

## **Individual versus family migration. Does this dichotomous classification correspond to the experiences of international migrants?**

Early migration literature was characterized by a focus on the economic factors shaping migration flows and a vision of the migrant as an actor pursuing individual objectives. Recent developments in the field have pointed in another interesting direction for understanding the dynamics of international migration: the family. Its' role and impact are visible in the different stages of the migration process: acting as the decision-making unit prior to migration, contributing to the organization of the move, providing access to family based migrant networks, facilitating the acquisition of a legal status in the destination country, etc. Despite the multiple ways in which the family is implicated in the migration process, only one indicator is cited most of the time to illustrate the importance of "family migration" in general: the number/proportion of legal admissions for family-related reasons. Although the absence of a universal definition of what is a family migration makes international comparisons problematic, we know that as of today family related migration accounts for more than one half of all permanent flows in countries with such different migration histories as the United States, France and Portugal (respectively 70,3%, 59% and 62,1%; OECD 2008).

Most analyses focusing on family migration distinguish several situations: family reunification in which a foreign resident is joined by the spouse and children; family formation in which a national citizen or legal resident marries a person residing abroad and is joined by him/her; accompanying family members travelling with highly qualified workers. This typology has the advantages of being identifiable – the sub-groups are clearly defined in existing immigration policies – and quantifiable – information on the number of migrant inflows is most often based on administrative data that uses these definitions. However this typology also has its shortcomings. Firstly, it only takes into account one aspect of the migration project, namely the official reason of admission into the receiving country. Secondly, it focuses on the nuclear family and ignores the role of other relatives in the migration project since in most cases legal entry is only granted to persons related to the sponsor by links based on filiation and marriage.<sup>1</sup>

Although the legal dimension is important in understanding family migration dynamics today, it is far from being sufficient. A migration can be classified as family-related or, on the

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<sup>1</sup> The United States is a notable exception, as there exists a special migrant category for siblings.

contrary, as individual using other factors: who made the decision to migrate, with whom did the move take place, were there family members already residing in the destination country and thus forming a family network prior to the arrival of the migrant, was family mentioned as a reason to move by the migrant him/herself, etc. The inclusion of these different dimensions makes it apparent that a person can appear as a migrant acting individually in one domain, but within a family for another one which makes the classification individual / family migrant more complex. The adoption of this broader perspective makes it apparent that, in the case of family-related migration, the family does not limit itself to the spouse and children, but includes other family members as well. This observation is also more coherent with the existing literature, which has accentuated the important place of siblings, uncles and aunts and other relatives in the migration process.

In this paper we analyse the relevancy of the typology mentioned earlier for classifying family migrants and propose a new classification of family migrants based on the extent to which their migration project can be linked with their family one. Firstly, we examine whether the existing legal categories correspond to differences in the migrants' trajectories and their present day situations: Are the sex and age distributions, migration and family histories, types of family ties linking them to the persons acting as their sponsors in these sub-groups significantly different? Secondly, we observe if there are other family members, not acting as official sponsors, but nevertheless participating in the migration process of the individual: parents arranging the marriage leading to the migration of the new spouse, siblings already residing in the destination country and potentially providing help to the newly arrived migrant, etc.? Thirdly, we compare the group of family migrants to other groups of migrants in order to see if the way and extent to which the family is involved in the respective migration projects are significantly different. We analyse a series of indicators – who's decision it was to migrate, with whom did the move take place, presence in the destination country or cohabitation with other family members, etc. – in order to see if the appellation of the legal group of family migrants as such is confirmed in other domains or if they show similar levels as other groups.

The analysis is conducted on data collected within the Survey on the Careers and Profiles of Newly Arrived or Regularized Migrants (also known as the New Migrants survey) in France in 2006. The sample population was defined by several administrative criteria: respondents had to have arrived / been regularized within a permanent migration category. Two large migrant populations – students and workers – were thus excluded from the survey as up until

recently they were classified as temporary migrants (in the year 2006 they represented respectively 19% and 10% of the total number of inflows). The final sample size was 6280 and the majority of respondents were persons admitted for family related reasons; other large groups were refugees and persons regularized after having resided for a minimum 10 years in France. One of the main advantages of this survey is that it allows putting side by side the conditions of the migrant's legal admission in France, namely the detailed description of the type of residence permit rarely available in regular surveys, and his/her personal migration and family history, as well as summary information on their closest family members: spouse, children, parents and siblings. The major drawback of the survey design is that it does not cover a cohort of migrants, but a cohort of persons having received a certain type of residence permit in a given year. This means that certain respondents have been residing in France for several years at the time of the survey and we don't have information on their legal status at the time of their arrival.

The first results confirm the idea that family related migration does not resume itself to the relationship between spouses. Around 40% of the respondents having arrived as adults declare having at least one sibling residing in France. This proportion is over 50% among migrants regularized within a special category "Personal and family ties"<sup>2</sup> which suggests the fact that, although the acquisition of a legal status as a sibling is not possible in France (as it may be in the United States), the existence of such a tie may facilitate the migrant's integration into the host society, thus providing reasons for an ulterior regularisation of the legal status. This observation is coherent with literature on the subject on family networks, family being defined in a broad sense and not just as a nuclear unit comprising spouses and children. The analysis of the reasons for migrating to France also points to the fact that the desire to be reunited with other family members than the spouse may be at the origin of the move; indeed one out of four persons invokes this reason.

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<sup>2</sup> This new category of family migrants was created in 1998 and concerns individuals with strong family and personal ties in France. The nature of the tie may be diverse: persons residing in France for many years (for example rejected asylum seekers), persons in a non-marital relationship with a French citizen or legal resident, etc.