



# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

## MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TOWARDS INTEGRATION: THE DIVERSITY OF IMMIGRANT FAMILIES IN EUROPE<sup>1</sup>



FamiliesAndSocieties

This policy brief summarises recent research findings of the project FamiliesAndSocieties with regard to the impact of transnational families on children's wellbeing in both origin and destination countries, as well as to the demographic behaviour of immigrants and their descendants. The brief also presents suggestions for policy interventions.

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### INTRODUCTION

As a result of international migration, European societies have become increasingly diverse over the past decades. Today, immigrants, their children and their grandchildren form a significant part of the population in many European countries. Links between origin and destination countries have been established and strengthened through transnational family arrangements, and countries have created different policies to respond to new societal demands related to the management of international migration flows and the integration of immigrants. To form a transnational family is sometimes a voluntary choice. However, it can also be a result of immigration policies that make it increasingly difficult for families to migrate together or to reunify later on.

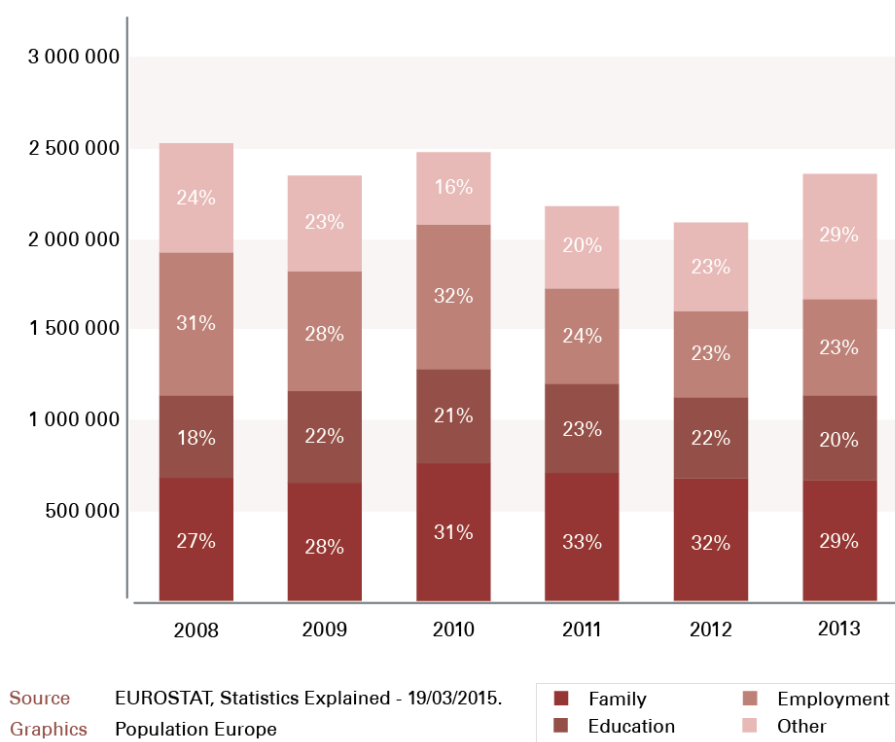
Data from EUROSTAT indicate that around 30% of all residence permits issued in Europe to third-country nationals (persons who are non-EU citizens) between 2008 and 2013 were granted due to family reasons (family reunification and family formation, figure 1). Italy and Spain were the countries that issued the maximum number of residence permits, followed by the United Kingdom and France. Family reasons were the main reason for issuing residence permits in 19 out of 28 EU Member States, and in Belgium, Greece, Spain, Croatia and Luxembourg, they accounted for more than 50% of all first permits issued. However, even when positive

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<sup>1</sup> This Policy Brief is co-authored by Amparo González-Ferrer, Hill Kulu, Valentina Mazzucato, Hector Cebolla-Boado, and Tina Hannemann. It is part of the tasks of the Work Package 12 of the project FamiliesAndSocieties, in charge of dissemination activities, led by the Max Planck Society for the Advancement of Science/Population Europe.

effects of family-based immigration are emphasised by experts, stereotypes and misconceptions about immigrant families are often observed in the media and the public discourse.

**Figure 1: First residence permits issued in the EU-28 by reasons, 2008 to 2013**



To date a focus only on receiving countries has largely hampered a proper understanding of what migration does to families, and what families do to migration. In this policy brief, recent findings on migration are presented from a family perspective: Partnership dynamics, divorce risks, and fertility patterns involving immigrants and their descendants, as well as the impact of transnational families on children’s wellbeing in both origin and destination countries.

## EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

### Partnership dynamics among immigrants and their descendants

During the last two decades, marriages and partnerships between natives and immigrants have increased in almost all European countries, even in those countries where the barriers between ethnic groups have typically been high. However, research on partnership dynamics among immigrants and ethnic minorities in Europe is scarce. Within the project FamiliesAndSocieties, researchers explored six country studies (Estonia, France, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Sweden and Spain) on partnership trajectories among immigrants and their descendants, by comparing their characteristics to those of the ‘native’ population (Kulu et al., 2014).

Significant differences in partnership formation and dissolution were found between immigrants, their descendants and the ‘native’ population in all six countries. Immigrants from non-European countries are more likely to follow the ‘traditional’ partnership trajectories than natives: They have higher marriage rates, lower

(premarital) cohabitation levels and they are less likely to separate. This trend comes with exceptions, though, for instance among Caribbean population in the UK and Latin Americans in Spain. The partnership patterns of the descendants of immigrants are 'in-between'. For some groups, they resemble those of their parents. For others, they mirror those of the 'native' population, supporting the idea that both the 'minority subculture' and the 'mainstream society' have an effect on their behaviour.

### **Divorce risks for immigrant-native couples – an open question to the future**

Partnership dynamics also involve divorce trends of native-immigrant couples. Nadja Milewski and Hill Kulu (2014) explored this issue for Germany. Their analysis shows that marriages between German-born individuals and immigrants have a higher likelihood of ending in separation than marriages between two German-born individuals or between two immigrants from the same country. The probability of experiencing divorce increases when cultural distance is high between the partners and when the spouses have different social backgrounds.

Although these results show some instability in ethnically mixed marriages, they do not necessarily suggest that the risk of divorce for inter-ethnic marriages in Germany and elsewhere in Europe will remain high in the future. The authors argue that the role of immigrants' descendants and the increase in cohabitations may lead to a decrease in the number of divorces in the future. In many European countries, inter-ethnic unions are increasingly represented by unions between 'natives' and descendants of immigrants. Descendants are generally better integrated than the first generation, and share the culture and values of their country of birth to a large extent. This should reduce the role of factors traditionally responsible for instability in inter-ethnic marriages. In terms of cohabitation, an increase in premarital cohabitation among ethnic minorities may contribute to a better match before becoming married.

However, immigrants, particularly those who marry before or just after migrating, have usually had no opportunity to live together in cohabitation: In general, these types of unions are often connected to the need of a visa to enter and stay in European countries. Conversely, a growing portion of immigrant marriages will probably consist of second-generation migrants who are married a first-generation partner from their parents' country of origin. Hence, divorce rates may also increase slightly in the future. As numerous studies show, divorce rates have generally increased across all social groups over the last decades.

Which of these scenarios will be most realistic will likely depend on the extent to which immigrants adapt to the attitudes regarding gender equality and the family norms of their host society's traditions and institutions.

### **Having kids in Europe: Why do some ethnic minority groups in Europe have high fertility?**

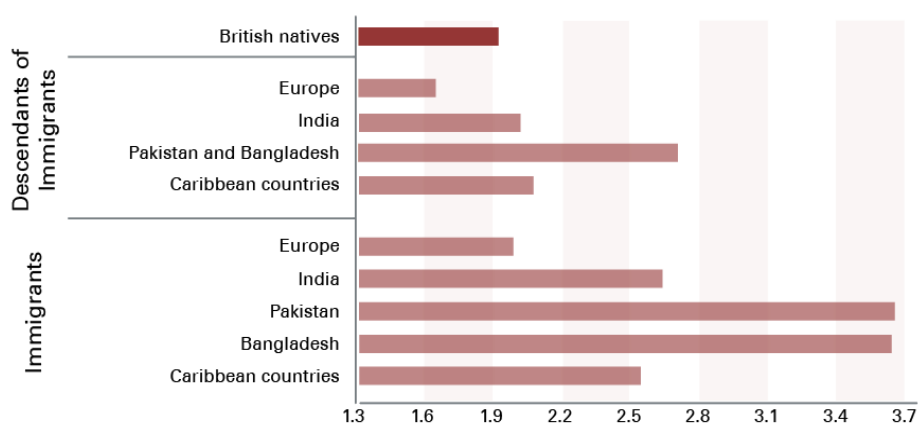
Fertility levels of immigrants and their descendants in Europe tend to converge with those of natives over time. However, according to a very recent and not yet published study by Hill Kulu and Tina Hannemann, fertility rates still remain high among certain ethnic minorities, for instance descendants of immigrants (measured as individuals with at least one parent who was born abroad) from high-fertility countries like Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in the UK (figure 2), and individuals of Turkish descent in France.

Why is fertility high among these groups? Results show that the most important factors are not differences in educational levels and language skills, as it would be expected, but their high fertility is mostly related to the fact that large families continue

to be a norm among these ethnic minorities. Socio-cultural elements such as the number of siblings in the origin family and religiosity explain most of the differences compared to natives for these groups. However, as the researchers emphasise, almost half of the difference in their fertility levels remained unexplained even after considering these socio-cultural differences.

Kulu and Hannemann also stress the importance of moving beyond the study of average fertility levels in order to gain a better understanding of childbearing patterns in ethnic minority communities. Their analysis shows that although UK-born Pakistani and Bangladeshi women have their children at later ages than their parents and some women remain childless, many ethnic minority women still decide to have three or four children.

**Figure 2: Total Fertility Rate Among Ethnic Minorities in Britain, 1989-2008.**



**Source** Calculations by Tina Hannemann and Hill Kulu based on unweighted data from the survey Understanding Societies, 2011

**Graphics** Population Europe

### Children at school age: Why are children with an immigrant background disadvantaged in school performance?

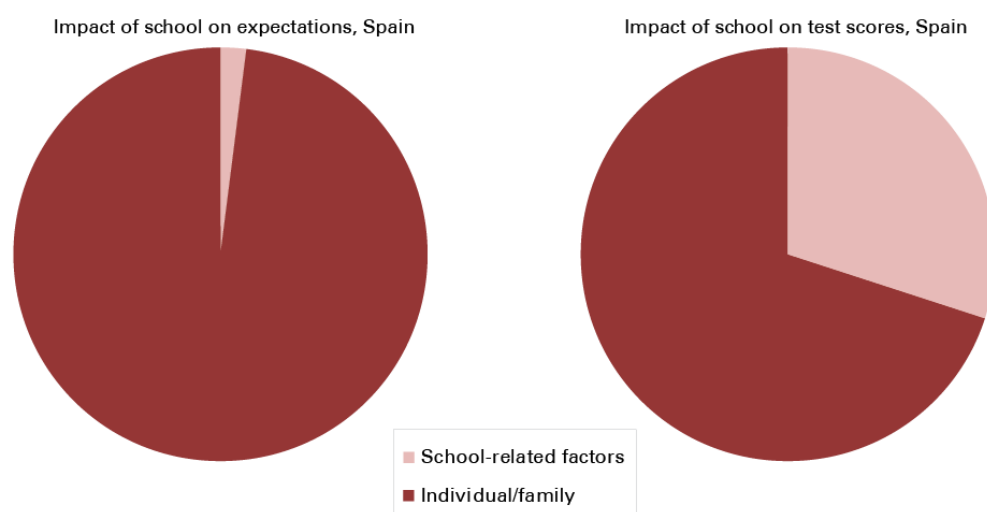
The causes of disadvantage among immigrant children and the children of immigrants in educational outcomes have recently been studied for Spain (Cebolla-Boado et al, 2013). Specifically, the authors analysed school performance from both an objective (test scores in mathematics) and subjective perspective (estimation by children and their parents of whether individual school results will allow them to proceed to tertiary education). Previous research on the importance of school effects to explain immigrant disadvantage in educational attainment is quite limited, and focused on the importance of immigrant concentration in deprived school environments. However, the few European studies available so far tend to confirm that the educational underperformance of the children of immigrants compared to their native-counterparts is barely related to school characteristics.

Results for Spain show that differences in school performance are mostly related to individual and family characteristics, rather than to differences across schools or, broadly speaking, institutional factors. Precisely, only 1/4 of the existing variation in test scores among these kids and comparable native kids finds an explanation at the school level (figure 3). When paying attention to non-cognitive outcomes, the study of educational expectations shows that students with an immigrant background expect to have larger and more prestigious educational careers than the children of Spanish parents. In this case, the school effect is even less important. Only 2% of the variation

in expectations is associated with the clustering of students across schools (figure 3). The difference between immigrant and non-immigrant children seems to be due to their parents' optimism regarding the future of their offspring, rather than children's own perceptions. Nonetheless, previous findings indicate that children of immigrants benefit from their families' higher educational ambitions.

Among teenagers, findings not yet published from Cebolla-Boado and Aratani indicate that the mental wellbeing of immigrants is poorer in comparison to natives. This seems to be related to the timing of family migration (children who migrated at the ages of 5-14 are worse off) and to the concentration of other co-ethnics, which prevents establishing interethnic friendship. In this case, schools also play a minor role as determinant in shaping outcomes.

**Figure 3: Impact of schools on expectations and on test scores, Spain, 2011.**



Source Cebolla-Boado et al., 2013.  
 Graphics Population Europe

### **Leaving kids behind: Do transnational living arrangements negatively affect family members?**

When parents migrate, leaving their children in the origin country, transnational families are formed. Focusing on these families from Ghana, Nigeria and Angola, Valentina Mazzucato and colleagues have analysed school children and young adults between the ages of 11 and 21 who live in this type of family by comparing them to children and young adults living with their parents in the countries of origin (Mazzucato et al, 2014). Their results show that living in a transnational family is not necessarily associated with worse outcomes for children. There are, however, three important conditions for the mental health of children. First, regarding the transnational family arrangement: Children should live with the same caregiver during the time parents are abroad. It is therefore important to make arrangements before departure to ensure stability in the household. Second, the children should have sufficient means of living, highlighting the importance of parents' ability to send remittances from abroad. Third, children in post-conflict settings always showed worse mental health when they lived in transnational families relative to their counterparts living with both of their parents. There is a need to pay special attention to transnational families of migrants coming from post-conflict countries.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Policy makers should consider the variety and complexity of family forms when elaborating immigration policies. Particularly, links between admission and integration policies should be strengthened.
- For instance, in terms of family reunification, countries should facilitate the integration of the reunified family members into the labour market, instead of establishing or reinforcing dependency on a provider.
- European visa policies should be adjusted to facilitate family life across borders. In particular, countries should facilitate issuing temporary visas for minors that allow children in the country of origin to visit their parents.
- Policy makers should be aware of the needs of large families regardless ethnic background, and ensure that social and housing policies support all families.
- Granting early and universal access to day-care and preschool is one of the most efficient interventions to reduce disadvantages among immigrant children.
- Finally, countries should invest more in professionals working with immigrant families, such as teachers and social workers, and also in raising awareness about these career options.

## RESEARCH PARAMETERS

FamiliesAndSocieties aims to investigate the diversity of family forms, relationships and life courses in Europe, to assess the compatibility of existing policies with these changes, and to contribute to evidence-based policy making. The consortium brings together 25 leading universities and research institutes from 15 European countries, three transnational civil society actors and a large number of national and international stakeholders.

The points of departure for the project are that family life courses are becoming more complex and diverse, that individuals' lives are interdependent - linked within and across generations - and that individual life courses are shaped by social contexts and policies. Four transversal dimensions are integrated into the project: gender, culture (ethnic, migrant and cultural identities, sexual orientation), socioeconomic resources, and life stages.

The project has four main objectives: to explore the growing complexity of family configurations and transitions across and within European societies; to examine their implications for children, women and men with respect to inequalities in life chances, intergenerational relations and care arrangements; to investigate how policies address family diversity and its consequences; and to identify likely paths of future changes in family compositions and related policy needs.

The approach is multidisciplinary, combining a wide range of expertise in social sciences, law and the humanities, represented in the consortium. Comparative analyses are being applied and advanced quantitative methods to high quality register and survey data used. Moreover, qualitative studies are being conducted. The project will develop two databases, one on the legal content of family forms available in

European countries, and another on EC/EU initiatives in core family-policy areas during the last decades.

The project is organized into 12 work packages including management and dissemination activities. Substantive work packages address family configurations, new gender roles, the new role of children and assisted reproductive technology, inequalities in children's life chances, childcare arrangements, intergenerational links, social inclusion/exclusion of migrants, policies and diversity over the life course, and foresight, synthesis and policy implications. All major European regions are represented in the project governance. Together with various stakeholders, government agencies, national and local policy makers, nongovernmental organisations and additional members of the scientific community across Europe, the project will identify and disseminate innovation and best policy practices.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

<b>PROJECT NAME</b>	FamiliesAndSocieties – Changing families and sustainable societies: Policy contexts and diversity over the life course and across generations.
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#### BUDGET

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#### WEBSITE

[www.familiesandsocieties.eu](http://www.familiesandsocieties.eu)

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#### FURTHER READING

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