winner is still the migrant women and the children are actually taken care of by their mother-in laws.

They also feel sad that they couldn't perform proper sit-home mothering to their children and blame their husbands for not taking care of their families properly. Overwhelming majority of women, send their money to their home country, and to their children and families. Most of these savings are invested in houses where their children and mothers are living in and – or they plan to live in during their retirement. They send money home either through the banks or informal channels. The respondents note that the amount of money they can save in Turkey is almost impossible to be earned in their home countries. Therefore, this separation from their children and families and their own social lives are hard yet very much worth investing in. They also remain responsible for most decisions in the family including child care, household repairs and maintenance. Among our respondents, some women were divorced. In those cases, the “bread winning” responsibility folded on the shoulders of the mothers even more. Women felt as though they need to feed and educate their children as single mothers, and are significantly motivated towards migrating in the international labor market to a less prestigious job than they were educated for.

This group of migrant women, even though they claim that they love living in Turkey and earning a living, saving money and supporting their families, they do not see this as a transition period where they would settle in Turkey one day. To the contrary, these women carefully plan and set goals for themselves when to quit their jobs, and what to do with the amount of money that they would earn in the meantime. As a result, circular migration is a norm and not an anomaly for this group of women. They see themselves in their home countries in the future, only as wealthier and living more comfortable lives.

The respondents noted that they work as live-in maids spending long months without seeing their husbands and/or children. They talk about how much they miss their families and spouses. They also talk about the jealous fits which their husbands show from time to time. In that respect, they claim that they would rather work in the houses where there is not a man so that their husbands would feel more confident. The respondents repeatedly mention the difficulties of leading a transnational family life. They also note that there has been jealousy on their part toward their husbands as well which did not last very long. One of the respondents noted that their marriage was already stabilised on trust issues since they had been married for over thirty years. Therefore jealousy due to separation was not really an issue in their case.

Most of the respondents noted that when they were at home they would resume their ‘wifely duties’ such as cooking and cleaning as if they had never left, and as if their role never changed from home-maker to bread-winner. They would assume both roles.

The respondents noted that the children had the most difficulty as a result of the transnational life of these families since their mother was not around them to take care of them. Most of the respondents became very emotional at the mention of their children. The respondents noted that the children lacked emotional support and also they had difficulty forming an emotional bond with their mothers. The respondents also note that their financial contribution to the household income is likely to improve the children’s opportunities for better living conditions and better education. In some cases older children would come and visit their mothers.

All of the respondents repeatedly cite the economic need for this life and this is seen as a sacrifice made for the children.

## 4. Conclusion

The main results of the research can be summarised in the following way:

<b>Mixed families</b>	<b>Transnational families</b>
<b>Education</b>	
The majority of women are well educated, e.g. high school and above. The husbands are less educated (mostly primary school).	Our respondents have different education levels (primary, secondary and higher education).
<b>Employment</b>	
Most of our respondents do not work. Those who are working are either working with their husbands or in jobs that do not meet their qualifications.	Economic need is the main reason for migration. As a result of unemployment in the country of origin, one of the spouses needs to emigrate. The partners left behind are mostly unemployed or work in the agricultural sector. All of the respondents work as maids in homes taking care of the home, elderly or children.
<b>Hypergamous and hypogamous marriage</b>	
For our respondents, the marriages are hypogamous from the point of view of educational level differences between the two spouses. Men are less educated than women. However the mixed marriages could be viewed as hypergamous as they provide some level of permanent income and housing for the migrant women within the marriage as well as a legal and social status in the receiving society.	
<b>Official institutions and discrimination</b>	
Overall our respondents do not have major problems with the institutions (administrative, police, tax, health). In the case of Turkey, marriage with a Turk also allows for accessing citizenship therefore there are increasing checks by Turkish authorities to verify the genuine nature of the marriage in the period leading up to the decision to grant citizenship.	

<b>Discrimination</b>	
The cases of discrimination in the case of Turkey are limited to the stigmatization of the women from these countries as working in the sex sector. The respondents (both female and male) note questioning and disapproving looks as the physical appearance (more fair skin and hair, taller compared to an average Turkish woman) of these women mostly signal them as foreigners.	
<b>Length of the separation</b>	
	The duration of stay differs from three to ten years. However, all of the respondents note that some day they will return to their country of origin.
<b>Communication and contacts</b>	
Whenever possible, the female respondents travel to their country of origin once or twice a year depending on their visa status and financial constraints.	The respondents note that they use telephones most of the time to communicate with their family in the country of origin. They also sometimes go back to their countries to visit their spouses, children and family. Some of them need to go even for three months due to their visa status, engaging in circular migration.
<b>Pluses and minuses</b>	
Mixed family life is defined as a challenge though some positive aspects are also emphasized. The respondents find their marriages mostly as calm, stable and safe. They all admit that they put a lot of effort to make their marriage work.	The transnational marriage has one very significant positive aspect and that is economic benefit. The income from working abroad is essential for the benefit of the children and the life of the family. The respondents use this income to buy houses in their country of origin, to pay debts and to contribute to the education of children. The negative side of transnational family life is mostly the impact on children left behind to the care of mothers or in-laws, and the relationship with the spouse among other issues. All respondents view their status as immigrants as temporary, and that they will return to their country of origin.
<b>Attitude of the parents</b>	
Parents of the female respondents mostly receive the decision to marry a foreign man fairly well. Mothers of the female respondents emphasize distance and that they would miss their daughter. They also form fairly warm relations eventually. The parents of the male respondents usually respond negatively. They maintain this attitude for a fairly long time in the marriage.	Mothers of female respondents usually support the idea of migration to overcome financial challenges. They also begin to act as mothers to their grandchildren during the process, and also contributing to the household work in the home of the transnational family.
<b>Attitude of other close relatives</b>	
Attitude of close relatives are neutral or supportive, including sisters and brothers of both	

spouses.	
<b>The circle of friends</b>	
Mixed couples are received positively by their friends. However, none of the couples mentioned a large circle of friends or social network. Female respondents usually do not have a large circle of friends and even avoid maintaining relations with their neighbours.	Social networks are critical in selecting the destination of migration and receiving support to find employment.
<b>Social environment and stereotypes</b>	
The social environment in Turkey is perceived as relatively accepting of mixed families. The only drawback comes from the stereotyping of women from these countries to be viewed as mostly working in the sex sector, which might subject the couple to “looks” in public places such as restaurants.	The wider community in the country of origin is not very positive to the idea of a woman working abroad. Some respondents view this as attempting to characterize what they are not able to accomplish negatively.
<b>Language</b>	
Couples use Turkish to communicate with each other.	Respondents use Turkish to communicate with their employers.
<b>Changes in self-identification and personality</b>	
In mixed couples, neither of the spouses express any fear of losing national identity.	The respondents note that the change in the husbands in the home country are mixed. In marriages in which the partners have been together for a long time, the partners trust each other and view the migration of the female spouse as a necessity. In some marriages, the relationships have been very strained through jealousy.
<b>Identity of children</b>	
Children are raised as “Turks” in terms of language and religious practices. They do not learn about the history, culture or religion of their mothers.	
<b>Religion</b>	
Among our respondents, the spouses have not identified themselves as religious. However, most of the female respondents had already converted to Islam. In some cases, they referred to the existence of “One God”, and this belief as common to all monotheistic religions, and that it would not matter to them to pray to the same God in one way or another.	Most of the respondents were of Christian origin.
<b>Conversion</b>	
Religious conversion to Islam or raising children in the Islamic tradition was seen as natural by both of the partners.	

<b>Gender relations</b>	
There was no hesitation on the part of any of the respondents (male or female) to share their opinions on their relationship or hesitate to have the interviewers speak to them.	Most female respondents express some jealousy toward their husbands. Those relationships which experience such jealousy are the ones which are most strained.
<b>Gender roles and labour division</b>	
The female and male respondents note that they help each other with household responsibilities. Only in some cases the female respondents note that they are more engaged with the domestic work and that it is natural for them to do those as wives. In almost all the cases, the male respondent is the main breadwinner.	The respondents note that they remain responsible for all domestic work once they are back in their country of origin. The respondents are also continuously responsible for main decisions concerning education and health care of children or household repairs.
<b>Decision-making</b>	
Both male and female respondents note the decision making-process as a result of negotiations and compromise.	The respondents note that the decision-making concerning their family in the country of origin is continuously their responsibility mainly conducted by phone.
<b>Problematic areas of family life</b>	
Both the female and male respondents do not cite any major difficulties which are beyond those of any marriage, which might be present among people from the same cultural origins and background.	The respondents note that leading a transnational family life is extremely difficult. They cite that they miss their children very much. Their relationship with their partner is also consistently subject to strain.
<b>Number of children</b>	
The mixed families from our sample have from one to three children, or no children.	Majority of the respondents from our sample have one or more children. Earning an income to provide for the children's well-being and education is cited as the major reason for the decision to migrate.
<b>Religion of children</b>	
The children are raised according to Muslim tradition.	
<b>Names of children</b>	
The children have Turkish names.	
<b>Positive consequences for the children</b>	
The children enjoy the cultural and linguistic advantages of being in a mixed family. However, none of the couples mention that they make a special effort to contribute to this enrichment by for example helping children learn the language of the mother.	Financial security is cited as the biggest advantage of a transnational family life. In some cases by visiting their mothers, the children and the spouses are also able to learn about another culture.
<b>Negative consequences for the children</b>	
None of the respondents noted a specific negative consequence for children growing up in	The respondents note that their relationship with their children is put to test to the extent that

mixed families.	their children view them only as financial supporters, the mother’s authority is questioned.
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## 5. Policy conclusions, potential impact and use of the research

In the post-1990 period, Turkey has been transformed from a country of emigration to a country of destination and transit. As part of the accession process to the European Union, Turkey’s legislation on immigration and asylum has been subject to a comprehensive transformation including the administrative structure, laws and regulations governing immigration and citizenship. In the post-2005 period several twinning projects continue to contribute to the change in legislation and administrative structures. Gender is not a very visible category in the changing legislation except for legislation concerning vulnerable groups such as women who have been subject to human trafficking. It is not also possible to identify extensive mechanisms to promote the social, labour market and cultural integration of female immigrants so far. These groups are also not part of the decision-making process concerning legislation on immigration in an extensive manner. In the last few years, the migrants have been consulted through conferences and workshops mainly through pro-migrant associations. The study on mixed and transnational families is highly likely to provide substantial input toward the formulation of legislation and practices which will contribute to a comprehensive legislation (which will account for their condition and the challenges) to be formulated for immigration, which will continue arriving.

The use of this research is manifold concerning the gender dynamics of intercultural interaction. In the research on mixed families, it points out that intercultural interaction in families, at least for the sample studied in the Turkish case, does not result in a major transformation in gender roles. However, in the mixed marriages there seems to be relatively more sharing of opinions and seeking consensus among the couple in household tasks and household decisions. Second, in mixed families the main breadwinner is the male partner in the case of Turkey, not challenging the conventional division of labor on breadwinning and household responsibilities. Third, mixed families in the case of Turkey do not necessarily result in easing integration of migrant women to the receiving society or facilitate the creation of a multicultural environment for the children in the mixed marriage. It seems that the female partners for one reason or another prefer to reproduce the culture of the receiving society (in this case Turkey) for their family. Fourth, the attitude of the in-laws toward foreign daughter in-laws is less than accepting and at times reactionary. However, gradually the relationship between the in-laws and the foreign daughter-in-law seems to improve. Therefore for the society at large the mixed marriage seems to lay down the seeds to combat discrimination by allowing people to observe other cultures at the family level and confirm that they are not significantly different and become more accepting of people from other cultures and tolerant in the society at large. Fifth a major challenge in mixed families is for the female partner to be perceived as a “legally wedded wife” of their husband as opposed to a “Natasha” (a sex worker) particularly for the current sample of interviewees. The contribution of this study is also for the policy level is to help public at large differentiate between women who are in legal marriages in Turkey and those who engage in sex work.

In terms of transnational families, when viewed from the perspective of the transformation of gender roles, there are various implications for policy formulations. The women who migrate and become main “bread-winners” for their families in the country of origin do not necessarily completely transform the gender roles. To the contrary these women continue to organize household tasks and responsibilities from a distance, and once they return they act as the traditional “mother” and “wife” by performing all the household responsibilities as they did before they left for work. Moreover such

migration by these women multiplies the care responsibility on their own “mothers” and “mother-in-laws” if they have children left behind. One significant policy implication is to ensure that the status of these women are regularized in terms of their work permits allowing them to be able to travel regularly to their country of origin to maintain their family ties in a more regular way and also improve their relationship with their children. These women seemingly enjoy better income by being employed in Turkey. However, in practice in most of the cases they are in the informal economy. However if their status was formalized which would provide them with access to social benefits such as healthcare or some pension benefits. Having a secure and stable job might have allowed them to be able to bring their children or facilitate their long distance arrangement for the care of their children and families in a way which would not challenge the lives of the children and their own mothers. Such formalization of their legal status and work condition would also facilitate the removal of stigmatization of these women as sex workers across the board and be recognized as workers, care-givers who have access to rights and benefits in the receiving country.

The research reveals many underresearched aspects of feminization of migration particularly in the case of Turkey. It highlights the problems which emerge due to the emigration of these women which need to be tackled with in collaboration with countries of origin. It notes that migration is a theme which needs to be dealt with in the comprehensive framework of family policies, care policies and the informal economy including in countries such as Turkey which were traditionally viewed as countries of destination, however, are not transformed into also countries of immigration.