

Transnational families, children and the migration – development nexus

Valentina Mazzucato and Djamila Schans

*University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands
v.mazzucato@uva.nl and j.m.d.schans@uva.nl*

Research on the effects of migration on the development of migrant-sending countries has largely focused on the economic effects of remittances on households and treated the household as a single unit. This paper explores the possibilities of including a broader array of effects of migration on development by focusing on the effects of migration on ‘the family’ and in particular on the different actors involved in transnational child-raising arrangements. Increasingly families are living apart-together. On the one hand, high rates of urbanization, modern production systems and an increase in transport technologies make migrating internationally in search for higher paying jobs attractive and accessible for many more people than was previously the case even just fifty years ago. On the other, increasingly stringent migration laws restricting entry into countries and the feminization of migration have led to families ‘splitting’ with at least one member migrating while the others stay behind. This creates families living apart-together, or transnational families, with parents and children living in different nation-states facing the challenges of organizing care of children transnationally. Through this process roles and relationships between spouses, parents, children and elderly parents change. What effects do these changes in relationships have for the different actors? And what development outcomes do these effects have for sending country societies? These

questions remain largely under researched due to theoretical and methodological gaps in the study of transnational families. Research on the effects of migration on families has two shortcomings. It either treats families as homogeneous units (migration and development studies) ignoring differential impacts that migration can have on individual members, or treats family members as living in geographic proximity (family sociology studies) ignoring those living in different countries. Yet recent scholarship from transnationalism studies has argued that due to global migration an increasing number of families are living apart-together, facing unique challenges in maintaining family ties over great distances. Despite this emerging scholarship, systematic analysis of the effects of migration on transnational families is yet to be conducted. Recent scholarship from different disciplines is beginning to address these gaps. This paper reviews some of the most recent contributions to our knowledge on transnational families in the fields of transnationalism, family sociology, gender and psychology studies and identifies some gaps. It focuses on the particular case of children who stay behind while one or both of their parents migrate and gives attention to the effects that the resulting transnational child-raising arrangements have on the different actors involved: migrant parents, children, and children's caregivers. It then proposes an approach to build on these most recent theoretical and methodological innovations in order to bring the effects of migration on the family to bear on the migration and development nexus.