

## Chapter 8

# Family Migration



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Family migration is the term used to categorise the international movement of people who migrate due to new or established family ties. People moving for family reasons constitute the largest group of migrants entering OECD countries, ahead of labour and humanitarian migration (OECD, 2017). To move for family reasons may encompass an array of different kinds of migration trajectories, from the adoption of a foreign child to family members accompanying migrant workers or refugees, as well as people forming new family units with host country residents. Yet, the primary form of family migration remains family reunification: when family members reunite with those who migrated previously.

Despite its ever-present relevance, family migration remains a dynamic and deeply political form of migration. Not only have migrants seen their rights to bring in family members fluctuate in the past decades, but the very meaning of ‘family’ has changed considerably, bringing legal implications for both nationals and migrants, and redefining what falls under the ‘family migration’ category. The question of who counts as family in family migration law owes a great deal to changing societal norms of family life and the quest for equal rights for all types of families.

Law often lags behind developments in society, and family migration law is no exception (Kofman & Kraler, 2006). Up until the past few years in Europe, **LGBT migrants** did not have the right to family reunification procedures for bringing their partners to their new place of residence. Not all countries included dependent ascendants in their family migration policies, nor are countries equally recognisant of domestic partnerships. Migrant families do add to the diversification of family structures and living arrangements already taking place in host countries’ societies, such as a relative decline in the traditional married couple nuclear family, and an

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increase in heterosexual and same-sex cohabiting couples, single-parent families, and blended families among other family forms.

The study of migrant families therefore cuts across the available legal definitions of family and brings to light emerging forms of living together, gender roles, sexualities, kinship ties, and caregiving practices. This chapter selectively synthesises recent scholarship on family migration, providing insights on the institutionalisation of the field, outlining its approaches and methodologies, and highlighting emerging topics for future research.

## 8.1 Development and Timeline of the Field

Starting in the late 1980s, theoretical and methodological research on family migration emerged as a subject of scholarly work (Boyd, 1989; Zlotnik, 1995). At the same time, the family and household emerged as a unit of analysis through the New Economics of Labour Migration (Stark & Bloom (1985) in which the household rather than the individual is conceptualised as the decision-making unit of migration for purposes of investment and diversification of its resources. However, this theory has been criticised for its failure to take into account intra-household inequalities, power and conflicts arising from gender, generation and age (de Haas & Fokkema, 2010). The role of family in internal migration (Mincer, 1978) and a number of country case studies of family reunification to the US were also published (see *International Migration Review*, 1977, 1986).

In Asia, too, family migrations, and especially marriages, gave rise to articles in the *Asia and Pacific Migration Journal* (1995, 1999). European research, however, lagged behind (Kofman, 2004); family migration drew less attention than **labour migration** as family migration was associated with dependency upon a primary migrant, and largely consisted of women and children. Even so, as labour migration grew in numbers, so too did family migration increase as a result of increasing family reunifications, a trend that also characterises southern European countries since the 1990s (Ambrosini et al., 2014; Barbiano di Belgiojoso & Terzera, 2018; Fonseca & Ormond, 2008; Gonzalez-Ferrer, 2011). Hence, over the past two decades, we see consistent growth of publications about family migrations in relation to its different forms, the experiences of different family members, familial strategies, and the formation of transnational families.

Interest in family migration and how families operate across space and time was inspired by studies of **transnationalism** where the significance of family, friends and kin became evident in the maintenance of networks across international borders (Schiller et al., 1995). In the early 2000s, Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) drew attention to transnational families in Europe and countries of origin, leading to the consolidation of family migration as a field, which has burgeoned in the ensuing years. While international migration had traditionally been equated with the movement of men, the growth of female labour migrants was seen to impact family life, especially those persons left behind (Wall & Bolzman, 2013). In countries with large

numbers of migrant female workers in domestic work, care work, and nursing, women became the sponsor of husbands, children, and parents.

In countries of destination, especially in Northern Europe, migrant families also became central to debates about how to live in multicultural societies and how to integrate future incoming migrants, especially [Muslim women](#) (Grillo, 2008). The politicisation and stigmatisation of migrant families have posed such families as a threat to Western norms and values and a drain on welfare expenditure.

However, it was not only academic interest in family migration that contributed to the growth of publications and comparative European projects. The Europeanisation of migration policy from Tampere onwards gave rise to the adoption of the Family Reunification Directive 2003/86 EC in 2003 (adopted by all Member States except Denmark, Ireland, and the UK). The Directive outlines the minimum rights third-country nationals should have in reuniting with a family member living in an EU Member State but does not address the situations of third-country nationals who are family members of an EU citizen.

The Directive also provides more favourable rules for refugees. It has been progressively adopted over several years by old EU states as well as the new enlargement states. The Commission has monitored (2008; 2014; 2019) the implementation of the Directive while the European Migration Network (EMN, 2017) has produced reports on issues and problems regarding family reunification and related issues. In part, concerns about family migration are due to the fact that, for the past 30 years, family reunification has been one of the primary drivers of immigration to the EU. In 2017, 472,994 migrants were admitted to the EU-25 on [grounds of family reunification](#), or approximately 28% of all first permits issued to third-country nationals in the EU-25. It should be noted that, for the purposes of migration policy, ‘family’ was conceptualised as the traditional nuclear family comprised of a married couple and dependent children under 18 years of age.

Comparative projects on family migration explore the impact of family migration policies on the condition of entry and on integration into the receiving society. Some examples of these works include *Civic Stratification, Gender and Family Migration Policies* (New Directions in Democracy, Austria, 2006–2009) (Kraler & Kofman, 2010); *PROSINT—Promoting Sustainable Policies for Integration* (Scholten et al., 2012); *IMPACIM—Impact of Admission Criteria on the Integration of Migrants* (Oliver & Jayaweera, 2013); *Family Reunification: a barrier or facilitator of integration?: a comparative study* (Strik et al., 2013). The impact of increasingly restrictive family migration policies has also been critically examined in Finland (Pellander, 2021) and Norway (Eggbø, 2013; Staver, 2015) as well as in North-western countries with long-standing patterns of family migration. Women, particularly those from Muslim countries, have been targeted through integration contracts and measures, such as knowledge of language and the receiving society (Kofman & Raghuram, 2015).

Studies of family migration dissect what constitutes ‘proper’ families ‘worthy’ of being granted admission and [incorporation](#) into national societies (Bonizzoni, 2018a, b; Bonjour & Kraler, 2015; Strasser et al., 2009). Stratification, especially by class (Kofman, 2018; Staver, 2015), determines the possibility of sponsoring

family members. Such inequality in the right to sponsor family members is particularly significant given that families underpin the circulation of care and maintain social reproduction (Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Bonizzoni, 2018a, b; Kofman & Raghuram, 2015). Additional migration-related topics that have gained attention over the past decade include cross-border and transnational marriages (and not simply marriages between co-ethnics) (Fresnoza-Flot & Ricordeau, 2017; Williams, 2010); migration and mobility theories (Bélanger & Silvey, 2020; Oso & Suarez-Grimalt, 2017); and methodological issues (Beauchemin, 2012; Beauchemin et al., 2015; Mazzucato & Dito, 2018). These topics will be explored in greater detail in the following sections.

## 8.2 Approaches and Theories

Many disciplines, ranging from anthropology, geography, politics, sociology, history, and law contribute to the study of family migrations. Most empirical studies have tended to be qualitative (Beauchemin, 2012), but more recent studies have generated large-scale data, enabling comparative analysis (Mazzucato & Dito, 2018). Approaches to family migration studies vary according to subtopics and disciplinary field. Policy and legal analysis examine the impact of policy (Block & Bonjour, 2013; Staver, 2015; Kofman, 2018) and legal changes on individuals and families, including their ability to live together (Wray et al., 2014). Comparative analyses of family migration policies have become more common, ranging from two-country to EU-wide and OECD-wide comparisons. The Migration Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), for example, produced a comprehensive comparison of integration policies among 38 countries in the European Economic Area, and including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the US, Japan, South Korea, and Turkey. The overall index assesses the impact of immigration and residence regulations and integration measures for immigrants. MIPEX's framework of four broad criteria can be applied as a benchmark to evaluate the extent to which immigration and associated policies complicate or facilitate the reunification of families. The four strands include: (1) eligibility of sponsors and those sponsored; (2) conditions of sponsorship; (3) security of status; and (4) the rights of family members, especially spouses.

Other developments in the [trajectory of migration studies](#) should be noted. While earlier studies focused on countries of destination and often assumed that migrants wished to bring their family members with them, more recent studies take a more nuanced and critical view of migratory processes and question the desire to complete family reunification. Theoretically, studies have adopted a migration systems approach in which all forms of migration (permanent, temporary, circular, return) occur simultaneously. Increasingly, studies are multi-sited and transnational, in which people, services, and cultural and social practices circulate between places, underscoring the interdependency between the mobile and immobile to ensure successful migration outcomes (Bélanger & Silvey, 2020; Bermudez & Oso, 2018; Oso & Suarez-Grimalt, 2017).

Although family-related needs play a significant role in [intra-European migration](#) (depending on the data source) (Strey et al., 2018), this perspective has been somewhat neglected among researchers. Some of the difficulties of identifying family-related movements arise from the fact that individuals are often not counted as such because they do not hold a residence permit under this category and because restrictions on movement for family reasons do not apply to the same extent for EU nationals. Yet, large-scale migration from Eastern Europe post-EU enlargement in 2004 drew attention to the family strategies deployed by Polish migrants in their migration to and settlement in western Europe and relationships with their homeland (Ryan et al., 2009).

## 8.3 Research Topics

### 8.3.1 *Transnational Families*

Because states do not collect information on family members living apart, we do not know the prevalence of transnational families (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002) whose members live some or most of the time separate from each other across national borders. However, in more recent scholarship, transnational families are receiving more attention due to the general increase in the number of migrants, many of whom are temporary or do not have a sufficiently regular status or resources to bring other family members with them. Quantitative studies (see above) have questioned the commonly held idea that migrants want to reunify in the country of work and decide to do so based on familial structures and gender ideologies in the country of origin (Lenoel & David, 2019). Multi-sited and longitudinal studies have been able to capture the fluctuating and complex changes in the composition of the family in the destination country in response to economic crises (Oso & Suarez-Grimalt, 2017), the contextual factors in sending and receiving countries (Mazzucato & Dito, 2018), and the changing care demands in countries of origin and destination (Baldassar & Merla, 2014).

### 8.3.2 *Staying in Touch*

Family members commonly use multimedia or [information communication technology \(ICTs\)](#) to stay in contact (Madianou & Miller, 2012). Although these media may help to overcome absence and create a degree of intimacy, they require considerable effort and time to be effective (Baldassar et al., 2016). In spite of these advances, a sense of intimacy with distant or Skype parents can be more difficult to achieve.

Of course, ICTs are not equally available to all. Women in low- and middle-income countries, for instance, are 10% less likely to own a phone than men

(Rowntree, 2018). In the United States, a study found that migrants with lower education and income levels were not able to access or afford the same types of ICTs as higher-skilled migrants and thus were in less contact with their [families back home](#) (Cuban, 2018).

Return visits are usually the more preferred and traditional means for maintaining relations and bringing family members to the country of destination for short periods. These visits are much easier for those with a regular status and for EU citizens who do not require visas and can benefit from cheap transport.

### ***8.3.3 Separated Families and Deportation***

Separation of transnational families—either voluntary or forced—is another key issue, particularly in cases where a family member is deported. There are conflicting views among academics and policymakers about the impact of separation on children whose parents have migrated (Lam & Yeoh, 2019) and on parents whose children migrate. Generally speaking, different outcomes are shaped by the wide variety of pre-migration structures and childcare traditions and variables that shape the experiences and outcomes for children and parents left behind (Zentgraf & Chinchilla, 2012).

Separation and forced transnationalism of immigrant families can also occur when a family member is in immigration detention or has been deported. These immigration enforcement actions are important cornerstones of restrictive immigration policies as they can function as deterrent for prospective immigrants. The United States provide an important and current example in this aspect. The number of deportations from the US rose drastically over the last three decades, with more than 340,000 people having been deported in 2017 alone. Interestingly, these immigrants have been living in the US on average for more than a decade (APA, 2018). The number of children who have undocumented parents potentially facing deportation numbers are in the millions (APA, 2018). Many of these children are US citizens, often even from birth (e.g., when parents had been given lawful but temporary protection that was not renewed later). The detention of a parent or close family member has serious economic, physical, psychological, and developmental consequences on children, other family members, and entire communities (APA, 2018). Brabeck et al. (2011) found that the consequences of the forced separation linger even after the family unit has been restored.

### ***8.3.4 Impact of Family Migration Policies***

While earlier research focused on family reunification of migrants and co-ethnic marriages, more recent research has turned to how family migration policies define the acceptable family and permissible intimate relationships (Bonizzoni, 2018a, b),

which includes a range of family members and familial and kin relationships, but also other affective relationships (e.g., love and marriage, parenting of children, and parental care) (Groes & Fernandez, 2018; Mai & King, 2009). Migrants benefitting from family migration regulations are expected to demonstrate they have the capacity to be productive, comply with acceptable cultural practices, and not be a burden on the welfare state (for a review of family migration and integration see Eggbø & Brekke, 2019). Integration policies have tended to represent family migrants as relatively homogeneous and often ‘transferring’ traditional cultural and social practices, yet, in reality, they come from many different countries and reflect an increasing global mobility that has extended intimate relationships (Wagner, 2015). An intersectional approach analysing the dynamic interaction between nationality, gender, age, class, and race needs to be applied to acquire a better understanding of family migration and the impact of policies (Korteweg, 2017). For example, class and socio-economic resources, which vary within nationalities (Horst et al., 2016), make a difference in how migrants navigate regulations (Chauvin et al., 2021). Furthermore, the complexity of how family members contribute to the social reproduction of the family tends to be given little attention in the migration literature. Rather, attention is paid to the nuclear family in immigration legislation while the roles of parents and other kin are marginalised.

The MIPEX (see above) rates the degree of difficulty for family reunification in 38 countries, most of which are in Europe, but also include a few wealthier Asian nations. The right to family reunification and formation—income, other resources, such as housing, integration conditions—has generated inequalities. **Family reunification policies** are most restrictive in northern countries, as they align the conditions for sponsorship increasingly with economic conditions for labour migration, especially the high-income requirements in a number of countries, which has rendered class more significant in the stratification of access to family life (Kofman, 2018; Staver, 2015). The focus of academic studies had tended to be on spousal sponsorship, but in recent years the growing restrictions on parents (Bragg & Wong, 2016) has led to more studies of the difficulties parents face in re-joining their children (Bélanger & Candiz, 2019). Arising from the large inflow of refugees since 2015, a number of countries imposed a temporary halt on family reunification (as from March 2016) for those with subsidiary protection—a lower level of protection than refugee status—who had to wait for 2 years before benefitting from it in Germany. In August 2018, this was abolished altogether and replaced with a cap of 1000 persons per month allocated according to humanitarian reasons (AIDA/ECRE). Denmark put a stop for refugees in general (Rytter, 2019).

### 8.3.5 *Marriage Migration*

Binational marriages in Asia grew from the 1990s (Chung et al., 2016; Palriwala & Uberoi, 2008) and were conceptualised by Constable (2005) as global hypergamy where labour and marriages from poorer to richer countries paralleled each other. In

Europe, however, research tended to be focused, initially, on marriages between co-ethnics such as Turks, Moroccans, or Pakistanis marrying with someone from their homeland and seen as a problem for integration of the migrant in the receiving society. Cross-border marriages between a wider range of nationalities than co-ethnic as a means of migrating legally and acquiring citizenship have begun to receive more attention. Such migrations raise questions about [the regulation of who belongs and who deserves citizenship](#) (Bonizzoni, 2018a, b; Fresnoza-Flot & Ricordeau, 2017; Moret et al., 2021; Williams, 2010).

Intra-European binational couples have been surprisingly under-studied (Gaspar, 2012; De Valk & Medrano, 2014) due in part to the assumption that intra-European mobility is primarily driven by work reasons. However, Migali and Natale (2017) found that familial reasons are nearly as significant as work motivations. Other studies of intra-European mobility, as in the *Pioneur* research conducted between 2002 and 2006, showed that love migration came first by a slight margin over work reasons (Recchi, 2015). For many individuals, the movement for familial and intimate reasons represented a second mobility, following an initial move for education or work (Gaspar, 2012). Having the privilege of EU citizenship, couples do not have to marry, but may cohabit. However, same-sex marriages are only recognised in northern, western, and southern European states, which, from 2018, were able to benefit from free movement rights.

## 8.4 Conclusion

Family migration is a broad migration form, which encompasses various kinds of movements, living arrangements, geographies and rights. Its statistical importance attracts political attention, but its manifold empirical forms and practices extend its relevance beyond policy-oriented studies. The study of family migration owes its dynamism to the constant change of what is (or should be) understood by the word 'family'. The transformation of familial forms and the diversification of migration patterns encompassing both intra-European and third country nationals happen at a faster pace than scholarly enquiry, thus generating research gaps. Some of these gaps are emerging topics within the field and include: (1) understanding the effects of restrictions on family migration across Europe and identifying strategies developed by family members who are excluded by (new) family reunification provisions; (2) examining how the 'shrinking' of the family as a result of migration and impediments to family reunification may be distressing and producing emotional dependency, while, at the same time, may also be experienced as liberating by some migrants in terms of autonomy, self-expression, gender roles, and sexuality (Kofman et al., 2011); (3) including more diverse familial and intimate arrangements such as LGBT families in cross-border marriages (Chauvin et al., 2021) and intersectional approaches taking into account class, race, nationality and age in family migration and the impact of policies; and (4) further investigating how Europe's recent [refugee](#) intake will unfold as refugee families reunify.

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