

Some aspects to families in a multicultural world



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Families of immigrants and settled populations of immigrant origin have become central to discussions about the integration and living in multicultural societies in Europe and elsewhere. At the same time, immigrants and ethnic minorities are themselves reflecting on how to manage their family relationships in a changing world in which migration is transnational and societies are increasingly pluralized. Although many migrants are long-term settlers, or have been born and brought up in receiving countries, relationships with sending countries have not diminished.

Ralph Grillo says that in analysing the controversies surrounding immigrant and minority ethnic families, a starting point is to describe some perspectives as “external” (from the viewpoint of “outsiders”), others as “internal” (from the viewpoint of “insiders”). The first encompasses the public policy perspective which addresses familial relations within immigrant and minority ethnic communities from the viewpoint of the society of immigration. The second includes what happens “inside” minority, ethnic and immigrant families, and the communities, and may be observed in many different locations; local, national and international.

Transnational migration means that new questions are posed, and new solutions sought, for example through the demands of distant care, often ignored in official and traditional conceptions of the family. Transnational caregiving is primarily characterised by varying degrees and forms of communication and interaction. The most common ways people exchange emotional and practical care across distance is by regular telephone calls for example by skype, social media and letters. Remittances are also sent to origin country. In addition, visits between migrants and kin are important avenues for caregiving and are the only way of delivering “hand-on” personal care.

One phenomenon of families and international migration covers so-called split families. This includes children who are left behind, i.e. children who do not move themselves, but are left behind by one or both parents who have migrated. They may live with one parent or stay with other relatives, such as grandparents, aunts or uncles if both parents migrated.

There is, for example, one story how the father of the family had emigrated from Latvia to Ireland and that time mother was pregnant and stayed in Latvia with a 6 years old son. The husband’s purpose was to work a half a year or maximum one year abroad, but he was still in Ireland after two years working there. This was because in the home country there were no open vacancies. The family and children met each other on Skype nearly everyday. The father had seen, so far, his youngest son only through social media, and not yet in homeland Latvia. This is showing how there are so-called social costs for families when somebody from the nuclear family moves abroad. This phenomenon is quite common nowadays because temporary migration has been an increasing trend. Sometimes, however, the family can follow after a while, and nuclear family can live together.

Sources

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