

Gender, Migration and intercultural Interaction  
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## Synthesis Thematic Report on WP9

# Invisible Engines of Change and Self-sacrificing Tradition-breakers: Mixed and Transnational Families in Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey

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**Georgeta Nazarska, Marko Hajdinjak**

International Center for Minority Studies and  
Intercultural Relations (IMIR)

Research teams

**International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations, Bulgaria**

Main researchers: Georgeta Nazarska, Marko Hajdinjak

Assistant researchers: Violeta Angelova, Lubomir Petkashev, Maya Kosseva, Antonina Zhelyazkova, Evgenia Troeva-Grigorova

**Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Center for Gender Studies, Greece**

Main researchers: Annie Kavvadia, Maria Stratigaki

Assistant researchers: Voula Touri, Alexandros Delistathis

**Bilkent University, Department of Political Science, Turkey**

Main researchers: Dilek Cindoglu, Saime Ozcurumez

Assistant researchers: Nazli Senses, Tolga Bolukbasi, Adnan Boynukara

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## 1. Introduction

The social scientists are interested in studying mixed and transnational families for a number of reasons. Multicultural coexistence, racial, ethnic and gender conflicts and tensions, and formation of hybrid practices and identities can all be analysed in their relation to the issues of identity, religion, language, traditional gender roles, racism and xenophobia, and acceptance and tolerance.

Of the two family types, the mixed families were the first to attract the attention of researchers (late 1960s), but the bulk of the research dates from the post-1990 period. The interest in transnational families also intensified since 1990, when a number of key texts in anthropology have reconceptualised the research on the international migration and introduced the concept of “transnationalism.” Transnationalism influenced a new understanding not only of individual migrants and migrant communities, but also of migrant families. The traditional understanding of families as units based on co-residency at the same place had to be changed as it became clear that many of the families in today’s world are spatially dispersed and fragmented – the transnational families. Despite the rich body of literature, which has appeared during the last two decades, the field is still not well theorised and conceptualised as most of the existing studies on mixed and transnational families are empirical and contextual.

This is even more the case in south-eastern Europe, where so far little scholarly attention was devoted to the subject of mixed and transnational families and where even the empirical studies are very scarce. The Bulgarian research literature for example is most often interested in emigration, while immigration and immigrants have been so far insufficiently studied. There are virtually no studies dedicated exclusively to the issue of mixed or transnational families. The transnational families have been touched upon by several authors while studying the emigration patterns of Bulgarian citizens, but were never the main focus of the study. Several authors have looked into the phenomenon of mixed families, but again mostly in studies on emigration (mixed marriages of Bulgarians with nationals of destination countries – USA, Hungary, Slovakia). The mixed marriages of Bulgarians with immigrants in Bulgaria have been only episodically included in the studies of immigrants (for example a study on the integration of Kurdish immigrants or the problem of selection of children names in the Bulgarian-Arab families).

In Greece, the issue of mixed and transnational families has so far received very little attention. Even the issue of transnationalism, despite monopolising a large part of the debates in the literature on international migration in the last two decades, is still under-explored in the Greek literature. There are only a handful of exceptions. Mixed and transnational families are an under-researched area also in Turkey and have not been addressed in the existing research on migration in the country.

<sup>1</sup> Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, Cristina Blanc Szanton (eds.) *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration. Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered*. New York: New York Academy of Sciences, July 1992, Vol. 645

Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, Cristina Szanton Blanc (eds.) *Nations Unbound. Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994;

Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (eds.) *Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism*. Cheltenham, UK, Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 1999;

Steven Vertovec “Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism” in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* Vol. 22, No. 2 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Margarita Karamihova. *Американски мечти. Пътеводител сред първа генерация емигранти* (American Dreams. A Guide through the First Generation Emigrants). Sofia: IK Krotal, 2004;

Valentina Ganeva-Raicheva. *Българите в Унгария – проблеми на културната идентичност* (Bulgarians in Hungary – Issues of Cultural Identity). Sofia: AI Prof. Marin Drinov, 2004;

Valentina Ganeva-Raicheva. “Българската диаспора в Унгария – аспекти на интеркултурния диалог” (The Bulgarian Diaspora in Hungary – Aspects of Inter-cultural Dialogue) *Антропологични изследвания* (Studies in Anthropology), Vol. 5, 2004, pp. 145-172.

Svetlana Antova. “Смесените бракове между българи и словаци” (The Mixed Marriages between Bulgarians and Slovaks) in *Българска етнология* (Ethnologia Bulgarica). Vol. 1, 2004, pp. 28-39.

<sup>3</sup> Evgenia Miceva. “Кюрди” (Kurds) in Anna Krasteva (ed.). *Имиграцията в България* (Immigration in Bulgaria). Sofia: IMIR, 2004, pp. 137-155;

Katya Grozeva-Issa. “Психо- и социо-лингвистични проблеми при избор на лични имена в българо-арабски семейства” (Psycho- and Socio-Linguistic Problems in First Name Selection in Mixed Bulgarian-Arab Families) *Улика* (Science). Sofia: Union of Scientists in Bulgaria, Vol. 5, 2004, pp. 49-52.

For this reason, the current research is of significant importance as it generates a ground-breaking and previously unavailable knowledge. In addition to being among the very first studies conducted on this topic in Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey, the current research is also among the first attempts to produce a comparative study on gender and migration involving these three countries and to draw some region-valid conclusions.

The following report is based on the field research conducted in Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey between February 2009 and January 2010 by three different teams, each doing a fieldwork in its country: IMIR in Bulgaria, Panteion University in Greece and Bilkent University in Turkey. The introductory section of the report will outline the main objectives of the report; describe the methodology used during the fieldwork; and define and explain the basic concepts and terms.

The central section of the report is divided into two parts. One presents the main findings and the analysis of the field research on the mixed families, while the other brings forward the results of the study on transnational families. In the conclusion, the main findings of the research are summarised and some relevant policy recommendations are proposed. In two appendixes, the profiles of the respondents from interviews and focus groups are presented.

## **1.1. Research goals**

The goal of the present research is to investigate the intersections between gender and migration, and explore their influence on the relations between members of mixed and transnational families. The report will analyse the way gender dynamics in these families is conditioned by the external factors like the levels of acceptance and rejection in the specific national settings, institutional frameworks dealing with immigrants, and the prevailing traditional patterns of gender relations, and by the internal factors like interactions between people with different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds in a family environment. The changing gender relations within such families and their position in a broader social context will also be assessed.

The research method selected for this field study was the analysis of qualitative data gathered through interviews and focus groups. Given the relatively limited number of respondents who were involved in the research, the findings cannot be used as a basis for making general comprehensive conclusions but rather to identify the prevailing trends and more precisely interconnections between gender, ethnicity, religion and intercultural integration as they can be observed in the specific area of parental, family and social relations. Traditional ethnic/national and gender hierarchies suggest that local and male partners occupy the dominant position in the family hierarchy, while the migrant and female partners are in the position of dependency. However, the intersections of these two traditional sets of power relations may reveal some interesting and "unexpected" tendencies in the social and family relations.

Mixed families face a very specific set of problems and difficulties. These can be a consequence of the partners' experiences with their extended families, the prevailing attitudes in the society, and the framework provided by the legal environment and the official institutions. These difficulties include (but are not limited to) issue of citizenship/residence permit of the migrant spouse and children, unfamiliarity with the official language, access to social benefits and health insurance, access to kindergartens and schools, employment possibilities for immigrant spouse, and the prejudices and discrimination towards foreigners from certain countries/regions. All these issues influence the social status and the possibilities for integration of such families, and consequently also the gender roles and gender dynamics.

The lives of the transnational families have also been tremendously changed as a result of the migration experience. The transnational spouses, mothers and fathers have left behind their partners and children under the pressure of economic needs and have gone abroad in search of better

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<sup>4</sup> Lina Ventoura, Sevasti Troumbeta (eds) "Σύγχρονες Θεωρήσεις του Μεταναστευτικού Φαινομένου" (Contemporary Approaches to Migration) in *Σύγχρονα Θέματα τευχ. 92* (Synchrona Themata), special issue, No.92, 2006, pp. 21-86.

employment. Despite providing the much needed economic and financial security for their families, the transnational family life has profoundly influenced and changed all family members. Our research concentrated on exploring gender and social relations of the partners from transnational families. The research also tried to establish how the existing national policies and institutional frameworks dealing with immigrants, the prevailing traditional patterns of gender relations and the long separation from the partner and children influence the gender dynamics in the transnational families.

The research has also explored the mixed and transnational families as spaces of intercultural interaction. In particular, the experiences of mixed and transnational families as an indicator of tension and conflict in intercultural relations was investigated in order to establish how and if such families could play a role of a factor contributing to intercultural dialogue, integration, tolerance and social cohesion.

## **1.2. Research methods**

The field research was based on the qualitative research methods – semi-standardized in-depth interviews and focus groups.

In the case of mixed families, both spouses were interviewed at the same time in the same place, but in different rooms – independently from each other. A male interviewer talked with the male respondents, and a female interviewer with the female ones to ensure the maximum level of comfort and willingness to discuss the often sensitive issues. The decision to interview both partners at the same time was made to prevent the possibility of one partner telling the other about the interview and the questions asked, which would significantly reduce the authenticity of the answers. The interviews were pre-arranged. The first contact was usually established over the telephone or through a mediator, and the time and place were agreed. Some couples were contacted via the social environment of the researchers and some through a non-governmental organisation, which specialised in migration issues. The teams encountered certain difficulties during the fieldwork. The Bulgarian team found it difficult to motivate and persuade Bulgarian women married to foreigners to participate in the research. It was also difficult to find couples where both partners were willing or able to give interviews at the same time and place. The Greek team had difficulties, after identifying mixed couples, to make them agree on simultaneous interviewing. In addition, husbands were more reluctant to expose their personal lives to the researchers. The Turkish team identified mixed couples by snow-balling technique. The main problem was establishing trust needed to be referred to other couples, but the team overcame this challenge after a few interviews.

In the case of transnational families, only one spouse was interviewed. In Turkey and Greece, the researchers interviewed the immigrant partners - women from the former socialist countries, who have left their families behind and settled in Athens or Istanbul, where they now live and work (most often in domestic care work). In Bulgaria, the respondents were those partners from transnational families, who have stayed behind at home and are relying on remittances sent by the partner who has emigrated. This part of the fieldwork took place in several small towns and villages in south-west Bulgaria – an ethnically and religiously diverse region with unfavourable economic situation and high level of emigration.

After the interview stage, several focus groups were organised in all three countries to gather additional information. The focus group participants were different from the interviewees, but had a similar social and demographic profile.

### Mixed families

Prior to the start of the fieldwork, the research teams discussed and decided on the main characteristics of the respondents for each of the three countries. The interviews were taken at different places: some in the offices of the research teams, some at homes of the families or at their work place, some in neutral places like coffee shops. The interviews lasted from one hour to two hours. All were recorded and fully transcribed. The questions in the interview guides were divided into the following sections: Background on family characteristics; Contacts and experience of mixed

families with the official institutions; Intercultural aspects of mixed family life; Gender 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 adaptation and integration of the immigrant spouse into the host society, the family social environment (including extended 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.

After the data from the interviews has been analysed and it was established which areas were sufficiently covered and where additional information was needed, the interview guides were revised and shortened. Thus the questionnaires for the focus groups were designed, consisting of about 10 most relevant questions (each providing space for additional sub-questions if needed).

The Bulgarian team has focused on interviews with mixed families consisting of a Bulgarian woman and a man from Middle Eastern or an African country. All together 8 mixed families were interviewed (men were from the following countries: Afghanistan - 2, Austria, Guinea, Iraq - 2, Lebanon, and Zambia). Although immigrants from Africa and Middle East represent a relatively small share of immigrants in Bulgaria and the more typical mixed families in Bulgaria are those involving foreign spouses from the Western European countries or former Soviet Union, the Bulgarian team considered the selected family unions as exceptionally interesting and challenging case study. Such families have been very rarely studied in Bulgaria before. What is known from various studies on ethnic and racial distances is that the immigrants from Africa and Middle Eastern Muslim countries are perceived as the least desired marital partners. Because of these negative public perceptions, such mixed families are subject to a strong social pressure and suffer from a number of problems - from being rejected by friends and families through institutional discrimination to racist attacks. Two focus groups were organised in IMIR's office in Sofia. The group with male participants included 8 people (from Congo, Ghana, Guinea, Palestine, Syria, Tanzania, Togo and Zambia) and lasted almost three hours. The female group consisted of 4 participants (all Bulgarians) and lasted about an hour and a half.

The Turkish team interviewed 8 couples – wives from the former Soviet Union, Central and Eastern Europe and Turkish husbands. Such families/couples are the most common and typical mixed family type in Turkey. The female respondents were from the following countries: Georgia, Hungary, Moldova - 3, Russia, and Ukraine - 2. Two focus groups were held at a research office in Istanbul. A female group had 6 participants (from Armenia, Moldova - 2, Romania and Russia - 2), while the male group had 5 (all from Turkey).

In Greece, the selection of mixed families was different from Turkey and Bulgaria. In order to make comparisons and study the interplay between gender and nationality, the Greek team split the interviews in two groups. The researchers thus interviewed 6 couples composed of Greek husbands and wives of foreign origin (Albania, Czech Republic, Moldova and Romania - 3) and 5 couples with a foreign husband (Albania - 2, Colombia, Jordan and Turkey) and a Greek wife. One group was organised at the Centre for Gender Studies at the Panteion University. It included three immigrant women (from Bulgaria, Montenegro and Russia) married to Greek men.

### Transnational families

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<sup>5</sup> The interview with a family Bulgarian wife – Austrian husband was added to provide a different perspective and comparison with the Bulgarian-Middle Eastern and Bulgarian-African families

<sup>6</sup> According to the information of the National Statistical Institute, there have been 403 permanently residing foreign nationals in Bulgaria on December 31, 2000. Of this number, 4,379 were from Europe, 988 from Asia and only 651 from Africa. [http://www.nsi.bg/ORPDOCS/Pop\\_5.8\\_Migration\\_DR\\_EN.xls](http://www.nsi.bg/ORPDOCS/Pop_5.8_Migration_DR_EN.xls)

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 Gender 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 respondents (or their partners in the Bulgarian case). 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-making 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, issues of trust and jealousy, the role of the extended family, and the advantages and disadvantages of transnational family life.

In the Bulgarian case, 12 interviews with the members of transnational families were taken during the three field-trips to different areas in south-western Bulgaria. They were not pre-arranged. The respondents were found and selected on the spot – the information about where to find them was gathered in village shops, bars and other public spaces. The interviews were taken at different places – on the central village squares, on children playground, village pubs and at homes of the respondents. The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to a bit over an hour. A focus group was organised in the village of Sapareva Banya with six women participants – it lasted just short of one hour.

In Greek case, 8 interviews with women who are working as in-house domestic workers in Athens were conducted. Four interviews took place at the house where they work (the employer was absent during the interviews), three took place at the office of the interviewer and one at her house. Interviewees came from Bulgaria - 2, Georgia - 2, Poland - 2 and Ukraine - 2.

The Turkish team interviewed 8 respondents who live and work as domestic help in Istanbul. The interviews have taken place either at the workplace of the respondent or a coffee shop and lasted up to one hour. They were from different countries (Bulgaria, Moldova - 6, Turkmenistan). The Turkish team organised also a focus group in Istanbul – four women participated (from Georgia - 2, Mongolia and Russia).

### **1.3. Basic premises and concepts**

The term mixed marriages is one of the most commonly used (in addition to intercultural families, cross-ethnic families and cross-cultural marriages) for referring to marital unions of partners coming from different countries and belonging to different religions and ethnicities. Such marriages are often in the focus of studies exploring the processes of cultural adaptation, integration of immigrant groups, the nature of inter-group relations, social distances, and power relations between state institutions and different cultural groups.

Mixed marriages have first attracted the attention of the US scholars, but soon became a popular research topic also in Europe and other parts of the world. Scholars have been interested in the various types of intermarriages: interethnic, interfaith, intercultural or interracial. Some authors are interested mainly in the demographic characteristics of individuals in mixed marriages and explore their links with the cultural and structural factors influencing intermarriage. Others center their research on the interplay of racial and gender variables in the mixed marriages and explore the place of such marriages in the societal and cultural context. Special attention is given to the question whether these contexts are permitting or discouraging mixed marriages. A considerable number of studies have dealt with marital unions of "western" (usually North American and Western European) and "non-western (most often African and Asian) partners.

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<sup>7</sup> Rosemary Breger, Rosanna Hill (eds.). *Cross-Cultural Marriage: Identity and Choice*. Oxford, UK: Berg, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Ann Baker Cottrel "Cross-national Marriages: A Review of the Literature" *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* Vol. 21, 1990, pp. 151-169;

Dina Khan. "Mixed Marriages in Islam: An Anthropological Perspective on Pakistan" *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* Vol. 29, 1998, pp. 5-28;



Another volume of research is interested in exploring how the state policies in the field of intermarriage influence (positively or negatively) the social discourses towards foreigners and mixed marriages.<sup>9</sup> Various authors have studied the influence of different societal factors on the attitudes towards mixed marriages<sup>10</sup>

There are two main theoretical paradigms regarding the processes of cultural adaptation in intermarriage. Some authors perceive the mixed marriages as a form of assimilation of immigrants into the dominating culture.<sup>11</sup> Opposing the assimilation theory is the acculturation paradigm, which states that intermarriage does not lead necessarily to loss of ethnic or cultural identity and rather a consequence of cultural mix and social tolerance.<sup>12</sup> Some authors believe that the process of cultural adaptation affects both partners (from the minority and the dominating culture) and thus talk about "mutual acculturation."<sup>13</sup>

Another group of authors looks at mixed marriages as a challenge to the prevailing norms of endogamy and points out that as such, mixed families are often subject to a considerable social pressure and social sanctions.<sup>14</sup> There are also authors who put their focus on the positive aspects of mixed marriages – greater degree of tolerance and respect, possibilities for education and growth of children, shortening of interethnic, interfaith and interracial distances.<sup>15</sup>

The actual possibility to meet someone with a different cultural, religious or ethnic background through education, work or informal socializing is an exceptionally important precondition for a mixed marriage. Segregation, geographical isolation, separation based on differences in education and income, ethnic/national/religious animosities on group and individual level, and language and cultural differences are named as the most important factors contributing to high homogamy rates in a particular society.<sup>16</sup> Group identification, group sanctions, social and cultural distances between various groups, openness of a given society to cultural heterogeneity all play an important role in encouraging or discouraging intermarriages.<sup>17</sup>

The studies of mixed marriages are closely linked with the correlations between ethnic/racial endogamy and social/educational homogamy and with the correlations between gender, race,

Dorit Roer-Strier and Dina Ben Ezra. "Intermarriages between Western Women and Palestinian Men: Multidirectional Adaptation Processes" in *Journal of Marriage and Family* Vol. 68, Issue 1, Feb 2006 pp. 41-55;

Anne E. Imamura. "Strangers in a Strange Land: Coping with Marginality in International Marriage" *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* Vol. 21, 1990, pp. 171-191.

<sup>9</sup> Breger, Hill (eds.). *Cross-Cultural Marriage: Identity and Choice*

Roer-Strier and Ezra. "Intermarriages between Western Women and Palestinian Men: Multidirectional Adaptation Processes."

<sup>10</sup> Cardell Jakobson, Tim Heaton. "Comparative Patterns of Interracial Marriage: Structural Opportunities, Third-party Factors, and Temporal Change in Immigrant Societies" *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* Vol. 39, Issue 2, 2008, pp. 129-148

Bryan Johnson, Cardell Jacobson. "Contact in Context: An Examination of Social Settings on Whites' Attitudes towards Interracial Marriage" in *Social Psychology Quarterly* Vol. 68, 2005, pp. 387-399.

<sup>11</sup> Milton M. Gordon. *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origin* New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.

<sup>12</sup> Steven Martin Cohen *American Assimilation or Jewish Revival?* Bloomington: Indiana University, 1988.

<sup>13</sup> Celia Jaes Falicov "Cross-Cultural Marriages" in Neil Jacobson, Alan S. Gurman (eds.). *Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy*. New York: Guilford, 1995, pp. 231-246.

<sup>14</sup> Abe W. Ata. *Intermarriage between Christians and Muslims in the West Bank Study* Victoria, Australia: David Lovell, 2000.

Walton R. Johnson, D. Michael Warren "Introduction" in Walton R. Johnson, D. Michael Warren (eds.). *Inside the Mixed Marriage: Accounts of Changing Attitudes, Perceptions of Cross-Cultural and Interracial Marriages* Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994, pp. 1-13.

Hilke Thode-Arora. *Interethnic Marriage. Theoretical and Methodological Aspects* Berlin: Reimer, 1999.

Jutta Lauth Bacas *Cross-border Marriages and the Formation of Transnational Families: A Case Study of Greek-German Couples in Athens* Oxford: University of Oxford, Working Paper, October 2002 <http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working%20papers/WPTC-02-10%20Bacas.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Rosemary Breger, Rosanna Hill. "Introducing Mixed Marriages" in Breger, Hill (eds.) *Cross-Cultural Marriage: Identity and Choice*

Man Keung Ho. *Intermarried Couples in Therapy* Springfield, IL: Thomas, 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Jakobson, Heaton. "Comparative Patterns of Interracial Marriage: Structural Opportunities, Third-party Factors, and Temporal Change in Immigrant Societies"

<sup>17</sup> Helmut Muhsam. "Social Distance and Asymmetry in Intermarriage Patterns" *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* Vol. 21, 1990, pp. 307-324;

Matthijs Kalmijn "Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns, Trends" *Annual Review of Sociology* Vol. 24, 1998, pp. 395-421.

ethnicity and hypergamy. The number and acceptance of mixed marriages in a given society is thus for many authors an indication of integration of a given minority or immigrant group into the dominating society. The more frequent the intermarriages, the lesser are the structural and cultural distances between different groups. The main factors on which intermarriages depend are identified as ethnicity, race, religion and education. According to various authors, the racial boundaries to mixed marriages are much more substantial and difficult to overcome than for example ethnic or national origin and religion.<sup>18</sup>

Some of the critics to the existing scholarship on mixed marriages point out that usually little attention is paid to the cultural adaptation strategies of the partners belonging to the host or dominant group. Critics also note that too often the approach of researchers is too static and does not consider multiple adaptation strategies of mixed families, and that mixed families are usually studied as a passive indicator of inter-ethnic relations in a given society and not as an engine of social change.<sup>19</sup> In the opinion of some authors, the influence of the power relations and ethnic/racial/cultural hierarchies over mixed families has yet to receive the attention it deserves.

The transnational families got in the focus of the migration studies in the early 1990s. The new analytical framework introduced the concept of "transnationalism" and explained migration as a multi-sited social space, which is simultaneously experienced by communities across borders. Unlike the traditional migration theories that treat the migration phenomena as limited to integration or assimilation in the receiving societies, transnationalism offers an alternative approach, where experiences of migrants are analysed through the prism of multiple attachments and their simultaneous positioning in several social (and territorial) locations.<sup>22</sup>

The main fields of study within the paradigm of transnationalism deal with transnational migrant networks, transnational political activity, transnational citizenship, remittances, and transnational families. The concept of transnationalism has influenced not only the new reading of migration and migrant communities, but has also changed a perspective on the traditional understanding of families – from families based on co-residency at the same place to ones that are spatially dispersed and fragmented. Members of transnational families maintain transborder kinship relations to sustain livelihoods that span over two or more states.<sup>23</sup>

According to the early authors of transnationalism, the family is a basic unit of the transnational relationships. The family and the need for its survival through remittances and other forms of assistance is the main factor triggering migration. Migration usually has an additional effect of widening family networks as migrants locate all possible relatives able to help in the process of migration.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>18</sup> George Douglas, George Yancey. "Taking Stock of America's Attitudes on Cultural Diversity: An Analysis of Public Deliberation on Multiculturalism, Assimilation and Intermarriage" *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* Vol. 35, Part 1, 2004, pp. 1-19.

<sup>19</sup> Joshua R. Goldstein. "Kinship Networks that Cross Racial Lines: The Exception or the Rule?" *Demography*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 1999, pp. 399-407.

George A. Yancey, Sherelyn W. Yancey. "Black-White Differences in the Use of Personal Advertisements for Individuals Seeking Interracial Relationships" *Journal of Black Studies* Vol. 27, No. 5, 1997, pp. 650-667.

<sup>20</sup> Roer-Strier and Ezra. "Intermarriages between Western Women and Palestinian Men: Multidirectional Adaptation Processes."

<sup>21</sup> Glick Schiller, Basch, Blanc Szanton (eds.) *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration. Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered*

Basch, Glick Schiller, Szanton Blanc *Nations Unbound. Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*

Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen. "Introduction" in Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (eds.) *Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism* Cheltenham, UK, Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Schiller et al (eds.) *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration*.

<sup>23</sup> Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, Cristina Blanc Szanton "From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration" in *Anthropological Quarterly* Vol. 68, No. 1, January 1995, pp. 48-64.

<sup>24</sup> Nina Glick Schiller, Georges Eugene Fouron. *Georges Woke Up Laughing: Long Distance Nationalism and the Search for Home* Durham-London: Duke University Press 2001, p. 61.

The majority of existing studies on transnational families have focused on separations between family members – between spouses and between parents and their children (transnational parenting,<sup>25</sup> transnational motherhood<sup>26</sup> and transnational childhood<sup>27</sup>). Analysing the transnational family life from the gendered perspective, some of these studies indicate that in the case of families with migrant mothers (the “transnational mothers”), the families come under more pressure and experience more difficulties than in the cases of migrant fathers.

There are two general approaches to the study of transnational families. One focuses on the negative and the other on the positive and constructive aspects of transnational family life. The negative aspects revolve around the notion of “care drain” – the global transfer of care work from poor to rich countries, and the consequent transfer of emotional resources, which has exceptionally negative effects on the children left behind.<sup>28</sup> Among the positive aspects different authors stress the durable practices of maintenance and reproduction of family ties, which are kept alive despite the great distances and prolonged separations.<sup>29</sup> The very existence of transnational families rests on kin ties being kept alive and maintained across time and space. Some studies pay attention to the importance of transnational “productive,” “kin” and “caring work.” Productive work regards the involvement of migrant women in the economic support of their families. Kin work regards the role of women in maintaining transnational family relations and kin ties. Caring work involves the tasks related to looking after the young, the elderly and the sick. Studies dealing with the care work domain are interested in the ways in which caring tasks are being carried out across geographical distance. The focus has been on caring work that occurs both between and within generations. Work on transnational families thus aims to study the new ways of articulating family relationships as a result of migration and the changes that are produced by migration in the structure of the family, its functions and the gender roles within it.

<sup>25</sup> Jason Pribilsky. “Aprendemos A Convivir’: Conjugal Relations, Co-parenting, and Family Life Among Ecuadorian Transnational Migrants in New York and the Ecuadorian Andes” in *Global Networks* Vol. 4, Issue 3, 2004, pp. 313-334; Michele Ruth Gamburd. *The Kitchen Spoon’s Handle: Transnationalism and Sri Lanka’s Migrant Housemaids*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000;

Ninna Nyberg Sorensen. *Transnational Family Life across the Atlantic: The Experience of Colombian and Dominican Migrants in Europe* Paper presented at the International Conference on Migration and domestic work in a global perspective, Wassenaar, the Netherlands, May 2005.

<sup>26</sup> Umut Erel. “Reconceptualising Motherhood: Experiences of Migrant Women from Turkey Living in Germany” in Deborah Bryceson and Ulla Vuorela (eds.) *The Transnational Family. New European Frontiers and Global Networks*. Oxford: Berg, 2002, pp. 127-146;

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila. “I’m Here, But I’m There. The Meanings of Latina Transnational Motherhood” in *Gender and Society* Vol. 11, Issue 5, 1997, pp. 548-571;

Rhacel Salazar Parreñas. *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

<sup>27</sup> Rhacel Salazar Parreñas. *Children of Global Migration: Transnational Families and Gendered Work*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005;

Carola Suarez-Orozco and Marcelo Suarez-Orozco. *Children of Immigration*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2002.

<sup>28</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (eds.) *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. London: Granta Books, 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Deborah Bryceson and Ulla Vuorela (eds.) *The Transnational Family. New European Frontiers and Global Networks*. Oxford: Berg, 2002.

Jennifer Mason. “Managing Kinship Over Long Distances: The Significance of the Visit” *Social Policy and Society* Vol. 3, No. 4, 2004, pp. 421-429.

Raelene Wilding. “Virtual Intimacies? Families Communicating across Transnational Contexts” *Global Networks* Vol. 6, Issue 2, 2006, pp. 125-142.

Elisabetta Zontini. “Italian Families and Social Capital: Care Provision in a Transnational World” *Community, Work and Family*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 2006, pp. 325-345.

<sup>30</sup> Loretta Baldassar and Cora Baldock. “Linking Migration and Family Studies: Transnational Migrants and the Care of Ageing Parents” in Biko Agozino (ed.) *Theoretical and Methodological Issues in Migration Research: Interdisciplinary, Intergenerational and International Perspectives*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000, pp. 61-89

Harry Goulbourne and Mary Chamberlain (eds.) *Caribbean Families in the Transatlantic World*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001;

Tracey Reynolds and Elisabetta Zontini. “A Comparative Study of Care and Provision Across Caribbean and Italian Transnational Families” in *Families and Social Capital ESRC Research Group Working Paper No. 16*. London: South Bank University, 2006

Zontini. “Italian Families and Social Capital: Care Provision in a Transnational World.”

## 2. Analysis of the field research on mixed families

### 2.1. The main characteristics of the respondents

The three teams have conducted altogether 54 interviews (with both partners from 27 mixed families). In Bulgaria and Turkey 8 families were interviewed, while in Greece 11. Several focus groups were also organised – in Bulgaria two (with Bulgarian women and with immigrant men), in Turkey two (with Turkish men and immigrant women) and in Greece one (with immigrant women).

According to the preliminary declared intentions and interests, which were dictated by the characteristic features of mixed marriages in all three countries, the research teams studied different types of mixed families. The Bulgarian team thus studied predominantly mixed families consisting of Bulgarian women married to men originating predominantly in the Middle East (Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria) and Africa (Congo, Ghana, Guinea, Tanzania, Togo, and Zambia).<sup>31</sup> The Greek team concentrated on two models typical for the country: marriages between Greek men and women from the former socialist bloc (Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Russia) and between Greek women and men from (predominantly) Muslim countries (Albania, Jordan, Turkey).<sup>32</sup> The Turkish team studied the families consisting of Turkish men and women from the former Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries (Armenia, Georgia, Hungary, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Ukraine). Such selection of interviewees provided the research teams with the opportunity to study both the migration trends and the interactions between Islam and Christianity.

The profile of the respondents can be outlined in the following way. Their ages range from 26 to 75 and thus the sample included representatives of relatively young, middle-aged and senior generations among them (Turkey: 29-57 for women, 26-65 for men; Greece: 40-57 for women, 40-64 for men; Bulgaria: 37-67 for women, 38-75 for men). The length of their marriages is very diverse too – from six months to 44 years in Bulgaria, from one and a half to 38 years in Greece and from 1 to 19 years in Turkey. In many cases, especially in Greece and Turkey, the current marriage is a second marriage for one or both partners. Those respondents with previous marriages evaluate their mixed marriages in a very positive light and compare them against their marriages with their compatriots, which have brought them only disappointment.

The majority of respondents in all three countries have higher than the average education level – especially in Bulgaria and Greece, where most of the respondents have high education (in Turkey the majority have secondary education). In Bulgaria there is usually no difference in the education level of the partners, while in Greece and Turkey in the majority of cases immigrant partners are with better education than the native ones.

Regarding their social status and professions, most respondents belong to the middle class and intelligentsia – they work as doctors, engineers, technicians, domestic workers, clerks, employees in restaurants, petrol stations and other private businesses, lawyers, teachers, businesspersons, etc. It is worth noting that in Bulgaria, most often the male immigrants (despite having university degrees) do not work in their fields, but rather have low-paid manual jobs or are unemployed, which is closely connected with discrimination because of their racial origin or religion. In Greece, migrant men also often work in jobs shaped by their ethnicity – they rarely have jobs corresponding to their level of qualification.

Most of the families have met in the countries under study.<sup>33</sup> They usually met through common friends and social networks – in most cases in the university campus, at work or during leisure

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<sup>31</sup> There was one exception – family with husband from Austria.

<sup>32</sup> With one exception – husband from Colombia.

<sup>33</sup> The exceptions are very few – one couple from Bulgaria met in Austria, and two from Greece in the USA and Czech Republic respectively.

activities. The majority of respondents were attracted by the outside appearance and above all the moral qualities of their partners (honesty, responsibility, respect, humour, etc). In all three countries the period of dating before the marriage was relatively long – from 1 to 3 years, which is characteristic for this type of marriages, as partners are more careful with getting to know each other and have to overcome considerable social pressure.

All three teams have noticed the small number of children in the mixed marriages, which is a significant deviation from the traditional model for many of the countries our respondents were from. In most cases, the families have one or two children, while some have none.<sup>34</sup> In several cases, the reason for the small number of children are the persistent economic problems (especially in the cases when the immigrant partner is male), but from the context of the conversations can be deduced that the social exclusion and the resistance of the extended family also play a significant role.

## 2.2. Integration into the host country

Many of the interviewed foreigners from the mixed families in all three countries believe that the society is to a considerable extent unfriendly or even hostile and rejects those who are of different origin and culture. Such attitude is especially visible regarding the mixed marriages with Muslims (in Bulgaria and Greece), Albanians (in Greece), women from the former Soviet Union (in Turkey), and with Africans (in Bulgaria). *Well, at first there was much fear and distrust. Because we Bulgarians are brought up to believe that Muslims are terrible. They were literally afraid for me. ...Another bad thing is that when they see a Bulgarian woman married to an Arab, they consider her an easy wd/man* (Iva, 49, Bulgaria, Bulgarian report).

Numerous negative stereotypes and prejudices have been formed regarding these immigrants. Some of the stereotypes (regarding Muslims in Greece and Bulgaria) have historic roots and are linked with the centuries when these two nations were under the Ottoman domination. Some are a product of the modern times (racial prejudices against the Africans); others emerged after the end of the Cold War (about Albanians as terrorists and criminals, and "Russian" women as prostitutes). Some stereotypes lead to stigmatisation and strengthen the social distances, while others go even further and result in racist and xenophobic attitudes and policies of social exclusion. *What I have gone through because of this relationship – I do not wish this to anyone* (Iva, 49, Bulgaria, Bulgarian report).

Most of the respondents say that they have encountered the strongest resistance among the older generations, while in general the younger tend to be more liberal. *I believe that nowadays the youth... at my daughter's age, they don't... they don't have any difficulties, they don't pay attention to the nationality. I don't think sb* (Maria, 57, Czech Republic, Greek report).

On the other hand, the African immigrants in Bulgaria complain of being frequently attacked by gangs of skinheads – part of the youth subculture, which often acts as a strike force of the extreme right political formations. *And there are many skinheads, they curse you, attack you, even on buses. They have beaten me on a bus, followed me, I was hit on a bus station and had to go to the emergency hospital* (Lansana, 38, Guinea, Bulgarian report).

The attitudes towards immigrants are highly conditioned by the social-economic class and education of the people from the host society. *Sb the people who are well educated, have good culture, from nice environment, they will not look down on you* (Nasir, 50, Iraq, Bulgarian report). *"In my student years, for example, at the university, in the libraries, we didn't have problems. But at the same time I lived and worked with the common people, so to say with the lower class. They pay much more attention to the racial issues, they call you a monkey* (Peter, 40, Zambia, Bulgarian report).

In this unfavourable social climate, the mixed families can successfully integrate into the host society only if supported by a favourable micro-social milieu. The families of the immigrants, which

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<sup>34</sup> A partial exception to this rule were some of the families in Turkey, where spouses had several children from their previous marriages. However, they usually have no or one child together.

remained behind in their home countries, usually fully support the mixed families. *My parents are totally open-minded, regardless of who my partner would be, they simply wish me to be happy* (Maria, 33, Bulgaria, Greek report). The support of the mothers of the female immigrants is especially noticeable (Greece, Turkey). *My mother was first afraid of my husband to be. However, when he came to visit, she really liked him* (Katinka, 50, Hungary, Turkish report) and *My mom really liked him.* (Olesya, 51, Russia, Turkish report). The parents have accepted and approved the fact that their children have married a person from the country to which they have migrated. There were only few examples of objections *"And why are you going to get married to a Greek woman, and I don't know what"* (Ervin, 36, Albania, Greek report).

In contrast, very often the families of the local partner reject or disapprove (at least initially) of their children's decision. Usually, the reaction of the fathers was much more negative and in some cases went to the extreme – refusal to be present at the wedding, cutting off contacts, disinheritance. *"He does not want to accept the fact, he openly tells me – he not only shows it, but actually tells me when he is angry: I will never give you my approval. You have married my daughter in spite of my objections and you can't expect anything from me"* (Mohammad, 48, Afghanistan, Bulgarian report) *"Basically, Sotiris's father disinherited him. That is, all the family fortune belongs to his sister"* (Corina, 49, Romania, Greek report).

The disapproval is often reflected in how the parents responded to the announcement of the marriage by these couples. *My husbands' family never wanted me, did not want to talk to me, did not want to meet with me and did not want to see me... when my husband announced that he wanted to marry me, they told him 'You cannot marry her, and if you ever do so, we will denounce you as our son'* (Elena, 30, Ukraine, Turkish report). *They arrived at the wedding as guests, they were afraid that we might push them to have hashish, which [they believed was] a Turkish tradition to smoke* (Sait, 50, Turkey-Kurdistan, Greek report). *Nobody from her family wanted to come to the wedding. Only her sister came, drank one small glass and after two minutes said she had to go* (Hasan, 37, Togo Bulgarian report).

Mothers were as a rule much more open towards the new situation and were the first to break the deadlock, starting the communication and eventually accepting the newly-wed. *My mother for example has no objections to this relationship* (Elena, 37, Bulgaria, Bulgarian report) *"My mother accepted it instantly. And my sister as well"* (Anna, 67, Bulgaria, Bulgarian report) *"We lived two years with her parents. Her mother still cries because we moved away. I like to cook very much, to do the domestic work. We constantly ran into each other in the kitchen, behind the stove, at the sink. So I told her that we both needed a kitchen of our own. So don't think that we are moving out for some other reason, I just need to have my own kitchen. But she still keeps a room for us"* (Jamil, 56, Syria, Bulgarian report). Of course, there are also exceptions and some mothers reacted extremely negatively. *"We were married for three years without the knowledge of her mother. Our son was born without her knowing it. My wife used to tell me that if her mother found out about me, she would get a heart attack. After all, she eventually did find out. She almost fainted. And from then on, everything went wrong. They started pulling her away from me and giving her conditions – either to be with them or with me. And so we separated"* (Chisse, 45, Ghana, Bulgarian report).

The respondents evaluate the attitude of their friends and neighbours in a much more positive light. Very positive examples were provided in Greece and Bulgaria: both partners were usually well accepted and approved by their old friends and maintain close and friendly ties with them, they visit each other and often spend time together. They have also built friendly and trusting relations with their neighbours. Only the Muslim men in Greece and Bulgaria were initially received with certain distrust, but this was soon overcome and they integrated well into the social networks. The case of female immigrants in Turkey is usually quite different. Many have not managed to socialise well and lead a very isolated life. They rarely communicate with their neighbours and colleagues. This is partially explained with the strong social stigmatisation against the wives from the former Soviet Union. The rejection is also a consequence of the fact that they are associated with a different religion (although the majority of them have converted to Islam).

An important role in the integration of the immigrants from mixed families play the associations of their compatriots. The fieldwork has revealed that male immigrants are much more active and interested in the work of such organisations – especially those men expressing political interests and ambitions (Arabs in Bulgaria, Kurds in Greece). Quite often, their wives also participate in various initiatives organised by the immigrant communities (poetry readings, national holidays, festivities and celebrations, etc). Female immigrants from mixed marriages say that they intentionally avoid contacts with their co-nationals, although they are certain that they would receive help from them if they asked for it. This decision is probably a result of their desire to cut ties with their roots and assimilate faster. *"I have been there two to three times, I didn't like it at all, it was miserable.... It reminds me of the old Ceausescu regime, I had nothing in common with them, that is I never went back again..., too fake... I was getting bored."* (Daniela, 41, Romania, Greek report). In the case of Turkey, this is also partially due to the prioritisation of family life or work over socialization. *"I have a few friends however we are never able to schedule our meetings. I organize my time according to my husband's schedule."* (Alona, 29, Moldova Turkish report). The African immigrants in Bulgaria cannot count on such social networks because their national communities are too small (with the exception of the Ethiopian one) to set up national associations, however they are informally connected through a general association of Africans in Bulgaria.

### 2.3. Contacts and experience with official institutions

A number of different models of behaviour regarding the possibilities of obtaining the citizenship or residence permits in the host country have been observed among the foreigners from the mixed families. Those who have resided in the host countries for many years and have (or would like to have) a permanent employment are most eager to apply for citizenship or have in some cases already obtained it (immigrants from Middle East in Bulgaria and women immigrants in Greece). The second group are those immigrants who are susceptible to assimilation, but do not look for employment outside the household and are thus more passive regarding the application for citizenship (majority of women in Turkey). There are also foreigners without citizenship. Some choose not to apply for it (because of the challenges related to the duration and complexity of bureaucratic procedures involved in acquisition of citizenship – female immigrants in Turkey, or because they have a strongly expressed sense of national identity – male immigrants in Greece). Others face certain legal barriers to do so (like Africans in Bulgaria, who for various reasons cannot obtain the necessary documents from their home countries). Only few of the respondents complained regarding the procedures for obtaining citizenship or residence permits. In the opinion of the majority, if one has all the necessary documents, has a good command of the official language and takes the necessary exam, they are able to obtain the citizenship. Only the Africans in Bulgaria complained about racism and discrimination in the procedures. *It is very difficult to get citizenship here, especially if you are black* (Lansana, 38, Guinea, Bulgarian report).

All respondents in Bulgaria and Turkey have only a civil marriage, while in Greece almost one half were married also in church. The very low number of religious ceremonies is easily explained by the fact that the partners profess different religions. In addition, other factors like low religiosity of the partners (Bulgaria) and the resistance from the extended family also play a role. The high share of religious marriages in Greece is also easily explained by the fact that (unlike in Turkey and Bulgaria) partners in over half of mixed families in Greece belong to the same religion – Orthodox Christianity. The importance of religion in Greece is also much stronger than, for example, in Bulgaria.

According to the respondents, in all three countries conducting a mixed marriage is accompanied with a number of legal obstacles. In Greece and Bulgaria (as EU members), the couples need to provide a large number of different documents and certificates and after the marriage are subjected to strict monitoring to prevent the cases of false marriages. In Turkey, the laws on citizenship acquisition changed in May 2009, making it more stringent to acquire citizenship through marriage. These circumstances have led some of the couples to the decision to marry earlier than they would normally want.

The respondents in Turkey were the only ones not to name any cases of discrimination against foreigners from the official institutions. In Bulgaria (Muslim and African respondents) and in Greece (women from Albania and Montenegro) complained about the discrimination on the labour market because of their differences (name, origin, skin colour). *Oh, Muhammad! Are you really a Muslim? In other words, you are such a good person, you look nice, you are dressed well and are so intelligent, how you can be a Muslim. I'm supposed to be some kind of beast or what?* (Mohammad, 48, Afghanistan, Bulgarian report) *"That is discrimination, I can't develop. My name is not Markov nor Hristov nor I don't know what, I wasn't born here. I can't develop, that is absurd."* (Mayri, 48, Palestine, Bulgarian report)

Many were refused employment, lost jobs or were paid less. There were also cases of discrimination from police and other state institutions. A Romanian woman, married to a Greek, had problems with obtaining a driving license because she kept her maiden name. Another female respondent said she started hating the Greek state because of her problems, although she loves the country as a place to live. A couple, a Bulgarian woman – an Iraqi man, spoke about the humiliation and insults their daughter is exposed to at school because of her Arabic family name and that the teachers and the principal refuse to take action to protect her. The Africans in Bulgaria spoke about the systematic harassment from the police and about how the police refused to interfere when they were attacked and maltreated on the street in broad daylight. *There was a time when police used to beat me, the police stops me and beats me* (Lansana, 38, Guinea, Bulgarian report). The Kurdish political activist complained that he has no political rights and that the Greek police repeatedly searched his home. The principal expression used to describe the institutional attitude towards foreigners in Greece and Bulgaria was *"very strong social and state racism"*. *Generally speaking, in the first ten years we experienced very strong social and state racism. The state racism was mainly expressed through the legalization process, "clearing" processes of illegal immigration, check-out conducted by the authorities and... through mass deportations. Personally, I have been sent back at least three times and I have returned by crossing the borders* (Ervin, 36, Albania, Greek report). *"The discrimination continues, although it is not so visible any more, it is not so open. It is a bit in the shadow, but it is still here. The fact that my name is Mohammad and not Ivan or Angel makes an immediate impression. Nobody asks directly, but simply thinks: Oh, there is an Arab employed in this company, God knows what kind of company this is"* (Mohammad, 48, Afghanistan, Bulgarian report)

## 2.4. Intercultural aspects of mixed family life

Based on their personal experience, many respondents describe the mixed marriage as a "challenge" (Turkey, Bulgaria), while stressing the mutual understanding and respect as the main tools for building a harmonious family life. The respondents believe that the personality of their partners is much more important than their ethnic origin and cultural background. *It does not matter, if he is a decent human being, no difference* (Maria, 56, Moldova, Turkish report). They underline that the mixed marriage has enriched them personally, expanded their worldview, helped them to overcome stereotypes. *"I benefited from a different culture, I have a broader world view, ...why? Because it is a different culture!"* (Tatyana, 32, Ukraine, Turkish report). The mixed marriage is exceptionally beneficial to the children, who can draw the best from two cultures. The main negative aspects are the financial difficulties (especially in the families where immigrants are men), different cultural codes and experiences (such as dress code in the case of Turkey). *As you know, Moldavians dress a bit more open... I am used to that... He tells me to wear a long t-shirt if I am wearing stretch jeans for example"* (Alona, 29, Moldova, Turkish report). Nostalgia for the homeland and families, and the hostile social environment are also a problem.

In most cases, the families communicate in the language of the local partner. According to the respondents, the decision for this came naturally. In Bulgaria, most of the immigrants from the field study learned Bulgarian as students, while in Greece the male immigrants had to learn the language to be able to find work. The female immigrants in Turkey and Greece spoke the local language to a certain extent before meeting their partners, but had to improve their language skills as their Turkish



and Greek husbands usually do not speak (or do so on a very basic level) their languages. Very rarely (mostly in Bulgaria and less in Greece) a bilingual model of communication is used (English, German, French, Serbian-Croatian, Bulgarian), including for the upbringing of children. More common practice is to speak with the children only in the official language of the country. The awareness of the immigrant mothers that their mother tongue would not be practical and useful to their children plays a very important role for such decision: *"My child says that he doesn't need to know Romanian... He doesn't want to know Romanian. I also didn't want to push him [to learn the language] being aware of his attitude towards the issue... Under no circumstances does he want to have anything to do with Romania"* (Corina, 49, Romania, Greek report).

Learning the language of the other partner did not lead to the loss of the national identity of the immigrant partner. They maintain and use their native language, follow the news from and about their home country, keep in touch with their families and friends at home and meet other compatriots in the city where they live. When possible they travel home, they teach their children about the language and history of their country and nation, cook traditional dishes. Some of the female immigrants have also preserved their maiden family names: *"I kept my Romanian family name, which immediately stands out... And whoever can accept this, that's fine. Whoever cannot accept that I'm Romanian is not welcome, and that's it."* (Daniela, 41, Romania, Greek report). In general, the male foreigners (in Greece and Bulgaria) and those female immigrants who are not economically dependent on their husbands are more determined and active in preserving the characteristic features of their national identity and passing them on to their children. On the other hand, no signs of pressure from inside or outside the family to change the national identity were observed during the fieldwork.

At the same time, multicultural identities are also being formed. Some of the immigrant spouses said that in addition to their national identity, they also have the civic identity of the country they live in. They perceive themselves also as Greeks or Bulgarians, because they live there and their children are brought up in the Greek / Bulgarian way: *"You declare [your nationality] based on the official papers you hold – but, in my personal life I feel Greek"* (Sifis Taiem, 42, Jordan, Greek report). *"In Bulgaria I say that I'm a Bulgarian from Iraq. If I'm abroad I say that I'm from Bulgaria"* (Masir, 50, Iraq, Bulgarian report).

Religion was not named as a problem in the life of the mixed families. Most of the foreign women who have married in Turkey have changed their religion to Islam, but they describe this step as a natural one, made out of love and without any pressure. Originating from the former communist countries, the respondents do not describe themselves as deeply religious. For this reason, the conversions took place without concussions. The converts to Islam make an effort to perform their religious duties properly and to observe the dress code. They believe that in this way they show that they adhere to the traditions of their new religion: *"I said why not [become Muslim]? I will also make him happy, and it does not matter for me to be Muslim or Christian because there is only one God."* (Katinka, 57, Hungary, Turkish report). There is only one case of conversion in Greece – a Muslim Albanian woman was baptised into the Christian Orthodox faith.

In other cases in Greece and Bulgaria, the respondents say that they have kept their religion and practice it to the degree possible in the environment they live in (an important factor is the existence of the respective prayer homes). The Muslim interviewees in Bulgaria describe themselves as not very religious. Their behaviour shows signs of religious syncretism and numerous elements of assimilation – they rarely respect the food taboos, drink alcohol, rarely observe fasting during Ramadan, do not pray regularly, rarely visit the mosque and actively participate in the celebrations of Christian religious holidays. Some even visit churches with their wives: *"We follow both traditions. He respects the tradition of visiting my family for Easter very much, he also loves Easter eggs, I have even taught him how to paint them. And then he prepares the lamb meat in his way"* (Petya, 38, Bulgaria, Bulgarian report). *"On Easter I go to buy the Easter cake and eggs, and then we set the table and celebrate together"* (Said, 50, Afghanistan, Bulgarian report). *"We celebrate only the Bulgarian holidays. I love them very much, because these are beautiful traditions, it is when all loved ones get together and have fun"* (Lukman, 75, Iraq, Bulgarian report).

Muslim male respondents in Greece also consider themselves to be not that religious, but (contrary to Bulgaria) they live in a deeply religious environment, which provokes them and puts pressure on them. They say that in their families, they do not celebrate Christian holidays. The majority of the respondents demonstrate significant tolerance regarding the religious choices of their partners. Often both partners share the belief that "God is one." This also explains the absolute absence of any case of religious conversion, caused by pressure from the other partner. *My wife is a Christian by religion, and I'm a Muslim, but if I tell you that we both, regardless of differences in our religions, believe in one and the same Lord or God, or one and the same force, which controls the entire universe, it will not be incorrect. We believe in the same. My wife and I believe in one God. It doesn't matter to us if we call him Allah, Buda, Krishna, Lord (Mohammad, 48, Afghanistan, Bulgarian report).*

The raising of the children also provides an interesting viewpoint towards the intercultural interactions in the mixed families. As noted above, they rarely have more than two children, which is a deviation from the general standards and cultural traditions in Greece and Turkey, and in numerous countries of origin of the immigrants (especially in the Muslim and African countries). Apart from the explanations provided by the respondents (linked to the economic and social factors), the researchers believe that this also comes as a result of an agreement made between the spouses regarding the accommodation of their religious and cultural differences.

When selecting names for the children, most mixed families (with the exception of several couples in Bulgaria) did not turn to the neutral option (international sounding names or several names) or mutual compromise. The majority, wanting to protect the children from social exclusion and learning from their own negative experience, preferred to give them names, which are consistent with the local traditions and acceptable for the ethnic majority. *When we were selecting [our daughter's] name, we decided not to use his first name Mohammad as her second name. I didn't want it to be included in her name. Because Mohammad is somehow a very religious name (Magdalena, 37, Bulgaria, Bulgarian report).* In most cases, the name was selected by or on the initiative of the father – often the child is named after the grandfather or other male relative on the father's side. This is very characteristic for foreign women, who are married to Greek or Turkish men. In those cases in Bulgaria, where the fathers came from a Muslim country, and where the children were given Muslim names, the respondents often spoke about racist attitudes, verbal abuse and stigmatisation against the children at school.

The children from the mixed families speak predominantly the official language of the country of their residence. This decision of their parents is dictated both by the more influential position of the local partner and by considerations for a more efficient and faster socialisation in the formal (school, work) and informal (friends, classmates) surroundings. The domination of the Greek and Turkish language in the mixed families in these two countries respectively is unconditional. Here mothers play the principal role – the immigrant mothers do not teach their children their native language, while the Greek mothers object to their children speaking with their fathers in their language. In Bulgaria, the situation is more liberal. In some cases, Bulgarian mothers encourage their children to learn the language of their fathers – not just in cases of more popular and potentially economically beneficial languages like German, English and French, but also in cases of Arab and Persian languages.

Religion of the children is an important issue in Greece and Turkey – both countries with a high degree of religiosity of the population. All mixed marriage children in Turkey are Muslims – in conformity with the religion of their fathers and in harmony with the prevailing religious environment. In Greece, despite the desire of most mixed families not to influence the religious choice of their children, the extended families of the Greek wives have exercised considerable pressure on them to have their children baptised in the Greek Orthodox Church. According to the male respondents, this has caused considerable tensions among the spouses. The religion in Bulgaria has been pushed aside, most likely due to the high level of secularisation of the population. All respondents have stated that they do not interfere in the decisions of their children and that they will provide them with full freedom to make their religious choice. For this reason, the children were baptised in only one family

<sup>35</sup> In Bulgarian tradition, father's first name is usually used as child's second name.

(on the mother's insistence). *We didn't influence the child to become a Muslim or a Christian, she is not baptised. We have actually both told her that she needs to make her own choice in what she wants to believe'* (Magdalena, 37, Bulgaria, Bulgarian report).

## 2.5. Gender dynamics in mixed families

The Greek team has encountered in its fieldwork a clear link between the ethnic and gender hierarchies based on comparisons between the two groups of mixed families (foreign husband/local wife and local husband/foreign wife). In the families in which women are of foreign origin, gender hierarchies have been strengthened by the ethnic hierarchies. For example, the Albanian and Romanian women are immigrants from countries, which are economically less developed compared to Greece. For these women, a marriage with a Greek man is most often hypergamous (it increases their social standing) and they demonstrate highly traditionalist viewpoints. They believe it is completely normal if a woman is restricted to the role of a housewife and to taking care of the children, while men are the heads of the family and play the leading role. *I prefer the man to hold the leading role at home. Because, it feels in a way that he's the master of the household, and we respect him, but we are not afraid of him, right? It's just the way it should be.* (Cozeta, 40, Albania, Greek report). In the mixed families with husbands of foreign origin, their cultural, social, political or professional status seems to be more important than their ethnic or national origin. Social hierarchy is in their case more important than the ethnic one and has a decisive influence on gender hierarchy. In other words, their social status allows them to acquire the dominant position in the gender relation hierarchy.

Somewhat similar are the relations in the Turkish mixed families, although in the Turkish case both men and women can claim that they have entered a hypergamous marriage. Men have married a foreigner, which is seen as prestigious (despite the widespread stigma against the blond Russian-speaking women) and because their wives are in most cases with better education, thus bringing into the family a certain class and behaviour. Women are in a socially and economically subordinate position and show a tendency towards submission in the private sphere – they change their religion, give Turkish names to their children, do not teach them their mother tongue, do not work in their previous professions and are content with being housewives.

In most of the Bulgarian cases, the mixed marriages were hypergamous for the immigrant males, i.e. they had improved their social status by marrying women with permanent incomes and housing. For the women, these marriages were undoubtedly hypogamous, i.e. they were not conducive for the improvement of their social status (an important issue here are the prejudices and negative social attitudes towards immigrants from certain regions/countries).

The gender segregation in the society is rarely mentioned. The foreign women in Greece note that it exists, especially on the labour market, but deny that they feel it in any way in their families. They believe that the "double role / double burden" of women (at home and at work) is something natural, stemming from the expectations of men that their wives should take care of the household.

The responses regarding the gender hierarchy within the families are very diverse and show that this process is a very dynamic one. Although the female immigrants in Greece say that their Greek husbands are more involved in the household work than the average Greek men, the Greek male respondents describe the traditional gender division of labour with male and female roles as natural. *"...each one is doing what s/he has to do without any rational explanation.... For a strange reason, things are done in this way* (Kostas, 50, Greece, Greek report). Some of the foreign men married to Greek women share this opinion. *I don't cook at home because I have the feeling that it's my wife's responsibility to cook, I was brought up with such trends (...). I told you, the cooking is my wife's responsibility, part of the household, despite the fact that I'm a cook. Laundry is de facto her responsibility, ironing, anything related to clothing. My responsibilities are, in a sense, "male" responsibilities: shopping in the market and the supermarket, cleaning the verandas, hovering. Things like strewing the beds are her responsibility* (Sifis Taiem, 42, Jordan, Greek report). In the opinion of these husbands, taking care of the children is female obligation. Women should also strive to preserve

their femininity and not get involved with inappropriate work. For these reasons, men should only occasionally help with certain “female” household activities.

However, in many families with a foreign husband, the traditional gendered labour division at home has changed significantly. Many such men say that they evenly share the household work with their wives and they do not divide it into “male” and “female.” In their opinion, since their wives are employed, they should not do all the housework alone. *We do everything together. I cook – I like cooking, washing dishes, I like to have everything in order, to think up a new dish, something to make the children happy* (Nasir, 50, Iraq, Bulgarian report). *The biggest difference [with my home country] is that a woman there has to do many things – cooking, washing; here we do everything together. You shouldn't wait for one person to do everything* (Lansana, 38, Guinea, Bulgarian report). *He doesn't hide from work. He is hard-working and helps a lot. He does the male work and if I ask him to do some female work, he won't say 'that is woman's work' but will go ahead and do it* (Katina, 37, Bulgaria, Bulgarian report).

Similar, non-traditional gender division of domestic labour seems to be common among the mixed families in Turkey. The Turkish men married to foreigners appear to be very active in the household work – at least in the accounts of their wives, who compare them to the men in their home countries (Moldova, Russia). Although these women largely reproduce the traditional gender roles, they share with delight that their husbands help them very much with the domestic work, do not drink alcohol and do not abuse them. *Moldovan men do not work... you work and come home and they are drunk, they beat you...* (Katrina, 32, Moldova Turkish report). *I tell him to do this (pay the bills) and he does so, not like the Moldovan meh* (Katrina, 32, Moldova, Turkish report). *We do not really have a big role differentiation... Sometimes I do the salad and he does the meat* (Katinka, 57, Hungary, Turkish report).

The decision-making processes in the mixed families differ from the traditional for the region models of gender hierarchy in which the decisions are taken by the husbands. Before making the decision, the mixed families discuss, negotiate, make compromises and try to achieve agreement on all issues dealing with finances, property, raising and education of the children. *No one of us insists on his or her position, uncompromisingly and without grounds. This is how I want it and that's it. I'm the head of the family and it has to be as I say. It is not like that with us. We discuss things and find a common ground* (Mohammad, 48, Afghanistan, Bulgarian report).

Only in a few interviews, there were indications that this balanced model is occasionally disturbed by one of the spouses. Some of the interviewed Greek men have shared that according to them, the important decisions should be made by men. In Bulgaria, one of the Arab respondents (who is considerably older than his wife is) believed that the fact that he had a richer experience in life gave him the right to impose his opinion in most cases. On the other hand, some of the female Bulgarian respondents said that they were more active and decisive regarding certain family decisions. However, these examples seem to be more dependent on the individual features of the respondents and do not represent a rule.

Of the three teams, only the Greek one has explored to what extent the cultural differences influence the sexual life of the mixed families. As can be expected from the nature of the fieldwork, the answers to such questions were general and cannot be taken as entirely reliable. All the main groups of respondents (local and foreign men, local and foreign women) said that they have very good sexual relations and were pleased with their partners. One interesting aspect that deserves to be mentioned is the evaluation of men regarding the accessibility of women for sexual contact and their attitude towards the pre-marital sexual relations. The Greek men, who were interviewed, believe that Eastern European women are much more open, informed and easier to establish contact with. They make a clear difference between the non-binding sexual affair and serious relationship and unlike Greek women can enter a relationship without having marriage in mind. The foreign male respondents compared Greek women with the women in their home countries and came up with similar conclusions.

When asked to compare their family life with other families (in their home countries or in the country of residence), the respondents provided some interesting answers. On the one hand, most

respondents say there are no significant differences because they all live in the same social and economic surroundings. On the other hand, they believe that the partners from the mixed families have the possibility to build significantly more trust and a deeper relationship among themselves because they are under a constant social monitoring and have to rely much more on their internal resources. They are much more active in their search for mutual understanding, compromises, and common grounds. The quarrels and misunderstandings are less frequent, the cases of domestic violence and separation are very rare. The foreign spouses evaluate their own family experience in a more favourable light compared to those of their parents. Many concluded that they would not feel comfortable if married to a person of the same nationality and religion. For this reason, the majority concluded that they would also advise their children to follow their example and form mixed families. Only exceptionally, respondents said that they regret the choice they have made and that they would advise their children against it.

### **3. Analysis of the field research on transnational families**

#### **3.1. The main characteristics of the respondents**

The three teams have conducted altogether 28 interviews (12 in Bulgaria, 8 in Greece and 8 in Turkey) with spouses from transnational families. The Bulgarian team interviewed 10 women and 2 men, whose partners have left to live and work abroad (some of the respondents also had their own labour migration experience). The task of the Greek and Turkish teams was to investigate those transnational spouses, who live and work in the host country and support financially their families who remained back home. For this purpose, the teams conducted interviews with women who work as domestic servants or take care of the elderly or ill persons in the households of the upper middle and middle class in Athens and Istanbul. The Bulgarian and Turkish teams also organised two focus groups – respectively with 6 women in Sapareva Banya and with 4 women in Istanbul.

The Bulgarian respondents live in small towns and villages in the south-western Bulgaria, a region significantly affected by the economic crisis, with high level of unemployment and with ethnically and religiously mixed population (Bulgarians, Pomaks – Bulgarian Muslims, and Roma). The partners of the respondents have left to find employment in various countries – mostly Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece, but also as far as the USA. Most of them work in agriculture, construction, timber industry, and in restaurants. Greek and Turkish respondents come from the former socialist countries like Bulgaria, Georgia, Poland and Ukraine (in the case of Greece) and Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Mongolia, Russia and Turkmenistan (in the case of Turkey).

The respondents belong to different religions. In Bulgaria they include Orthodox Christians and Muslims, in Greece – Orthodox Christians and Catholics, in Turkey – Christians and Muslims.

The age of the respondents varies considerably – from 19 to 54 in Bulgaria, from 46 to 63 in Greece and from 23 to 53 in Turkey. For this reason they can be considered as a representative sample of people, who have been affected in their active age by the economic transition in the former socialist countries and forced to look for employment abroad.

The level of education of respondents is also very different. The ones in Greece and Turkey have predominantly secondary and high education, while the majority of the Bulgarian respondents have secondary or lower than secondary education.

In all three countries, the separation was intended to be temporary, but in many cases at the time of the interviews it was in its 1<sup>st</sup> (Bulgaria), 1<sup>st</sup> (Turkey) or even 1<sup>st</sup> year (Greece). The respondents said that they or their partners return to their home countries once or twice a year at the

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<sup>36</sup> One interview was taken in a larger town of Blagoevgrad.

most – usually for a couple of weeks. Some transnational spouses have not returned home even once since departing.

All respondents said that the reasons for the family separation were strictly financial. One or both spouses have lost their job, wages were too low, the children needed money for education. The decision for emigration was usually made after consulting other relatives and friends, as the partner who remained at home with the children often had to rely on their support and assistance.

### 3.2. Integration into the host country

The interviews showed that most of the labour migrants from transnational families arrived to their host countries with tourist visas and remained there illegally after the visas expired. In time, most of them succeeded (usually with the assistance of their employers) to obtain work and residence permits and the right to social and medical insurance. Some prefer to work and live without any insurance in order to save more money for their families. A small number (mainly women in Turkey and some of the partners of the Bulgarian respondents) continue to live and work without documents.

The relations with the employers were described in all countries as very good. The women working in domestic aid in Greece and Turkey often described the relations as being almost like in a family – they refer to their employers as “aunts, sisters, mothers,” say that they feel like being at home and love the families of their employers like their own. *I feel as if I were at home, I work as if I worked at home, I love them as if they were my family since I do not have my family here* (Zara, 57, Georgia, Greek report). The wives of the Bulgarian immigrants spoke with gratitude about how the employers in Spain and Portugal have taken care of their husbands in the time of illness and about treating them as their relatives.

The social behaviour of the immigrants is conditioned by the nature of their work and place of residence. The Bulgarian emigrants usually work in peripheral regions, on construction sites, on farms or in kitchens of restaurants. As such, they usually live with other Bulgarian migrants and migrants from other countries and rarely speak the official language beyond the elementary level. The migrants in Turkey and Greece work in private homes in big cities like Athens and Istanbul. They have a very good command of the local language, despite learning it on their own through watching TV and communication with the host family. In general, their interaction with the people outside the place where they live and work and their level of socialisation are very limited.

In most cases, immigrants communicate with the authorities only through the mediation of their employers, which increases their dependency. The unregulated status of some migrants and their fear of being exposed by the authorities makes them very cautious and withdrawn. They are not interested in the initiatives of the immigrant communities and rely exclusively on the informal networks and contacts – at private homes, churches and other places where they can meet in private. *We gather there, ten women, we cook our own meal, we sing, we watch television... We receive videotapes from Ukraine and we see our family, that's the way it is* (Alexandra, 63, Ukraine, Greek report). Many of the women working as live-in maids are uneasy about spending much time outside the home where they work and live. In Turkey, this is very much connected with the widespread stereotype about Russians (usually all women from the former Soviet Union are referred to as “Russians”) as “Natashas” (prostitutes) and the related social stigmatisation.

A common feature in all three countries is that the immigrants do not want to apply for the citizenship of the host country. They all see their migration as temporary and are convinced that sometime in the future they would return to their families in the home country. This is another explanation for their reluctance to integrate into the host society, form lasting attachments and participate more actively in the life outside the realm of their home / work place.

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<sup>37</sup> Most notably those residing in the USA. Many used to live and work illegally in the EU countries, but this has changed after Bulgarian EU accession when Bulgarian workers were granted legal access to employment in most EU countries.

### 3.3. Aspects of transnational family life

Although the migrations were planned as temporary and short-time, in many cases the separation of the families has lasted up to 10 and more years. During this time, the migrants rarely returned home – in most cases once or twice a year for a short period (about 2-3 weeks). They usually visit their families during the winter holidays and/or in the summer. The cases when the families of the migrants have visited them in the host country are very rare. The reasons for this are mostly financial – their spouses are frequently unemployed or have low salaries and cannot afford the costs of travel and accommodation.

The transnational spouses maintain contacts by communicating frequently on the phone, mobile phones and Skype. Most of the interviewed women in Athens and Istanbul say that a large part of their savings is spent for communication costs. Because of the relatively isolated and withdrawn life of many immigrant spouses, the regular communication with their families often becomes their main source of emotional support. *He has no one to talk to. He talks only with me over the phone. He has no TV, nor has the time to watch TV because he works all night, and during the day he needs to wash clothes, cook, sleep* (Daniela, 36, Bulgaria, Bulgarian report)

According to the answers of the respondents, the immigrants send from 60 to 90% of their savings to their families. Although some send the money home through bank accounts, many do not trust the banking sector in their home countries and prefer to bring money home themselves when they visit or send it through informal channels and trusted people. In practice, the immigrants hardly save anything for themselves, spend money only on the most essential items, and do not set apart any money for leisure time, culture or travel. All the money they earn goes for their families at home – to support their children and spouses (who are in many cases unemployed), for the present or future education of the children, and for construction or payment of the house. *It's the money I gain here that I send over to them. I don't even save 5 euros for myself. We used to follow different trends and I brought them up very well and now I'm thinking that even nowadays I don't want them to lack anything. And I'm thinking, I want them to be happy, even if this means that I remain by myself for the rest of my life* (Madonna, 51, Georgia, Greek report). *"The separation is hard to cope with but we need the money."* (Aurie, 31, Bulgaria, Bulgarian report)

It is interesting to note that those respondents, who are divorced, said that they do not count at all on any financial support for the children from their ex-husbands, but have taken on the task of providing for the children entirely upon themselves. *Two years ago during the summer he came to see the children. He said he worked in the construction and that he was earning 9 euros per hour, but when I asked him to send some money – nothing and nothing. He only sends the alimentation through bank transfer. 25 euro per month. I talked with a lawyer and she told me that [in Bulgaria] legal upper limit was 40 eur* (Kristina, 37, Bulgaria, Bulgarian report)

The plans for reunification of the families strictly depend on the achievement of financial security. With the exception of several husbands of respondents from Bulgaria, who are making plans to stay abroad and have their families join them, most immigrants see their situation as strictly temporary. They do not want to remain in the host country, nor do they plan to bring their families there to live with them while they are abroad. Their principal plan is to earn enough money to return home one day and live the rest of their lives there without financial problems and worries. In general, despite the considerable nostalgic feelings for their families, migrant women in Greece and Turkey reject the idea of their husbands joining them. This would destabilise the family's economic plan and leave their children unattended. Respondents in Bulgaria provided similar reasoning. *I can't go and live with him because the child is too young. If I go there, I would have to find work. So I would have to leave her at the kindergarten or hire a babysitter. She would talk to her in Portuguese, and in the evening I would speak with her Bulgarian and she would get all confused... that is why I do not want* (Gyultena, 26, Bulgaria, Bulgarian report)

Evaluating the family life in transnational families, the respondents in all three countries make the following conclusions. Such family life is not "normal," because it creates numerous problems between the spouses (alienation, distrust, jealousy) and has a very negative effect on children. They feel

abandoned (especially when the migrants are their mothers), and suffer from emotional difficulties. *When son turned 20, I'm beginning to realise that he didn't learn anything – he is withdrawn, can't communicate with others, disordered, has no sense of order and discipline. I blame his mother for that, because she was not there for him* (Georgi, 54, Bulgaria, Bulgarian report). The lack of emotional support of one of the parents cannot be compensated with the financial means and presents.

In Greece, most of the women underlined that in addition to suffering from the separation from the children, they also strongly miss their partners – physically, emotionally and personally. *I feel the pain inside of me, too much pain! I cry easily, very often. I'm mentally tired and I have lost my faith. You don't want to know..* (Madonna, 51, Georgia, Greek report).

In many cases, especially when they come from small towns or villages, the migrant wives are stigmatised and criticised by the relatives and neighbours for breaking the traditional model of women-housewives and for abandoning their children. *Generally speaking, in the village they look with distrust and disapproval on women who work abroad* (Aurie, 31, Bulgaria, Bulgarian report). *My father! My father was jumping out of his skin: 'You are crazy, where do you want to go, you will destroy the family... He [husband] will go on the wrong paths, you will break up the family, what will the children do without parents?'* (Aneta, 35, Bulgaria, Bulgarian report). In case of women immigrants in Turkey, they can be further stigmatized because the society back home often associates the migration to Turkey with sex work.

### 3.4. Gender dynamics in transnational families

The prolonged separate life has led to significant changes in the gender hierarchy in the transnational families. In the Bulgarian transnational families, the decision-making, which previously used to be a male priority or a result of discussion and mutual agreement, has become almost completely a female responsibility. Although all the female respondents say that they consult their husbands on the phone, it can be deduced from their responses that they actually manage their families on their own – they take care of the household, bring up the children and distribute the family budget. Their replies show that the telephone communication cannot adequately substitute the face-to-face contact and that the “virtual” partner cannot provide a genuine contribution for making important and difficult decisions. *I decide everything. He tells me: 'I can't make a judgement from here, you decide'* (Aurie, 31, Bulgaria, Bulgarian report). *We discuss things, but it's entirely up to me. In the end I decide* (Nevse, 24, Bulgaria, Bulgarian report).

For some women, who were previously used to their passive role in the family decision-making, the new and changed situation came as a burden and caused them a number of difficulties. The most serious complaints refer to the strenuous domestic work and the fact that they have to be responsible for all important family decisions – from education and health care of the children to household repair work and maintenance. *Well, we manage. It's more difficult, as I have to take up his responsibilities too, you need to be in charge of everything when he is not around. But for more important decisions, we talk on the phone, you know, to agree* (Dzhamile, 44, Bulgaria, Bulgarian report).

The changing gender relations and the burden of being the actual head of the family weights heavily also on many female immigrant respondents in Greece and Turkey. There is a general contradiction between their beliefs and opinions and their evaluation of the current situation. Most of them are strong supporters of the traditional perception of the family in which the man is an indisputable head of the household and where there is a clear traditional gender division of labour (man - breadwinner / woman - carer). *A woman shouldn't be the leader of the household because she's getting tired. A woman should cook, stay at home with the children... No, it's not the mother's responsibility what to eat today, how much money have we got, what are we in need of, how do we get it. This is what I have been doing throughout my life, and I'm very tired* (Madonna 51, Georgia, Greek report). Most of the respondents noted that when they visited their homes they resumed 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.



And yet, becoming the main or the only bread-winners in their families, they are actively involved not only in the decisions concerning their nuclear families, but also in those of the families of their grown-up children. They say that they feel responsible for all actions of their families and insist on being consulted on all important issues, especially those concerning children and family finances. *"Without me, my family is not capable of doing anything at all. I'm the mother who must be asked before taking any action... This has always been a family characteristic. You can feel this even today... I have always been the family leader"*(Madonna, 51, Georgia, Greek report).

Both the answers of women in emigration and those at home show that wives and mothers are the main decision-makers in the family, especially on issues concerning children, regardless of the fact if they are at home or several thousand kilometres away.

In many cases, the entire extended families rely exclusively on the financial support provided by these transnational wives and mothers. They act as a social welfare agency not only to their children, but also to their economically disadvantaged parents and siblings. Despite that, they often experience overwhelming guilt and sadness from not performing the "classical sit-at-home" mothering. The majority of the respondents noted that the transnational family life had the most negative consequences for the children. The children lacked the emotional support and had difficulty forming an emotional bond with the absent parent. Some highlighted the problem of communication with their children, while others spoke about the deviant behaviour of the children as a result of mother's / father's absence. *I feel like a stranger in my own family. When I returned four years later, I went back to my house and feared that I had to face the result of the distance*(Alexandra, 63, Ukraine Greek report).

In contrast, a significant majority of the female respondents believe that their relations with their spouses have remained unchanged. Only a few have noticed signs of destabilisation in the relations, alienation or even admit that the contacts have been cut. Some also talk about the jealous fits, which their husbands show from time to time. To avoid this, they prefer to work in the houses where there are no men so that their husbands would feel more confident. Some respondents have also been jealous toward their husbands in certain periods, while some (especially those a bit older) noted that their marriages were already stabilised and that they trusted each other. However, being absent from their families for such a long period of time, they most likely do not grasp fully the changes, which have occurred during this time in their relations.

According to the wives of the Bulgarian immigrants, the separation has significantly influenced their partners and as a result, they have changed. In some cases the change is perceived as positive – the husbands have become more responsible, they have come to appreciate the hardship of the domestic work and are willing to help with it. In other cases, the change was for the worse. The husbands have become nervous, bad tempered, jumpy, jealous and alienated from their families.

In general, the advantages of trans-national family life are reduced to better salaries and financial security. *"The only gain is that in the period of economic crisis, we live relatively calmly and that she is saving money to buy another apartment for the old age"*(Georgi, 54, Bulgaria, Bulgarian report).

After the migration, the original expectations for the family life were completely reversed. Despite providing the financial stability and security for their families, the respondents are very disappointed and unhappy with the decision they were forced to make. *I had dreamed of a life like a fairy tale, but things turned upside down* (Veska, 48, Bulgaria Greek report). However, they see their situation as a necessary sacrifice that had to be made to improve their children's opportunities for a better life and above all for better education. They hope their children would never have to make a similar decision and would strongly advise them not to repeat their experience.

## 4. Conclusion

### Prejudice, rejection and the art of becoming invisible

The research on mixed families in Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey has presented a rather gloomy picture of societies in all three countries, marked by the low levels of acceptance of otherness, sometimes latent and sometimes openly displayed racism and xenophobia, and widespread stereotypes and prejudices against the immigrants. On the personal level, there is a problem of (at least initial) rejection of the mixed family by the parents and relatives. This is above all the case with the parents of local female partners, who in the majority of cases disapproved of the fact that their daughters were marrying foreigners. In the most extreme cases (usually if the immigrant partner was black or a Muslim), all contacts between parents and the mixed couple were cut off. However, in most cases the strained relations improved in time, when the personal qualities of the immigrant partner overpowered the distrust based on general group stereotypes. A birth of a child is the most important landmark after which the mixed marriages are usually accepted by all parents and family relations reach an acceptable *modus vivendi*.

On the social level, the rejection of otherness is manifested most clearly in the fields of employment and education. The male immigrants rarely have jobs corresponding to their qualification and work in professions shaped by their ethnicity. They are often victims of discrimination on the labour market – Africans because of their race and Muslims because of their names and religion. The situation is quite different with the female immigrants. Those who are employed outside home usually have jobs in line with their education and qualification. On the whole, the wives of foreign origin encounter less social resistance than foreign husbands. One reason is that they seem to be willing to sacrifice much more to “blend in” the dominating society. The second reason is the still predominantly conservative and patriarchal nature of societies in all three countries. The foreign husbands are thus seen as a threat – not just as someone coming to take “our” jobs away, but also “our women.” In contrast, the foreign wives are coming here to “become one of us.” This is especially evident in Turkey, where women who have married Turks rarely work outside their homes, have very limited contacts with people outside (their husbands’) families, often change their religion and bring up their children without any contact with the culture, language and religion of their home countries. In short – women do all in their power to become invisible for the society.

Rejection and prejudices are also very visible in the education system. Children from mixed families whose otherness is visible (black or darker skin colour, a different name – especially if it is a Muslim name in Bulgaria or Greece) are often stigmatised by other schoolchildren. They are verbally and sometimes physically abused and rarely find help and support among teachers and principals. To prevent this, parents often deliberately select names, which are considered to be in line with the local traditions. The children are most often brought up by stressing the local culture, religion and language and neglecting those of the immigrant partner (this is much more often the case with immigrant wives than husbands). In some cases, the result of such decision was the child’s deliberate and firm rejection to be associated in any way with the nationality and other identity markers of the immigrant parent.

The predominantly negative attitudes towards immigrants (especially those from certain countries or regions) have been reflected also in the work of various state institutions. Although the majority of immigrant respondents stated that they had no problems with the official institutions, this partially comes as a result of the fact that they largely avoid contacts with them and that such matters are usually handled by the local partner. However, some respondents did complain over the delays in obtaining various documents due to racist attitudes of civil servants and complications caused by cumbersome bureaucratic procedures. African immigrants said that they were victims of discrimination regarding the employment and unprovoked police checks of documents. In most drastic cases, some were victims of violence and abuse at police stations in the past.

### **Mixed families as the engine of social change: Intercultural and gender aspects**

The gloomy cloud described above fortunately has its silver lining. On a person-to-person level, an encouraging finding is that friends of both partners usually accept the mixed couple positively (some

initial distrust was expressed in cases, where the immigrant partner was a Muslim, but suspicions usually dispersed after getting to know each other better). In most cases, the couples said that the network of friends is exceptionally important for them and that they very much rely on their support.

The pattern of distrusting / disliking immigrants as a group, but approving of a particular immigrant friend largely copies the model of perception of traditional minorities in the three countries. Very often, certain negative stereotypes are ascribed to minority groups as a whole, while a particular person of minority origin can be our friend or neighbour because of their good personal qualities, which are acknowledged. The key word here is visibility. The traditional minorities in all three countries are today in a much better position regarding the respect of their rights than was the case a couple of decades ago. Their stepping out of "invisibility" and into the social spotlight through political parties, NGOs, media and other forms of public participation has caused an initial negative backlash, but in time led to a gradual recognition and legal regulation of minority rights.

In the same way, the immigrant communities should step out of the private realm and make themselves more visible. The state institutions should of course also play their part. By drawing from the experience of the EU as a whole and those EU countries with a much longer history of immigration in particular, the three SEE countries studied in this research should strive to provide a much more accommodating and welcoming environment to immigrants as is currently the case. The experiences of mixed families as bridges and catalysts of cultural interactions between the host and immigrant societies can be indispensable in these efforts.

Another area where the mixed families are challenging the traditions are gender hierarchies and gender roles. Although there is no doubt that the societies in Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey as a whole are gradually moving in the direction of establishing genuine gender equality and away from the traditional patriarchal arrangement, it seems that in this respect the mixed families are quite a few steps ahead of the majority of "ordinary" non-mixed families. Even in Turkey, where most of the mixed families seem to follow the traditional gender pattern in which the man is the head of the family and the woman willingly restricts herself to the role of a housewife and mother, the domestic work and the decision-making processes and strategies in the mixed families tend to be shared much more evenly than in the marriages of co-nationals.

In the families where the husband is an immigrant (in the majority of our cases, they come from countries, which are in fact even more traditionalist and patriarchal than the three destination countries), the traditional gender roles are most often completely abandoned. The domestic work is shared on personal preferences and time availability and not based on gender "predispositions." Both parents are involved in the upbringing of the children. The decision-making processes in the family are described as a result of mutual compromise, discussions, and negotiations. However, it seems that the local spouses (both wives and husbands) were often at the root of a number of initiatives and were the ones who in fact made the actual decision. In some cases, the local women are the main breadwinners of the family, and the immigrant husbands take over the larger share of the domestic work.

Life in a mixed family has numerous positive aspects (described with words like "support," "confidence," "understanding," "calmness," "safety," and "stability"), but at the same time it is also a challenge. A happy marriage is a result of many efforts and has its price. Knowing and sharing a different culture can be a positive element of a marriage, as reported by several spouses, especially when one considers that the new situation provides for more open and relaxed life. A large number of both local and migrant spouses recognize that living in mixed couples can broaden their children's culture horizons and make them more open-minded.

### **In the name of the children: A transnational sacrifice**

The life of the mixed families can be very strenuous. Often faced with unfriendly or sometimes even hostile social environment, the partners from mixed marriages are required to invest much more effort and energy into building a trusting and strong relationship. However, they can count on each other's support and strength in this process. In contrast, the transnational spouses stand alone in their struggle. Separated from their loved ones for five, ten, twenty or even more years, they deprive

themselves of most of the little luxuries ordinary people take for granted (friends, social life, leisure time, holidays, culture) and spin in the endless cycle of working and saving money, offering one single universal explanation: it is a sacrifice they are consciously making in the name of their children.

The one and only reason for leaving behind their families, relatives, friends and homes and going abroad was to find employment and earn enough money not just to support their families at home, but save in order to build or expand the family house, and to provide for the children's education. Any personal preferences and desires are subordinated to this goal and the transnational migrant spouses are as a rule employed in jobs that are not consistent with their education or previous work experience.

The transnational husbands and wives lead a very solitary, isolated life. The husbands of the Bulgarian respondents usually work in relatively closed environment like farms or construction sites and rarely communicate with anyone outside the circle of their co-workers (who are also mostly immigrants), while the female immigrant respondents in Turkey and Greece spend most of their time in the confines of the homes where they work and live. There are many reasons for this self-isolation: many are occupied full-time six or seven days a week with the household, some are without residence or work permits and avoid going to places where their documents might be checked, others feel uncomfortable with the frequently displayed stereotypical and discriminative behaviour and attitude considering single women immigrants as being sexually available. However, the two most important reasons for the intentional withdrawal from the social life are the determination to save every last penny for the family and the absolute confidence that their stay abroad is temporary – hence there is no need for integration and attachment to the life in the host country. All respondents say that once enough money is saved and the financial problems of the family resolved, they will return home and resume their normal family life.

The only "luxury" the transnational spouses usually permit themselves are the communication costs. Some use modern and cheap communication technologies (Internet, Skype) to be in touch with their families, although this is not always possible since their families usually live in rural and less developed regions, where modern information technologies are not easily available. The majority rely on telephones and mobile phones, which can be quite costly (especially since most of the immigrants come from outside the EU), but the desire to communicate is sublime as this is a way to reduce the sentimental pressure of nostalgia and the fear of losing control concerning the participation in the decision making in the family.

As mentioned above, the one and only benefit of the transnational family life is the financial security. The money earned abroad is essential for the family. The transnational spouses (especially the wives/mothers) feel that they are obliged to safeguard the family and are prepared to make any sacrifices necessary for the benefit of their children. Despite being fully aware that their families could not survive without their work and their remittances, they are usually torn apart by feelings of guilt for abandoning their loved ones. The prolonged separation always takes its toll: the impact on the children and the relationship with the spouse. The children grow up without really knowing the immigrant parent. They are in contact with him/her only on the phone or via Skype. This leads to depersonalization of his/her authority, lack of a model to follow, and disrupted emotional ties. The absence of one of the parents loads the other one with too many responsibilities and often predetermines errors in his/her approach to the children's upbringing. The separation from one parent often leads to a too strong attachment of the children to the other parent, which in turn can become a cause for problems between the spouses. The spouses in time also grow apart from each other and sometimes find the alienation too difficult to overcome. In rare cases, the long periods of separation had a reverse effect – some respondents describe the periods of reunification as "second honeymoon," but acknowledge that this usually happens in the first years of separation, and is less likely to occur later.

### **Mothers in charge: A transnational challenge to traditionalist gender models**

The socio-political and economic changes that occurred in the former communist countries have completely overturned the traditional family and gender models, forcing many women to migrate as job seekers. The new transnational family model was not easily accepted by the wider society – the idea of a woman working abroad and providing for the family directly challenges the traditional family gender roles.

Transnational families often have to overpower the resistance and opposition of the extended family, especially their own parents. Despite acknowledging the difficult financial situation, the parents believe that the family should stay together no matter what and find alternative ways to support itself. Their main concern are the grandchildren, who have to grow up without one of the parents. Nevertheless, after the initial opposition to the migration, the parents and especially the mothers of the migrants most often become very supportive and helpful after the migration takes place. They act as substitute mothers to their grandchildren and contribute to or completely take over the household work in the home of the transnational family. Likewise, the absence of the male partner is usually partially compensated by the assistance of an elderly parent, who helps with the household.

Nearly all interviewees say that they support and believe in the traditional gender roles – the husband-father should be responsible for the financial situation of the family and the wife-mother responsible for the household and the children's upbringing. The transnational family life has reversed these roles and many transnational spouses are deeply troubled by this change. The female respondents in Turkey and Greece stress the importance of motherhood as a social obligation and defend their (female) role by demonstrating that they are good mothers despite being absent from the family. They feel guilty because they have burdened their husbands with the sole responsibility for the children and the household, yet at the same time they say that they have the leading role in the important family decisions. They consult their husbands on everything related to their children (health care, education, upbringing), management of the household and even distribution of the family budget. The female respondents in Bulgaria, whose husbands work and live abroad, have taken these tasks entirely upon themselves. For some of them, who were previously used to their passive role and are now entirely in charge of all family affairs, the new situation comes as a burden and they often feel alone, mentally and physically exhausted, and caught in a situation from which they cannot escape.

And yet, despite the disapproval of the social environment and their own anxieties regarding the new situation, the transnational family life has challenged and started to change the traditional gender roles and hierarchies in the region. After the wives/mothers departed to work abroad, the husbands had to take on a more active role in the household work (although in many cases an older daughter or a grandmother was there to lend a helping hand). While husbands have (to a smaller or larger extent) turned into home-makers, the transnational mothers became the main bread-winners and thus the titular heads of the family, who have the last word on the important family matters. In cases where husbands/fathers have emigrated, the traditional gender roles have been seemingly preserved. The man is still a bread-winner and the woman is a home-maker, mother, housewife. And yet, quite unlike the female migrants, who stay very much involved in the family matters from afar, the role of migrant husbands is reduced to providing financial means to the family, while they delegate all the responsibilities and decision-making duties to the wives-mothers, thus making them de facto heads of the families. This shows that in the world of transnational families, the traditional gender hierarchy has been turned upside down. The wives and mothers are the center around which the family life revolves, regardless of the fact whether they are at home or several thousand kilometres away.

## **5. Policy recommendations**

### **Mixed families:**

- Strict prosecution of cases of hate speech and racially, religiously or ethnically motivated attacks.
- Effective and genuine prevention of discrimination in education, employment, health care, work of state institution.
- Better coordination of work between state and non-state agencies concerned with immigrants (central and local authorities, churches, mosques and other places of worship, schools, centres for social work, health care facilities)
  - Encourage dialogue and partnership between state agencies and immigrant associations and organisations; immigrants from mixed families should be motivated to play an active role in the formation and maintenance of such partnerships.
  - Education and training for personnel in state agencies working with immigrants.
  - Introduction of additional classes in multicultural education in schools attended by immigrant children and mixed family children with special attention on the culture of the communities the children belong to. The children need to be encouraged to develop the language and learn about the culture of their immigrant parent.
  - A more efficient and reliable collection of statistical data about the number of immigrants in the country, especially introduction of gender-sensitive indicators in data on immigration and migration-sensitive indicators in gender and family statistical data.

#### **Transnational families:**

- Provide easier, inexpensive and renewable short-term residence and work permits to migrants who are already in the country, have work and demonstrate the intention to return to their home countries.
- Provide easier and cheaper short-term visas to family members of immigrants so that they can visit them more frequently
- Amend immigration policies to facilitate parent-child reunification and remove legal obstacles that prolong family separation.
- Seek partnership and assistance of immigrant associations, places of worship and other formal organisations where immigrants gather and enlist their help in reaching out to transnational parents and especially transnational mothers.
- Establish help and support centres for transnational families with the awareness that many transnational mothers are very cautious in seeking assistance due to social prejudices and stigmatisation. Special attention should be given to the women who were potential victims of violence – either in their families or during their migration experience.
- Prevent the double taxation of remittances sent by immigrants to their families.
- Recognition of domestic care work, especially the inclusion of those employed in the domestic care work into the system of health and retirement insurance.

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## Appendix 1: Respondents' profiles – mixed families

### Bulgaria:

#### Interviews:

1. Mohammad, 48, Afghanistan, Muslim and Magdalena, 37, Bulgaria, Orthodox Christian 16 years of marriage, 1 child
2. Said, 50, Afghanistan, Muslim and Daniela, 42, Bulgaria, Orthodox Christian 14 years of marriage, 2 children
3. Felix, 38, Austria, Catholic and Diana, 39, Bulgaria, Orthodox Christian 8 years of marriage, 2 children
4. Lansana, 38, Guinea, Muslim and Petya, 38, Bulgaria, Orthodox Christian 7 years of marriage, no children
5. Lukman, 75, Iraq, Muslim and Anna, 67, Bulgaria, Orthodox Christian 44 years of marriage, 2 children
6. Nasir, 50, Iraq, Muslim and Iva, 49, Bulgaria, Orthodox Christian, 29 years of marriage, 3 children
7. Ali, 39, Lebanon, Muslim and Elena, 42, Bulgaria, Orthodox Christian 18 years of marriage, 2 children
8. Peter, 40, Zambia, Catholic and Elena, 37, Bulgaria, Protestant: 6 years relationship, no children

#### Focus group – men:

1. Lusien, 44, Congo, Catholic, 16 years of marriage, 1 child
2. Chisse, 45, Ghana, non-religious, married in 1991, divorced since 1996, 1 child
3. Moussa, 39, Guinea, Muslim, 8 years of marriage, 1 child
4. Hayri, 48, Palestine, Muslim, 26 years of marriage, 3 children
5. Jamil, 56, Syria, Muslim, 10 years relationship, 3 children from previous marriage
6. Daniel, 40, Tanzania, Catholic, 6 years of marriage, 1 child
7. Hasan, 37, Togo, Muslim, 6 months of marriage, expecting a child
8. Frederick, 42, Zambia, Catholic, 5 years of marriage, 1 child

#### Focus groups – women (all are Bulgarians):

1. Maya, 37, Orthodox Christian, 5 years of marriage, 1 child
2. Zvezdica, 40, Orthodox Christian, 15 years of marriage, 2 children
3. Fidanka, 32, Orthodox Christian, 3 years of marriage, 1 child
4. Elka, 38, Orthodox Christian, 8 years of marriage, 1 child

### Greece:

#### Interviews with couples immigrant wives – local husbands:

1. Savvas, 40, Greece, Orthodox Christian and Marianna, 42, Romania, Orthodox Christian: 10 years of marriage, one child
2. Kostas, 50, Greece, Orthodox Christian and Daniela, 41, Romania, Orthodox Christian: 5 years of marriage, one child (and one child from the first marriage of the husband)
3. Hercules, 60, Greece, Orthodox Christian and Maria, 57, Czech Republic, Orthodox Christian: 38 years of marriage, one child
4. Giorgos, 45, Greece, Orthodox Christian and Cozeta, 40, Albania, Orthodox Christian (converted Muslim): 8 years of marriage, one child (and two children from the first marriage of the wife)
5. Kostas, 64, Greece, Orthodox Christian and Eleni, 57, Moldova, Orthodox Christian: 2 and 1/2 years of marriage, no children (two children from the first marriage of the wife)
6. Sotiris, 51, Greece, Orthodox Christian and Corina, 49, Romania, Orthodox Christian: 24 years of marriage, two children

Interviews with couples immigrant husbands – local wives:

1. Sait, 50, Turkey-Kurdistan, Muslim and Vaso, 40, Greece, Orthodox Christian: 16 years of marriage, two children (and one child from the first marriage of the wife)
2. Betin, 33, Albania, Muslim and Nancy, 37, Greece, Orthodox Christian: 1 and 1/2 years of marriage, one child
3. Ervin, 36, Albania, Muslim (Orthodox Christian mother, Muslim father) and Aggeliki, 28, Greece, Orthodox Christian: 3 years of marriage, no children
4. Sifis Taiem, 42, Jordan, Muslim and Vaso, 47, Greece, Orthodox Christian: 15 years of marriage, one child
5. Alvaro, 53, Colombia, Catholic and Mary, 48, Greece, Orthodox Christian: 21 years of marriage, two children

Focus group – immigrant wives:

1. Bebe, 29, Montenegro, Catholic, 4 years of cohabitation with Greek, no children
2. Raisa, 46, Northern Russia, Orthodox Christian, 8 years of marriage to Greek, one child from her first marriage
3. Maria, 33, Bulgaria, Orthodox Christian, 3 years of marriage to Greek, one child

**Turkey:**

Interviews:

1. Mustafa, 53, Turkey, Muslim, and Olesya, 51, Russia, Christian: 6 years of marriage (her second marriage), 1 child.
2. Mehmet, 65, Turkey, Muslim, and Maria, 56, Moldova, Christian: 2 years of marriage (his and her second marriage), he has 6 children from the first marriage, she has 3 children from the first marriage.
3. Hakan, 26, Turkey, Muslim and Elena, 30, Ukraine, Christian: 4 years of marriage (her second marriage), 1 child (she has one more child from the first marriage).
4. Tuncay, 47, Turkey, Muslim and Katrina, 32, Moldova, Christian: 3,5 years of marriage (his second marriage), he has 1 child from the first marriage.
5. Cevdet, 58, Turkey, Muslim and Katinka, 57, Hungary, Christian: 19 years of marriage, no children.
6. Hasan, 54, Turkey, Muslim and Olga, 30, Georgia, Muslim: 4 years of marriage (his third and her second marriage), he has 3 children from the first marriage, she has 1 child from the first marriage.
7. Kemal, 32, Turkey, Muslim and Tatyana, 32, Ukraine, Christian: 13 years of marriage, 2 children.
8. Seckin, 40, Turkey, Muslim and Alona, 29, Moldova, Christian, 1 year of marriage (her second marriage), 1 child (from the first marriage).

Focus groups – women:

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

Focus group – men (all are Turks):

1. Ahmet, 36, Married, 2 children
2. Hakan, 31, Married

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3. Muzaffer, 41, Married, 2 children
4. Ihsan, 45, Married
5. Fatih, 37, Married

## Appendix 2: Respondents' profiles – transnational families

### Bulgaria:

#### Interviews:

Women (all are Bulgarians)
1. Aneta, 35, Muslim, 13 years of marriage, 2 children
2. Ayrie, 31, Muslim, 8 years of marriage, 2 children
3. Dzhamile, 44, Muslim, 27 years of marriage, 2 children
4. Silvena, 48, Muslim, 28 years of marriage, 2 children
5. Nevse, 24, Muslim, 5 years of marriage, 2 children
6. Gyultena, 26, Muslim, 3 years of marriage, 1 child
7. Kudrie, 31, Muslim, 10 years of marriage, 2 children
8. Maria, 34, Orthodox Christian, 10 years of marriage, 1 child
9. Kristina, 37, Orthodox Christian, has been married for 12 years (divorced since 2002), 2 children
10. Daniela, 36, Orthodox Christian, 18 years of marriage, 2 children

Men (all are Bulgarians)
1. Georgi, 54, Orthodox Christian, 30 years of marriage, 2 children
2. Borislav, 53, Muslim, 28 years of marriage, 2 children

#### Focus group – women (all are Bulgarians):

1. Reni, 50, Orthodox Christian, 32 years of marriage, 2 children
2. Ginka, 33, Orthodox Christian, 16 years of marriage, 1 child
3. Spaska, 40, Orthodox Christian, 18 years of marriage, 1 child
4. Natasha, 39, Orthodox Christian, 21 years of marriage, 3 children
5. Daniela, 36, Orthodox Christian, 10 years of marriage, 2 children
6. Snezhana, 19, Orthodox Christian, 3 years of marriage, 1 child

### Greece:

#### Interviews:

1. Liuba, 54, Ukraine, Christian, 36 years of marriage, four children and two grandchildren
2. Madonna, 51, Georgia, Christian, 30 years of marriage, two children and four grandchildren
3. Zira, 57, Georgia, Christian, 24 years of marriage, two children and four grandchildren
4. Gianna, 54, Poland, Christian, 31 years of marriage, two children
5. Anna, 62, Poland, Christian, 27 years of marriage, one child and three children from the first marriage, two grandchildren
6. Veska, 48, Bulgaria, Christian, 25 years of marriage, one child, one grandchild
7. Alexandra, 63, Ukraine, Christian, 35 years of marriage, two children, three grandchildren
8. Marianna, 46, Bulgaria, Christian, widow, one child

**Turkey:**

Interviews – women:

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

Focus group – women:

1. Tamara, 52, Georgia, Christian, Married, 2 children
2. Irma, 41, Georgia, Christian, Widow, 1 child
3. Oha, 41, Mongolia, Christian, Divorced, 2 children
4. Alona, 39, Russia, Christian, Married, 1 child