HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES (TraFaDy WG4)

Families that live apart build well-being together.

Countless families in Europe live across two or more countries. A parent works abroad, a child stays behind, or the whole family moves. Their health and well-being is not something each person manages alone: it is built together, through shared decisions and daily care across distance. WG4 looks at how families do this — and at what gets in the way.

1 Do children who move — or who stay behind — get the healthcare they need?

Healthcare for children in families affected by migration

The problem is not only missing services

- These children need the same care as any other child: check-ups, mental health support, dental care, and emergency care.
- Access is blocked less by services that do not exist than by systems that do not adapt — legal rules, paperwork, cost, language, and discrimination.

Children who stay behind are almost invisible

- Very little research looks at children whose parents migrate without them, even though the evidence points to risks in food, mental health and regular check-ups.
- Their care is usually arranged by grandparents or other carers, who face the same barriers.

Questions to consider: What would it take for health systems to treat every child as a child with rights, and not as an exception? How can care for children who stay behind reach research and policy?

Based on: Spiteri, Ramos, Pinheiro Mota, İpek, Ducu & Bäckström (2026), Journal of Migration and Health. Read the article
This article was carried out in collaboration with WG2

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2 Is well-being something you have alone — or something a family builds together?

Well-being as a shared achievement, not an individual score

Families say "our" well-being, not "my" well-being

- Families from Ukraine and Moldova rarely describe well-being as something personal.
- Even children speak about "the well-being of all of us".

Children help build family well-being - they do not only receive it

- Children take part in family decisions, keep everyone in touch, and look after others and themselves.
- They weigh what the family gains from a parent working abroad against what it costs them emotionally.

Questions to consider: How can research and policy capture well-being as something a family builds together, rather than something measured person by person? What changes if we listen to children's own accounts as closely as we listen to adults'?

Based on: Ducu, Hossu & Telegdi-Csetri (2025), Global Networks. Read the article

3 How do families keep in touch — online and in person?

What helps families stay close across distance

Being together happens online and in person at the same time

- Families keep daily routines, celebrations and care going by phone and in person at once. Many feel closer than before the move.
- What matters is not the screen or the visit, but how the two are combined.
- Older parents often lack the skills to use digital tools safely. Access and simple training come first.

Generations bring different values — and professionals need training for that

- Migrant adult children and their parents often disagree about work, life balance and coming home. Parents also say they learn from their children's new life.
- Living between two cultures can build strength, if the differences can be talked about rather than avoided.
- Psychologists, teachers, social workers and health staff need training in language, in each country's rules, and in how these families keep in touch.

Questions to consider: Who is still left out of digital contact, and who pays for access and training? How should the training of professionals change?

Based on: Barros & Hanenberg (2024), Social Sciences. Read the article

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4 What happens to the bond between people who emigrate and their parents?

Closeness, conflict and mixed feelings between generations

Distance does not simply weaken family bonds - it reshapes them

- Young Portuguese adults living elsewhere in Europe describe closeness, conflict and mixed feelings - often all at the same time.
- Conflict is not the opposite of a good relationship. Families who can argue and then repair often end up closer.

Four patterns in how emigrants and their parents get along

- Close and dependent: daily contact, little conflict, and guilt about not being there.
- Strong bond, openly tested: the largest group — support and disagreement both in the open.
- Warm, but with no-go subjects: everyday support works, values are never discussed.
- Distant: contact reduced to duty. For a few, distance improved their well-being.

Questions to consider: Which patterns tell us a family needs support, and which simply show a different way of being a family? What changes if mixed feelings count as normal, not as a warning sign?

Based on: Barros, McGarrigle, Santos, Albert & Murdock (2023), Human Arenas. Read the article

Across all four themes: well-being is built together

Getting healthcare, caring for each other, keeping in touch, holding on to a bond across generations - in all of it, these families are building their well-being. It does not simply happen to them.

Well-being is not only something to measure. It is something families do - together, across borders and generations.

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Publications summarised:

- Spiteri, J., Ramos, A. C., Pinheiro Mota, C., İpek, E., Ducu, V., & Bäckström, B. (2026). Access to healthcare services for migrant and left-behind children: A scoping review. Journal of Migration and Health, 14, 100425. doi.org/10.1016/j.jmh.2026.100425
- Ducu, V., Hossu, I.-E., & Telegdi-Csetri, Á. (2025). The Well-Being of Transnational Families: Views and Relationality. Global Networks, 25(4), e70031. doi.org/10.1111/glob.70031
- Barros, C., & Hanenberg, P. (2024). An Integral Approach to Well-Being in Transnational Families: A Brief Proposal for Best Practices. Social Sciences, 13(3), 131. doi.org/10.3390/socsci13030131
- Barros, C., McGarrigle, J., Santos, A. S., Albert, I., & Murdock, E. (2023). Solidarity Typologies in Dynamics Between Portuguese Emigrants and Their Parents. Human Arenas, 8, 1114–1129. doi.org/10.1007/s42087-023-00368-0