

# TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY & MIGRANT INTEGRATION

## THE SCOPE OF ITHACA:

### LINKS BETWEEN TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY AND INTEGRATION

#### The ITHACA Project:

Integration, Transnational  
Mobility and Human, Social and  
Economic Capital Transfers

<http://ithaca.eui.eu>

#### The authors:

Anna Triandafyllidou, Professor  
and Director

[Anna.triandafyllidou@eui.eu](mailto:Anna.triandafyllidou@eui.eu)

Ruby Gropas, Research Fellow

[Roubini.gropas@eui.eu](mailto:Roubini.gropas@eui.eu)

Irina Isaakyan, Research Associate

[Irina.isaakyan@eui.eu](mailto:Irina.isaakyan@eui.eu)

Cultural Pluralism Research Area,  
Global Governance Programme,  
Robert Schuman Centre for  
Advanced Studies



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Today in the EU, there are more than 30 million third-country nationals. These non-naturalized foreigners often find themselves on the move, having families and socio-economic relations and engaging in economic and political activities in more than one country. It is a challenging task for experts and policy-makers to understand the dynamic and complex relationship between integration and transnational mobility and to initiate changes in migration-, (re)integration- and diaspora policies. We may ask therefore:

- What drives migrants to be transnationally engaged and mobile?
- Which dimensions of integration matter most for migrants to engage in transnational mobility?
- Which factors may encourage or hinder transnational mobility?

Thinking about the answers to these questions, ITHACA examines the link between integration and mobility by focusing on **transnational mobility for economic purposes as a starting point for research**, and by examining the **types of capital transfers** that are generated through it. Our methodological approach brings together statistical analysis, secondary sources and innovative qualitative research. We interviewed stakeholders in four EU countries (Austria, Italy, Spain, UK) and five non-EU countries (Bosnia, India, Morocco, the Philippines, and the Ukraine) and conducted a mixed method (quantitative and qualitative) survey among transnationally mobile migrants in 2014-2015 in all nine countries (both at destination and returnees).

The ITHACA project has thus put together a database of 331 quantitative questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with transnationally mobile individuals offering innovative insights into the lived experience of mobile livelihoods. We have looked at conditions that may facilitate or obstruct such transnational engagement practices, and into how such practices may change throughout the migrant's lifecycle. We have also elaborated on **the nexus between integration and transnational mobility**, considering the two considering those as **two multi-dimensional social processes** that often develop in tandem, in complementary or opposed ways but without being in a causal relationship with one another.

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR FINDINGS

ITHACA studies the links between transnational mobility and other forms of transnational engagement. It also investigates the relationship between migrant integration and transnational mobility.

This brief presents insights from research conducted on transnationally mobile migrants between **Austria, Italy, Spain, and the UK**, on one hand, and **Bosnia, India, Morocco, the Philippines and Ukraine**, on the other.

- **Transnational Mobility is a niche phenomenon concerning a very small number of migrants** that are usually highly educated. It develops out of desire or necessity and it takes different forms in different phases of the person's life and migration trajectory. It may be powered by nostalgia and desire to return or by the wish to disseminate ideas or invest at the place of origin while firmly rooted at destination. It may be a strategy of necessity (to complement income or feel 'at home') or a strategy of expansion and creation (to increase income or help others).
- **Regularization and acquisition of long-term status** determines migrants' transnational mobility (frequency, duration of stay) and the ease with which they can move between origin and destination developing their economic or civic project.
- **Integration** in the host society facilitates transnational engagement in at least three ways: it enables accumulation of material and social networking resources that can then be invested in the country of origin; it provides a background of security that maximizes the chances for success/accomplishment of the transnational investment as it enables the migrant to gradually prepare and develop this investment and follow it up personally; it permits return to the country of destination at anyone point.
- **Family motives** are a powerful driver of transnational mobility; Plans to return, and particularly retirement plans, constitute the most dynamic catalysts for transnational economic engagement including travelling back and forth to repair a house or set up some small business (e.g. a shop or restaurant).
- **Transnational mobility** may or may not be associated with **transnational engagement**. In other words, individuals who are highly mobile between two (or more) locations may be intensely economically engaged in either or both of these locations, or, they may have minimal economic engagement. Similarly, individuals who are largely immobile may on the contrary be intensely transnationally active for instance via their engagement in NGOs, or investments followed closely by family members.
- **Specific socio-economic and political conditions** at destination or origin may matter in different ways to different groups. For example, the economic crisis in Italy and Spain has led to a deterioration of the migrants' actual situation and future prospects (income, job security) and has encouraged the pursuit of alternative or complementary investment of resources (financial, time, efforts) in the country of origin for certain population groups (Moroccans), but less for others (Indians or Filipinos). However, a more local political situation in such countries of origin as Bosnia and Ukraine becomes a more powerful integration/transnationalism factor than the global economic crisis.

Transnationally mobile migrants generate **social remittances**: they disseminate new ideas and socio-cultural practices in both origin and destination countries.

## TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY AND OTHER FORMS OF TRANSNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

### Further readings:

Triandafyllidou, A. et al. (2015), *“The Link between Migrant Integration and Transnational Mobility: Who, What, How and Why.”* ITHACA Final Comparative Report 07/2015, EUI, Florence: <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/37870>

Gropas R. & Triandafyllidou A., (2014), *“Integration, Transnational Mobility and Human, Social and Economic Capital – Concept Paper for the ITHACA Project”* 1/2014, EUI, Florence: <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/31200>

Gropas R., Triandafyllidou A. & Bartolini L., (2014), *“Conceptualizing the integration-transnationalism nexus.”* ITHACA Research Report 2/2014, EUI, Florence: <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/33654>

It has been increasingly recognized that people may be physically mobile and attached to particular (and often more than one) places at the same time. The simultaneity of **mobility and fixity**, or the transition from fixity/immobility to mobility and vice-versa are defined by the individual conditions of the migrant, including her/his social and economic integration at destination, as well as situation at origin country, as well as the policies of the origin and destination countries which may facilitate or hinder mobility and enable or discourage the migrant’s transnational economic or civic involvement.

**Transnational mobility fluctuates throughout the lifecycle and the migration-cycle of the individual.** For instance, in the first years after migration, travelling back to the country of origin tends to be rare due to lack of adequate resources to pay the travel costs but more importantly due to the lack of regular status that would permit travel and re-entry. Once the status is regularized and long-term residence is secured then the frequency of travel back to origin tends to increase.

The principle **motives** for transnational mobility:

- To see and care for family - parents or children who have been left at origin (e.g. Filipinos in all the countries, Ukrainians or Moroccans in Italy or Spain, Bosnians in the UK or Austria);
- To take care of property including building/repairing a home, cultivating the land – for private use or for income generation (e.g. Moroccans in Spain or Italy);
- To fulfill personal/ emotional needs – bonding with their home-town for themselves or to nurture a sense of attachment for their offspring (e.g. Indians in the UK, Filipinos in Italy and Spain);
- To provide assistance to communities at origin – disbursement of funds raised for emergency humanitarian projects or development projects (e.g. Indians or Filipinos from Austria, Italy or Spain).
- To be involved in civic and political mobilization (e.g. Ukrainians and Bosnians from Austria or the UK)

Transnational mobility is one form of intensive transnational engagement. It is not necessarily positively correlated with remittance behaviour. Actually, individuals who are highly mobile between the two countries may be remitting less (because mobility absorbs a lot of resources) while people who travel less may be remitting regularly and larger sums. The relationship between the two types of transnational engagement is not a stable one: they may develop in parallel or in opposition.

Transnational mobility may develop as a form of economic or civic investment at origin but it may also be a way out of a socio-economic impasse at the destination country:

- Transnational mobility and investing in economic activity and

family relations back home may be a **preparation for a retirement return migration plan.**

But transnational mobility may also be related to

- **the deterioration of the socio-economic conditions in the country of destination**
- **or a crisis in the country of origin** which may prompt civic and political engagement and travelling to the origin country.

## TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY AND TRANSFERS

### Further reading:

Isaakyan I., (2015), *“Capital Transfers and Social Remittances of Transnational Migrants in the EU.”* ITHACA Research Report N. 6/2015, EUI, Florence:  
<http://hdl.handle.net/1814/37870>

Transnational engagement and mobility is evidently connected with **monetary** transfers between origin and destination. The migration project starts with an economic transfer from the country of origin to the country of destination to pay for the cost of the migration. Subsequently, it becomes a flow of remittances from country of destination to the country of origin. These financial remittances are mainly intended for family needs (subsistence, education, medical costs, dowry and costs related to family life events), they may include repayment of debts and loans accumulated prior to migration or taken out to cover the migration project initial costs, and eventually may also include collective remittances (reconstruction after natural catastrophes or war, development projects, charity).

As for **cultural** and **educational** capital, in their majority our respondents acquired their formal education in the country of origin so there is a substantial social capital that is transferred from origin to destination at the outset of the migration cycle. However, it is only in exceptional cases that this capital is ‘formally’ tapped into at destination by individuals becoming employed in sectors where they put to use this formal education acquired in their country of origin.

Interestingly, neither are the **skills and professional experience** acquired in the country of destination ‘formally’ transferred back to the country of origin even when the individual is transnationally mobile and active. The field in which they choose to invest in the country of origin is generally unrelated to the professional sector in which they work in the country of destination, so the transfer is not always explicit.

For instance, a Filipino or Ukrainian domestic worker in Italy (Spain or the UK) who invests in buying land and setting up a farm in the Philippines or opening a shop/restaurant in Ukraine is not directly transferring skills and knowledge acquired in the home-care sector into the agricultural sector or the trade sector.

Although the only evident and tangible capital transfer between the two sectors and regions seems to be the transfer of the income generated from employment in domestic work into the domains of agriculture and trade back home, in practice of course much more is transferred. This may range from management and negotiation skills that the migrant has acquired on the job and that improve her/his entrepreneurial nature, too much wider and more encompassing social remittances such as awareness of environmentally-friendly and sustainable consumer practices which is particularly the case for Filipino and Indian migrants.

## TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY AND MIGRANT INTEGRATION

Integration is a socio-cultural process of becoming part of and identifying with the receiving society. Integration also consists of structural dimensions that denote the position of migrants in education, on the labour and housing markets and their legal and factual position with regard to residence, nationality and access to the labour market and social and political rights. The table below summarises the typology of transnational migrants that we have elaborated on the grounds of interaction between transnationalism and integration:

**The relationship between transnational mobility & integration**

Transnational Mobility	Integration		
	High Social and Economic Integration	Combination of high economic integration and low social integration or vice versa	Weak Social and Economic Integration
<b>Mobile Family Transnationalist</b> (High or Moderate)	Homeland Investor	Preparing for Return	Returning Family (Wo)man
<b>Mobile Economic Transnationalist</b> (High or Moderate)	Global Businessperson	Resource Mobiliser	Second Chance Mobile Transnationalist
<b>Mobile Civic Transnationalist</b> (High or Moderate)	Global Citizen	Homeland Reformer	Nostalgic Mobile Transnationalist

This table shows that, in order for a migrant to become transnationally engaged, s/he must be **sufficiently integrated** in socio-economic terms in the society of residence. By sufficiently well integrated we mean having a long-term and secure legal status (or access to citizenship) and stable employment which allows for an accumulation of financial resources and human capital that can serve as the platform from which to pursue transnational activities.

It also means having a sufficiently wide and dependable social network consisting of contacts among the migrant and native populations in the destination country that offers the individual the confidence to launch into a transnational initiative and a ‘cushion’ to fall back on in the event that the transnational activity fails or is challenged.

Finally, it also means having meaningful attachments and identifications with both ends of the migration corridor; these may be expressed through nostalgia, appreciation of the advantages that each location offers, and active engagement at both locations that may range from collective fund-raising and development cooperation to individual business initiatives.

## KEY MESSAGES FOR POLICY MAKERS

Transnational mobility (as one among several forms of transnational economic and civic engagement) is a niche phenomenon that concerns a small number of migrants. It can however be beneficial both to the migrants and to destination and origin countries as it facilitates the transfer of not only financial resources (new business creation, investment in real estate) but also it can further social remittances notably civic projects promoting social solidarity or democracy, the diffusion of new ideas and alternative lifestyles. Transnational mobility can be sustained and encouraged through policy measures facilitating portability of rights and transnational entrepreneurship:

1. **Portability of welfare and pension rights** would further enable migrants to become transnationally mobile and alternate periods of living at origin with periods of living at destination.
2. **Facilitate transnational entrepreneurship** that involves mobility between the two countries – as people are the best carriers of innovative ideas. This could be achieved through bilateral agreements supporting investment in specific sectors where transnational engagement has an added value (e.g. the food industry, the arts, academic research, alternative medicine). Such bilateral agreements could fund and promote meetings between local authorities, migrants who have technical and cultural know how in both countries, investors, scientists. This would facilitate communication and would help spread good practices and promote networking.
3. **Transnational mobility as a factor of healing in divided societies**, acquiring a special political and civic role in societies that are divided by ethnic and religious cleavages like Bosnia. The engagement of their diaspora in political and civic projects and the mobility between different countries of destination (e.g. UK or Austria) and Bosnia can promote a politics of reconciliation and democratic consolidation as well as foster investment and socio-economic development.

### Ideas for Further Research

Study migrants' families back home in order to see how they receive transfers and enable or obstruct the remitting migrant's transnational mobility. Study transnational mobility patterns over longer periods to capture the life history dimension so as to better analyse how transnational mobility relates with migrant integration.

## MORE ABOUT ITHACA

Scientific Coordinators of the  
ITHACA Project

**Professor Anna Triandafyllidou and Dr. Ruby Gropas,**  
Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (RSCAS),  
European University Institute (EUI), Florence

Project website

<http://ithaca.eui.eu>