Social **Vulnerability**
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Research on vulnerability linked to cross-border family processes

Authored by: Spanish Red Cross and
ESCODE
Analysis
Qualitative analysis: Silvina Monteros Obelar,
Raúl López López (ESCODE).
Technical team: María Cortijo, Susana Gende
and Marga Nebreda.

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PROLOGUE

Vulnerability linked to family processes across borders

International immigration is one of the main determinants of population evolution in the 21st century. In the last three generations, Spain has become a multicultural society that has established policies aimed at interculturality. These policies have led to significant progress in terms of access to and respect for rights, but there are still many challenges to be faced.

The trajectory of the Red Cross in this context, aligned with its mission and Fundamental Principles, has been constant. Accompanying the social, demographic and economic changes, we have promoted programmes to provide better care to migrant families, from the first emergency response, to the accompaniment in all phases of social integration. The daily contact from all our Territorial Network — helping to cover basic needs, bureaucratic procedures for regularisation and regrouping, school support, access to training and employment, etc. — has allowed us to detect that there are new challenges and needs to break down the barriers and situations of discrimination of cross-border families.

With this research we have explored, through the discourse of migrant families living in Spain, the details of their migratory journeys, their relationship with socio-legal systems, personal processes of transformation, the relationship with their families and new links and support networks, as well as their strategies in the care chains across borders.

The strength of this study lies in its focus on the role that families play in migration decisions and processes. People migrate to seek opportunities for themselves and other family members, or to safeguard the integrity or life of other family members. They even migrate to distance themselves from family ties. When family members separate, ties usually survive and are connected in a complex transnational network, in which care, goods and information circulate. Reunifications and returns of family members dynamise ties and lead to changes in functions, responsibilities and roles. Migration and integration processes in the destination places pose significant challenges for families, which are affected by immigration regulations, occupational segregation, discrimination in access to housing and educational barriers. All of these impact on the configuration, dynamics and well-being of families, as well as on their child-rearing practices.

Through the qualitative analysis of discussion groups with families of migrant origin from different territories, as well as professional teams from the Red Cross and other experts, we have been able to analyse the barriers and obstacles that hinder full social integration and, on occasions, violate the right to family life. All of this with the aim of offering a series of recommendations for all the social actors involved that will allow us to advance in policies to respond to the specific and diverse needs of cross-border families.

I would like to thank all the people who have accompanied us in this research, the social entities, migrant associations and experts for their participation, but above all, in a very special way, the protagonists, all the families of migrant origin, who have so generously shared their life experiences.

María del Mar Pageo Giménez
President of the Spanish Red Cross

01
INTRODUCTION

Migration to Spain has a relatively recent history compared to other countries in the surrounding area, which have more experience in managing migration (Bascherini, 2008). The most noticeable rise in migration to Spain has occurred since the 2000s, from which time a gradual feminisation of migratory pathways has been observed. Yet it is only in recent years, with the increase in family reunification and the integrational challenges posed by migrant children's incorporation into the education system and the social environment, that attention has turned toward the family dynamics of migration (Gonzálvez, 2016; Sørensen and Vammen, 2016). As of this time, studies on family migration have become more prevalent and have begun to incorporate gender, intersectional and care-based approaches within a transnational sphere (Pedone et al., 2012, Gil-Araújo and Pedone 2014). Alongside this, the field of social intervention has seen the gradual introduction of intersectionality and family diversity perspectives into the support provided to migrant families. One example of this is the project 'Mirada intercultural de la crianza. Puentes para la convivencia y la crianza en positivo" ['*An Intercultural Approach to Parenting: Bridges for Coexistence and Positive Parenting*'], developed by the Spanish Red Cross (2022)[1].

The Spanish Red Cross has extensive experience in supporting people from migrant backgrounds. Every year sees an increase in the number of migrants who receive some kind of assistance; during 2023, 200 thousand people were helped.

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1.   CRE and FAMI video (in Spanish) about the 'Intercultural approach to parenting' project and link to the specialist toolkit.

On the heels of the significant social, demographic and economic changes occurring in Spanish society, our institution has been working to incorporate plans, projects and programmes for providing increasingly comprehensive assistance to migrant families, ranging from initial emergency response, through support during the various reception stages, to social integration. This course of action, together with the progress made in public policies and social changes in relation to migration over recent years, has allowed us to identify new and emerging needs where it is essential to strive to protect the dignity and safeguard the protection and enjoyment of the fundamental rights of all people.

Discriminatory, racist and xenophobic speeches on the part of some sectors of society is generating new discrimination and difficulties, which we thought had already been overcome, among migrants, making it urgent to analyse the needs and barriers they face.

The successive crises we have experienced (the economic crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the energy crisis) have contributed to an emergence and increase of social inequalities and this has had a greater impact on specific population groups, including migrants and applicants for and beneficiaries of international protection.

It is clear that Spanish society is facing significant challenges related to inclusion and human rights, especially with respect to migrants. While progress is being made toward an increasingly intercultural and inclusive society, the various crises we are undergoing have exacerbated

inequalities, leading the way to an increase in discriminatory, racist and xenophobic discourse in some sectors of society, and generating discrimination against and difficulties for migrant people that we thought we had overcome. This makes it ever more urgent to understand their realities and analyse the barriers they encounter in order to honour our commitment to equal opportunities for all people living in Spain, following a human rights-based approach.

Over a decade has passed since the 2011 approval of the second '2011-2014 Citizenship and Integration Plan' and the 'Comprehensive Strategy against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Other Related Forms of Intolerance'. With the launch of the current Strategic Framework for Citizenship and Inclusion and against Racism and Xenophobia, it is a good time to reflect on the effectiveness of the policies implemented within this framework over recent years, as well as their impact and the way in which they have steered the development of Red Cross involvement.

At the same time, there are new challenges that require us to analyse these legislative initiatives within the current context and, above all, the actions carried out by the Red Cross in response to these emerging situations.

The purpose of this research is **to attempt to understand the diverse realities** experienced by **families of migrant origin in order to create tools for inspiration and motivation** in our different areas of knowledge at the Red Cross. We also aim to establish a dialogue with the authorities and other social entities in order to **improve policies and actions that champion the citizenship, integration and inclusion of people of foreign origin**, supporting their processes of family reunification, guaranteeing a better quality of life for family members and countering the forms of intolerance and discrimination to which they may be exposed in all areas of society.

02

THE SOCIOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF FAMILY MIGRATION

2.1.   Migration in Spain

There are currently **5,542,932** people in Spain who have emigrated from other countries. There is a wide diversity among the migrant population, including **more than 120 different nationalities**. **One third** of the population is from within **the EU** (33%, taking into account people from Romania and Bulgaria). **People from Latin America** (including Central America, the Caribbean and South America) account for **29%** of migrants, while **18% are from Africa**, including a large majority of Moroccan nationals (13%). **Asian** citizens, predominantly from Chinese and Pakistani communities, **account for 8%** of the migrant population (INE, 2024).

78% of the migrant population is aged between 16 and 64 years old, i.e. **of working age**, while the proportion of the Spanish population in this age group is lower, at 63%. Another difference can be seen in the percentage of the population within the **over-65 age group**, which is **7.5% among migrants**, in contrast to 21% among Spanish nationals. With respect to the **0-15 age group (children and adolescents) both groups are equally represented at 14%**. In addition to the total number of people from other countries, there are also some 2.5 million people who were born abroad and who currently hold Spanish nationality. While this population has full citizenship rights, many people experience continued discrimination on the basis of their origin, due to the social and occupational dynamics of racialisation.

Foreign women account for 50% of the migrant population and 55% of those who have acquired Spanish nationality. Female migration to Spain began later than in other countries in the Global North and has come about as a response to the caregiving crisis in this country, related to the difficulties of balancing work with family life and the consequent need to outsource **care. This has led to the segregated employment of migrant women in domestic work and caregiving** (Spanish Red Cross, 2024), resulting in job and wage insecurity and, in many cases, deskilling due to lack of recognition of qualifications from the country of origin. Another area of demand for migrant women is agriculture, with workers recruited in their countries of origin and channelled to Spain. **Nevertheless, over the last 20 years, migrant women have been entering the workforce in other sectors and jobs, as a result of the acquisition of residence and work permits or Spanish nationality, the official recognition of qualifications or vocational training in Spain, and the expansion of their social support networks**. Comparing the data from the 2011 and 2021 Labour Force Surveys (LFS), we can see positive changes in this respect. For example, **the number of migrant women in elementary occupations (low-skilled) has fallen from almost 310 to 200 thousand**. While **the number of women employed in personal services (caregiving or domestic) and catering has remained stable** (206 thousand and 200 thousand, respectively), **the number employed as professionals, scientists and academics has risen** (from 33 thousand to 41 thousand). Meanwhile, the number of women has doubled in accounting and administrative positions (from 22 thousand to almost 40 thousand) and the same holds for operators of facilities and machinery (from 6 thousand to 12 thousand) (LFS, 2021). Despite this, much remains to be achieved in terms of upward labour mobility for migrant women.

> Migrant women have been moving into more diverse sectors and jobs due to the acquisition of residence and work permits or Spanish nationality, the homologation of qualifications or vocational training in Spain, as well as the expansion of their social support networks.

2.2. Migration and families

Whether directly or indirectly, **families are involved in immigration decisions**, even when these are made in emergency situations. Very few people emigrate alone without the acceptance, support or sanction of family members. **Migration, therefore, is usually a family strategy**

for survival, livelihood, upward social mobility, advancement or increased social and economic capital. This is also true of people who migrate without informing their relatives, as occurs with some children or adolescents who emigrate alone or unaccompanied**. There are also cases where people migrate precisely because they need to flee their family**, having experienced violence and/or risk to life within the family - a determining factor in some women's migration processes.

Families are involved in migration processes to different degrees and at various stages. **Many people migrate alone, paving the way for direct or indirect family migration** and seeking what is termed **family reunification** in the destination country, a process which may be either **formal** (meeting the regulatory requirements stipulated by the host country), **informal or irregular**. There are men and women who travel alone, leaving spouses, sons and daughters in the care of relatives and later reunite with them. There are couples who travel together and then have children in their country of destination. There are women who choose to regroup with their children and their own mothers or sisters, to share parenting responsibilities and facilitate work-life balance. There are migrant teenagers and young people who, when they become adults, travel to their country of origin to marry and then return to their host country with their spouse. And there are people who migrate for love - a situation that occurs increasingly frequently due to the exponential growth in the use of communications technologies to enter into relationships of various kinds. In many cases, a family or a significant proportion of its members migrates together. This is especially true in situations involving war, armed conflict or catastrophic events in which the family loses their home or there is risk to life or the integrity of its members. There are cases in which family members separate during the journey, whether because of disappearance or death, or as a strategy for crossing borders to ensure that some of them reach their destination so they can help the others.

Immigration laws play a key role in immigration decisions in general and in decisions that concern family groups in particular. These laws can facilitate or hinder family migration. Where countries have migration policies geared toward national employment needs, these are often based on the idea that migrants will be temporary workers and restrictions are therefore imposed on the migration of family members in order to prevent permanent settlement. Some countries restrict family migration for unskilled workers but facilitate it for skilled workers. Others stipulate a period of time in which workers may reunite their family, which entails their remaining alone for some years. **The rules on family reunification may vary depending on whether applicants are migrant workers or refugees**. Generally, the latter are more likely to be able to reunite their loved ones, although in practice the procedures can be complicated. In almost all cases, formal family reunification – undertaken within the legal framework of each destination country – is often a lengthy and complicated process (UN Women, 2019).

2.3. Families in the Aliens Act

Public policies on foreign nationals and families affect the decisions of migrants and their opportunities to migrate as a family unit. They also **impact welfare and care provision strategies** in the transnational sphere.

The Aliens Act[2] **governs the right of migrants to live with their families, but only under certain circumstances** (Articles 52 to 58 of Royal Decree 557/2011, approving the Regulations on Aliens[3]). **The most important requirement is to hold a residence permit**, which is acquired through a complex bureaucratic process. **Eligible family members consist only of the spouse or partner, children under the age of 18 years and children over the age of 18 if they are dependants due to disability**.

Some **other dependants are eligible for reunification in exceptional cases, such as first-degree ascendants**, provided that it can be proven that they are the applicant's responsibility and that there is a relationship of economic dependence or caregiving. In addition, **the applicant must prove that they have sufficient financial resources to support the reunited family members without having to rely on the Spanish social assistance system** and **that they have housing** that meets the habitability conditions for accommodating their family members.

In accordance with the **Asylum Act**[4]**, persons who are seeking or who have been granted international protection may also apply for family reunification when they have proved their**

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2.   Organic Law 4/2000 of 11 January on the rights and freedoms of foreigners in Spain and their social integration.
3.   Royal Decree 557/2011 of 20 April, approving the Regulation of Organic Law 4/2000 on the rights and freedoms of foreigners in Spain and their social integration, following its reform by Organic Law 2/2009.
4.   Law 12/2009 of 30 October, regulating the right to asylum and subsidiary protection.

family members' kinship and their vulnerability or situation of risk. These laws provide for residence permits for family members and work permits for adults**. In the case of spouses and persons over the age of 18 years, these permits become independent of marriage and relationship, which means that their holders can separate without losing rights - a crucial legal step for women who want to divorce or who suffer gender-based violence**. Lastly, **children born in Spain to parents of foreign origin will have residence permits if their parents are registered residents**. They may also acquire citizenship if one of the parents is a Spanish national or if they are stateless (when their parents are from a country that does not grant nationality to children born outside its territory).

Although Spanish legislation recognises the right of migrants and refugees to live with their families, the corresponding requirements may limit their opportunities. Migrants who are in an irregular administrative situation must wait at least three years to apply for settlement (*arraigo)*, from which point they must submit documentation proving that they have been resident in Spain during that time**. Settlement procedures can take several months, which means that the family's separation can extend beyond three years**. The first obstacle is demonstrating that there are sufficient economic resources with which to support the family due to the informality, temporary nature or insecurity of the work of many migrants. Secondly, there is the difficulty of proving that there is adequate housing to accommodate the number of reunited family members**. It is a fact that there is discrimination against migrants within the housing market, while the rent increases since the COVID-19 pandemic prevent families from accessing decent living conditions** (Spanish Red Cross, 2023), all of which negatively impacts family reunification processes through official channels. Irregular family reunification means that many migrant families have to endure overcrowding (renting rooms) and social vulnerability, while family members, including children, are forced into irregular administrative situations (Fundación por Causa and Save the Children, 2021).

> Immigration laws and their regulation of the family can contribute to the separation of families by shaping a transnational space for kinship and parenting relationships.

Moreover, for people seeking international protection, it is not always easy to prove a relationship of kinship or the vulnerability of family members when they come from dictatorships or countries where there is political and administrative corruption. Armed conflicts, environmental disasters, ethnic persecution or urgent escape can result in the destruction or loss of documents, preventing migrants from being able to provide proof as required.

In short, **immigration laws and their regulation of families can contribute families' separation, creating a transnational space for kinship and parenting relationships**. The complexity of administrative processes makes family reunification under legal conditions difficult and stressful.

It is important to note that **the degree of difficulty of reuniting families differs according to the gender of migrant workers**. Until the economic crisis of 2008 and particularly before 2011 (**with the approval of the Royal Decree amending the system for domestic work5 which includes the requirement for written employment contracts), migrant women faced many problems in reuniting their families on their own account. Since administrative regularisation depended on a formal employment contract and this was not compulsory in the domestic work sector - where a significant proportion of migrant women are employed - they could not apply for reunification until they entered formal employment**. In the case of migrant men, their more stable employment in construction and hospitality facilitated applications for family reunification, making their spouses dependent on them in terms of their administrative situation until the changes made in 2009. **The crisis of 2008, which lasted until 2014, had a sharp impact on employment for migrant men, while women who had access to formal contracts in domestic work and other sectors became more likely to be able to reunite their families**. Nevertheless, migrant women's low-income work continues to act as a barrier to family reunification processes through legal channels.

Article 16.3 of the <u>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</u> states: 'The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State'. **The Spanish State, however, has yet to sign the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, which underlines the continuing need for improved support for migrant families in public policies.**

2.4.   The sociological profile of migrant families

In step with the feminisation of migration, there has been an increase in the number of **migrant households or households with a migrant background, currently amounting to 2,363,000.** These households are extremely diverse in their composition. To some extent, **cultural aspects influence kinship and relationships, the distribution of roles and even the concept of the household**. At the same time, the circumstances surrounding migration decisions and processes also

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5.   Royal Decree 893/2024 of 10 September, regulating the protection of health and safety in domestic service.

have a significant influence on how these households are organised, which members migrate or remain in the country of origin, who will live under the same roof and what roles each person will play, depending on their opportunities in the new context (Camarero and García Borrego, 2004). The migration process also determines economic and working conditions, which, in the case of a significant proportion of migrant families, are often limited. **The stratification of the economic system and the labour market in Spain prompts many migrant women to enter insecure employment or the underground economy, including domestic work, catering or agricultural work**. **Migrant men, on the other hand, generally find jobs in construction, agriculture or hospitality**. When structural crises occur, these sectors may bear the brunt of the impact, even when there is higher demand for labour. This was the case with employment in domestic work, caregiving, agriculture and the food industry during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, which became categorised as *essential* work (*Esenciales*, last accessed: October 2024). Nevertheless, despite the crucial importance of these jobs, they have also become increasingly insecure due to reductions in working hours, increases in unrecognised working hours and casual work and a greater risk of infection (Spanish Red Cross, 2022a). In contrast, during other crises, such as the 2008-2014 economic crisis, a significant proportion of migrant men lost their jobs in construction due to the bursting of the property market bubble, while migrant women remained in domestic work and caregiving jobs. **All of the above plays a crucial role in how migrant households and those of migrant origin are organised, transforming kinship and relationships, and the functions and roles that were in place prior to migration**. One example of this is the process by which **many migrant women become heads of the family and its main provider, and this changes the dynamics of couples or parent-child relationships**.

Migrant families are often described as culturally diverse, without taking into account that an important part of the diversity in the configuration of these families is given by the economic and labour structure of the country where they arrive and the position that each of their members occupies in that country.

Migrant families may sometimes be described as culturally diverse, without taking into account that an important part of the diversity in the organisation or composition of these families is imposed by the economic and labour structure of their country of destination and the position that each of its members comes to hold within it. **Discrimination, racism and segregation also play a fundamental role in family organisation in the context of migration and influence the family environment and its relationships**. Mi-

grant families play a very important part in Spain's social and economic situation, and we must continue working actively to break down the barriers they face so that they can gain access to better, more decent living conditions.

Due to cultural processes, migratory pathways and structural conditions in Spain, **the composition of migrant families is statistically different from that of Spanish families**. Although the majority of both types of households are formed either by couples without children, couples with one child or couples with two children, the specific proportion of each varies in relation to the others. According to the National Statistics Institute's (INE) Continuous Household Survey (ECH, last accessed: October 2024), **among migrants, there is a higher percentage of households composed of a family unit living with people who are not part of the family unit (12% of migrant households, compared with only 3% of Spanish households).**

This may indicate several factors: cultural patterns of coexistence, whereby relationships may be different from Western nuclear family traditions; coexistence with acquaintances determined by solidarity networks; or subletting of rooms to acquaintances or other people. Given the current housing problems, this last circumstance may be the most common. Data for 2024 from the INE's Continuous Household Survey also indicate **that 7% of migrant households comprise people who are not part of a family unit, i.e., people living in sublet rooms or friends sharing housing**.

The percentage of Spanish people living in this type of household is only 2%. Meanwhile, **7% of households of migrant origin consist of two or more families. These generally comprise extended family or other known families sharing housing**. Again, this proportion drops to 2% in the case of Spanish multifamily households. Finally, among households of migrant origin, **8% are formed by couples with three children, compared to 2%** of Spanish households. In contrast, among **Spanish households**, there is a noticeable proportion of **single-person households (28% compared to 13% of migrant households**); couples without children (21% compared to 18% of migrants); couples with only one child (16% compared to 13% of migrant households); and single-parent households, which account for 10% of Spanish households, compared with 7% of migrant house-

holds. In short, we see a great diversity of types of households, but **among migrants, the most significant comprise couples with three or more children, more than one family unit, one family unit with an unrelated person and households composed entirely of people who are unrelated**. This may be due in the main to migratory conditions and the need to share housing with social and family networks, as well as cultural patterns. Meanwhile, among Spanish nationals, the most prevalent are single-person households, couples without children and couples with only one child, following the trend of declining birth rates.

I understand "migrant family" as any type of family unit. It doesn't have to be a nuclear family - it could be a mother and her son and daughter, it could be a couple of brothers travelling together, a family group composed of at least two people who have some sort of relationship and who are following a migration pathway together or who are living in a country different from their country of origin. There are nuclear families made up of mother, father and children, but we also have extended families, which include brothers- or sisters-in-law, grandparents and/or grandchildren, and quite a few single parent families made up of a mother and her child. We also have families composed of mothers and children and, in some cases, single-parent families consisting of parents with children of other nationalities, such as from Latin America. There are fewer from the countries of Sub-Saharan West Africa, because nuclear families don't usually come.' (Red Cross staff focus group)

In this respect, the profiles of migrant households and families are very diverse, and this diversity depends on their country of origin, the circumstances of their migration, the pathways they follow and the opportunities they find in Spain to be able to reunite or communicate transnationally.

Family profiles depend a lot on nationality and background context. From Latin America, they're usually nuclear families with or without dependent children. But if we're talking about African or Ukrainian people, for example, we'd be talking about women heading single-parent households. So it's very difficult to talk about a profile because the scope and diversity of migration plans are also determined by the context.' (Red Cross staff focus group)

In Huelva, we've got several seasonal encampments. Most of the ones I've seen have been of Sub-Saharan people, rarely with young children, from what I've been able to see. As regards Moroccans, the father usually comes first, followed by the mother with the children, or the other way round - first the mother with the children and then the father. In the case of Latin American families, we see households with groups of families, for example, two or three mothers with their respective children.' (Red Cross staff focus group)

Birth and fertility data are also useful in understanding the degree of settlement of the migrant population. The total fertility rate in Spain (INE, 2024)[6] stood at 30 births per thousand women of childbearing age in the country in 2020, but the differences between Spanish and migrant women are significant; the rate is almost 30 for the former but 45 for the latter, which indicates the contribution that migrant women make to population replacement. These data must, however, be qualified. Observing the total fertility rate over a period of almost 20 years (2002 to 2023), we find that, while it falls in both cases, the decrease among Spanish women is 9 points (from 37 to 28), while among migrant women the decrease is abrupt and very pronounced at 23 points (from 63 to 40).

This suggests that, **although migrations to Spain are mostly from countries in the Global South, where birth and fertility rates are higher, and these patterns are reflected to some extent in the destination country, the settled migrant population is gradually changing how they organise their families, based on the economic, labour and social structure of this country**. This leads us to believe that the decline in the birth rate among migrants in Spain is influenced by socioeconomic factors, such as working hours, the drastic reduction of their social and family support networks, and the need for economic stability.

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6.   The total fertility rate (TFR) is the average number of children who would be born to a woman during her lifetime if she spent her childbearing years conforming to the age-specific fertility rates of a given period of study (usually a specific year) and was not exposed to mortality risks from birth until the end of her childbearing years.

Table 1. Total fertility rate by mother's nationality. Births per thousand women

	Both nationalities	Spanish	Foreign nationals
2023	30.24	28.08	39.75
2022	31.40	29.21	42.00
2021	32.25	30.28	42.42
2020	32.28	29.80	45.39
2019	34.20	31.41	49.97
2018	35.42	32.78	51.54
2017	37.22	34.78	53.08
2016	38.53	36.25	53.69
2015	39.00	36.97	52.42
2014	39.14	37.21	51.71
2013	38.29	36.47	49.20
2012	40.18	38.27	50.97
2011	41.26	39.28	52.26
2010	42.19	39.70	55.90
2009	42.61	40.07	56.38
2008	44.68	41.70	61.58
2007	42.71	40.24	58.08
2006	42.49	40.47	57.07
2005	41.47	39.65	56.30
2004	41.04	39.13	59.61
2003	40.38	38.64	60.29
2002	38.88	37.22	63.33

Source: INE, 2024

Another difference in fertility patterns between Spanish and migrant women is the age at which they usually give birth. **Migrant women have a fertility rate7 up to the age of 22 that may be more than three times that of Spanish women in the same age range. From the age of 31, however, the fertility rate among migrant women begins to decline gradually and is surpassed by that of Spanish women, up to the age of 38. From the age of 39, both rates are practically equal until the end of their childbearing years**. Migrant women tend to have a longer period of fertility, which is most significant between the ages of 19 and 40, while among Spanish women, childbirth is concentrated between the ages of 26 and 40. Migrant women generally have children at a younger age.

In conclusion, it can be said that the composition of migrant families may vary according to their origin, culture and the specific circumstances of their migration. **This family diversity can lead to difficulties in understanding on the part of the social services, whose ideas are often based on traditional family models.**

2.5. Quality of life and conditions for migrant families in Spain

The AROPE rate indicates the risk of poverty and social exclusion among a given population. It is an indicator that has emerged within the context of the European Union's UE2030 Strategy. **Migrants, specifically non-EU migrants, are at risk of poverty or social exclusion and the corresponding AROPE rate has been steadily increasing since 2008, tripling that of the Spanish population**

7.   The General Fertility Rate is the relationship between the number of births occurring in a certain period of time and the number of women of childbearing age in the same period. It is expressed as the number of births per thousand women of childbearing age in a year.

in some years. In 2023, for example, the risk of poverty for Spanish people was 25.2, while for non-EU migrants it was 57 (AROPE, last accessed October 2024).

Table 2. Risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE rate) by nationality (persons aged 16 and over)

	Total	Spanish	Foreign nationals (EU)	Foreign nationals (other)
2023	25.2	22.3	36.5	57.0
2022	24.9	21.9	39.6	60.4
2021	26.9	23.6	40.3	65.2
2020	25.5	22.6	43.4	58.0
2019	24.4	21.7	46.2	54.2
2018	25.6	23.1	47.7	56.0
2017	25.7	23.4	40.8	58.7
2016	27.2	24.7	47.3	60.1
2015	27.8	25.5	40.2	63.9
2014	28.1	25.6	45.2	62.7
2013	26.6	23.5	38.9	60.3
2012	26.5	23.4	38.7	57.3
2011	25.9	22.9	37.2	57.1
2010	25.2	22.3	41.2	51.3
2009	23.7	20.8	38.4	50.4
2008	22.7	19.4	43.4	52.9

Source: INE, Survey on Living Conditions, 2020

This situation stems in large part from the legal status of foreign nationals, whereby **people who migrate for work remain in an irregular administrative situation for three years if they have not entered the country on a work visa. During this time, they depend on jobs in the underground economy, which usually involve elementary, low-skilled, insecure, temporary or seasonal work**. Once they obtain work and residence permits – usually through the settlement process (*arraigo*) – **they often continue to work in**

these low-skilled and temporary jobs, due to reasons related to training, discrimination and lack of official recognition of qualifications. In the case of migrant women, caregiving responsibilities, especially for infant children, also act as an obstacle to a linear and upward path of employment or training.

The INE does not cross-reference AROPE data by type of household and nationality, so it is not possible to see migrant households' risk of poverty and social exclusion according to their composition. Nevertheless, **there are two types of households that score highly for risk of poverty and social exclusion which are also prevalent among migrants: single-parent households** (with a risk of almost 53) **and 'other households' with dependent children** (including households comprising extended families or those formed by two families), whose risk of poverty is almost 30.

Table 3. Risk of poverty or social exclusion by type of household

	Risk of poverty or social exclusion
Total	26.5
Single-person households	32.4
2 adults without dependent children	20.0
Other households without dependent children	18.0
1 adult with 1 or more dependent children	52.7
2 adults with 1 or more dependent children	28.5
Other households with dependent children	30.3
No response	33.0

Source: INE, Survey on Living Conditions, 2020

The Spanish Red Cross Social Vulnerability Bulletin No.22, entitled *Early Childhood Parenting* (2021), shows that the migrant families assisted by this institution experience multiple situations of vulnerability. In addition to low incomes, they have difficulties in accessing housing in good condition, with a high prevalence of housing shared between family units and, in many cases, overcrowding. **There is also a high prevalence of single-parent households made up of women in challenging circumstances, brought about by their parenting responsibilities, their problems with work-life balance and the high levels of insecurity** in the jobs they can access. When there is no work, migrants **have difficulties in paying rent or mortgage fees, which can result in them facing eviction.** In addition, they may frequently be unable to pay for energy services, which may lead to their electricity being discon-

Migrants, specifically non-EU migrants, have a risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE indicator), which in some years has tripled that of the Spanish population and has been increasing since 2008

nected (Spanish Red Cross, 2024a[8]). In these situations, **some migrant women are afraid to go to the Social Services for information or assistance, because they believe that when their level of poverty is assessed, their capacity to care for their children will be called into question** (AIETI, 2024). **Language can be a major barrier to accessing information and resources** among those who do not speak the State's official languages, and the same holds for those in irregular administrative situations, which excludes them from applying. **With respect to the needs of the migrant families supported by the Red Cross, especially with respect to children, the Social Vulnerability Bulletin reports on the need for certain types of food, such as milk, meat or fish; clothing and footwear; and school materials and other resources related to extracurricular activities, which are vital for their social integration** (Spanish Red Cross, 2021[9]).

Not all migrant families experience poverty in Spain, but a significant proportion of them are in a vulnerable situation, due to their status as foreign nationals and their difficulties in accessing formal and stable employment. Special attention needs to be paid by the social action organisations to the following types of household where children are present:

- Cross-border families
- Single parent families (lone mothers)
- Large families
- Families in overcrowded housing
- Families who are squatting
- Households with energy poverty
- Families served with an eviction order
- Transnational families where children are separated from their parents
- Households in which there is gender-based violence
- Households in which there is violence against children.

Within migrant families, mothers play a crucial role in supporting transnational households, contributing not only to caregiving but also supporting the family with their productive work in Spain. In many cases, they face significant challenges due to geographical dispersion and family fragmentation.

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8.   Spanish Red Cross (2024a). The impact of energy poverty on the social vulnerability of the population supported by the Spanish Red Cross in the context of the inflation crisis. Social Vulnerability Bulletin No. 32. Spanish Red Cross.
9.   Spanish Red Cross (2021). Early childhood parenting. Social Vulnerability Bulletin No. 22. Spanish Red Cross.

2.6. Family policies and transnational families

The approval process for the Families Act is now under way. This is a law which will introduce a series of innovative measures with the aim of recognising the diversity of family structures, facilitating work-life balance and strengthening social protection for families. Important aspects of this law include:

- Recognition of new types of families, including LGBTIQ+ households, adoptive and single-parent families, as well as the specific situation of households which have members with disabilities.
- Single-parent families with two children will have the same rights as large families, facilitating access to specific services and benefits.
- Introduction of parental leave of 8 weeks per child up to the age of 8, which can be flexible (4 weeks of paid leave as of August 2024).
- Extension of paid leave (up to 5 days for caring for relatives of up to the second degree in cases of serious illness; up to 4 days for unforeseen family emergencies; adaptation and flexibility of working hours for reasons of work-life balance.
- Maintenance of the parenting income of 100 euros per month for families with children under the age of three, gradually expanding to include children up to the age of six.
- Strengthening of protection for vulnerable families. Provision of free educational services for children from single-parent families and specific assistance for families which have members with disabilities.
- Administrative simplification: changes in the definition and processing of benefits to match the real needs of families, such as the legal equivalency of married and common-law couples for certain types of leave.

The law will also guarantee a series of measures that are beneficial to migrant families. The most noteworthy measure en-

ables the children of migrant families in an irregular situation to obtain residence permits, guaranteeing their access to basic services such as healthcare, compulsory education and social services. This is aimed at promoting equal opportunities and rights for the children of migrant families, while protecting family unity and stability. **The law underlines that children and adolescents of migrant origin must not be disadvantaged by the legal situation of their parents, thereby promoting a more inclusive and equitable environment**. This measure has been included to ensure the best interests of the child, in line with international recommendations on child protection.

Measures aimed at protecting families in situations of social vulnerability will also apply to migrant families, and these include **access to child development support programmes or educational support; economic benefits (parenting income); pre-primary education and support for single-parent households**. **Nevertheless, some of these measures are only applicable to families that meet the basic requirements, which includes being in a regular administrative situation. Moreover, measures aimed at work-life balance may only be applicable if the parents are in formal employment**. This means that the informal work carried out by many migrant women and men would make them ineligible. **Some members of the expert focus group have commented that the intersectional perspective of the Families Act is limited, because it overlooks situations and problems faced by migrant families, such as discrimination in access to the formal labour market or housing**. Furthermore, the Act includes no mention of this last issue, which is one of the biggest problems currently facing many families in this country. It is a fact that, while a family makes a home, for there to be a home there must be housing.

> At the time of this research, the "Ley de Familias" was in the process of being passed, which introduces a series of innovative measures with the aim of adapting to different family structures, facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life, and reinforcing social protection for families.

'We need to talk about family diversity. There's a Families Act, which must not only be feminist - which it is, since the Act recognises that the vast majority of families are supported by women and it does provide a response in this respect - but the Act must also follow an intersectional and anti-racist approach. It must include the different realities that migrant families experience and their different situations. There should be more effort made with respect to single parents.' (Expert focus group)

The public policies and legislation on families currently in force in Spain do not recognise circumstances which are highly specific to migrant families, such as the ability to claim tax relief for children who remain in the country of origin, despite the fact that the sending of remittances for their education is usually ongoing. Similarly, there is a lack of consistency with respect to what constitutes a large family. It is generally understood that a large family, based on the idea of the nuclear family, consists of a couple with more than two children. On the basis of this model, nuclear households with two children have been included when one of the spouses has died. However, households made up of a single mother with two children do not fall within this category in most of Spain's autonomous regions. The Families Act would resolve this issue by expanding the categorisation of large families, but its effects have not yet been implemented.

'There are legal issues, which are also unjust. Here, for instance, a father who's been widowed and has two children automatically becomes a large family, but for a migrant single mother with three children, it nearly kills her to get recognised as a large family, because of the lack of standardised legislation on families. Neither are children recognised on parents' tax returns when they're living in the country of origin and receiving remittances from the parents. There's no tax relief for these children. These diversities aren't recognised in public policies or legislation and this hurts migrant families in particular.' (Expert focus group)

Groups and entities geared toward protecting families find that the Act is lacking in measures that they have been demanding for some time (De Sousa, 2024). Single-parent families, for example, are not able to claim the total of 16 weeks of childbirth leave that would correspond to two parents in traditional families. The classification of families with special needs includes only those with two children, who might have disabilities, therefore excluding single-parent families with only one child, even if they have a disability. Eight weeks of unpaid parental leave is unaffordable for many families who depend entirely on the parent's income to survive. It does not include an extension of childbirth leave up to 6 months, which has long been demanded by family organisations. Neither does it specify measures in relation to support for children with developmental and learning needs. There is also insufficient coverage of teleworking for work-life balance in the legislation. In this respect, some of the experts who have participated in the focus groups have expressed their views.

Current public policies and regulations on the family in Spain also fail to recognise very specific situations of migrant families, such as tax deductions for children in the country of origin, despite the fact that remittances for their education are often constant.

'My opinion is that they prepare us all to be engineers, doctors, teachers - for work - but they don't prepare us to be parents. The State sees families as institutions that provide children so that these children can then become workers, pay their contributions and maintain the pension system. But there's no realistic family policy. It's thought that talking about the family is an issue for the right or the far right, but it's not - it's a reality to which we need to pay attention, because families just can't cope. And this is worrying.' (Expert focus group)

In conclusion, the Act is making progress on key aspects of family protection, adhering to a gender perspective and considering diversity and intersectionality. Yet there are significant omissions, especially in its consideration of what constitutes productive work (focusing on formal employment), the specific needs of single-parent families, access to rights in cases of disability and, in general, the concept of family, since it continues to embrace the assumption of the nuclear family. Single-parent families are an exception to nuclear families, while families consisting of siblings without parents or of grandparents and grandchildren are a glaring omission.

03

RESEARCH APPROACH (conceptualisation and hypothesis)

Defining what constitutes a family and a migrant family is no easy task. Much depends on the different theoretical perspective. From an anthropological point of view, a family is formed of people who are linked through bonds that, depending on culture or tradition, may be forged by blood or marriage; they may be familial, affective or social, or a combination. It derives from the need to procreate and provide care, insofar as each new member of a society is born without the capacity to fend for themself (Álvarez and Monteros, 2019). Based on the various ways in which a family is organised in different societies and cultures, we can draw the conclusion that it is a socially and culturally constructed institution. In this respect, **the concept of a *migrant family* is also a social construct and, in this case in particular, a legal construct, because its definition depends, to a large extent, on the dictates of the laws on foreign nationals**. The experts who have participated in this study have underlined that the act of taking the decision to live in another country makes people migrants. Similarly, fleeing to another country to safeguard their life and integrity makes them refugees. The migration process encompasses more than just the journey; it includes preparatory actions, **border crossings, settlement in the new destination and integration processes**. This series of processes can last several years, even when migrants settle and acquire citizenship in their destination country, since there are social factors of discrimination and personal factors of belonging and identity which can influence how the person continues to be seen or how they may still feel like a 'foreigner' many years after migrating. **While migrating is a process, considering someone as a foreigner or immigrant distils that process, placing the person outside of a social group**.

What then do we mean by a *migrant family*? For the experts involved in the focus groups, **it would mean a family in which at least one of its members has migrated**. Although some family members may remain in the country of origin while others migrate, the decision may have been made jointly, the trip may have been planned with the help of several members **and, during the settlement process, transnational connections between family members create a flow of information, goods and caregiving between two or more countries**, which may be more or less common depending on the individual case.

I understand migrant family to mean any family in which there's at least one person who's decided to realise their life project by migrating, because they're changing their country of residence. And in terms of typology, there are as many categories as there are families.' (Expert focus group)

Other opinions focus on the view that a migrant family is one whose origin determines its diversity and, in some cases, its barriers or difficulties, since the social reproduction of inequality can affect new members, even when they are born in the destination country or have citizenship. Although some family members may not consider themselves migrants, others feel like this for many years or for their entire lives.

So, for us the concept of a migrant family has more to do with origin, a family of migrant origin, because then the composition of the family will begin to change over time. It's not the same to think of grandchildren as migrants, or even the children of migrants who no longer feel like migrants.' (Expert focus group)

What is clear is that the family dimension acquires great importance in migration and social integration processes; therefore, it must be taken into account both in public policies and in social intervention actions.

It's extremely complicated to define what a family is and what it is to be a migrant. But for me, from the point of view of an intersectional perspective, I believe that it's one of the most important dimensions that must be taken into account in understanding situations in the home and their circumstances.' (Expert focus group)

Migrant families create social support networks in both their countries of origin and destination, and these are essential for their survival, as well as for their integration into care, education or employment systems.

In our case, we get people who need to apply for international protection, because their lives are in danger in their country of origin. We assist them through the State's reception programme for asylum seekers. And, on the other hand, there are people who are migrants, who come above all to improve their living conditions. But we all work on programmes and projects in which we see a great deal of variability. We need to be constantly adapting because we work with a subset of people whose profile changes a lot, depending on the situation of each country. Currently, we're getting families who come from Peru, seeking medical treatment for serious diseases, like cancer treatments, especially for children, but there are also families who've had to separate in their country of origin; they don't all come together, they don't have the economic means to all come together. In fact, sometimes they come as a result of collections made in their country of origin through their relatives and their social networks.' (Red Cross staff focus group)

These family dynamics are not always considered in laws and public policies, which are based on a Eurocentric perspective of what a family is (nuclear, mother and father, blood ties or official adoption, independent living). **Public policies give rise to plans, programmes and projects that reiterate this perspective and determine who is served and who is not**. To overcome this obstacle and to be able to serve everyone, **a more desirable strategy for social intervention is to understand these households through the affinities of their members, or as cohabitation units, which don't have to be subject to kinship**.

Depending on the financial backer of the projects we implement, it limits the concept of family. For example, some include kinship only up to the second degree, which is usually the case, but for us, when we're carrying out our work, we do so taking into account what we consider the most important: **affinity**.' (Red Cross staff focus group)

Laws are also a determining factor when defining what a family is, who its members should be, and what rights and obligations are assigned to them, just as they determine what a migrant is, where they can go and with whom or whether they can reunite. **The people we consulted offered an example of the extent to which laws influence the composition of a migrant family**. There are cases of people from countries close to Spain who would prefer to engage in circular migration, i.e., they would like to do seasonal work in Spain and return with their families to their country of origin during non-working periods. **Circular migration is, however, restricted to work tied to recruitment in the country of origin, which is not always accessible. People are therefore forced to migrate on their own, obtaining residence and work permits** after several years so that they can finally regroup with their relatives under the terms of the law, **since their return, even if temporary, could entail the loss of such permits**. As a consequence of the law, someone may spend years separated from their family.

The law is also a determining factor in how families are organised. I think that, if it were possible, many people would come to Spain on their own to work. They'd stay here while they work and then return to their country when they're not working, so they'd be coming and going without having to bring their children. The problem is the law, which forces them to stay here, since when they spend more than six months outside Spain they lose their papers and that's also the reason that there are so many families living here in Spain that end up bringing their children. This is what the Moroccans have told me - that if it weren't for the law making them stay to keep their papers, they wouldn't stay, that is, they'd be here while they were working and then they'd go back to their country.' (Red Cross staff focus group)

The laws also stipulate which families are less likely to be separated for long periods. **For example, applicants for international protection may apply for residence permits for all their family members, provided that they can prove kinship, and if they come from certain countries considered at higher risk, they may even enter group resettlement schemes, as is currently the case for families from Ukraine**. People from other countries with a similar level of risk to life or integrity may not meet the same specific conditions. This is due to a regulatory determination of which countries are more at risk than others (Monteros and Tudela, 2022). With respect to protection, the laws establish inequalities by country of origin.

'People often arrive alone from Sub-Saharan Africa, but then these lone people have specific circumstances that we all understand - the pressure and the need to send money to their home country. And, in the end, after a very long time, they can regroup their family. It's true that many single-parent families come from Ukraine, because of the war, but many others have come with their husbands and children and even their mothers, and then they've been settled here and each one has found their space.' (Red Cross staff focus group)

Barriers to migration imposed by laws on aliens and border control programmes force migrant families to find strategies to enable them to reach Europe, some of which are life-threatening. One of these strategies is to separate the family in the country of origin or in transit. Sometimes these separations are made as a matter of urgency and desperation. Thus there are cases where mothers leave their babies or young children with acquaintances or extended family who have a better likelihood of crossing a border or getting on board a boat. This phenomenon has been observed in humanitarian assistance and initial reception programmes, which is why DNA tests are carried out. While every effort is made not to separate infants or children from the people they are travelling with while awaiting the results of the tests, separation has sometimes occurred when there is a suspicion of child trafficking. **In these cases, children are separated and cared for by child protection services. In reality, trying to locate their mothers – who may have remained in transit countries or who may have arrived in Spain, but via other pathways to other cities – can be a very difficult task. This is a clear example of how laws on aliens impact family separations, which can become extremely painful and traumatic**. These separation processes include the migration of unaccompanied children and adolescents or those who become separated in transit, as well as the migration of older siblings with younger siblings, in some cases, to prevent younger sisters from undergoing genital mutilation.

Migrating is a process, but considering someone as a foreigner or immigrant stagnates this process, placing the person outside a social group.

'Every year there are changes, depending on the conditions in the countries of origin. In terms of Sub-Saharan Africa, people have recently been arriving from Mali and Senegal, and that changes the profile of people arriving, because two years ago, people were coming more from Morocco and Algeria. If they're coming by small boat, it's difficult to bring their whole family, so they arrive alone or with just part of the family. There are even cases where, at the time of travelling, other people - family or acquaintances - are asked to take the children, and when they arrive in Spain, the adults are not the parents. That's why DNA tests are done. It's also to try and prevent child trafficking, but of course, it's difficult to understand at a cultural level.' (Red Cross staff focus group)

In view of all the above, what do we understand by a *transnational family*? **The concept of transnationalism when applied to migration is defined as a set of long-distance sustained communications, which includes practices, dynamics and relationships linking migrants with other family members in their country of origin or other countries**, given the importance these relationships and practices acquire with respect to the lives of both the person who migrates and those who do not. The dynamics of these relationships in a transnational sphere means that they are considered migrant families, since migration is a determining factor in their organisation and in their cross-border exchanges of goods and care. Both the productive and reproductive strategies of these families take place in a transnational context (Bernardi, 2011; Gonzálvez, 2016).

The term **cross-border families** is also commonly used**. In the academic sphere, this refers to families separated by borders between adjacent territories, across which material and intangible goods circulate**, giving rise to production and reproduction strate-

The concept of transnationalism as applied to migration is defined as a set of sustained long-distance communications, including practices, dynamics and relationships that link migrants with other family members in the country of origin or other countries, given the importance that such relationships and practices acquire for the life of the migrant and non-migrants.

gies (Soriano, 2008; Trinidad, 2011). Nevertheless, **the term cross-border could be applied to transnational families that are in two or more non-adjacent territories, since it is not solely restricted to geography or topology**. Migrant families also experience the impact of social, legal, cultural and administrative boundaries (Fernández et al., 2016). When a border is crossed, the previous structural frameworks are disrupted and changed, redefining what a family can be. Legal borders make migrations either legal or 'illegal'. **Administrative borders determine whether it is possible for migrants to formally live and work in the destination country, or whether their entry is irregular. Social borders dictate obstacles or opportunities, through processes of discrimination or integration. Cultural borders can mark out differences, or pose a challenge to build pluralities**. They are, therefore, not only transnational families but also cross-border families, insofar as they are impacted by borders. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this report, **the term *transnational families* will be used because of its explanatory power and its broader complexity**.

While migrant families form networks of exchange, the relationships or links are not always horizontal (based on cooperation). They are also formed of vertical links that give rise to inequalities and asymmetrical positions within their structure. These asymmetries can occur in both origin and destination countries, but on crossing borders they can be disrupted or rearranged. **Gender and generational positioning is fundamental to establishing these asymmetries.**

The relationship between migration and gender has been established in two closely linked ways. Migration impacts traditional gender relations and practices within family units, bolstering inequalities and traditional roles or challenging them; gender influences who migrates, why and how the decision is taken, the ways in which migration impacts the migrants themselves, in the origin and destination areas, and in the processes of family fragmentation and reorganisation after migration' (Fernández et al., 2016, p. 93).

Traditional gender roles can be interchangeable, with women taking on greater importance in supporting the family (Fernández et al., 2016; Zapata, 2019). Sons and daughters can also take on the role of caregiver for their younger siblings, or even act as a liaison between the destination country society and their parents, due to language and cultural barriers. In this way, they take on adult responsibilities.

Migrant families may sometimes be described as culturally diverse, without taking into account that an important part of the diversity in the organisation or composition of these families is imposed by the economic and labour structure of their country of destination and the position that each of its members comes to hold within it. **Discrimination, racism and segregation are also very apparent, playing a fundamental role in family organisation in the context of migration and influencing the family environment and its relationships**.

04
RESEARCH AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

This study aims to **deepen our understanding of the new profiles of migrant families, as well as the situations they encounter during their migration processes, in order to identify the needs and the strategies that will help formulate recommendations for improving public policies and social intervention measures**. Specifically, we will analyse the following aspects:

- The motives, objectives and expectations underlying family migration.
- The relationship with administrative and socio-legal systems and the barriers and obstacles they impose on migrant families.
- The symbolic dimension of kinship ties, and care and support networks.
- The redefinition of gender and generational roles and their importance in parenting and educational processes.
- Family vulnerabilities.
- Family members' processes of identity and belonging, especially those of children, adolescents and young people of migrant origin.
- Production and reproduction strategies.

The **research methodology is predominantly qualitative**, **based on the use of focus groups**, which are important in furthering the experiential aspects of migration, as well as the opinions of experts and specialists in the field. Personal experiences allow us to observe how structural frameworks impact both individual and group life trajectories (Camarero and García Borrego, 2004). This study is intended to contribute to the field of migration studies, proposing a connection between the conceptual dimension and the micro-level and subjective dimension of migration. Five focus groups were established, bringing together experts on migration and families, Red Cross staff and volunteers, members of migrant families and young migrants (see Table 1). The groups were distributed as shown below.

This research incorporates gender and intersectional perspective as well as a human rights approach, in the analysis of the opinions and experiences expressed, by considering the differential situation of women and men, as well as their migratory status, age, origin, ethnicity, diversity and social class.

Table 1. Study sample

	No. of participants	Gender of participants
Experts[10]	7	5 women 2 men
Red Cross staff and volunteers	12	10 women 2 men
Children of migrants, aged 16-25 (Madrid)	10	8 women 2 men
Migrant families (Almería)	4	4 women (1 male translator)
Migrant families (Valencia)	10	9 women 1 man

The focus groups were organised with the help of specialist staff and volunteers at the Red Cross, who facilitated contact with the participants. The opinions expressed by focus group participants were recorded on audio files and then transcribed. In a second phase, the content of the transcriptions was systematised with the help of the qualitative data analysis software NVivo, which determined the predominant subject matter using saturation criteria. The subject matter was analysed based on the textual contributions from participants' discourse (verbatims), which are used in this report to illustrate our findings. At all times, we have sought to ensure faithful reproductions of the expressions used by the participants, respecting their opinions and allowing them to form a dialogue with other research or reports drawn up by different entities. We have also endeavoured to protect participants' privacy by guaranteeing their anonymity when so requested in their informed consent.

This research incorporates gender and intersectionality perspectives in the analysis of the opinions and experiences expressed, taking into consideration the different situation of women and men, as well as their immigration status, age, origin, ethnicity, diversity and social class. It also applies a human rights-based approach to addressing discrimination and vulnerabilities through the guarantee of human dignity, social justice and equality, values promoted by the Red Cross.

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10. Entities participating in the expert focus group: Ramiñahui, AESCO, Salud y familia, UNAF, AMALGAMA, CEPAIM, Alianza por la solidaridad, Asociación marroquí de inmigrantes, University of Granada.

05

TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES IN SPAIN: An experience-based analysis

This section sets out the opinions, perceptions and experiences of the study's participants, organised into thematic blocks. At all times, we have endeavoured to reproduce participants' statements accurately by illustrating the analysis with verbatim accounts.

5.1. Factors in migration decisions

The factors involved in migration decisions are multiple and diverse. They may be economic, political, demographic, social, environmental, health-related, family-related or educational, among others. In general, each specific situation involves several interconnected factors. Those related to armed conflicts, wars and catastrophes create refugees and have become increasingly prevalent at a global level.

'Another important aspect that seems to me to be on the rise and that we're going to see more often is migration driven by climate issues. Droughts and natural disasters may be the reasons for the migration of African populations, but there's also, for instance, been recent earthquakes in Turkey and Morocco, which have led to migration. Because of this, I think it's important that we include it in these analyses and take it into account.' (Red Cross staff focus group)

'There are four of us. All four of us came together because the threat was to the whole family. My mother said, "Everybody pack your bags and let's go". My mother's the captain of the boat, but we continue to live in fear because it's happened to us before. Maybe it won't happen here, but we always live with that fear, and also the fear that we won't get asylum.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

The political and social instability in some countries generates insecurity, while socio-economic inequality gives rise to unmet basic needs in terms of healthcare, education or well-being. Many families want to improve their quality of life and enable their children to have educational opportunities, whether the children remain in the country of origin (by means of remittances) or migrate to the country of destination.

'I'm from Equatorial Guinea. It's bad politically and economically, with things changing all the time. I've got a job there at the Embassy. We're from a country where when you've got a responsibility or need to help your family, we make whatever decision we have to and I've come to help them.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

'It was the political instability and economic instability that made us emigrate to Spain. We decided everything very quickly, I mean, we didn't think about it for long. Then we got here and started looking for a school for our daughter. Right next to our daughter's school, there's a school for adults, so we started studying. We did 2 years of compulsory secondary education and then intermediate level and now we're waiting to see if we can get a contract to be able to work.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

Migration decision factors related to armed conflicts, wars and natural disasters are becoming increasingly important.

These are the reasons for migration most frequently seen by Red Cross staff in social inclusion programmes, but focus group members also wanted to draw attention to reasons related to protecting children. For example, there are many cases of mothers trying to save their daughters from female genital mutilation or forced marriages.

> There's also the issue of forced marriage and female genital mutilation, that is, there are also women, including mothers and family units, who are also becoming culturally empowered and know that this is a serious violation and so initiate these migration processes with close family themselves.' (Red Cross staff focus group)

There is also persecution for sexual diversity, as happened to Marco, a young gay man whom his mother and father wanted to protect because of the increased hatred toward the LGBTIQ+ community in El Salvador, in view of the dictatorial turn taken by its government.

> I come from El Salvador. A gang war broke out against the government and the government began to enforce an emergency law and it didn't matter who you were or where you came from. If the police took a dislike to you, they could throw you in jail for 30 years. If you had a tattoo with that letter, they could put you in prison. So, I also belong to a gay minority, and this became a serious issue in the country - there were persecutions. Then, my mum said, "Right son, we're going. We're going for you and because of the violence". And they sent me first, then the men in the family - my dad, my brother-in-law - and when my dad got money here, he rented a flat and brought my mum and my sister. Little by little we've been getting our papers, but there are still some family members who don't have them. Though we have more friends now and we're more established, it was difficult at first.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

In addition, parents frequently decide to migrate to protect their children from the insecurity that they experience in their countries of origin as a result of street violence, drug trafficking or kidnappings, where children are the most vulnerable.

> Many women tell us that they've come with their sons and daughters to give them safety. I'm from Peru and there, unfortunately, children's lack of safety is very bad. This is a form of expulsion.' (Expert focus group)

'I'm Mexican. I, my husband and my two children arrived in Spain in 2020. We had to leave our country because, well, I don't know if the others are from Latin America, but at least the context in all respects is very important. At the moment, Mexico is in a difficult situation when it comes to lack of safety. Drug trafficking, kidnappings, violence… Unfortunately, the village where we're from is overrun by this situation - we were practically under curfew. From a certain time of day, you can't go out because anything could happen. I think that for all of us who've done the migration process, it's difficult because you get disconnected from everything. From your family, from what you could have built at the time, from your work, from everything…. You have to give up what you've built and fill yourself with strength, because from the moment you make the decision to migrate you leave everything behind. We've got no family or people we know here. It's been very difficult.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

'We're descendants of Spanish people and my mother got citizenship when things began to get very bad in Mexico - a lot of violence, especially gender-based violence. We were growing up, we became teenagers, young people, we started going out with our friends… So, it was inevitable that my mum would be afraid. She had some money saved and her Spanish passport and we all came. My brothers and I had no papers for the first year, but my mother started the paperwork. It was difficult - the first year was awful - but it's better now.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

In recent years, there have been more cases of parents applying for humanitarian visas to save the lives of sons or daughters with serious health problems who do not have access to life-saving treatments.

'Healthcare is one of the reasons that we see. If children have serious illnesses and there's no treatment in their country or it's not covered or impossible for the family to afford, a parent may come with the child who's got the health problem. There are many others who leave because of economic problems. The family stays and one of the members comes here, either the father or the mother, and they prefer to send money so that the family unit remains in the country of origin. We've also seen cases of families migrating together due to problems of safety. This happens a lot with families from Latin America, who come from countries that are very unstable. Healthcare reasons and safety reasons are significant factors in cases where the whole family unit makes the journey together.' (Red Cross staff focus group)

'I'm from Morocco, a teacher. I've got a house and everything there, but I needed to come here because of my 5-year-old daughter's health problems. I've been trying to get to Germany for 10 years.' (Almeria migrant families focus group)

It should be noted that while **families' survival and well-being underpin most reasons for exile and migration, migration decisions do not always take into account the opinion of all family members, especially when they are minors**. In some cases, children and adolescents are not informed that they will be taken to another country. This is done to prevent distress. Nevertheless, the experience of the migration process during transit and in the destination country affects them in particular.

'I thought we were going on holiday. They took me to Guatemala because we were in danger in my country [El Salvador], and when we got there, my parents told me, "Listen, we're going on holiday to Spain". When I got here they told me, "They were going to put your mum in prison". We can't go back. The first year I didn't feel good because I didn't know anyone - it was bad. But then, you start to feel better. It's helped that we try to see the positive side. I don't think that anyone wants to leave their country, I mean, there are very, very few people who really decide to leave their country. Mine is wonderful - it was the place where I feel I belong, with my people, my food, my things, but it happened and that's it, you have to face it and put on a brave face and take it as a new experience.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

There are also migration decisions taken in the opposite direction. Some migrant parents find it extremely difficult to raise and educate their children in Spain, given the conditions of vulnerability they experience, so they decide to send them to their country of origin, where they have a family network that can help with their care. This was the case with Nadia, a young woman with Spanish citizenship who has a Venezuelan mother. The mother emigrated at a very young age when she became pregnant with Nadia and had to leave school and look for a job to support her. In Spain, she could only find work as a live-in domestic employee, so she decided to send Nadia to her country of origin, to be cared for by her grandparents. When Nadia's mother found another job after a few years, she reunited with Nadia. This situation creates **circular migration at a family level, which further connects transnational parenting dynamics and practices.**

'When things got bad, my father lost his job because he fell and my mother was very young and had to leave school to come to Spain to work and help her siblings – there were 6 of them – but she got pregnant - she was pregnant with me - and as she was a live-in worker, she sent me to be with my grandparents. Later, she brought me back.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

5.2.   Barriers and obstacles experienced by migrant families in Spain

Migrant families **experience multiple barriers and obstacles in their integration process in Spain, which makes migration more than just a journey.** Instead of putting an end to their difficulties, reaching their destination country often increases them. In the view of one of the experts consulted, experiencing situations such as **discrimination in employment and rental housing, language and training barriers, and informality and insecurity at work produces a shock, a psychological impact on migrants, especially if they have migrated with their children. In many cases, the only thing that sustains them in their drive to overcome these obstacles is the fact of having family members that need their economic and psychological support.**

> Well, I think the main challenge for migrant families is the shock they experience in relation to the expectations that they had about their migration process, because what they actually find here, normally, is a system that's unequal, based on social classes - a system that's also patriarchal, in which caregiving is to a large degree the responsibility of women and where the labour market is unequal for both the native population and for migrants. It's also segregated by gender, there's inequality in access to housing and services and this system, which is so unequal, is what they find.' (Expert focus group)

The following subsection discusses the main obstacles identified by the migrants who participated in the focus groups.

5.2.1.   Administrative obstacles to regularisation

It is important to note that the issuance of residence and work permits is limited to specific migratory circumstances. **Protection for humanitarian reasons or exceptional circumstances allows residence but not work, as is also the case with international protection during the initial stage**.

> When you migrate for health reasons, you usually enter seeking protection for humanitarian reasons or exceptional circumstances, which is included in the legislation. The problem with this route is that it grants a residence permit, but not a work permit, which then makes it difficult for the family to sustain itself financially.' (Red Cross staff focus group)

Furthermore, due to the legal barriers to applying for humanitarian or international protection, as well as to entering Spain to work, many people's migration processes involve irregular administrative situations. The legal concept most frequently relied on by these people to regularise their situations is work-based or social settlement (*arraigo*). This entails a wait of two or three years (depending on the case), during which they must be continuously resident in the country. **A fundamental requirement for both types of *arraigo* is to be registered as a resident of a municipality and, in the case of a work-based process, to have paid contributions for at least six months in a period of two years**. Applying for *arraigo* may require several months of waiting until the public authorities (the Territorial Offices for Foreign Nationals) issues a positive or negative response. As a result, a large number of migrants in Spain remain in an irregular situation for more than three and a half years. If they have not been able to register as a resident when they first arrive, they may remain in an irregular situation for four years or more.

Protection on humanitarian grounds or exceptions allows residence, but does not authorise work, as does international protection during the first phase of granting protection.

> I've got 3 children, I live in a rented property, my husband works once a week at the port, picking up goods, with no work papers. I've got a child with a disability and I'm trying to get my degree. Neither I nor my husband have papers. We need to register as residents because without that, they can't help you. We're from Melilla and we had to come here for the doctor and the medicines that my son needs. There, they're very expensive but here they're cheaper. We live in a squat in a bad neighbourhood.' (Almeria migrant families focus group)

When family migrations happen in stages (some family members regrouping with other members), **internal inequalities often emerge within the family with respect to the obtaining of residence and work permits**. Family members who have been in Spain for the longest time have permits, while those who have arrived more recently or those who do not meet the requirements for formal reunification (non-dependent older relatives, siblings over the age of 18 years, for example) do not. This places the burden of economic support on the former.

I've been here in Spain for 20 years. My mother came here almost 6 years ago and I also have a 26-year-old brother with Down syndrome and recognised physical and mental disabilities. I've already got dual nationality, and my mother is part way through the process - she's got documentation - but my brother has no papers. My mother is also a dependent, but right now she has no recognised right, she doesn't receive anything because they've told me that she doesn't have the right and we're living off a payment of €400, which they give me for the three of us. We live in a tiny flat, an apartment with everything in one room. We came from Morocco.' (Almeria migrant families focus group)

In some types of households, it is more difficult for members to regulate their administrative situations. This is the case with single-parent families (lone mothers), where there are children or persons with disabilities who require care and mothers are unable to work full-time and obtain a formal employment contract. For these families, the experts propose relaxing the requirements for obtaining residence and work permits.

Several organisations have joined forces to submit a series of proposals for the new Regulations on Aliens. One of these takes into account the specific situation of single-parent migrants, proposing that the requirements for *arraigo* are relaxed, so that they don't have to wait two years for work-based settlement and an employment contract, because for a single-parent family this is very difficult. These families need other channels for accessing regularisation, since the usual channels don't cover their specific situation.' (Expert focus group)

In addition to all the above, it can also be **difficult to arrange an appointment at the Offices for Aliens and Asylum in order to carry out the procedures**. Several groups and entities have lodged complaints in this respect, because it prevents people from being able to regularise their situations or renew permits[11]. This is drastically prolonging migrants' and refugees' irregular administrative situations. **It is also having a negative impact on permit renewal processes, which has led to people unexpectedly finding themselves in irregular situations**.

> My only hurdle is getting a work permit. I'm here for humanitarian reasons, but it's run out and they won't give me an appointment to renew it. So, that's the enormous obstacle to my being able to work - I'm in limbo.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

The difficulty in arranging an **appointment at the Offices for Aliens and Asylum have prompted the emergence of a business dedicated to this task**. Some notaries and law firms offer a service for arranging appointments. At the same time, there are individuals or organised groups that 'sell' fraudulent and even fake appointments.

> For us, what's happening with appointments for international protection is a serious issue. People are paying very large amounts of money to get those appointments and a lot of them are fake. It also happens to be a very long process that you have to document very carefully to get a favourable outcome. Likewise, the process for obtaining *arraigo* based on employment, social settlement or training is very complicated, and for the latter you need to get a provisional contract, which is almost impossible. You're also paying to get registered as a resident. In the end, registered residency is what determines how long a person's been living in that city.' (Red Cross staff focus group)

What the Red Cross staff has observed is **a great deal of misinformation among migrants about the processes for regularisation and for applying for international protection**. Alongside this disinformation, they bring with them false or erroneous information from their countries of origin or transit, or they hear it in Spain from other migrants. They also receive false or erroneous information from people who take advantage of their situation for profit. **Migrants, especially families with children, are extremely vulnerable to this kind of misinformation. There are areas in some cities, such as rural or urban encampments, where access to information and basic services is not available.**

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11. See Andalucía Acoge, "La Comisión Europea reconoce el retraso en las citas de asilo", in https://acoge.org/la-comision-europea-reconoce-el-retraso-en-las-citas-de-asilo/

> 'The issue of regularisation is perhaps the most important and fundamental. We've found that there's inaccurate information and misinformation with respect to regularisation procedures, alongside misconceptions of how people can regularise their situation. Some people end up in a loop of bad information, which leads to them making mistakes or wasting time or spending valuable time submitting documentation. In Huelva there are many encampments, which are also home to families. People have been living there for more than three years and were already able to regularise their situations but had no information about it. Nor do they have direct access to social resources. It also happens that, while they know how to regularise their situations, for example, through *arraigo* for reasons of social integration or training, they don't meet all the requirements: registration of residence or an employment contract for training. I think that much more information is needed on legal and administrative issues, through free access to people who are specialists, so that no one profits from this need. We've found that some people pay a lot of money for information, which in the end has been of no use in regularising their situations.' (Red Cross staff focus group)

In short, migrants and their families encounter multiple obstacles when they seek to regularise their administrative situations. There are difficulties in arranging appointments at the Offices for Aliens and Asylum; the processing of cases is troublesome and slow, extending irregular situations; there are language barriers that prevent the information provided by the authorities from being properly understood; there is also **inaccurate information and misinformation** which has a significant impact on the ability to regularise situations; **the requirements for regularisation - whether for international protection, humanitarian protection or settlement based on social integration, training or employment - are difficult to meet and many people are excluded from the opportunity to apply under these legal circumstances**. Consequently, **the number of migrants in irregular administrative situations has increased considerably over recent years**. **It is estimated that there are currently around 700,000 non-EU persons in this situation, accounting for 17% of the migrant population** (FUNCAS, 2024).

Formal reunification involves complex procedures, which entail rigorous requirements. This excludes and discourages many people from family reunification, or leads to irregular family reunification, which has an impact on the social integration processes of the reunited family members.

5.2.2.   Obstacles to family reunification

One of the issues that concerns many migrants is the reunification of family members. This is especially true for spouses and children but also extends to parents or siblings. Reunification can be either a formal process, involving applications for visas, residence permits or international protection for family members, or an informal process, helping them to migrate to Spain without the necessary authorisation. **Formal reunification involves complex processes which entail meeting stringent requirements** such as being in possession of a residence permit, having sufficient income to keep family members together and demonstrating that they have habitable housing with sufficient space for the whole family unit. **This may exclude or discourage family reunification for many people, or lead to families reuniting in irregular circumstances, which impacts social integration processes for the regrouped family members.**
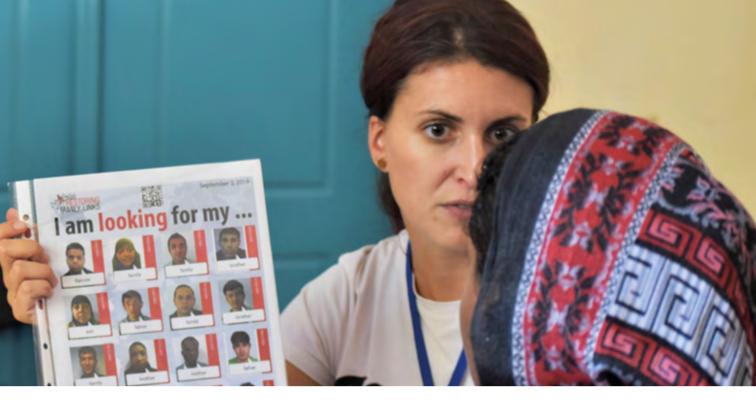
I've got papers and work, but I don't have a contract. I asked for papers for my daughter and my husband, but at first they refused - they told me that he doesn't have a serious illness. So, I've got to re-apply for papers for my family. The problem is that I don't have a contract that allows me to apply for papers for my husband and daughter.' (Almeria migrant families focus group)

The **greatest difficulty lies in providing proof of income through stable jobs with formal employment contracts**. Another obstacle is housing, especially in recent years, during which the touristification and gentrification of many cities has led to considerable increases in the cost of housing, in terms of both sales and rent. **This is compounded by discrimination and racism, which result in the exclusion of migrants from the housing market**, as well as vulnerable families in general. Due to the protection of children enshrined in Decree 37/2020 on housing measures to address situations of vulnerability[12], approved during the COVID-19 pandemic, **many landlords fear that eviction orders will not be executed for non-payment of rent. While measures have also been adopted to compensate property owners and landlords in these situations[13], disinformation leads to discrimination against vulnerable families, especially migrant families and families with children** (Spanish Red Cross, 2023). As a result, many of these families live in informally sublet rooms, **which not only prevents them from meeting the housing requirement for family reunification but often also the requirement for registered residence, which is essential in applying for regularisation through** *arraigo*.

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12.   Royal Decree-Law 37/2020 of 22 December on urgent measures to address situations of social and economic vulnerability in the areas of housing and transport. This Royal Decree-Law has been extended up to the present day by Royal Decree-Law 1/2024 of 14 May, extending measures for suspending evictions from the primary residence for the protection of vulnerable groups.

13.   See: https://mpt.gob.es/delegaciones_gobierno/delegaciones/castillaleon/actualidad/notas_de_prensa/notas/2023/12/2023-12-27_08.html

The enormous obstacles to family reunification lead to migrants deploying various strategies in order to regroup. One of these strategies is to bring each member over separately, based on opportunities and the most urgent needs. **Decision-making is not easy. Neither is it exempt from guilt (for choosing one member over another) or fear (for leaving others behind in difficult circumstances)**. One example of this is explained by Dolores, a woman from Honduras who decided in 2012 to migrate to enable her to bring over her son with a disability and her daughter, both minors at the time. While Dolores found work in Spain, it took many years to regularise her situation and save the money to reunite them, and it was not possible for her to bring both of them at the same time. Her economic and residential situation left her in the onerous position of having to decide who to bring first. Her son was now over the age of 18, but because of his disability, she could apply for formal reunification for a dependent family member. On the other hand, her daughter was 17 years old, leaving little time left to apply for formal reunification, since at 18 the law would not allow this. Finally, Dolores chose to bring her son, because of his care needs, which she felt guilty and worried that she was not able to provide. Shortly afterward, her daughter in Honduras became pregnant, compounding Dolores' feeling of guilt for not bringing her to Spain first. Alarmed, she quickly organised a formal application for reunification, but due to the delay in processing, her daughter turned 18 and it was refused. Dolores has since managed to bring her daughter and grandson here irregularly, and, as a consequence, neither has a residence permit.

> Over there, people with disabilities aren't important. It took me a long time to get the money to make the journey. I came first to get money together to bring my son, but it was very difficult. I had no work for four months, then I found work and started working by the hour and from there I started saving to be able to bring my children. First my son, because he was a dependant, and then I wanted to bring my daughter, who was 17. She got pregnant

over there, and I managed to bring her here last year, but she was already an adult so we couldn't regroup formally. Now she's here irregularly, but my son and I are regularised.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

5.2.3. Barriers to accessing housing

The difficulties in renting a home lead many migrant families to live in extremely precarious conditions, including in sublet rooms which house whole family units, or in flats shared with other unrelated people, other relatives or even other family units. Then there is also the rental of housing that is deficient or in unsafe conditions, especially for children, or squatting.

At the moment, I'm working so that my husband can do training. I told him, "It's your turn to study - I'll do the work and once you're sorted out, it'll be my turn". But it's such a difficult situation. Renting is a nightmare. We were lucky - they rented us a room through a person from the church and we paid him for the room. When we tried to look before, they asked us for everything - salary, contract - or asked us to pay a full year in advance to be able to rent. It was very hard. It's unreasonable, and as migrants there's no one who'll rent to you. You just can't manage to solve all these problems.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

I'm from Romania. I've got 6 children. They're with me. I came to Spain for work. First, I came alone - I had problems with my husband. Thanks to the Embassy I was able to bring my children. I can finally get into a flat that's almost a ruin, just to be with my children. I learned to speak good, proper Spanish. I'm 60 years old and it's very hard to find work. My children work collecting scrap metal with other Romanians. In the house where we live now there's lots of people and it's very bad - cracked walls, no water, no electricity.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

Often, habitability conditions also prevent family members applying for registration of residence in the Municipal Register. Although the regulations allow registration under special circumstances[14] such as those referred to above, there is disinformation spread about it, while some municipalities refuse to effect it. Registration of residence is the most important requirement for applying for regularisation through *arraigo* in Spain and for these families, it is not always accessible.

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14. Royal Decree 141/2024 of 6 February, amending the Regulations on the Population and Territorial Demarcation of Local Entities, introduces a relaxation of registration criteria, which affects the situation of homeless people and people living in sub-standard housing. The law regulates registration of residence without a fixed address.

Deficient housing and overcrowding even occurs in cases where migrants have employment contracts and hold Spanish nationality, because stereotypes and discrimination based on origin or ethnicity are powerful drivers of exclusion in the rental market.

> 'I've got my contract for €1200 and I've got Spanish nationality and when my mother and brother came I couldn't work any more because I had to take care of them. I had to clean and cook. We all lived in one room. So I went to see an apartment through an estate agent, who told me 100% that they were going to rent the flat to me. We just needed to sign and then the owner says it's not for rent any more. I had everything in order - Spanish nationality, my employment contract, everything - but she doesn't want to rent me the house because I'm from another country and she doesn't trust me.' (Almeria migrant families focus group)

All of the above can coalesce into a situation of extreme vulnerability and poverty for some families, who become disconnected from opportunities for integration and, consequently, marginalised. Migrants' encampments, both urban and rural, are proof of this. Multiple problems can be seen in these places, including deficient living conditions, energy poverty, poor nutrition, school failure, and physical and mental health problems. Red Cross staff have reported that there are families living in these encampments with children and teenagers, who are particularly affected by these living conditions. They also state that some families have been living in encampments for more than ten years, which is an indicator of the persistence and proliferation of social exclusion.

> 'We work in humanitarian care. We've got a reception centre and lately we've had many families of mother, father and children. A lot of them have problems with irregular situations because they either missed the deadlines for applying for international protection or were denied it. As a result, it's not just the parents but also underage children who remain socially excluded. What's the problem we see here? People leave the centre and no longer have a place to live or a place where they can cover their basic needs, so they end up moving to marginalised areas and stay there with a total lack of protection, because social services can't meet all the needs of the children or the family. And they don't have all the information they need once they've left the centre. So marginalised areas spring up, where there are multiple problems - school absenteeism, language barriers, and in cases where there's some type of income, it's always from the underground economy. Then there emerges a dynamic of socially reproduced marginalisation. There are families that may have spent 8, 9 or even 15 years in that situation, and their children grow up there and can't get out of there, because they have no training, and no access to basic services and benefits.' (Red Cross staff focus group)

5.2.4. Barriers to accessing training

Training and education improve job opportunities. Many migrants have intermediate-level or higher qualifications, but the processes for official recognition of qualifications are complex, expensive and long,

While, in general, the priority for the young Spanish population is education, in the case of young migrants or young people of migrant origin, the priority is to work to help the family economically.

which ultimately deskills them for work in Spain. As a consequence, some people, especially younger people, consider vocational training, but here again they encounter barriers. One obstacle is their administrative situation, because to access training leading to official certification, they must have a residence permit. The second obstacle is related to priorities. While training is generally a priority among the young Spanish population, for young migrants or young people of migrant origin, their priority is to work in order to help the family financially. This is what we have heard from Antonia (21 years old) and Nadia (25 years old), two young people of migrant origin, whose responsibilities include helping to pay the rent and send remittances to their countries of origin.

'So, I came here to Spain with my sister. Right now, we live in one room and it's hard for us to get our papers and study. The little bit I can do is to take courses, but it's like starting from zero, because to study they ask for your papers, and we also can't study because we have to pay for the room, so, first there's the issue of work. So, I think that the first ones to migrate - I think they pay a higher cost, because I, for instance, what I'd like to do is study and I can't. I want to do so many things, but I can't because my first need is to work and that limits me.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

'I've been here for 2 years. I'm from Venezuela. First I went to Argentina, where my father was, and I worked with him for 1 year and 8 months. Then my aunt gave me the opportunity to come here because in Argentina things were also getting bad. Here, when I arrived, I lived with a relative for 3 months and when I found work I became independent and I rented a room. I'd like to study to finish secondary school, but I can't now. I was living with my mother - my parents are separated - so I try to help my mother.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

The difficulties in obtaining official recognition of degrees or training negatively impact these young people's job opportunities and they are forced into precarious and insecure jobs in the face of economic crises. This issue poses challenges for their futures.

5.2.5. Barriers to accessing the labour market

The work done by the migrants who participated in the focus groups is usually temporary, poorly paid and/or in the underground economy. These are jobs which make it difficult to renew residence and work permits because to do so it is necessary to prove the following circumstances, which are mainly related to formal employment[15]:

- They have remained in the employment that gave rise to the granting of the permit whose renewal is sought.
- They have worked for a minimum of three months per year and are in one of the following situations:

  - they have entered into an employment contract with a new employer in accordance with the characteristics of their work permit and are paying social security contributions at the time of application;
  - they have a new contract that guarantees the requirements established in Article 64 and whose validity is dependent on the granting of the renewal;
  - the employment relationship that gave rise to the permit whose renewal is sought was interrupted for reasons beyond their control, and they have actively sought employment by registering as a jobseeker with the competent public employment service.
- They are receiving contributory unemployment benefit.

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15. See Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration: https://www.inclusion.gob.es/web/migraciones/w/renovacion-de-la-autorizacion-de-residencia-temporal-y-trabajo-por-cuenta-ajena.

- They are the beneficiary of public financial support aimed at their social or employment integration.
- Their employment has been terminated or suspended as a result of them being a victim of gender-based violence.
- They have been working and paying social security contributions for a minimum of nine months in a period of twelve, or eighteen months in a period of twenty-four, provided that:

    – their last employment relationship was interrupted for reasons beyond their control;
    – they have actively sought employment.

In the labour market, there is segmentation based on workers' origin, which relegates migrants to certain employment sectors and occupations that are at greater risk of job insecurity and labour exploitation.

" They take advantage a bit. When we first come, we can't hope to access many areas of work, only those that are structured for migrants. No work is bad, but we also have other hopes, we want to go further. I, for example, started by washing dishes, and it's an honest job and I spent a lot of time washing dishes, but I wanted more. I want to be a nurse and I think I'll be able to manage it, but it's going to be difficult.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

Some women also talk about their experiences of sexual harassment in these jobs.

" They exploit you three times over. As a woman and a Latina who comes here, they think you're cheap or things like that. That's how they see you and it makes it difficult.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

Furthermore, there is occupational segregation based on gender, through which migrant women are in demand for domestic work and caregiving, a number of specific agricultural jobs (such as picking certain products or packaging) and jobs in the hospitality industry (such as cooking), while migrant men are in demand for work in construction, livestock production, agriculture and industry. Since the 2008 economic crisis and especially since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the demand for caregiving and food-related work has been increasing, creating more opportunities for migrant women, although within a market that remains very insecure. Also, since the crisis of 2008, there has been an uptick in the number of men working in paid care. The marked rise in labour shedding in traditionally male sectors such as logistics, construction and industry has led many men (especially foreign nationals) to find jobs in the long-term care sector.

5.2.6. Difficulties in achieving work-life balance

Finding a job with a salary and being able to meet the needs of the family is the most common goal among the migrants who participated in the focus groups who have completed a migration process. The inability to achieve this goal produces enormous frustration and feelings of powerlessness, as well as insecurity, dejection and guilt, especially if there are children. Working, however, does not necessarily assuage any of these feelings, because in many cases migrants become poorly paid workers. In Spain, it is estimated that one third of people living in poverty have a job and this is a problem for migrant women in particular (EAPN, 2023). Migrant women also have to try to balance these precarious jobs with caring for their children and, as a result, they often have to seek part-time jobs.

'I'm from Romania. I arrived in Spain 3 years ago. I live with my partner and my son. During the first year, everything was fine until I became pregnant. We can't get a place to rent with a child, we can't find a job, I can't work, because I don't have a work permit. That's the first thing. The second thing is that when you've got a child it's hard to work. I'm in the middle of the *arraigo* procedure, but it takes such a long time - I've been waiting for 11 months.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

Maternity is a situation that considerably limits opportunities for work, particularly when it involves single-parent families and there are small children or children with disabilities. Some women in this situation are forced to leave their children alone for part of the day in order to work or look for a job, but they risk being called into question by both neighbours and the Social Services. This is what happened to Desiré, who was taking a healthcare training course when she received a call from social workers who had been alerted by her neighbours that her children had been left at home alone. Since then, Desiré has been afraid of being away from home, so now, paradoxically, she cannot find work to support them.

'I have a daughter who's ill. She was healthy when she came, but here they discovered the disease. I'd never heard the name of the disease before. She's already an adult, but I've got other small children. I have to look after them, but sometimes I have to leave them on their own, because I have to look for work, or go out to do things, like now when I've left them alone and I can't be out long because the neighbours call the police - these neighbours report me for not being at home and they can take them away from me for neglect. That fear's always there. It happened once - the social worker called saying that my children were on their own, while I was doing the course at the hospital, but thankfully the teacher called and explained everything.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

These situations reflect the lack of application of a gender approach in public policies for supporting families.

5.2.7.   Barriers to accessing specific services

Several of the participants in the focus groups have close family members, mainly sons or daughters, with some type of disability. Red Cross staff have stated that, in recent years, there has been an **increase in the number of migrant families seeking subsidiary protection for health reasons, including rare diseases or disabilities**. These often involve situations of extreme vulnerability, entailing permanent caregiving, which prevents caregivers from working outside the home and leads to poverty. Requesting an assessment of the degree of disability often involves difficult and lengthy procedures and does not always result in the disability being recognised, leaving families without access to specific resources. Persons with disabilities who are in an irregular administrative situation are directly excluded from such resources, unless they are minors (or under 21 years of age in certain cases). This is the case

Applying for a disability assessment often involves lengthy and cumbersome procedures and does not always result in recognition of disability, leaving families without access to specific resources.

with Haddou, a Moroccan mother with a 22-year-old son who is entirely dependent on her, and who until the age of 21 was in a specialist centre. Since Haddou's son does not have a residence permit, when he reached this age, he was required to pay 70% of the cost of the resource, which was impossible for Haddou and she had to remove him. This and her irregular administrative situation prevent her from finding productive work.

‘I'm Haddou and I've got a son and a daughter. My son has a disability, he's 22 years old. I live in a flat with my two children. I'm from Morocco. I've been in Spain for 4 years and I haven't got any papers, I've got no right to work, and my son needs a lot of things. The biggest problem I have is with my son. There's no recognition for him. He has to be at home all the time. He was in school before, but only until he was 21 - after 21 you have to pay 70 per cent. I'm looking for work, but I've got no papers.' (Almeria migrant families focus group)

The disability assessment is important in enabling access to specific resources and support, but there are difficulties in arranging an appointment with the assessment services, as the bureaucracy is complex and the procedures are lengthy. For vulnerable families who have children with disabilities, this creates barriers to accessing essential educational support, as well as work-life balance.

> It's been awful dealing with the people from the disability service, because they didn't want to give me any information. And they always ask me for this document. For instance, they ask me for it for school assistance, because otherwise it's me who has to pay for transport. The social worker told me that she was going to call to do the assessment for my son, but I keep waiting and it's still not sorted out.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

5.2.8. Situations of discrimination and exclusion

In addition to administrative and structural barriers, focus group participants **report acts of discrimination and racism in their everyday interactions**, for example, in their jobs and schools, as well as shops and other public services. The experience of these situations causes feelings of powerlessness, shame or even anger. **When repeated over time, they can cause a sense of not belonging, which impacts on social integration**. People allude to **racist phrases spoken on public transport, on the street, in shops, in the Offices for Aliens and Asylum, and in health centres**. Most refer either to migrants coming to Spain to **benefit from public resources or to their dangerousness or criminality**. Children and teenagers are particularly affected by racism and discrimination.

> Yesterday I was in a queue and they called us names. You hear them talking and they say that Gypsies and Africans do bad things. There are people who don't hide it and they say things about us. My children hear it on the bus, in the street.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

'I worked for three months caring for a sick grandmother and one day I was telling her that I was going to a lawyer, because of a problem with my Spanish boyfriend. I'd been in a situation of violence, and I told her that I'd asked for a legal aid lawyer and she said, "But how's it possible that you immigrants have a right to a free lawyer? It doesn't make sense that I have to pay for lawyers and you get them for free". In the end, there's a totally false image of migrants being created. They're saying that migrants are getting all the aid.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

'I notice this a bit - like the colonist and the colonised - they always have some little thing to tell you that makes it look like they think they're better than you. I'm Mexican and I'm always proud of it. Mexico is my life, but I love living in Spain. Of course, there are people here who are very friendly. But there's also a lot of people who think they're superior. We're *panchitas* [pejorative term for a South American]. They say it as a joke, but it's not a joke to me - it's not funny - in fact, I've had arguments with a lot of people.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

'Once I was at the Renfe train station listening to a video, and I didn't know not to have the volume on, so I lowered the volume and they jeered, "Get back to your black country". They see us as the worst of the worst. Immigration officers can also sometimes say very derogatory things: "Here comes another one asking for papers". They're very dismissive. I think that in these institutions they should make the people who work there get training, to train them to treat people better.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

Some people experience what is called racial profiling, i.e. **the practice of security forces disproportionately stopping people they consider ethnically different, based on the preconception that they might be committing a misdemeanour or crime**. Those who endure these kinds of police practices live in constant fear of being stopped and questioned in the street, and feel shame.

'I worked with a Peruvian who did removals, and one day we went to do a removal for a Spanish person. We finished all the work and this man wouldn't pay the Peruvian. He told him he wasn't going to give him anything and if he kept on about it, he'd report him for working without papers. And it happens to me a lot. The police stop me and ask me for documentation when I haven't done anything. They do it all the time, just to make you identify yourself. And then they try to search you, to see if you've got anything - something that's never happened to me in Peru. Here, you've done nothing - you're just walking along and they stop you, as if you were a criminal.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

This kind of hate speech instils fear and rejection among the population and needs to be quashed through greater effort in anti-racist public policies, as suggested by one of the participating experts.

Hate speech has profound and multifaceted repercussions, ranging from harm to victims' mental and physical health to the normalisation of intolerance and, consequently, incitement to systemic discrimination and violence. Hate speech contributes to societal polarisation and fragmentation by reinforcing negative prejudices and stereotypes, generating a sense of vulnerability among victims, and a social environment of mistrust and hostility[16]. As one of the experts invited to participate in the focus group explains, **hate speech is clearly related to the increased strengthening of border security, which, in turn, is linked to institutional violence on the part of some public servants, as well as the rise of the extreme right, which provides a platform where there is a certain level of impunity from racism**. In the view of this expert, the data from the latest surveys on the Spanish population's attitudes toward migrants are concerning, which suggests the need for greater effort by the State in its due diligence to eradicate racism and discrimination.

> Hate speech has profound and multifaceted repercussions, ranging from damage to the mental and physical health of victims to the normalisation of intolerance and, consequently, incitement to systematic discrimination and violence.

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16. Mahía Casado, R. and Medina Moral, E. (2022). Informe sobre la Integración de los Estudiantes Extranjeros en el Sistema Educativo Español. Ed. Observatorio Español del Racismo y la Xenofobia (OBERAXE)

5.3.   Family and social support networks

Support networks are a set of relationships that integrate a person into their social environment. The links between people make it possible to solve the material and emotional needs of groups of humans. When there is exchange of goods, information or care, social networks are formed. These networks are constantly changing and can grow or weaken in line with changes in the relationships between their members and over time. Networks exist, to a greater or lesser extent, in all contexts - family, community, school and work - and are fundamental to people's integration in each of them. **Migrants usually have family support networks at the start of their migration processes,**

Family networks are fundamental for people who migrate. In fact, they are their main source of motivation and economic and emotional support for migrating.

in their countries of origin; in the destination country, they have social networks formed by other migrants, generally of the same nationality, which gradually start to change depending on the areas that they are integrating into. In general, however, their support networks are fragile or limited. Social networks in the school are often restricted to the exchange of specific educational information, while those in the workplace are usually segregated by occupational sector; in this respect, these networks are more instrumental. The following sub-sections analyse migrant families' main support networks, based on their prioritisation by their members in the focus groups.

5.3.1.   Transnational family networks

In most cases, family networks are critical for people who migrate. They are, in fact, the main source of both motivation and economic and emotional support for migration. In many families, the decision about who migrates and who does not is determined by their opportunities, capacities and likelihood to succeed.

> In my case we're all really close. My mother's got lots of brothers who are in Bolivia and always tries to find a way to help them. She's always worried about them and is always sending them help. And even though we're a long way away, I learn from them, from what they've taught me.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

Migration is expected to provide a benefit, which may affect the whole family or just part of it. **Remittances play a crucial role in meeting the material and caregiving needs of the family that remains in the country of origin. Virtual contact or trips back to visit enable family members to maintain emotional support in both directions.** Yet this can place significant responsibility on the shoulders of those who migrate, who find themselves obliged to meet the material or emotional expectations created by the migration process. **The migration of family members gives rise to expectations which can become a burden, and this can negatively affect relationships, resulting in feelings of frustration, guilt or powerlessness.**

It breaks my heart because I'm at the limit - I can't help anyone in my family. I do feel bad because I know that my dad or a relative is ill and I can't send them anything for medicine or anything else. So, honestly, I'd rather not even speak on the phone. My voice breaks when I hear about their situation and can't do anything at all. And of course, since I don't say anything, they don't know, for instance, when I've been out of work, and my mum tells me, "Your sister's ill or I need to buy such and such medicine." Because I don't want to tell her anything, I have to find it anywhere I can. If I have to borrow, I borrow, and so I leave that gap, because I'm not going to say to my mum, "No, no, I can't send it." So, I try to send whatever I can, because my brothers and sisters live from day to day - they earn a pittance at work. So, I have to deal with it because I don't like to make my mum worry more. I keep my problems to myself.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

In some cases, these dynamics can result in a gradual weakening of communication with the family so as not to disappoint them.

'There's also 8 hours' difference between here and Mexico, and when I want to talk our schedules don't match. What with trying to make a living here, it means you're almost getting further away from the family and sometimes it's difficult to share these situations with them because we create worry, distress, and you keep everything to yourself. Maybe they think it's a lack of interest, or maybe they think we're doing well here and that's why we don't think about them anymore.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

In other cases, **family contact in a transnational context decreases due to time and distance**, causing feelings of loneliness.

'You drift apart. It's not that you lose interest in the family, but it's difficult to keep in touch. There's 8 hours' time difference with my country. When I want to talk to them, they're asleep. When they want to talk to me, I'm at work. So, we lose communication quite a bit and it's very difficult. In my case, practically my whole family is over there. Here, there's just my two children and my grandson, but my mum, my brothers, my dad, they're all there and there's very little communication because of the times.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

There are also many obstacles to travelling to the country of origin to visit family. The main barrier is irregular administrative status, which prevents people leaving Spain due to the risk of not being able to re-enter the country. Once this hurdle is overcome through the issue of a residence permit, there remains the financial hurdle. Long distance travel is very expensive and beyond the reach of some people, and the cost has only increased since the COVID-19 pandemic. This forces families to arrange visits for only some of their members, while others have to remain in Spain. In general, and in order to get the most from the trip, **people try to stay as long as they can in the country of origin, but this is dependent on work or unemployment benefits. If the person is receiving benefits, they are required to notify the Social Security in advance and may not be absent from the country for a period exceeding 30 days. All these issues constitute major obstacles to the ability to travel in an emergency, in the event of a serious illness or death of a family member. Difficulties with mourning processes add to feelings of guilt, sadness and frustration.**

Migration of family members gives rise to expectations on family members, which can become a burden and this negatively affects the relationship, leading to feelings of frustration, guilt or helplessness.

Another circumstance that prevents migrants from travelling with their families to visit other relatives in the country of origin is related to difficult divorces or gender-based violence. **Some mothers state that their former partners and children's fathers will not sign for permission to allow them out of Spain, as a way of continuing to inflict harm and exercise control over them**. These women feel 'imprisoned' in Spain without the ability to see their own mothers, fathers or siblings, or take their grandchildren to visit.

> My son can't leave Spain to go anywhere in the world, because he [the ex-husband] refuses to sign the documentation. I'd like it if these bureaucratic procedures made it easier for us - the mothers who are victims - so that they'd let our children go with us on a trip and wherever we go, so that we're not here like prisoners in one place. My family doesn't know my child and he doesn't know his relatives. He can't travel until he's 18 years old. And that depends on an administrative process, even though it's me who has sole custody. But if I go to the airport, they won't let me leave - I'm like a prisoner.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

Some people, especially older adults, would like to return to their countries of origin once they have finished their working lives in Spain and have retired or begun receiving a pension, but if they suffer from serious or degenerative diseases they have to remain in order to continue treatment. In this respect, they are faced with the dilemma of whether to live longer without their family networks, or live a shorter life in the company of their loved ones. Having children or grandchildren in Spain can assuage their sense of longing, but their children often experience difficulty in achieving work-life balance, so elderly parents are unable to quell their feelings of loneliness.

> My mother would surely like to go back, but she can't. She needs the doctors and the medicines here. She couldn't live over there, but she always gets very sad thinking about her country and her family. She made her life there and now she has to leave it all behind to be able to stay alive.' (Almeria migrant families focus group)

The idea of returning in old age is present even in many cases of people who have spent many years in Spain. They have reunited their sons and daughters, have seen their grandchildren grow up and are aware that everyone has their own family, but they feel lonely.

The idea of returning in old age is common even among people who have spent many years in Spain. They have reunited with their children, watched their grandchildren grow up and are aware that everyone has their family, but they feel lonely. When they think of returning, they imagine the family they left behind when they migrated years ago, but in many cases, those relatives are gone; they have lost fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers far away. **In these circumstances, they may decide not to return in order to avoid feeling like a stranger in the place which they left. Yet their life in Spain may also be marked by loneliness. The specific situation of older migrants has scarcely been taken into account in public policies and social care services.**

> We also see women who've got family members they've educated far away. They've worked hard, done all that work of keeping them in education and when they reach an age at which they can no longer work, they want to retire and return to their countries, but they see that they've got no place to return to. So, they stay here, but they're lonely too. So, I think the precariousness is permanent.' (Expert focus group)

Other people, in contrast, do not wish to have any relationship with their family in their country of origin. Either they have not felt supported in their migration process, or they may have experienced situations of violence in the family. Yet there are cases where they have a family member they want to help. This is what happened with Amal, from Morocco, who regrouped with her son and daughter in Spain, but has cut off relations with the rest of her family, except for a brother who has a mental disability. While Amal has organised the reunification process to allow her to look after her brother in Spain, she is currently finding it difficult to take care of him and work at the same time.

> There's nothing for me in my country any more. My family doesn't want contact and I sold everything to come here with my children. I don't want to go back. There's nothing there to go back for and what I want is to move forward and find a place where I can work and live in peace with my children and they can have the care they need. I've never been back since I came here. I have no contact with them any more - they treated me badly. My brother needs to go to a special school for his particular needs, his syndrome. He doesn't relate to people and I'm very sorry that he can't lead a normal life. My brother's stayed at home all the time he's been here in Spain, just sitting, without talking to anyone.' (Almeria migrant families focus group)

Family ties underpin our life in the world; they are the first social bond every person forms. They can be caring, educational, supportive, but they can also be ties of control, violence or neglect. **Migration decisions and processes are carved into these links, and migration pathways, as well as migration laws, signal the direction that migrant families will follow**. In some cases, links are strengthened as a result of migration, and the family becomes the main source of mutual support.

> 'I feel that here, we've grown a lot internally, as people. We've matured with migration. It's taught us a lot about empathy too, to help other people, because at times we've needed it. We are a close-knit family. My mum pays for the whole flat. Sometimes my brother-in-law, my brother or my stepfather pays, sometimes I pay for my room - we help each other.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

In other cases, mutual support is affected by the circumstances experienced during integration processes in the destination country. Migrating with other family members does not necessarily mean 'being at home'. Working hours and dynamics, housing difficulties, stress, among other aspects, can affect relationships of coexistence.

> 'Back there, we were really close. Here, everything is very different. My sister and I came here together, but we don't get on, we hardly see each other - we both work. In Peru we were closer. Here we live better, we've got work, we send money to our family, but we have no relationship. My sister and I were really close in my country - we had each other - but here it became different, we didn't even talk, because we argued. I feel a constant fear of losing that togetherness, that support.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

5.3.2. Support networks in Spain

Migrant families in Spain are constrained to the number of members who have migrated, which limits their opportunities for support through kinship. In addition, the need to support themselves requires that active members work or are constantly seeking employment. These circumstances affect the time they can spend on caregiving within the family and migrants are therefore forced to find new strategies to balance work and family life that, in many cases, cannot rely on the support of the extended family. It is at this point that social support networks become crucial. **Close friends of the same nationality, other migrants or Spanish people with whom cooperative ties can be established can help with caregiving and information on employment, social resources or integration into the education system, especially at the beginning of the settlement process**. The support they provide takes many forms: help with social integration; help with finding the psychological strength to face the challenges of migration; and help with accessing resources for citizenship. At the same time, however, they may often provide erroneous information about procedures, they may be more instrumental than supportive, or they may reinforce controlling cultural patterns. Although experiences are very diverse, one element that characterises most of these networks is that they are not predetermined; they must be knitted together little by little within the various contexts (community, school and work). In this respect, building a social support network is yet another task for migrant families, which often remains unaccomplished.

Family ties are the basis of being in the world, they are the first social bond of each person. They can be of care, education, support, but they can also be of control, violence or abandonment. Migratory decisions and processes are inscribed in these ties, and migratory trajectories, as well as migration laws, mark the paths that migrant families will follow.

'We help each other, though there are some migrants who make things difficult for you - they mislead you. In my case, I've got no connection with my family. I left everything behind. If I hadn't come, my son would have died, but my family couldn't understand why I'd leave my culture and my country. Here, there's a bit of everything - there are people who are very good people and help us, some of the neighbours. There are also other people who discriminate against us and abuse us. It's hard to live in another country and get people to respect you.' (Almeria migrant families focus group)

'When I came here, I met a lot of people from my country. There's envy, selfishness... I had a lot of problems and those people knew. I didn't need to pay for my son's enrolment, and this person knew where I had to go to ask for help and didn't tell me anything, even though she'd already gone through the whole process. She knew where they gave out the help and I spent months looking. And still, I helped her. They were practically living in my room and they never went short of food. Well, one of them did help me find work.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

Some people prefer not to establish support networks with other migrants, because they believe that it will not help them in their integration process, or because it might be counterproductive due to the control they can exercise with respect to traditional cultural patterns. This is the case with Marco, a young Venezuelan, who migrated to be able to freely express his sexuality, and does not want other people in his country to point him out and judge him.
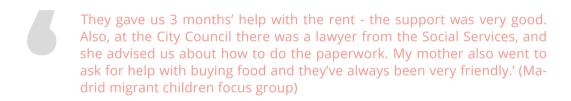
'My parents are religious, and I'm gay. For my parents that was a big blow. My mum said that I was going to give my dad a heart attack. They don't understand that I was looking for a family model that was different from theirs. That was a very tense moment. They wanted me to get out of the country and I migrated and that was great for me. I can't go back to Venezuela now. Here, I signed up as a Red Cross volunteer and I met my boyfriend, who's Spanish, and all my friends are Spanish.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

Social networks can help people deal with situations of social discrimination and racism, providing emotional support, information, resources and care, but they can also be a source of oppression. In the case of vulnerable families, their social networks are often weak and limited, which suggest we should consider the importance of social care resources.
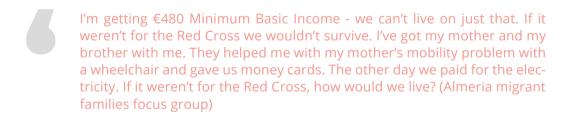
5.3.3. Support from social entities and institutions

When family and social networks are weak and vulnerable, social resources and institutions play a crucial role. The people participating in the focus groups make reference to institutional support, such as the aid provided by the regional Social Services, which has enabled them to pay their rent for a few months or to receive Minimum Basic Income.

'We went to the Social Services and they asked us for a bank account, so we had to open one. They gave us help with the rent for two months, but they didn't pay us but the landlord. And we also come to the Red Cross. We see the psychologist and we come to workshops.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

'They gave us 3 months' help with the rent - the support was very good. Also, at the City Council there was a lawyer from the Social Services, and she advised us about how to do the paperwork. My mother also went to ask for help with buying food and they've always been very friendly.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

The participants also talk about social organisations, such as the Red Cross, for which they have a deep appreciation. They refer to help with social emergencies, such as food or hygiene products and financial aid for the payment of household energy services, but also to employment guidance, training, legal services for foreign nationals and psychological support.

'I'm getting €480 Minimum Basic Income - we can't live on just that. If it weren't for the Red Cross we wouldn't survive. I've got my mother and my brother with me. They helped me with my mother's mobility problem with a wheelchair and gave us money cards. The other day we paid for the electricity. If it weren't for the Red Cross, how would we live? (Almeria migrant families focus group)

'Everyone's been incredibly helpful - the Red Cross, Caritas - they've given me nappies for the baby and food. While I've got a bit of work I don't like to ask, but it's just not enough.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

'I came to the Red Cross to take a course and they said yes and they took my details, and I asked about food and they said yes to that as well and said why hadn't I asked before.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

Nevertheless, some migrant families cannot access help because some or all of their members are in an irregular administrative situation. These families are entitled to social emergency assistance, especially if they have underage children, but they are not eligible for long-term benefits, such as Minimum Basic Income, rental assistance or certain healthcare or disability benefits managed by the public services. In some autonomous regions, there are public benefits or resources which can be accessed simply by providing a certificate of registration of residence, even for those in irregular administrative situations. At the same time, some people cannot even access the Municipal Register because they cannot prove their residential circumstances.

Some migrant families are not eligible for benefits because some or all of their members are undocumented. These families are entitled to emergency social assistance, especially if they have minor children, but are not eligible for long-term benefits.

'The social worker refused to give my daughter a wheelchair. They asked me for €200 for a wheelchair. I went to the social worker. I explained it clearly, but she told me that this was for people with papers and people who are registered and she said, "Unless you send me your registration I can't help you". Then, the health centre called the Red Cross and the next day they gave it to us.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

'I think that the Social Services act when there are children in the family, when families have needs for their children and ask for resources such as grants for nursery school, scholarships, free school meals, and so on. But of course, migrant families without residence permits don't have access to these resources. So, we need to have an impact at the political level, so that there is legislation that gives families real access to these Social Services resources.' (Expert focus group)

Experts participating in the focus groups refer to the Social Services' lack of economic and human resources, which makes the aid that they arrange for people more of a stopgap than a stepping stone to full social integration. In their view, it is a political issue and an economic structure which leaves people's needs behind, and this is especially true for those in vulnerable situations.

'My opinion is that there needs to be a sea change with the Social Services in support for migrant families. We know there's a lack of resources and social workers do what they can, but they're just applying band-aids - the structural situation isn't being resolved. But inaction leads to dehumanisation.' (Expert focus group)

'I understand that the Social Services have a lot of work, and social workers are overwhelmed and overworked, and that can affect how they operate. They need more staff, as is also the case with public healthcare. We mustn't stop demanding funding and more human resources.' (Expert focus group)

These experts are therefore calling for more financial resources for the social sector and for better coordination between social, educational, healthcare, employment, legal and social housing services.

> At our service, what we do most of all is work together with different services. The most fundamental is work with schools and healthcare services. There are health centres that offer workshops for mums, with topics related to parenting. We make referrals to family spaces, for mums or dads with babies aged from nought to three, who are still too young for school, where they can work on parenting skills. We also have a lot of contact, for instance, with drop-in centres. When children are a bit older and when they're teenagers, these are resources that help families understand this stage. We also work with mother and baby residential resources, with mothers who are in very vulnerable situations. Working jointly with city services is crucial, since together we can provide integrated support for families.' (Red Cross staff focus group)

Finally, participants in the focus groups are demanding compensation for the fiscal resources generated by migration's contribution to the country and its fair redistribution in society as a whole. This would help counter racist discourses that refer to migrant families' reliance on social and healthcare resources. The government must endeavour to exercise strong leadership with respect to the Social Service's current crisis situation, in order to consolidate the welfare state and, more specifically, all matters related to the full integration of the migrant population (Bracho and Miras, 2014).

The experts participating in the focus groups alluded to the lack of financial and human resources available to the Social Services, which means that the aid that is administered acts as a 'stopgap' rather than enabling full social integration.

5.4. Parenting challenges for migrant families

Migrant families face various challenges in Spain. We have already discussed the barriers to accessing administrative regularisation, decent employment and habitable housing, as well as the issues of discrimination and racism. All this affects the family environment. Residential overcrowding or coexistence with people outside the family or extended family, in cramped housing, can lead to tensions and conflicts, lack of privacy and a lack of space for children to study or just hold a quiet conversation. **Stress and anxiety about low incomes can lead to feelings of powerlessness, frustration, guilt and fear, which in turn can result in anger, arguments or evasion**.

Obviously, cultural patterns change a lot from one geographical region to another. It's not the same how children are raised here - the values that parents try to instil - as in the United States or countries in Africa. So, starting from that basis, parenting gets complicated when there's a lack of support networks, when working hours don't coincide, when there are demands from schools. With migrant families, we work on shared responsibility, especially when they're of African origin, from both West and Sub-Saharan Africa, we try to work on this idea. We encourage them to use before-school services and school canteens. Here in Almeria, migrant women often do agricultural work, where they know what time they start work but don't know what time they'll finish, because it depends on the circumstances of production. So, from that premise, it's very difficult to find a balance, especially when you don't have a support network that'll take care of picking up your child. Often, these support networks are created among themselves or in the neighbourhood. I think parenting's very difficult in these contexts.' (Red Cross staff focus group)

These circumstances are particularly difficult for migrants' children who, depending on their age or mental capacity, may or may not understand. Some react by externalising their frustration within their educational or social environment and have problems adapting.

My children are older, but they sometimes have a hard time when they see that we can't do what other people do, that life is hard for us, and that can make them argumentative and have problems even outside the home.' (Almeria migrant families focus group)

What their sons and daughters do outside the home is of great concern to parents. They fear that they will become involved with peer groups that will negatively impact their education. This fear is greater when migrant families live in unsafe neighbourhoods, where addictive substances are sold or crime is common.

> 'We've got work here, but it's very difficult for the family. There are problems in the neighbourhoods where we're able to live, not in others, but we can't pay any more rent. I'm frightened for my children and about crime and drugs. Sometimes we argue with the children, trying to help them so they don't end up in a bad situation. I even argue with my husband about money and work issues. My son can't move by himself and doesn't leave the house. He sometimes feels miserable and argues about me being the only one who takes care of him. My daughter helps me, but to be able to take care of my disabled son I need the kind of housing and conditions that we just don't have.' (Almeria migrant families focus group)

Some parents are also concerned about the behaviour of some of the boys or girls in their children's educational environment or in the neighbourhood, such as underage smoking or drinking, or girls wearing revealing clothing. They may compare this behaviour with what they have experienced in their countries of origin and find it shocking. They state that they do not wish their children to imitate it.

> 'I went by the school and saw 13-year-old children smoking. I couldn't believe my eyes! I got such a shock. In my country, children go out and play football - they're in their own world - but here I think they don't grow up. They think they're grown up when they're smoking or when girls wear very short skirts or makeup. In my country, at that age, they're still playing with dolls, but here they're already putting on lipstick. I don't want that for my daughters, it's shocking.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

To try to prevent their children imitating unwanted behaviours, some parents implement strict rules both inside and outside the home, which can have mixed reactions. Each child is different and the circumstances surrounding their conception, birth, upbringing or migration process influence their personal identities, even within the same family. To illustrate this, we can look at the example of Gisela, a Mexican mother, who has a son and daughter, both minors. Her son was reunited with her at the age of 9 and her daughter was born in Spain. Her son still considers himself Mexican. He misses his family and the food in Mexico, and has found it difficult to adapt to his new community and educational environment. His younger sister, however, is Spanish and identifies as such, and both he and his mother have seen her behaving in ways that are not typical of what they call 'Latino culture', such as the manner in which she addresses her teachers. The fear that her daughter is disrespectful at school prompts Gisela and her son to exercise greater control over her. Since the girl is fully integrated into her school's dynamics, this may lead to her experiencing a dilemma as a teenager; she may feel that the way she lives is called into question by her own family, yet if she follows patterns of behaviour more in line with what they expect from her, she may in turn feel called into question by her peers.

'My children don't go out late. They've got a group of friends, but they're home by 9. When they want to go somewhere, they ask me and say please and thank you. I know all their friends and we're not strict, but there's discipline and respect. For instance, we don't speak informally to teachers, we're always polite and formal. So, it's been a process, a cultural process. Now, my son doesn't speak formally but he's still got that respect. My son's uncomfortable with children's attitudes here and he's told me, "Mum, don't let my sister behave like this - she's only 6". So, he's helped me a lot when my daughter suddenly wanted to copy the behaviour here. He's told his sister himself that it's not right, because respect for parents, for adults, is important. So, my son has helped me a lot with these things, but it's been a drastic change. He misses his family and the food, because we Mexicans eat a lot of spicy food. They don't eat it here. I think that when there's a solid behavioural grounding, there's respect and we can be more empathetic and it can reduce racism.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

This cultural supervision can also be seen in other families, and its purpose is to preserve ways of being that ensure the survival of original traditions, but in a very diverse context.

'Here the children are ruder and more spoilt. My daughter's 17 and she's only ever raised her voice to me once. When we go out for a walk, she knows to always say hello. We've got a very good relationship with all the neighbours and we always wish them "Good morning". If someone drops something, she'll go and pick it up for them. I think everyone raises their children differently, because there are children who are well brought up who are Spanish or from different countries, but some are bad-mannered, though there are also some Latinos who are bad-mannered.' (Valencia migrant families focus group)

This sometimes entails a reinforcement of discipline, which can lead to unwanted effects when children reach adolescence. It can, for example, cause greater emotional and identity-related instability. Teenagers may reject the culture of their country of origin or, instead, the social patterns of the country in which they live. As one young woman expresses it: 'It's like I'm living there' permanently.

'My mum's really scared that we're going to end up on the road to promiscuity. They think that people here are very free sexually. In our country, it wasn't like that. So, when I go out partying she doesn't want to let me go. Or they think I'm going to hook up with some guy. She lives in constant fear - fear that she's even passed on to me. It's as if my country had come here. She's given me something like hypochondria, a knot here [points to part of her stomach]. They care a lot about the fact that I have to be a virgin. It matters there.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

The experts add that there are underlying explanatory factors in these family dynamics and parenting practices. They suggest that migrant parents are often unaware of the effects they have on their sons and daughters, and even of the racism they may be experiencing in educational or community contexts.

> What I don't like and the things that go too far are the racist jokes. It's one thing to make a joke - everybody enjoys a laugh - but there are some things that you just can't take. One of my classmates is African, and we might be in a lesson - philosophy, say - and they show us a documentary and a monkey appears and they say, "Look, there you are". It's the same with "*panchitas*" [pejorative term for a South American]. It doesn't offend me because I'm proud to be Latino, I've got roots and I'm very proud. I don't have to justify myself or anything, but they say it to offend. I don't get into it, because if I did, I could also say things about history that they're not going to like, but it's not about that. So, the upbringing you get at home is important and it doesn't matter where you are - there needs to be respect.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

In many cases, the parents are extremely concerned about the survival of the family unit, and when they observe that their children are adapting to their environments, they feel a loss of control. Moreover, in many cases, these parents have the task of raising their children alone, without the support or advice of their relatives (especially grandparents) to help them with work-life balance and parenting, and this result in their clinging to what they consider were their own experiences of upbringing when they were children themselves. Yet these patterns or beliefs about upbringing may have changed over time, and may not now be the same in their countries of origin.

> Sometimes parents don't realise how much racism their sons or daughters endure in school. They work long hours, work hard in the home, they've got heavy workloads, they're trying to solve very difficult problems, such as housing or work... And they often don't realise that school is a battlefield.' (Expert focus group)

'Adolescence is the stage when you suffer the most or when you're most aware of rejection. And migrant teens feel rejected by their peer group when they can't spend the same amount of money or when they can't do a particular activity. And they also feel rejected by their own family, because in the end their values are from both here and there - they might fall in love, might see themselves with someone who's not what their parents expect. And then there's another very important issue, and it's that when migrant women have a baby they don't have anyone to help. They don't have their mother or their aunt to teach them parenting skills and when their children reach adolescence, they don't have the skills to cope with this situation - they're on their own.' (Red Cross staff focus group)

It is also important to ensure that children, adolescents and young people who are migrants or have a migrant background are involved in family decisions, especially when they are directly affected. Consequently, it is essential to create a space for communication and dialogue within the family. Another proposal made by the experts is **engagement in educational and community contexts to raise awareness about issues related to the migration process and the integration of migrant children.**

'The problem is that, being teenagers, they often don't know how to express themselves, especially with their family. They don't talk about their discomfort, their worries, their fears and this all becomes very heavy baggage, both for them and for their parents, because in the end it gets thrown back at the family and the host society in general. These tensions within the family need to be averted before they have a chance to appear. It's also essential to work on communication between parents and children before they're reunited, trying to ensure that the children are involved in the process. On the other hand, we also need to work here on school environments to make them more welcoming, intercultural, with a special focus on mid-year arrivals. Imagine what happens when they come to autonomous regions with other official languages.' (Red Cross staff focus group)

It is also important to encourage the establishment of spaces exclusively for the children of migrants. Teenagers are generally more reserved about their emotions and experiences, because they often do not understand what they are experiencing and feel that their families do not understand them either. Experts point out that space for self-expression among their peers enables them to express what they feel and what makes them uncomfortable. This allows them to be understood and can help them obtain support that is better adapted to their specific needs.

'We talk to the kids. It's not easy, they don't talk much, but when they trust you they tell you things. Many of them feel angry and powerless. They tell you, "They called my mother a 'f***ing immigrant' and said 'go back to your country' and I got into a fight and we started hitting each other". I believe that we need to address these situations - we need to understand. I also think that most authorities don't want to uncover the reality of it, because racism is like a stain and it's all about covering it up.' (Expert focus group)

It is averred that issues related to family communication, parenting and upbringing are overlooked and this is, in part, related to the model of care practised by social services and social resources, whereby families are expected to ask for help, whereas in reality, it is a matter of reaching out to them in their own spaces of interaction, such as schools, neighbourhoods and homes. People working in these areas state the importance of understanding what is happening inside some households, where there are migrant women suffering gender-based violence together with their children. There are also families whose cultural dynamics and practices are unknown, because they are not users of the Social Services, but with whom intercultural actions could be carried out, and this includes families of Chinese origin.

'We assist women who've been reunited with their husbands and who don't work outside the home. This mainly involves women who don't speak the language and who are financially dependent on their husbands, and also to be able to renew their residence permits. We've found situations of violence, but if you don't go to their homes and visit them you can't detect them. This is why I think that assistance in these cases is really necessary, but we can't wait for them to ask for resources – we need to go to their homes. This is also true for African women. We don't know what's going on with Chinese families. We have some contact, but we need to strengthen it. Here the women do work - they work in the shops or the bars that belong to their family. And we also see that Chinese families have their children in their workplaces - they watch over them in these places and they use technology more. We Latin Americans, on the other hand, use it more for chatting. Our children are online while they're eating and there's not much communication. I think we need to regulate this issue of children's mobile phones - we need to pay more attention to what's happening inside homes.' (Expert focus group)

The aim here is to encourage migrant families to create a sense of social belonging in the environments in which they live, through a dialogue between the patterns and beliefs that they bring from their countries of origin and the patterns and beliefs that they find in their destination country. Having a secure place to live is the first step, which helps bring stability to the process of raising children.

'Parenting remains a secondary issue for families. The main focus is the migration project, finding work, administrative issues, with all of its well-known problems. So, dedicating time and space to parenting is difficult. But it's also a turning point for families, because they've migrated precisely because they want to improve their children's upbringing, to improve the well-being of later generations, and here at this point is just where they find that there's a breakdown. So this is one of the challenges - to provide support for parenting processes in a different social and cultural context, in a context in which they are time poor. Our project is about this - enabling mothers, and also fathers, if possible, to get involved in associative spaces, for instance, PTAs, which are places where they can make themselves known, where they can contribute. It's about constructing a sense of belonging - belonging to the neighbourhood, the community, the school - because if the family sets down roots, they also generate a sense of belonging in their children. The problem is that many families experience permanent uprooting and this affects the children. Some families have to change neighbourhoods or cities several times before they find a habitable home or a better job. So, this is an issue to work on - families generating a sense of belonging.' (Expert focus group)

'For integration to happen, especially for children, it's essential that they feel integrated into their environment, their peer group, that they're accepted and seen as another member. This requires social awareness, work in schools on the issue of diversity.' (Red Cross staff focus group)

Despite all of the above, migrant children deploy various integration strategies, seeking to incorporate the patterns of their origins with the cultural patterns of their destination, and in this process they expand their worldviews, creating transnational spaces of linkage.

'When I'm with my family or friends from Venezuela, I feel more Venezuelan than an *arepa* [traditional South American maize flatbread], I'm from my country. But when I'm here, I mean, when I'm with people from here, not so much. For me, one of the things that's been hardest to incorporate, for instance, is music. When I've shared a car and had to listen to music it's been difficult for me. I've learned Melendi's [Spanish singer-songwriter] songs, for example, but it's so difficult. Music's something you feel - you experience it intensely, passionately.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

5.5.   Children's experiences

First-person statements from the focus group conducted with young people of migrant origin have been one of the most relevant findings of this research. The way in which they relate cultural clashes and expectations with family members and peer groups have revealed the great capacity for resilience and adaptability with which they construct their identity processes.

The sons and daughters of migrant households and children of migrant origin have plenty to say. The focus groups involving young people attest to their feelings of **shock on arrival in Spain as part of a family reunification process - a shock that those born in the country do not experience**. The challenges they face include adaptation to a new education system; their families' precarious economic conditions, which impact on their access to education; and the differences they perceive between their social position and that of other young people of the same age. Some of these children are forced to enter the labour market at an early age in order to help their parents or to pay for the cost of their education. This limits their leisure and free time, which usually comes at a high cost.

I feel a lot of frustration because I look at the friends I've got here in Spain and they, of course, were born here, they've got roots. I had roots in my country and I had to start all over again. We're the same age, but the roads we've travelled aren't the same. Besides that, it also makes me very frustrated that I have to work while they get to study. I'm a waiter. I sometimes do 18 hours of work and they're studying, going off for the summer with their friends. That makes me so frustrated.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

I came here when I was 9, and I'd never done a multiple choice exam. Here almost all exams are multiple choice, with some essay questions. Also, the teachers here have a much more creative methodology, much more inspiring, much more participatory. We don't have that. Later on, it's difficult to get into university. My parents made a huge effort to be able to pay for private intermediate-level education, because there was no possibility of applying for a scholarship in the first year. Now it's difficult for me to get into university for the same reason - I don't have access to a scholarship. I need to get a job to be able to pay for university, to continue with higher education.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

Working and studying is a major challenge for these children. On the one hand, they want to meet their parents' expectations with respect to their educational and employment opportunities. On the other hand, they are aware of the difficulties in trying to combine working and studying. This is one of the reasons why there are lower percentages of these children accessing non-compulsory education, such as baccalaureate and university. According to the Informe sobre la Integración de los Estudiantes Extranjeros en el Sistema Educativo

Español [*Report on the Integration of Foreign Students in the Spanish Education System*] (Mahía y Medina, 2022), only 6% of migrants study for a baccalaureate, despite the fact that they account for 9% of their corresponding age group. This should be interpreted as an indicator of a failure to integrate migrant students into the higher education system. Furthermore, although many would like to continue their studies, this group does not tend to complete their education at a more advanced level, which demonstrates the existence of significant barriers in this area.

' Here, we need to work much harder, we have to try three times as hard, because it's much more difficult when you come here - you're also new and the goals you had in your country are completely different and you have to make new ones here. I look at my classmates at university and they only have to study. Instead, I have to dash out of university to get to my job, to be able to support my family and pay for university. So it's like sometimes I can't spend enough time on my studies because I have to work to pay for them. It's like you're caught up in a circle.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

' I was studying communication studies, journalism in Peru. I had one year left, but because of the risk to my life we had to come and I think... well, I don't know if it'll be the best way, I don't know, but we're here now. I'd like to carry on studying - I think it's the best route I can take, but I came here with just my mum and my brothers. I'm the oldest, but I have to work to help them, because I'm not going to leave that burden just to my mum. So, for the moment, I won't be able to study. I'll have to wait. I'm trying to find a secure job, because I've only got casual work at the moment and that's what there is right now.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

' I'm not saying that it's bad being a waiter, but I don't want that to be all I can do. My dreams are to be something else. There have to be more possibilities.' (Madrid migrant children focus group)

Barriers to accessing higher education stem not only from the fact that many young people have to work; **they also derive from administrative situations. Without a residence permit**, they are excluded from access to non-formal education, as well as the financial support for training from which many Spanish families benefit and without which they cannot afford the cost of higher education. Despite this, **some migrant families struggle hard to pay for private higher education. Unfortunately, in many cases, these studies are not completed either because they cannot continue to pay** or because the children are working to contribute to the cost and do not have enough time to meet the academic expectations.

06
FINAL
CONSIDERATIONS

Families play a fundamental role in migration decisions and processes. People migrate to seek opportunities for themselves and other family members, or to safeguard their integrity or lives. They may even migrate to distance themselves from family. Viewed from this perspective, a significant proportion of migrations are family migrations. When family members are separated, ties generally persist and a complex transnational network is formed from the flow of care, goods and information. **Family reunifications and the return of family members strengthen ties and lead to changes in roles, responsibilities and duties. Migration and integration processes in destination countries pose major challenges for families, who are affected by legislation on foreign nationals, labour segregation, discrimination in access to housing and educational barriers. All of this impacts the composition, dynamics and well-being of these families, as well as their parenting practices.**

The laws on foreign nationals - often based on national demand for employment - impose restrictions on family migration, with the aim of preventing permanent settlement by migrant workers. In Spain, **the Aliens Act enshrines migrants' rights to family life but establishes conditions that make it difficult to reunite family members, such as the need to prove sufficient income and adequate housing**. These conditions, coupled with the difficulty of obtaining and renewing residence and work permits, mean that many migrant families have to live separately for long periods, causing them to endure emotional tensions, sacrifices and a weakening of family communication. Migration laws also limit circular migration, forcing migrants to remain in Spain so as not to

lose their residence permits, thus preventing them from returning to their countries of origin for enough time to reinforce family ties.

The complexity of administrative processes and the barriers to family reunification mean that many migrants choose alternative strategies, such as regrouping their families one member at a time and outside official channels - strategies which cause stress, guilt and greater vulnerability. Alongside their precarious living conditions in Spain, this often directly impacts the upbringing of their children. Analysing the experiences of the participants in this study has allowed us to identify the following difficulties and challenges that these families experience in relation to parenting:

While there are public policies and regulations that protect families in Spain, they do not address the specific needs of transnational families, nor do they take into account the diversity of forms that transnational families take.

- Difficulties in balancing work or active jobseeking with the care and education of children, due to weak social networks and lack of family support.
- Processes of adaptation to the Spanish educational system among reunited children, and experiences of discrimination and racism.

- Economic difficulties and their impact on children's access to the education system, particularly non-formal and higher education.
- The need for children to enter the labour market at an early age, which affects their expectations of secondary or higher education.
- The cultural clash between parents' patterns or worldviews and those of their places of settlement. Children, especially during their teens, perceive marked cultural differences between paternal/maternal mandates and what is expected of them from their peer group, which leads to identity-related tensions. As a result, migrant parents often try to exercise greater control over their behaviour, which can lead to family conflicts.
- Children's construction of a sense of belonging can be affected by identity conflicts.
- The lack of social awareness about the challenges faced by migrant families means that their specific needs are overlooked in social and educational intervention processes.
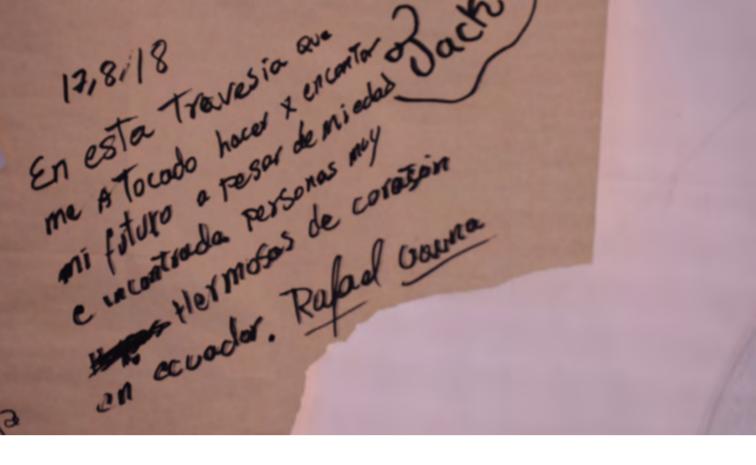
Although there are public policies and regulations that protect families in Spain, they do not address the specific needs of trans-national families, nor do they cover the diversity of forms that families may take. Family diversity in the context of migration derives not only from cultural patterns but also from the provisions of the Aliens Act and from contextual structural factors (economic, political or labour-related), which determine who can and who cannot migrate, as well as their living conditions, which in many cases are precarious. Structural problems require comprehensive solutions.

07
RECOMENDACIONES

B ased on the above, we can formulate a series of recommendations to promote the well-being of migrant families and their children. These recommendations are presented according to the context in which they should be implemented.

Recommendations for public policies and legislation:

- Ease the requirements for family reunification and streamline the administrative procedures for obtaining and renewing residence permits.
- Facilitate circular migration to enable migrants to return to their countries of origin for longer periods without losing their residence permits.
- Consider offering tax relief for children residing in the country of origin.
- Expand the categorisations of families to include de facto single-parent families, families formed by grandmothers and grandchildren, and older siblings with younger siblings.
- Address the specific needs of transnational families in the Families Act, including measures that promote equal opportunities for children and young people who are migrants or of migrant origin.

Housing:

- Eradicate discrimination in the rental market and guarantee access to decent housing for migrant families, especially those in vulnerable situations.
- Facilitate registration of residence in cases of informal subletting to enable migrant families to access Social Services and apply for regularisation through *arraigo*.

Employment:

- Promote integration into the labour market which allows migrants with caregiving responsibilities to balance work and family life, eradicate occupational segregation and guarantee decent wages.
- Facilitate the official recognition of qualifications obtained in migrants' countries of origin to enable them to practice their professions in Spain.
- Offer training schemes for young migrants which are adapted to the needs of the Spanish labour market.

Work-life balance:

- Expand childcare services to facilitate work-life balance for migrants with children.
- Promote shared responsibility for childcare within the home.

- Provide special assistance to families in which there are members with disabilities, ensuring they receive accurate diagnoses and assessments and guaranteeing their access to resources and services tailored to their needs.

Social support:

- Strengthen the regional Social Services, equipping them with more economic and human resources.
- Improve coordination between the different services providing care for migrant families (social, educational, healthcare, legal services, etc.).
- Promote access to information on the resources and services available to migrant families, in different languages.
- Implement social interventions in neighbourhoods, schools and homes, especially in areas where there is greater social vulnerability.

Discrimination and racism:

- Strengthen anti-racist public policies and promote awareness of family diversity in Spanish society.
- Eradicate hate speech toward migrants on social networks.
- Train public officials to provide respectful, intercultural care to migrants in all public administration services.

Parenting and education:

- Provide specific support for migrant families in raising and educating their children, taking into account cultural differences and the challenges of adapting to a new context.
- Promote spaces for intercultural dialogue where migrant families can share their experiences and address their parenting challenges.
- Promote empathetic parenting and dialogue about the needs of children who are involved in migration processes.
- Create spaces for self-expression among the children of migrants, where they can share their emotions and experiences with their peers.
- Incorporate an intercultural approach into the education system, endorsing the inclusion of migrant students and the appreciation of cultural diversity.
- Support migrant families in their construction of a sense of belonging in the community.

In conclusion, we propose a comprehensive approach to improving support for migrant families in Spain, ranging from the relaxation of migration laws to the promotion of social integration and interculturality. The aim is to guarantee migrants' right to family life, to promote their well-being and that of their sons and daughters.

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