

# Health and Quality of Life of Transnational Families in Switzerland

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Abstracts for EPC Conference (24-26th June 2020)

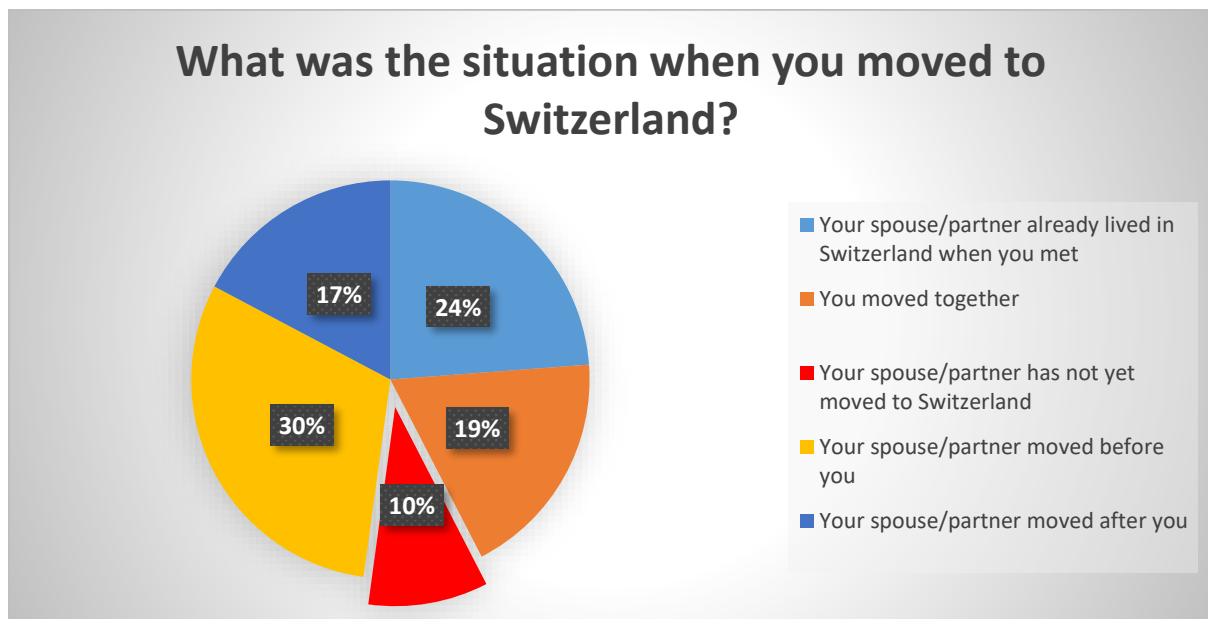
## Short Abstract

New ways of living have emerged with globalization, increasing mobility and the development of new ways of communication. In line with these societal changes, transnational families whose members are dispersed across national boundaries are currently challenging the nation-state paradigm. This paper provides an added value to the (limited) quantitative research that already exists on transnational families by using two new Swiss surveys on migration and mobilities that take into account the multiplicity of transnational ties among different types of families (e.g. long-distance partners, transnational retirees, flying grannies and transnational parents). On the one hand, the paper aims at understanding the determinants of those family configurations in Switzerland, a country with historically high migration rates. On the other hand, it analyses the consequences of these voluntary or involuntary living arrangements on the (mental) health and the quality of life of different family members. Several age groups are studied to encompass the plurality of phases of the life course of individuals, from early adulthood until late retirement age. Preliminary results suggest that a gender dimension exists both in the reasons for these family arrangements and in the consequences on the health and quality of life of different transnational families' members. Results are explained in line with migration experiences, mobility intentions, and family expectations of men and women at different stages of their life-cycle.

## Extended Abstract

### Introduction

According to the Swiss Federal Office (SFSO), in 2017, 73% of immigrants had at least one close family member who did not live in Switzerland. This share amounts 3.3% for those who have a partner abroad, 2.6% for those who have children (less than 18 years old). However, it is mainly composed by those who have at least one parent who does not live in the same country (66%)<sup>1</sup>. According to the Migration-Mobility Survey (2018), 10% of immigrants who *recently arrived* in Switzerland (in the last 10 years before the survey) experience a long distance relationship with their partner. This share rises to 17% for immigrants aged between 55 and 64 years old. In addition, more than 1 out of 10 recently arrived parents has at least one child abroad.



Migration-Mobility Survey (MMS) 2016/2018, 11,670 individuals.

This transnational living arrangement can be a free choice of individuals, but it can also be a forced decision imposed by the legal framework of nation states. In Switzerland, residency status as well as the access to a permit for migrants depend on several individual characteristics (EU or non-EU nationality, reason for migration, level of education, economic independence (income or rents) and professional activity). Among migrant families, the access to a permit might therefore condition the choice of some family members with respect to their living environment. Moreover, diversified access to social benefits and services (e.g. availability of childcare and its price, family allowances, health insurance and the portability of pensions) might also influence the decision to live in a different country.

The emphasis of this article will be on the relationship between intersectionality<sup>2</sup> and transnationality and on their impact on mental health and quality of life. As (Fresnoza-Flot & Shinozaki, 2017) underline,

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/fr/home/statistiques/population/migration-integration/transnationalisme.html>, consulted on October, 24th 2019

<sup>2</sup> "Intersectional approaches arose from feminist scholarship, which recognized that there were important differences among women and men rather than simply between them. Feminist scholars argued that gender, race and class are interconnected as "intersecting oppressions". (Castiello-Jones, Misra, & McCurley, 2008, p. 1). The migration status could be added to the intersecting oppressions.

it is fundamental to illustrate the intersection between categories of gender, social class, and generation in the transnational process. Indeed, several studies proved the importance of social class and gender in the transnational field of migration (Thai 2014; Kilkey & Palenga-Möllenbeck 2016). Gender is often related to care responsibilities and to dominance relationships among family members. In many societies, women are usually those who take care of the frailest family members (e.g. children, the sick and the elderly) and who move to fulfil their care responsibilities (Plaza 2000; Fresnoza-Flot 2009; Bocker & Gehring 2015). Over the life-course, family responsibilities and social roles can therefore shape divergent patterns of migration and mobility not only among active couples, but also among retirees (Baldassar 2007; Wilding & Baldassar 2009). Beyond gender, class and generations, the welfare state and institutional arrangements are certainly other important components that should be taken into account when analyzing transnational living arrangements (Kilkey, Lutz & Palenga-Möllenbeck 2010; Kilkey & Merla 2014). Although all these factors are broadly known to have an impact on the social isolation, mental health and life satisfaction of migrants (Hill et al. 2012; Barrett & Mosca 2013; Baykara-Krumme & Platt 2018), less is known about the impact of these factors on different family members that live in transnational family arrangements.

### Data and Methods

Two recent surveys contain variables that allow identifying if the partner, the (grand-)children or other family members live in another country: the Migration-Mobility Survey (MMS) and the Transnational Ageing Survey: Post-Retirement Mobilities, Transnational Lifestyles and Care Configurations (TA). The MMS focuses on recently arrived migrants in Switzerland between 18 and 64 years old. This survey has already been conducted in two waves (2016 and 2018). Only ties within the nuclear family are included in these two waves of the Migration-Mobility Survey (MMS). A third wave of the MMS is however planned for 2020. This new wave will allow for a panel analysis and for the introduction of more detailed questions about transnational families. The TA survey is complementary to the MMS as it focuses on people close to retirement age or already retired including also Swiss natives. This survey has been tailored to depict the complexity of transnational families, their movements and care relations. The TA survey is a new survey for Switzerland, and it will be completed in 2020.

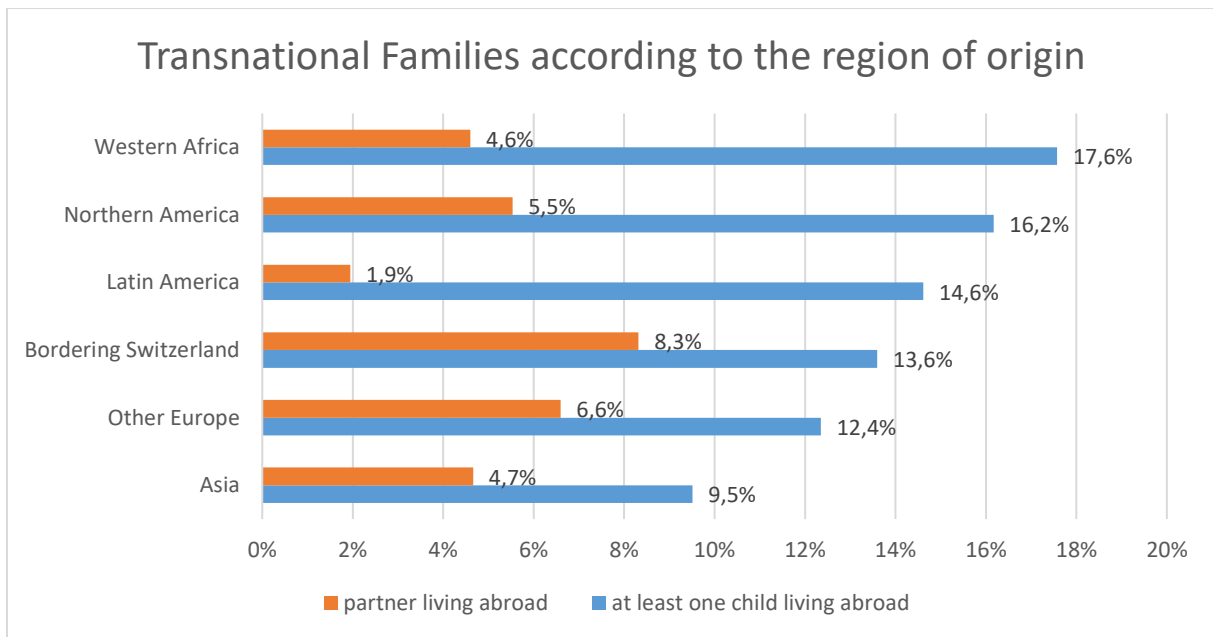
Apart from the classical socio-demographic variables, numerous indicators are available in these two surveys to measure past, present and future mobility and migration (e.g. reason for migration, mobility before arriving in Switzerland, nationality and country of birth, intentions to migrate or to engage in a transnational lifestyle) and family relations (frequency of contact with family members -not only the nuclear family-, emotional support, geographical dispersion of the family network).

Numerous questions about mental health, subjective well-being, quality of life and social support are also included in these surveys.

The analysis is based on multivariate regression models that employ the wealth of information provided by the MMS and the TA surveys.

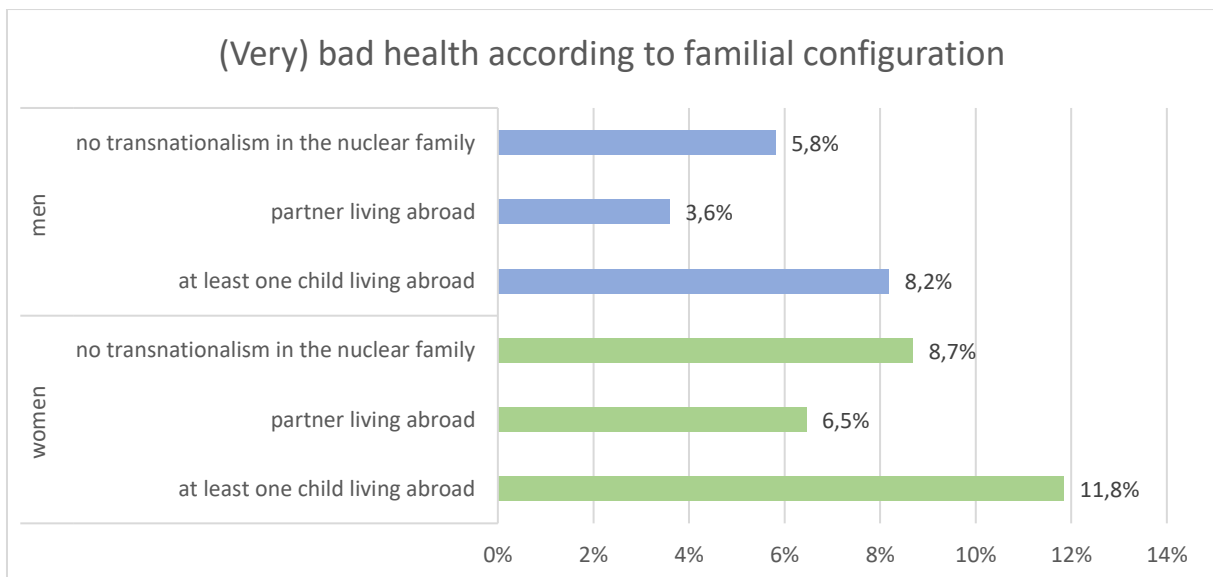
### Preliminary results

Preliminary results about the nuclear family surveyed in the last wave of the MMS indicate that the region of origin of recently arrived migrants is associated to the physical separation of immigrant families in Switzerland. Bivariate results allow us to see that the largest share of recently arrived immigrants who have at least one child abroad are from Western Africa and North America. The share of partners living abroad is higher among recently arrived immigrants from neighboring countries or other European countries (see next figure).



Migration-Mobility Survey (MMS) 2018, 7,417 individuals.

Moreover, having at least a child abroad is associated with having a (very) bad health status. This share is higher among women than men (see next figure). It is interesting to notice that very (bad) health is less present among those having a partner living abroad than among those with no transnationalism in the nuclear family and again men seem to suffer less than women. Multivariate analyses will allow to understand this relationship controlling for age, social class and migration patterns. In addition, the complementarity of the age groups surveyed by the MMS and the TA survey will provide a more complete picture of the different family arrangements that transnational families take in their life course.



Migration-Mobility Survey (MMS) 2018, 7,723 individuals.

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