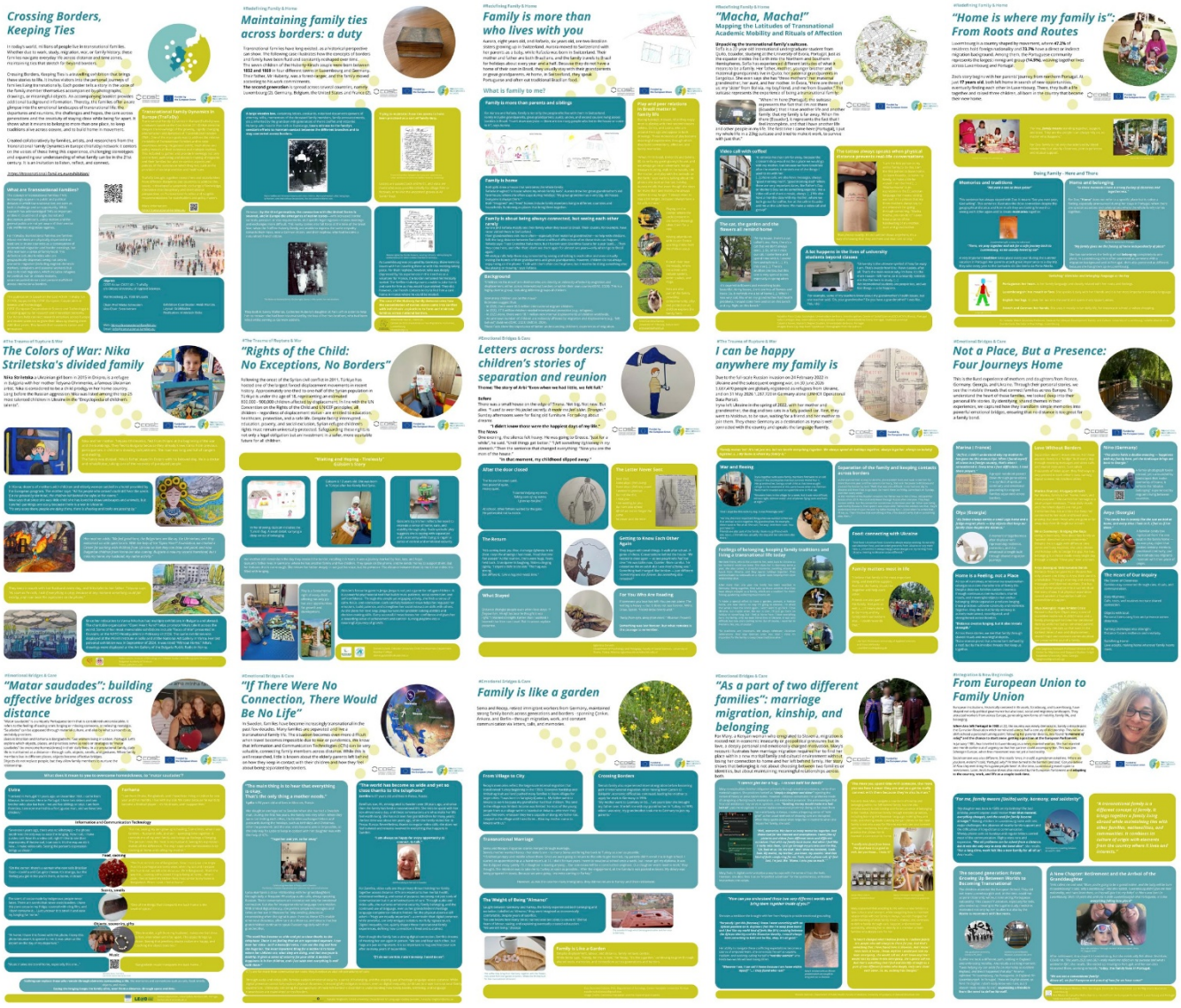
TRANSNATIONAL
FAMILY DYNAMICS
IN EUROPE



Crossing Borders, Keeping Ties

AN EXHIBITION ON TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY LIFE

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Introduction: A participatory and travelling exhibition

In today's Europe, millions of people live in transnational families. Although geographically dispersed families are not a new phenomenon, changing forms of mobility, communication, and transport have transformed how family members remain connected across distance. It was within this context that the COST Action 21143 Transnational Family Dynamics in Europe (TraFaDy) brought together researchers and stakeholders from different countries and disciplines to deepen knowledge of transnational families and make their diverse realities more visible to the public, institutions, and policymakers. For TraFaDy, transnational families are families whose members live across at least two countries as a consequence of international migration and border crossings, while maintaining a sense of familyhood. This broad understanding includes economic, educational, and professional mobility, as well as forced migration, including experiences of refugees, unaccompanied minors, and people displaced by war, persecution, environmental crises, or trafficking. The idea of borders itself is equally complex. The "national" is not a natural or self-evident category, but a social, economic, and political construct, shaped by histories, institutions, and relations of power. The distinction between the national and the transnational is therefore not fixed, nor are borders simply lines separating one territory from another.

It was from these questions that Crossing Borders, Keeping Ties emerged: a travelling and participatory exhibition on Transnational Family Dynamics in Europe designed to bring research and lived experience into dialogue with a wider public. Rather than presenting transnational families as an abstract demographic or sociological category, each poster centres on a particular family member, family, or case-study and presents their story through their own voice, accompanied by photographs, drawings, meaningful objects, or other forms of personal expression. Together, these stories offer glimpses into the emotional and everyday landscapes of transnational life: departure and reunion, absence and presence, care and responsibility, longing and joy, rupture and resilience, belonging and unbelonging.

The exhibition is grounded in a fundamentally multidisciplinary approach, bringing together different disciplinary perspectives to capture the complex and inherently relational realities of family life across borders. Quantitative research and demographic statistics are essential for identifying patterns, structures, populations, and transformations at larger scales. Yet such approaches cannot, on their own, fully convey what it means to live with absence, to care from afar, to grow up between places, to preserve a language, to hold on to an object, or to experience the emotional significance of a reunion. Difficult to capture through conventional categories alone, emotions are at the centre of the stories. They are not secondary to the study of migration, but fundamental to understanding how people experience distance, maintain relationships, construct belonging, and imagine their futures.

Another fundamental feature of this exhibition is that it was conceived as a fully participatory process from the very beginning. Its development follows a decentralised and adaptable approach, shaped through regular collaborative meetings within the TraFaDy network, and grounded in knowledge co-production,

cultural sensitivity, accessibility, and power-sharing. Participation extends across all stages, from the exhibition's initial design and methodology to the collection, selection, and presentation of materials. Transnational family members are actively involved as co-authors of their stories, deciding what to share, which objects or images are meaningful to them, and how their experiences are represented. This collaborative process continues as the exhibition travels, with each host institution invited to adapt and enrich it within its local context. Hosts can complement the core exhibition with local stories and testimonies, objects and archival materials, involve local stakeholders, associations, artists, and communities, and create complementary programming around its themes.

As the work developed, four broad and interconnected themes emerged. Theme 1, Redefining Family & Home, explores how migration unsettles conventional understandings of family and home, showing that both are relational and continuously produced through attachments, practices, memories, and connections that may extend across several places. Theme 2, The Trauma of Rupture & War, turns towards experiences in which mobility is shaped not by choice but by violence, conflict, persecution, or forced displacement. Theme 3, Emotional Bridges & Care, focuses on the practices through which family members sustain intimacy and responsibility across distance. Theme 4, Integration & New Beginnings, explores what happens when individuals and families establish or re-establish their lives in new social and cultural contexts. Integration is understood not as a simple process of assimilation or leaving previous attachments behind, but as an ongoing negotiation of belonging, recognition, identity, relationships, and future aspirations.

Across these themes, the posters reveal dimensions of transnational family life that cannot be understood through geography alone. They remind us that families may extend beyond co-residence and biological relatedness: friends, neighbours, partners, communities, and even companion animals may become part of the affective worlds through which people experience family and home. Language can carry memory, identity, intimacy, and belonging across generations; objects can preserve relationships and make present physically absent people; rituals can connect places and generations; and photographs, letters, recordings, and other material traces can become repositories of shared histories.

Time is equally fundamental. Transnational family life is not only about where family members are, but also about when they are together or apart, unfolding across both space and time. The intergenerational dimension is particularly important. Children are not merely passive subjects of family mobility: they have their own voices, experiences, rights, attachments, and interpretations of separation and belonging. Older family members likewise occupy distinctive positions within transnational networks, sometimes experiencing new forms of dependence and isolation, but also acting as important carriers of memory, language, traditions, and intergenerational knowledge. Looking across generations reveals how family members experience transnational life differently, with distinct challenges, responsibilities, memories, and expectations.

Conflict, war, political instability, persecution, and forced displacement can place relationships under extraordinary pressure. Borders may become barriers to

reunion, while uncertainty and loss can profoundly alter family life. Yet even under these circumstances, familyhood may survive and be reconfigured. Relationships can be preserved, recomposed, and reconnected; memories can become forms of continuity; and seemingly fragile connections can acquire extraordinary significance. The persistence of family ties under conditions of rupture reveals both the vulnerability and the resilience of human relationships.

Rather than treating incompleteness as a weakness, this exhibition understands it as an invitation to continuation. Many realities, voices, places, generations, forms of mobility, and dimensions of family life remain beyond these posters. Local organisers and host institutions are therefore encouraged to continue the story by creating new spaces for encounter and dialogue. What begins as a collection of experiences developed through the TraFaDy network can thus continue to grow as the exhibition travels.

Ultimately, Crossing Borders, Keeping Ties asks us to reconsider what we mean when we speak of family, home, distance, borders, and belonging. It invites us to look beyond the assumption that proximity is necessary for intimacy, that borders necessarily divide, or that migration means leaving one place behind in order to belong to another. The stories gathered here suggest instead that family can be maintained across distance, that home can exist in more than one place, that presence can take material and emotional forms, and that belonging can be multiple, layered, and continually negotiated.

Heidi Martins
Exhibition Coordinator

Theme 1:
Redefining Family & Home

Introduction and Scope

Migration has profoundly transformed how scholars conceptualise family and home. Rather than being understood as fixed, territorially bounded entities, both are increasingly recognised as dynamic, relational, and socially constructed through mobility, everyday practices, and transnational connections. Family is no longer confined to co-residence or biological ties but extends across borders through networks of care, emotional support, and reciprocal obligations that sustain relationships despite geographical distance (Baldassar & Merla, 2014).

Likewise, the notion of home has evolved beyond its association with a physical dwelling or a country of origin. Contemporary migration scholarship conceptualises home as an ongoing process of home-making through which individuals create familiarity, security, and meaningful social relations in changing contexts. Rather than a stable destination, home is understood as an evolving relationship with places, people, memories, and aspirations that unfolds over time and across multiple spatial scales (Boccagni & Kusenbach, 2020; Fathi, 2021). Recent work further highlights that home-making is not restricted to domestic spaces but also extends into neighbourhoods, communities, and public spaces where migrants negotiate recognition, identity, and everyday belonging (Boccagni & Duyvendak, 2021).

These transformations are closely intertwined with the concepts of belonging and unbelonging. Belonging is increasingly viewed as a relational and negotiated process rather than a fixed identity, emerging through interactions between personal attachments, social recognition, and institutional inclusion (Yuval-Davis, 2006). At the same time, experiences of unbelonging—resulting from exclusion, discrimination, or competing cultural expectations—are not exceptional but constitute an integral dimension of migratory trajectories. Individuals may simultaneously experience attachment to multiple places while feeling fully accepted in none, illustrating the fluid and often ambivalent nature of belonging across generations (Anthias, 2008).

This perspective is particularly relevant not only for first-generation migrants and their descendants, but also across diverse migratory trajectories, including forced displacement, asylum-seeking, and other forms of precarious or constrained mobility. Across these contexts, family relations, memories, and everyday practices continuously reshape how home is imagined, lost, reconstructed, or refused. For refugees and forcibly displaced populations, home may be marked by rupture, violence, or irreversibility, yet it can also persist as an affective and symbolic reference shaping identity and future aspirations (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002; Brun & Fábos, 2015). At the same time, in both voluntary and forced migration, home is rarely singular: it is produced through ongoing negotiations between past attachments, present conditions, and imagined futures.

The stories presented in this section show us that home, rather than representing a stable place of origin or settlement, emerges as a dynamic process through which individuals navigate continuity and rupture, belonging and unbelonging, across multiple social and spatial contexts. Viewing family and home through this expanded

relational and transnational lens therefore allows for a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary mobilities, highlighting how attachment, identity, and everyday life are continuously reconfigured across different regimes of migration.

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Poster 1: Maintaining family ties across borders: a duty

Antoinette Reuter, Centre de Documentation sur les Migrations Humaines, Luxembourg

Transnational families have long existed, as a historical perspective can show. The case illustrated in this poster shows how the concepts of borders and family have been fluid and constantly reshaped over time. As a methodological note, the sources used to reconstruct the Huberty family profile are primarily archival in nature. Only one oral testimony, belonging to the fourth generation, could be collected.

The methods applied in the study of the Huberty family draw on historical demography and microhistory. In terms of historical demography, the family reconstitution method developed in the 1950s by the French historian and demographer Louis Henry (1911–1991) was employed. At the core of this approach is the creation of family record sheets on which all available civil registry data – normally scattered across multiple sources – are systematically compiled. This process allows for the reconstruction of a family structure which, in the case of the Huberty family, is shaped by and crosses multiple borders. This reconstruction notably revealed that the two Huberty brothers who settled in France both married in Paris to two sisters originating from the same Luxembourgish village as themselves. There is a strong likelihood that these marriages were arranged by their families, as they reproduce a common practice in rural Luxembourgish contexts aimed at preventing the fragmentation of inheritance. These marital alliances also highlight the persistence of transnational ties at the village level.

Microhistory, developed in Italy by early modern historians Carlo Ginzburg and Giovanni Levi, provides a complementary analytical framework. The work of Hans Medick, who adapted this approach to social and economic history, proved particularly useful for this study. All documents from the Steffen-Huberty archive were organised chronologically and interpreted in dialogue with broader historical developments. It appears that the division of property within the first generation definitively severed relations with the American branch of the family as early as the second generation. More broadly, both local and transnational structural factors significantly shaped the ways in which the Huberty family was able to “make family.”

Paris and the Paris region occupied a central position in the circulation between the country of origin and the Luxembourgish diaspora. Many families appear to have maintained relatively well-established networks in Paris. The Steffen-Huberty family mobilised these networks, for instance, to arrange care for an adult nephew (third generation) following the death of his parents. Once emigrants left this privileged space, however, family ties tended to weaken and eventually break, as was the case with the French branches by the third generation. In Belgium, the Province of Luxembourg played a similar intermediary role in Luxembourgish transnational family relations, comparable to that of Paris in France. Any departure from this region likewise led to a weakening of familial contacts, and the Belgian branch became increasingly autonomous by the third generation.

The First World War, with occupations and border closures, only accelerated an already ongoing process of transformation. Relations with Germany persisted until

the rise of Nazism, despite some difficulties. They even evolved over time: Pierre Steffen continued to travel to the Saar region even after the death of his wife (née Huberty), as familial duty gradually transformed into a relationship of mutual affection. His grandson (fourth generation) accompanied him on these journeys, which, following the temporary autonomy of the Saar after the First World War, required crossing two French borders with strict and imposing controls.

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Antoinette Reuter is a historian based in Luxembourg and co-founder of the Centre de Documentation sur les Migrations Humaines (CDMH) in Dudelange. She taught history for several decades and has devoted her work to the history of migration and to the preservation and public recognition of migration heritage. She has contributed to numerous publications, exhibitions, and research projects on migration and memory in Luxembourg and beyond.

Poster 2: Family is more than who lives with you

Anne Carolina Ramos, University of Fribourg, Switzerland

Millions of children have been directly or indirectly affected by migration and displacement. Some children migrate internationally or internally with their parents, while others migrate on their own as unaccompanied or separated children. Some are in need of international protection, such as refugees and asylum seekers, while others are stateless, remain behind when their parents migrate for work, or are born into migrant families. Thus, children experience migration and displacement in diverse ways. Although many children are on the move and are also affected by multiple crises that drive migration, including economic crises, climate change, armed conflict, violence, and war, they remain one of the world's most marginalized groups and are underrepresented in data, statistics, and migration research. (IDAC, 2025) Research on transnational families, for example, has focused predominantly on adult family members (Fresnoza-Flot, 2018; Ramos & Riepl, 2025).

There is therefore a growing need to understand what family means to children in contexts of migration, how family is done across distance, and which family practices become meaningful to them (Jurczyk, 2020). In this poster, I draw on a drawing-elicitation interview with two sisters, Rafaela (6) and Aurora (8), to explore different aspects of their transnational family life. Rafaela and Aurora are growing up in Switzerland but maintain strong ties with their family in Brazil. Some points for reflection include:

- Children may understand family as an extended group, including (great-) grandparents, uncles, aunts, and second cousins. This challenges the notion of the family as a purely nuclear unit composed only of parents and siblings.
- With increasing life expectancy, not only grandparents but also great-grandparents can play an important role in children's transnational family relationships, highlighting the significance of intergenerational ties and how migration shapes relationships across multiple generations.
- Long-distance migration, such as between Switzerland and Brazil, makes face-to-face encounters less frequent, making communication technologies an important means of maintaining family relationships. However, children do not always enjoy remaining still during video calls.
- Children highlight the importance of play in transnational family life, particularly with cousins. This also underscores the importance of considering ‘children's peer cultures’ (Corsaro, 2018).
- Pets are also considered family members. Family pets living in another country, such as a grandparent's dog, can likewise become important family members to visit in person or see during video calls.
- The meaning of home can also extend beyond one's own household. Even without having a home of their own in Brazil, a grandparent's or great-grandparent's house may be experienced as a shared family home where everyone comes together.

Overall, children's perspectives show that family is more than who lives with you: it is made and experienced through relationships, care, shared practices, places, and connections that can extend across households, generations, and borders.

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Anne Carolina Ramos is a Senior Researcher in the Department of Educational Sciences at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. Her research focuses on children's perspectives in contexts of migration and forced displacement, with particular attention to transnational family relations, transnational care, intergenerational relationships, and well-being.

Poster 3: "Macha, Macha!" mapping the latitudes of transnational academic mobility and rituals of affection

Rosalina Pisco Costa, Universidade de Évora & Interdisciplinary Center of Social Sciences (CICS.NOVA.UÉvora), Portugal

This poster could tell the seemingly ordinary story of any young woman who leaves her homeland to pursue higher education. But it does not. Sofía is a 22-year-old international undergraduate student from Quito, Ecuador, studying at the University of Évora, Portugal. Just as the equator divides the Earth into the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, Sofía has experienced different latitudes of what it means to be a family. Her father, mother, younger brother and maternal grandparents live in Quito; her paternal grandparents in Sangolqui. She even says she has "three mothers": her maternal grandmother, her aunt, and her mother. In Évora, "there are three of us: my 'sister' from Bolivia, my boyfriend, and me from Ecuador."

Leaving one's homeland to study abroad means, in this case, crossing not only national borders but also cultural ones. International academic mobility is a global phenomenon of considerable scope and complexity. Often viewed through the lens of talent attraction and human capital development within East–West or South–North mobility dynamics, it frequently obscures the everyday realities experienced by young students beyond institutional, economic or educational perspectives. In fact, while navigating multiple transitions – from secondary to higher education, from adolescence to adulthood, and from dependence to independence –, young students experience not only relational transformations in their connections with parents, teachers, friends, and romantic partners, but also profound personal transformations that reshape their identities and the ways in which they understand and incorporate this experience into their emotional and developmental trajectories (Brooks & Waters, 2023).

Drawing on a creative methodology grounded in mobile interviewing and emotional mapping (Kara, 2015), Sofía guided us through both public and private spaces of the city, revealing the places that bring her closer to – or further away from – her experiences of "home" and "family". The walk through Évora mapped places such as the croissanterie, the public garden, and a university classroom. Encounters with public spaces of sociability and leisure, with nature and animals, and with the demands of academic life reveal the tensions and challenges that shape the everyday experience of international academic mobility. At the same time, they highlight the power of rituals of care and affection that sustain connections between "there" and "here" (Costa, 2013).

Like many other first-generation students globally, Sofía is the first in her family to leave home to pursue her own educational journey. Etched into her skin, the tattoo depicting "Macha, macha!" inscribed in the handwriting of her "three mothers" serves as a constant reminder of the strength of the family that accompanies her and the source of resilience that enables her to continue pursuing her dream. At the same time, the Ecuadorian expression meaning "Strong woman!" is far more than a physical and embodied mark; it becomes a symbolic inscription of belonging, connection, and continuity across space, time, and emotion.

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About the author

Rosalina Pisco Costa is a sociologist, academic researcher and university professor. In her daily teaching, she works closely with students from around the world. Listening to the lived experiences of transnational students has profoundly reshaped her understanding of a reality she once believed she knew well.

Poster 4: “Home is where my family is”: from roots and routes

Isabelle Albert, University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg

This poster is situated in a wider research program that has unfolded over the past years starting with a project on intergenerational relations in the light of migration and ageing (IRMA; Albert, Ferring, & Barros, 2016). While this project focused on identity constructions, family relations and intergenerational solidarity among first generation migrants from Portugal to Luxembourg and their (young) adult children, compared to Luxembourgish families, the present poster goes beyond the limited view on the life realities in the country of settlement. The underlying interview explicitly addresses the transnational dimension of belonging, which the original project had only touched upon. While in the earlier IRMA study the common practice of commuting between Luxembourg and Portugal was described by a part of first-generation migrants as one of the favoured options for their future retirement, we did not delve deeper into the actual lived experiences and concrete practices of a transnational lifestyle. Although for many participants, a strong sense of belonging to both Portugal and Luxembourg emerged, the study uncovered also difficulties of reconciling dual belonging: cultural identity struggles of first generation were partially related to intergenerational conflicts, and ambivalences emerged as part of identity negotiation processes in particular for some of the second-generation participants (Albert, 2025).

The present interview was guided by key questions around the meaning of family and of belonging including photographs of illustrative objects as well as the language portrait task borrowed from linguistics (e.g. Busch, 2016) and often employed in research on multilingualism. Participants are asked to localise the different languages they use in their daily life by colouring the respective body parts with different colours.

The present case study illustrates intra and interpersonal negotiation processes of the sense of belonging in the context of a transnational and intergenerational family as reported from the perspective of a young adult second generation family member. The interview widens our one-sided perspective on Portuguese migrants’ family life in Luxembourg by putting light on the so far invisible part: the family relations and practices of doing family in Portugal as well as the way of retaining closeness in family relations in this transnational arena. Interestingly, the long journey travelling between Luxembourg and Portugal has a meaning of connecting both places which goes beyond the mere displacement.

The results show that the sense of belonging in the context of migration cannot be understood by looking one-sided on the country of settlement but that the transnational dimension must always be taken into account as well. Belonging is deeply rooted in social experiences and memories with family, anchored in rituals and practices that provide a sense of security and embeddedness. The interaction with family in the context where parents grew up provides their offspring with practical hands-on understanding of an otherwise abstract knowledge about the country of origin through purely narratives. At the same time, the example shows how important social relationships are in both contexts for a sense of belonging. The

skilful use of different languages in different social contexts adds a further layer of multiple belonging.

All this makes the transnational family life so rich, providing resources for future generations, while the task of building a sense of belonging to a specific place can be more complex. However, the transnational practices provide also a sense of continuity as family relations are lived in different contexts that are linked to each other with traditions related to the journey – the arrival and welcome in Portugal, the trip to places of memory and the praying for safe travels as well as gifts with symbolic meanings – all function as a bridge between both contexts, thus the trip by car is essential for uniting – not separating- the different living contexts that seem distant and close at the same time. These practices ultimately enable the creation of a sense of belonging and security in both living contexts.

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About the author

Isabelle Albert is a psychologist and associate professor at the University of Luxembourg in the field of Lifespan Development, Family, and Culture. Her research interests include the study of transgenerational family relations in the context of migration and ageing, intergenerational transmission of values and family solidarity, as well as well-being over the life span.

Theme 2:
The Trauma of Rupture & War

Introduction and Scope

Migration is not always a process of choice, opportunity, or gradual transition. For many families, mobility is shaped by war, political violence, persecution, displacement, and the sudden loss of safety. In such contexts, migration may involve not only movement across geographical borders but also profound ruptures in family life, social networks, routines, and relationships. Forced displacement can separate parents from children, divide extended families, and disrupt the places and practices through which everyday life and a sense of continuity had previously been organised (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002; Oldroyd et al., 2022).

The experience of separation is particularly significant because family relationships are not simply suspended when relatives are geographically dispersed. Rather, absence can become an enduring condition of family life, requiring individuals to negotiate uncertainty, loss, and changing forms of responsibility. For children and young people, separation from parents or other primary caregivers may be experienced alongside multiple forms of disruption, including interrupted education, displacement, unfamiliar environments, and the loss of established social and cultural reference points. Research on forced family separation highlights the emotional and psychological consequences of these experiences, including anxiety, distress, behavioural difficulties, and symptoms associated with traumatic stress (Oldroyd et al., 2022). At the same time, the effects of separation cannot be understood solely in individual psychological terms: they are also shaped by migration policies, legal status, border regimes, and the unequal conditions under which families are permitted – or prevented – to reunite.

War and forced displacement further complicate the relationship between memory and belonging. Violence may transform places that once represented home into sites of danger, loss, or irretrievable absence. Yet memories of family life, neighbourhoods, landscapes, languages, and everyday routines may remain central to how displaced people understand themselves and their relationships to the past. Home can therefore become simultaneously a source of attachment and a reminder of rupture. For refugees and other forcibly displaced populations, memories of home may persist through stories, photographs, objects, rituals, and intergenerational narratives, allowing experiences of continuity to coexist with experiences of profound loss (Brun & Fábos, 2015).

Family separation also has a temporal dimension. Rupture is rarely confined to the moment of departure: it can extend through prolonged waiting, uncertain journeys, asylum procedures, temporary accommodation, and delayed or incomplete reunification. Reunification itself does not necessarily restore family life to its previous form. Parents and children may have changed during periods of absence, developing new routines, relationships, expectations, and understandings of one another. Studies of migrant family reunification therefore emphasise that reunion is better understood as a process of re-engagement and adaptation than as a simple return to an earlier state of family life (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). The emotional consequences of separation may remain present even after physical proximity has been restored.

At the same time, families are not only passive recipients of the consequences of war and displacement. They develop strategies to preserve relationships, transmit memories, protect children, and create forms of continuity in circumstances marked by uncertainty. Letters, photographs, phone calls, objects, stories, and other forms of communication can become important means of sustaining connection when physical presence is impossible. Such practices do not erase the experience of rupture, but they may provide ways of negotiating it, giving meaning to separation and preserving a sense of family across changing circumstances.

The experiences explored in this section therefore invite us to understand trauma and rupture not only as moments of loss, but as processes that reshape family relationships over time. War and forced migration can fracture homes, interrupt childhoods, and produce enduring forms of uncertainty, while family practices can simultaneously sustain memory, connection, and hope. Looking at displacement through the experiences of families and children makes visible the human dimensions of borders and conflict, reminding us that political ruptures are lived through intimate relationships, everyday absences, and the ongoing effort to remain connected across distance (Karl & Balykin, 2026).

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Poster 5: The Colors of War: Nika Striletska's divided family

Petko Hristov, Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum at Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Bulgaria

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 triggered one of the largest forced displacement crises in modern European history. The scale of military operations, population displacement, and their economic and geopolitical consequences have been unprecedented. More than 3.5 million Ukrainians have been internally displaced, while nearly 7 million have fled the country, with over 6.3 million seeking protection across Europe.

As a neighbouring EU member state, Bulgaria has become an important destination for refugees, predominantly women, children and older people. Unlike economic migration, conflict-induced migration is sudden, involuntary and accompanied by profound social, legal and psychological challenges. Families separated by war must cope with disrupted communication, prolonged uncertainty and the emotional burden of maintaining family ties across national borders. According to the Bulgarian Council of Ministers, more than 200,000 Ukrainian citizens entered and registered in Bulgaria during the first year of the war. Of these, over 91,000 remained in the country, including approximately 35,000 children (Bulgaria – RRP 2025–2026 Bulgaria Chapter).

The unprecedented scale of displacement prompted the European Commission to activate Council Directive 2001/55/EC for the first time (Schrooten 2025: 1). Alongside institutional support, informal social networks have played a crucial role in strengthening the resilience and integration of refugee women and their families. Beyond assistance with employment and material needs, these networks contribute to the social and cultural adaptation of refugee children, fostering a sense of stability and belonging in the host society. One such initiative is the charitable organisation Open Heart Fund in Varna, where we met the young Ukrainian artist Nika Striletska and her mother.

Born in Dnipro in 2015, Nika arrived in Bulgaria with her mother, Tetyana Ohrimenko, a prominent Ukrainian artist. Before the outbreak of the war, Nika had already gained national recognition, being included among Ukraine's twenty-five most talented children in the Encyclopedia of Children's Talents. Mother and daughter fled Dnipro during the first weeks of the invasion, undertaking a long and dangerous journey through areas affected by shelling. Nika's father remained in Ukraine, where he continues to work as a physician and rehabilitation specialist, treating patients with severe physical disabilities.

Nika's artistic development illustrates how forced displacement reshapes children's perceptions and forms of self-expression. Before the war, she primarily painted landscapes and animals; afterwards, her work became dominated by images of violence, destruction and fear. As she recalls: "It is very scary there. People are dying, there is shooting and tanks are passing by." Her paintings offer a child's testimony of war, expressing trauma while simultaneously serving as a means of emotional resilience.

Since settling in Varna, Nika has presented her work in numerous exhibitions in Bulgaria and abroad, supported by the Open Heart Fund. Among the most notable was Faces of War, exhibited at NATO Headquarters in Brussels in February 2024. Her artwork has become more than a personal response to displacement: it represents the experiences of thousands of Ukrainian children whose childhoods have been profoundly shaped by war, displacement and the search for safety.

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Poster 6: Rights of child: no exceptions, no borders

Demet Gülaldı, Üsküdar University, Istanbul, Türkiye

The phenomenon of transnational families, characterized by the geographical dispersal of family members across national borders due to war, forced displacement, or prolonged asylum processes, presents profound and often overlooked challenges to the realization of children's rights in an increasingly globalized yet border-reinforced world. International migration also undermines fundamental principles enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), particularly the right of the child to live with both parents (Article 9), the right to direct and regular contact across borders (Article 10), and the principle that the best interests of the child should be given priority in all administrative and judicial proceedings (Article 3). Türkiye hosts the world's largest population of refugees under temporary protection, the vast majority of whom are Syrians who fled the civil war that began in 2011 (Presidency of Migration Management, 2024). While many Syrian refugee families have rebuilt their lives in Türkiye, children continue to face challenges related to family separation, education, social integration, and access to opportunities that support their well-being and development.

The present study is a child-participatory study that aims to understand a child's emotions in a transnational family through the lens of the child's right to play. It is adopted a qualitative case study design to explore the lived experiences of a refugee child through a multimodal perspective. The research was grounded in Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), which enables the examination of meaning-making across multiple semiotic resources, including verbal narratives, visual representations, and photographs (Kress, G., & Bezemer, J., (2023). This approach acknowledges that children's experiences, emotions, and identities are communicated through diverse modes of expression.

Gülsüm (pseudonym) is a 12-year-old Syrian girl who immigrated from Syria while her mother was pregnant with her. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Gülsüm and her mother to explore the family's migration trajectory, everyday life, educational experiences, play opportunities, and aspirations. To facilitate child participation and capture Gülsüm's perspectives beyond verbal communication, she was also invited to produce a drawing and to take a photograph in response to the prompt: "What do you enjoy most about being here? In her drawing, Gülsüm depicted her home in Türkiye, the Turkish flag, flowers, and herself, accompanied by the handwritten statement, "Türkiye is very beautiful," reflecting her positive perceptions of her current living environment. She also identified the Jenga game as the activity she enjoys most. Beyond being a recreational game, Jenga represents opportunities for concentration, problem-solving, patience, and social interaction for kids. Through this simple yet engaging activity, Gülsüm finds a sense of calm, focus, and connection. Each carefully balanced move helps her regulate her emotions, build patience, and strengthen her social interaction skills with others.

Forced displacement should never diminish children's fundamental rights. Ensuring equitable access to all rights—particularly the right to play, participation, education,

and protection—is a shared responsibility of states, requiring rights-based policies and practices that remain unwavering regardless of children's migration status or circumstances (United Nations-Article 22).

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Demet Gülaldı is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Child Development at Üsküdar University, Türkiye. She holds a PhD in Developmental Psychology. Her research focuses on early childhood development, parent–child relationships, attachment, child participation, and child rights, with a particular interest in the well-being and development of children in vulnerable contexts.

Poster 7: I can be happy anywhere my family is

Ute Karl, Protestant University of Applied Sciences, Germany

In Germany, on 31 May 2026 1,287,720 people were registered as refugees from Ukraine (UNHCR, 2026). In the middle of the year 2024, around 65% of the adult refugees in Germany were female (Siegert, 2025). Due the martial law in Ukraine many women and children came without their fathers and partners, and families were torn apart. In 2023, 18% of the Ukrainian female refugees who were in partnership had a partner abroad, while this ratio for men was 2% (Zinn et al. 2025, p. 29). 43% of the adult women had at least one minor child (41% of the men) (Zinn et al., p. 30). Refugees from Ukraine who hold a Ukrainian citizenship or permanent residence permit in Ukraine are covered by temporary protection status (COUNCIL DIRECTIVE 2001/55/EC, 2001) until March 2028 (if not prolongated again). However, since July 2026 men aged between 23 and 60 have to proof that they left Ukraine legally and that they exempted from military service.

In contrast to other asylum seekers and refugees, Ukrainian refugees in Germany under the TPD can take up employment immediately, access the housing market directly, and have access to the welfare system and standard health care (Gesetzliche Krankenversicherung). Furthermore, they can travel to Ukraine for visits (exception: those men who fall under martial law are not allowed to leave Ukraine again) and travel within Germany and to other EU countries without limitations.

The interview with Iryna Verbivska took place in the second half of the year 2025. For Iryna, family also includes close friends and pets. Their pets accompanied them on the long journey to Germany and are an important anchor of wellbeing. During her flight she documented many cruelties of the war. Beside showing pictures of her family she also showed these pictures during the interview to bear witness to these cruelties. After fleeing the war in Ukraine together with some members of her extended family, she was separated from her partner and her father. They were finally able to reunite in Germany after a year. Iryna sees the future of her family in Germany, although one of her best friends has returned to Ukraine. Iryna speaks fluently German. She is very active in different fields in her professional live. The birth of her first baby changed her whole live. She was able to return to work thanks to the support of her family, especially of her mother who is happy to take care of the baby.

The situation of Iryna and her extended family shows how family reunification is an important factor for wellbeing and for integration in a new country. However, research on the situation of Ukrainian forcibly displaced people in Germany shows that the uncertainty of residence status under the TPD, the difficulties in accessing institutional childcare and the need to find work in order to obtain a more stable residence permit (Nowicka et al., 2026) still cause, more than four years after the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion, a situation of being in the limbo and of in-betweenness (Lashchuk, 2025).

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Poster 8: Letters across borders: children's stories of separation and reunion

Eglantina Dervishi, University of Tirana, Albania

Arbi's story sits within a much larger Albanian phenomenon. Since the fall of communism in 1990, Albania has experienced one of Europe's most intense waves of emigration, with over half of Albanian households reporting at least one member who migrated internationally, chiefly to Greece and Italy (King & Vullnetari, 2006). While much of the early scholarship on this exodus focused on the elderly "left behind" – the so-called orphan pensioners cared for at a distance through remittances rather than presence – comparatively less attention has gone to the children who remained, quietly reorganizing their daily lives around a parent's absence.

This gap matters because childhood parentification, as seen in Arbi's assumption of the "man of the house" role, is not simply an individual coping mechanism but a patterned response documented across transnational families worldwide, where children absorb caregiving duties, financial awareness, and emotional labor typically reserved for adults. What makes the Albanian case distinct is the cultural weight of patriarchal family structure: a son stepping into his father's role is not only a practical adjustment but a symbolically loaded one, tied to inherited expectations about male responsibility and household honor.

The "Letters to Mom/Dad Who Went Away" protocol was designed precisely to make this internal negotiation visible. Rather than asking children directly about difficulty – a framing that often produces guarded, socially desirable answers – the ten-chapter narrative structure invites them to inhabit the story chronologically, from the ordinary routines "before departure" through to the unsettled work of "getting to know each other again." Arbi's own reflection that "something was lost forever" captures a finding that recurs across this dataset: reunion is not a return to a prior equilibrium but the beginning of a new, renegotiated relationship, one where roles claimed during absence are not simply relinquished on a parent's return.

The Albanian proverb "larg nga sytë larg nga zemra" ("away from eyes, away from heart") frames absence as erosion. Arbi's narrative complicates that folk wisdom: distance did not empty the bond, but it did permanently reshape it.

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Theme 3:
Emotional Bridges & Care

Introduction and Scope

Transnational family life demonstrates that distance does not necessarily diminish family relationships, but it changes the ways in which intimacy, responsibility, and care are practised. When family members live across borders, care can no longer be understood primarily as something that takes place through physical proximity. Instead, it may circulate through multiple forms of exchange, including emotional support, financial assistance, communication, visits, gifts, practical help, and the sharing of everyday experiences. These practices challenge the assumption that care is necessarily tied to co-residence and reveal the diverse ways in which family members remain involved in one another's lives across geographical distance (Baldassar & Merla, 2014).

The concept of *care circulation* is particularly useful for understanding these processes. Rather than focusing on a one-directional transfer of care from one family member to another, care circulation draws attention to reciprocal, multidirectional, and sometimes uneven exchanges within extended family networks. Care may move between generations, genders, and locations, changing according to the needs and resources of family members over the life course. Such exchanges can include material support, emotional reassurance, childcare, assistance with everyday tasks, or the organisation of practical matters across borders. Transnational families are therefore sustained not simply through emotional attachment but through ongoing practices of reciprocity, obligation, trust, and responsibility (Baldassar & Merla, 2014).

Distance, however, also transforms the emotional experience of family life. Feelings such as longing, absence, anxiety, affection, and anticipation become part of everyday transnational relationships. The Portuguese expression *matar saudades*, for example, captures a particularly complex form of emotional practice: the attempt to respond to the pain of absence by reconnecting with people, places, memories, or sensory experiences associated with home. Such emotions are not merely private states but are embedded in social practices through which family members maintain a sense of closeness despite physical separation. Emotional bonds can therefore be actively produced and renewed rather than simply assumed to persist.

Communication technologies have become increasingly important in this process. Telephone calls, messaging applications, social media, and video communication allow geographically dispersed family members to participate in one another's everyday lives in ways that were previously difficult or impossible. Digital communication can facilitate the sharing of ordinary moments – meals, celebrations, school experiences, illness, work, and family events – and can create forms of what has been described as *ambient co-presence*, in which relatives remain aware of one another's lives even when they are not physically together. At the same time, digital connection does not eliminate distance. Access to communication technologies is uneven, and mediated forms of presence cannot fully replace physical proximity, particularly when care requires touch, practical assistance, or shared everyday routines.

Care across borders is also shaped by unequal resources and by the institutional conditions surrounding migration. The ability to visit relatives, send money, travel during moments of crisis, or provide hands-on assistance depends on legal status, income, employment, mobility regimes, and access to time and technology. Research on transnational care therefore highlights the importance of considering not only the emotional commitment of family members but also the structural conditions that enable or constrain their capacity to care. Restrictive migration regimes, for example, may prevent relatives from crossing borders precisely when proximate care is most needed (Merla, Kilkey, & Baldassar, 2020).

These dynamics also reveal that care is neither exclusively a private nor an exclusively positive domain. Transnational care can involve love and solidarity, but also obligation, guilt, conflict, dependency, and unequal expectations. Responsibilities may be distributed unevenly across generations and genders, and those who remain behind may experience both the benefits and burdens of transnational family arrangements. The circulation of care therefore makes visible the complex negotiations through which family members balance individual aspirations with collective responsibilities and emotional commitments.

The stories presented in this section focus on these everyday practices of connection. They show how families create emotional bridges through communication, remembrance, visits, gifts, rituals, and acts of care, transforming distance from a purely geographical condition into a social and emotional space that must continually be negotiated. Rather than suggesting that borders simply divide families, these perspectives highlight the creative and sometimes demanding work involved in maintaining intimacy across them. Family continuity, in this sense, is not simply preserved despite distance: it is actively produced through the many ways in which people make their presence felt in one another's lives.

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Poster 9: Not a place, but a presence: four journeys home

Lela Goginava, Grigol Robakidze University Tbilisi, Georgia

While the exhibition piece, "Not a Place, But a Presence: Four Journeys Home", provides a visual narrative of four women's everyday experiences, the underlying research is anchored in a broader theoretical shift within migration studies – the "emotional turn." Historically, research has heavily quantified economic remittances and labor market integration. This project, instead, delves into the often-invisible emotional labor required to sustain family cohesion across borders (Baldassar, 2015).

The socio-historical context of the selected narratives is deeply intertwined with post-Soviet migration trajectories. Participants from Georgia and Ukraine represent a critical spectrum of mobility – ranging from voluntary labor migration to Western Europe, to abrupt, forced displacement due to the ongoing war in Ukraine. This comparative framing was essential to understand how the nature of migration dictates the parameters of family intimacy. For economic migrants, asynchronous work routines create "emotional gaps" that must be bridged through scheduled rituals. Conversely, for those fleeing active conflict, the trauma of indefinite separation transforms daily digital communication from a simple tool for closeness into a critical psychological lifeline.

Methodologically, the study deliberately utilized open-ended narrative interviews, analyzed through Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This qualitative approach was chosen over structured questionnaires to allow participants to organically construct and negotiate their transnational identities during the interview process itself.

A primary theoretical perspective applied during data interpretation was the role of material culture in migration. As Boccagni (2014) argues, domestic objects in migrant lives are not passive; they actively negotiate belonging. The items highlighted in the poster – a familiar candy box, a generational prayer notebook, and a small Lego horse – function as "transnational transitional objects." They are not merely keepsakes; they serve as tactile anchors that materialize absent family members and bridge the sensory void created by geographic separation.

Ultimately, the research behind the poster argues that emotional closeness in transnational families is never a static state that merely survives distance. It is a highly dynamic, resilient process requiring deliberate, continuous maintenance through both digital connectivity and the profound symbolism of material objects.

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Poster 10: "Matar saudades”: building affective bridges across distance

Bárbara Bäckström, Universidade Aberta/LEAD, Portugal

This poster presents the stories of two migrant women living in Lisbon and explores how they cope with saudade – the longing for people and places left behind. We invited them to reflect on what they do to matar saudades, a Portuguese expression that literally means “to kill longing” but is better understood as finding ways to ease it rather than eliminate it. The act of 'killing the longing' reflects the centrality of this emotion in lusophone identity, functioning as an essential psychological and cultural mechanism for dealing with absence and distance (Silva, 2012). The narratives show that saudade is not simply an emotion but an everyday practice, sustained through objects, routines, memories, and sensory experiences that create affective bridges across distance Wise, A., & Velayutham, S. (2017) argue that transnational fields are heavily structured by an array of shared emotions, obligations, and sensory habits that maintain reciprocity across borders.

Elvira, originally from Manaus in the Brazilian Amazon, has lived in Portugal for 17 years. Although she initially expected to stay only temporarily, Lisbon gradually became home. Today, she lives with her husband and children, while several siblings also reside nearby, creating a transnational yet partially reunited family. Her story illustrates how experiences of saudade change over time. She recalls that, when she first migrated, communication with Brazil depended on expensive telephone calls: “Seventeen years ago, there was no WhatsApp.” Today, video calls allow emotional closeness through faces and gestures, demonstrating how digital technologies reshape transnational family life. Yet, her strongest connections remain deeply sensory: the smell of pure cocoa carefully preserved from Brazil, traditional Brazilian food, music that suddenly transports her back home, and a photograph taken at the airport on the day of departure. Interestingly, after many years in Portugal, she also experiences saudade for Lisbon when visiting Brazil, revealing that migration creates multiple and overlapping senses of belonging.

Farhana’s story represents a different stage of migration. Having recently moved from Dhaka, Bangladesh, with her son while her husband remained behind, her experience is marked by more immediate separation. Everyday routines help her cope with absence. Cooking is central: “When I cook, I feel at home.” The smell of spices, a bracelet given by her husband, and frequent phone calls become tangible ways of maintaining emotional proximity. At the same time, she deliberately manages her emotions: “I try not to think too much… I don’t want to be seen as someone sad.” Yet she also recognises the limits of these strategies: “Nothing replaces the absence of my husband.” Her experience reminds us that technology and material objects cannot fully substitute physical presence.

Together, these narratives illustrate the realities of transnational families, whose members remain emotionally, socially, and practically connected despite living in different countries. Rather than ending longing, matar saudades involves developing everyday practices that make separation more bearable through food, smells, music, objects, memories, and communication.

Methodologically, the poster is based on qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted in a conversational format, focusing on everyday practices, material culture, and sensory experiences. The participants' narratives were transcribed, translated, and condensed into short quotations suitable for a public audience. One of the principal challenges was balancing analytical depth with accessibility while preserving the authenticity of the participants' voices. The poster also acknowledges what cannot be fully represented: the evolution of saudade across different stages of migration, the embodied importance of the senses, and the enduring limits of connection, since no strategy can replace touch, shared daily life, or physical presence.

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Bárbara Bäckström is an Associate Professor, Universidade Aberta (2000), integrated researcher into Lead /Universidade Aberta. Developing research in inclusion of immigrants and refugees in the health and in education, participates in national and international projects and published several articles in specialized magazines, as well as books and book chapters, in the fields of her research.

Poster 11: If there would be no connection, there would be no life

Natalia Ringblom, Umeå university, Sweden

Transnational families maintain a sense of familyhood despite geographical distance. This becomes particularly challenging when war, pandemics, travel restrictions, and other crises make face-to-face contact difficult (Végh et al., 2025). Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have become central to transnational family life. They enable forms of "connected presence" through which family members can participate in each other's everyday lives despite physical separation (Licoppe, 2004). At the same time, digital communication cannot fully compensate for the absence of physical contact. This contribution explores these tensions through interviews with two elderly Russian mothers whose adult children have lived in Sweden for more than 30 years.

The study is based on online interviews conducted via WhatsApp with two participants living in Russia. Three calls were conducted with each participant. The first call established contact and introduced the study; the second focused on their experiences of transnational family communication; and the third was used to clarify and supplement the information collected. Each call lasted between 35 minutes and one hour.

Lydia (84), from Moscow, and Zemfira (87), from Penza, share a similar family history. Both experienced a period when visits, letters, and postcards were central to maintaining family relationships. Today, geographical distance, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine have made physical meetings much more difficult, increasing the importance of digital communication.Their experiences nevertheless reveal different forms of digital presence. For Lydia, technology itself is less important than the everyday interaction it enables. She regularly speaks with her daughter while she is cooking, baking, or doing household chores. Such mundane interactions create a sense of sharing ordinary life, illustrating how routine communication can sustain emotional closeness (Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016).

For Zemfira, seeing her son is particularly important. She speaks with him almost every day and values video calls, which allow her to participate in family celebrations and feel connected to life in Sweden. Yet she clearly distinguishes digital from physical presence: "We see and hear each other, but hugs are just as important." The interviews also highlight the intergenerational role of digital communication. Both grandmothers remain connected with their grandchildren. Lydia's interactions include Russian food, family history. ICTs thus support not only emotional connection but also the transmission of language, memories, and family traditions.

The two accounts show that ICTs are more than tools for exchanging information. Through everyday conversations, video calls, and participation in family events, they enable geographically separated relatives to remain present in each other's lives. At the same time, digital presence has clear limits. It can reduce distance and support emotional closeness, but it cannot reproduce physical proximity, touch, or shared space. For Lydia and Zemfira, staying connected is therefore both a practical necessity and a way of sustaining family life across generations and borders. Their

experiences demonstrate the possibilities of digital connection while reminding us that, however powerful technology may be, the longing for physical togetherness remains.

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Poster 12: Family is like a garden

Esra Demirkol Colosio, Çankırı Karatekin University, Türkiye

This poster situates the biographical narrative of Sema and Recep within the context of the history of migration between Türkiye and Germany. Their personal histories exemplify two related migration processes that profoundly impacted Turkish society in the latter part of the 20th century: mass internal migration from rural villages to urban areas, and later international labour migration to Western Europe. These experiences changed not only patterns of settlement and employment, but also family structure and the experiences of belonging among generations.

Following the signing of the first labour recruitment agreement between Türkiye and West Germany in 1961, hundreds of thousands of Turkish people migrated to Germany as Gastarbeiter (guest worker), initially on a temporary basis. While most people intended to save money and then return homeland, such as family reunification, economic fluctuations and future aspirations for the following generations this migration journey became permanent (Abadan-Unat, 2017). However, prior to migrating Western European countries, many Turkish families experienced internal migration from rural villages to urban cities. From the 1950s onwards, the mechanisation of agriculture, a lack of employment opportunities and regional disparities led to rural migrants moving to urban areas and creating slum settlements known as 'gecekondu' (Erman, 2001).

Either internal or international, migration transforms the way families are formed and sustained. As family researchers have demonstrated, families are formed not only by sharing aspect of life together, such as living in the same place, but also through ongoing routines of care, communication and shared responsibilities (Morgan, 2011). Despite being physically separated, families maintain closeness by communicating via letters, audio cassettes and, more recently, new digital communication technologies (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Madianou & Miller, 2012). At the same time, migrants often had to navigate complex issues of belonging, experiencing isolation in both home and host countries. Therefore, family becomes a space where care, identity and belonging are reconstituted across borders.

The title of the poster draws Recep's metaphor of the family as a 'garden', which grows through care, shared roots and memories despite geographical distance. This metaphor reflects the idea that family is a shared space, where family life is an ongoing process of daily interactions rather than a fixed identity. By tracing one family's journey across three generations, the poster illustrates how migration not a simple movement between countries but a lifelong process of constructing a family's identity, memory, and sense of belonging across time and space.

This poster is based on an in-depth interview with a retired Turkish migrant couple. The interview was audio-recorded during a face-to-face meeting, transcribed verbatim, and then analysed using qualitative narrative and thematic analysis. The participants were invited to review and discuss their life story interpretations to ensure the final narratives accurately reflected their experiences.

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Theme 4:
Integration & New Beginnings

Introduction and Scope

Migration does not end with arrival. For migrants and their families, establishing a life in a new place involves an ongoing process of adaptation, negotiation, and relationship-building through which everyday forms of participation and belonging are developed. Integration is therefore increasingly understood not as a linear process through which migrants gradually become part of a host society, nor as a requirement to abandon previous identities and attachments, but as a multidimensional and relational process involving access to rights and opportunities, social connections, recognition, and participation in the wider society (Ager & Strang, 2008).

This broader understanding challenges assimilationist approaches that equate successful integration with cultural conformity. Instead, a transnational perspective recognises that integration can occur alongside the maintenance of transnational connections and the development of meaningful relationships in the place of settlement. Migrants may participate in schools, workplaces, neighbourhoods, associations, and public institutions while continuing to speak their languages, practise traditions, maintain family relationships, and sustain emotional attachments across borders. Integration and transnationalism are therefore not necessarily opposing processes. For many families, belonging is shaped across multiple locations and through overlapping social worlds.

Family relationships play a particularly important role in these processes. Partners, children, parents, siblings, and extended kin may provide practical resources, emotional support, social networks, and cultural continuity during periods of transition. At the same time, family life itself may be transformed through migration. Marriage, partnership, parenthood, and kinship can become sites where different expectations concerning gender, culture, language, religion, and everyday life are negotiated. Transnational marriages and family migration, for example, reveal how intimate relationships can connect different migration trajectories and social worlds while also shaping processes of settlement and belonging (Charsley et al., 2020).

Belonging, however, cannot be reduced to participation or legal status. It also involves emotional attachment and the experience of being recognised as a legitimate member of a social world. Yuval-Davis (2006) distinguishes between *belonging* – the emotional and social experience of feeling at home – and the *politics of belonging*, through which boundaries are constructed around who is considered to belong and on what terms. From this perspective, integration is not solely something migrants achieve through their own efforts. It also depends on the willingness and capacity of institutions, communities, and wider societies to recognise difference, reduce exclusion, and create conditions for meaningful participation. Contemporary European approaches similarly frame integration as a two-way process in which migrants participate actively while receiving societies create the conditions necessary for full participation (European Commission, 2025).

New beginnings should therefore not be understood as complete breaks with the past. Migration often involves carrying previous relationships, memories, skills, languages, values, and aspirations into new contexts. Individuals may create new

routines while preserving old ones, develop new social networks while maintaining transnational family ties, and construct new identities without necessarily abandoning previous ones. The resulting forms of belonging may be layered and plural: a person can feel attached to a place of birth, a place of settlement, and several family locations simultaneously. Such attachments may change over time as life circumstances, relationships, generations, and experiences of recognition evolve.

The idea of a "new beginning" also needs to account for the structural conditions within which migrants rebuild their lives. Access to employment, education, housing, healthcare, citizenship, and social rights strongly influences the possibilities available to individuals and families. Discrimination, insecure legal status, language barriers, or limited access to services can constrain integration even when migrants themselves actively seek participation. Conversely, opportunities for social connection, recognition, and institutional inclusion can support not only material settlement but also the development of a meaningful sense of belonging (Ager & Strang, 2008).

For families, integration may therefore be less about choosing between an "old" and a "new" home than about creating forms of continuity between them. New relationships, partnerships, friendships, communities, and institutions can become part of an expanding social world in which previous attachments remain significant. This is particularly visible across generations, as children and young people may inherit, reinterpret, or transform family histories while developing their own relationships with the societies in which they grow up.

The experiences brought together in this section highlight integration as an ongoing process of making a life rather than a final state of arrival. They draw attention to the ways in which people build relationships, negotiate identities, form families, and imagine futures in new social and cultural contexts. New beginnings are thus not defined by leaving the past behind, but by finding ways to connect past and present, family and society, memory and aspiration. In this sense, integration can be understood not as the end of transnational family life, but as another stage in the continuing process of creating belonging across borders.

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Poster 13: "As a part of two different families": marriage, kinship, and belonging

Mariska Slekovec, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Foreign citizens constitute a significant part of Slovenia's population. In the first half of 2026, 224,413 residents held foreign citizenship, representing 10.5% of the total population (SURS, 2026). Their presence is unevenly distributed and strongly gendered, with men comprising almost two-thirds of foreign citizens.

Slovenia's migration landscape remains strongly shaped by established migration ties with the former Yugoslav region and by labour migration. Family reunification is an important but broad administrative category encompassing diverse forms of family mobility. In 2024, of 28,250 arrivals, 7,091 were recorded under family reunification, of whom 524 were non-European immigrants (SURS, 2024). This places non-European family migrants within a comparatively small segment of Slovenia's migration landscape.

These statistics point to a subset of migrants whose experiences remain comparatively absent from the Slovenian migration literature, namely non-European marriage migrants. Mary occupies an intersectional position within this landscape. She is simultaneously a woman, a non-European migrant, a marriage migrant, and a newcomer entering Slovenian society through family rather than through the dominant pathway of labour migration. These positions intersect rather than simply accumulate, shaping how she experiences integration and belonging. Her experience therefore represents not merely a "minority within a minority", but a migration position that can become obscured when gender, nationality, migration pathway and family status are considered separately.

For this poster, a phenomenological approach was used, based on a face-to-face, in-depth narrative interview with a Kenyan woman who moved to Slovenia to join her partner. Rather than measuring integration through predefined indicators, the study explores how integration, settlement and belonging are experienced and understood from the migrant's own perspective. A single case cannot represent marriage migrants as a whole; instead, this personal account illuminates aspects of integration in the context of marriage migration that broader categories may obscure.

Mary's experience shows how integration develops through intimate family relationships. Ager and Strang (2008) distinguish between social bonds, which connect people within their own groups, and social bridges, which connect migrants to the wider society. In Mary's experience, her marital family functions as both: an intimate social bond and a social bridge into Slovenian society. At the same time, she maintains relationships and circuits of care with the family she left behind, reflecting Baldassar and Merla's (2014) understanding of care in transnational families as circulating across borders. Her story therefore highlights dimensions of integration that formal measures, as well as the broad administrative category of family reunification, may leave invisible.

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Mariska Slekovec is a doctoral student in the Public Health track of the multidisciplinary Biomedicine doctoral programme at University of Ljubljana. Her research focuses on the wellbeing of marriage migrants, with particular interest in social inclusion, belonging, and mental health.

Poster 14: From European Union to Family Union

Heidi Martins, Centre de Documentation sur les Migrations Humaines, Luxembourg

This story is situated within the broader transformations of European mobility since the 1980s, marked by increasing intra-European circulation and the growing role of European institutions not only as political bodies, but also as major employers and spaces of everyday social and family life. Luxembourg, one of the European Union's principal institutional centres, hosts around one-third of all EU civil servants, making it a unique setting where professional careers and transnational family lives intersect. These institutional dynamics have unfolded alongside Luxembourg's transformation into one of the world's most international societies: today, 47.3% of residents hold a foreign nationality, while 51.3% of the resident population was born abroad, the highest proportion among OECD countries. Although the Portuguese community has gradually declined as a share of the total population, it remains Luxembourg's largest foreign community, representing around 14% of all residents and continuing to play a central role in the country's migration landscape (Klein & Peltier, 2025).

This poster is based on a comprehensive interview (Kaufmann, 2016; Ramos, 2015) conducted online with Ana Maria Barreiro, a former employee of the European Parliament in Luxembourg who is now retired and living between Portugal and Luxembourg, travelling back and forth. The interview was video-recorded, fully transcribed, and analysed using qualitative content analysis. Adopting a participatory research approach, the interviewee was invited to review and discuss the researcher's interpretation, clarify particular aspects of her life story, and validate the analytical narrative. This collaborative process strengthened the analysis while recognising the participant as an active contributor to the co-production of knowledge and as sharing interpretive authority over her own story and its authorship.

Ana's trajectory reflects the intersection of individual life courses with major socio-political transformations: Portugal's democratic transition following the Carnation Revolution (25 April 1974), the feminisation of professional mobility, and the gradual emergence of a more open and connected Europe following the implementation of the Schengen Agreement (signed in 1985, but only fully implemented on 26 March 1995, following the 1990 Schengen Convention). In the pre-Schengen period, mobility remained constrained and costly, shaping family life through geographical distance, periodic reunions, and reliance on letters and scheduled telephone calls. Within this context, the family emerges as a profoundly transnational social unit, sustained through continuous efforts to maintain emotional proximity across distance. Professional life within the European institutions functions as an important anchor, partly compensating for the absence of extended kinship networks while also structuring everyday experiences of belonging.

The second-generation experiences illustrate the differentiated effects of transnational socialisation: plural and shifting identities, enhanced mobility opportunities, but also tensions related to language, nationality, and institutional recognition. Growing up "between worlds" becomes less an exception than an

ordinary condition, reflecting spatiotemporal, relational, and situational dynamics of (un)belonging (Martins, 2019). The third generation reflects, in this particular case, a further reconfiguration of family trajectories within a fully Europeanised space. Mobility is no longer experienced primarily as a constraint but increasingly as a resource embedded in educational, professional, and family strategies. This perspective is equally relevant to other forms of migration – including labour migration, family reunification, and forced migration – where mobility, displacement, and settlement continuously reshape family relationships and meanings of home across generations. Europe thus becomes not only a political project, but also a lived social space in which kinship, mobility, and memory are constantly negotiated.

In this particular case, the relationship between mobility, space, time, and generations creates a meaningful parallel between the European Union as a political, economic, and cultural project and Ana's own understanding and definition of family as "union" and "unity." The title From European Union to Family Union therefore captures not only the institutional context of her life, but also a deeper connection between different forms of (un)belonging and the ways in which they are negotiated, experienced, and transformed across the life course, generations, and geographical and imagined spaces: on the one hand, a sense of belonging to Europe and to the European project; on the other, a transnational sense of belonging shaped through family ties across time and distance.

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Heidi Martins is a sociologist whose research focuses on mobility and migration, identities, and processes of (un)belonging. She holds a PhD in Social Sciences from the University of Luxembourg (2019), where she studied Portuguese "second-generation" migrants in Luxembourg and their experiences of (un)belonging across the life course. She is currently Scientific Coordinator at the Centre de Documentation sur les Migrations Humaines (CDMH), Luxembourg

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Hosting the exhibition: Places, audiences and principles

Crossing Borders, Keeping Ties was conceived as a travelling exhibition that can be adapted to different contexts and designed to enter into dialogue with the places, institutions, and communities that host it. As it moves between countries and settings, it encounters different audiences, experiences, and perspectives, acquiring new meanings along the way. Its travelling character therefore goes beyond physical mobility, embracing the diverse geographical and social contexts in which transnational families live and maintain their relationships.

Hosting the exhibition is an invitation to become part of this journey. The participatory and co-creative principles that guided its development continue as the exhibition travels. Institutions and local organisers are invited not simply to display the exhibition, but to adapt and enrich it within their own contexts, contributing with local stories and testimonies, objects and archival materials, and involving families, researchers, practitioners, associations, artists, and communities. Conferences, roundtables, workshops, film screenings, book presentations, school activities, artistic performances, and conversations can further create spaces in which the exhibition becomes a starting point for encounter. In this way, each host can help shape the exhibition's ongoing journey while connecting it to local communities.

The exhibition was deliberately conceived to move beyond conventional academic and museum spaces – *from museums to shopping malls* – and to reach people in different places and through different forms of engagement. Its modular format allows it to be displayed in museums, universities, schools, libraries, community centres, cultural institutions, associations, local administrations, and other public spaces. The posters provide a clear and engaging point of entry, while the accompanying booklet offers further conceptual, contextual, and scientific perspectives. Online and printable materials facilitate its circulation and ensure wider access. These different formats are not simply practical solutions: they reflect a commitment to accessibility and to reaching audiences beyond the spaces in which academic knowledge is usually produced and encountered.

In this sense, the exhibition embodies TraFaDy's commitment to inclusive, transdisciplinary, and socially grounded research. Its collaborative design, open-access format, and adaptability are not separate features, but interconnected principles that shape how knowledge is produced, shared, and extended. The involvement of transnational families in the creative process, together with the possibility for hosts and local communities to further contribute to its development, challenges the idea of the exhibition as a finished product. Instead, the exhibition remains open to new voices, contexts, interpretations, and forms of knowledge.

Crossing Borders, Keeping Ties ultimately seeks to embody the principle at the heart of its title: borders may separate places, but relationships, memories, care, and stories can continue to connect them. The exhibition itself follows this logic. It crosses geographical, institutional, disciplinary, and social boundaries while creating opportunities for dialogue across them. Through its journey, it carries

stories from one context to another, bringing different experiences into conversation and revealing shared emotions, challenges, opportunities, and human experiences, while fostering empathy across borders.

Heidi Martins

Exhibition Coordinator

Download, access and printing

The complete exhibition can be downloaded free of charge. It has been designed for printing in DIN A0 format.

Download here:

https://transnational-families.eu/wp-content/uploads/TraFaDy_exhibition.pdf

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Theme 1. Redefining Family & Home

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  - Antoinette Reuter, Centre de Documentation sur les Migrations Humaines, Luxembourg
- Poster 2: Family is more than who lives with you

  Anne Carolina Ramos, University of Fribourg, Switzerland
- Poster 3: "Macha, Macha!" Mapping the Latitudes of Transnational Academic Mobility and Rituals of Affection
  - Rosalina Pisco Costa, & Interdisciplinary Center of Social Sciences (CICS.NOVA.UÉvora), Portugal
  - Sofía Cumbajín Díaz, Universidade de Évora, Portugal
  - Catarina Nunes, Universidade de Évora, Portugal
- Poster 4: “Home is where my family is”: From Roots and Routes
  - Isabelle Albert, University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg
  - Zoe da Costa, University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg

Theme 2: The Trauma of Rupture & War

- Poster 5: The Colors of War: Nika Striletska's divided family
  - Petko Hristov, Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum at Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Bulgaria
- Poster 6: “Rights of Child: No Exceptions, No Borders”
  - Demet Gülaldı, Üsküdar University, Istanbul, Türkiye
- Poster 7: I can be happy anywhere my family is
  - Ute Karl, Protestant University of Applied Sciences, Germany
- Poster 8: Letters across borders: children’s stories of separation and reunion
  - Eglantina Dervishi, University of Tirana, Albania

Theme 3: Emotional Bridges & Care

- Poster 9: Not a Place, But a Presence: Four Journeys Home
  - Lela Goginava, Grigol Robakidze University Tbilisi, Georgia
- Poster 10: "Matar saudades”: building affective bridges across distance
  - Bárbara Bäckström, Universidade Aberta/LEAD, Portugal
- Poster 11: "If There Would Be No Connection, There Would Be No Life"
  - Natalia Ringblom, Umeå university, Sweden

- Poster 12: Family is like a garden
  - Esra Demirkol Colosio, Çankırı Karatekin University, Türkiye

Theme 4: Integration & New Beginnings

- Poster 13: "As a part of two different families": marriage, kinship, and belonging
  - Mariska Slekovec, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
- Poster 14: From European Union to Family Union
  - Heidi Martins, Centre de Documentation sur les Migrations Humaines, Luxembourg
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TRANSNATIONAL
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