Studying transnational families using quantitative methods: possible data sources in Serbia

Transnational families (TNF) are part of migration and mobility as ways of maintaining family relations across national borders. However, the research of this phenomenon has developed more significantly only in the last few decades, in the era of globalization, better traffic and information communication, and mostly with the increase of temporary and circular forms of migration and mobility in economically developed countries, which inevitably lead to geographically separate lives of members of the same family. TNF are mostly characterized by visible dynamics, in geographical, social, economic, psychological and other forms. It implies constant change, which is inevitably reflected in the possible approaches for the study of TNF. One of the challenges is the lack of agreed definitions. In most countries, a TNF definition does not exist. Therefore, it is not surprising that the vast majority of TNF research is based on topics that can be studied using qualitative methods.

However, over time, TNF members, especially in destination countries, have become important stakeholders about whom little is known, whether they are workers, students, refugees, among whom are a large number of minors. Also, family members, for example, parents, left behind in the origin countries, or retired foreign workers in destination countries, are placing increasing demands on the state funds for their care and well-being. Issues of social and health care and the rights of TNF members both in the countries of origin and destination are just some of the topics for which reliable and accessible data are necessary. These are also the main reasons why in economically developed countries approaches to the study of TNF using quantitative methods are increasingly being developed. Therefore, the aim of the paper is to consider the most important sources of data on TNF. Survey research stands out among them. On the example of Serbia, which at the same time faces emigration and immigration, as well as transit forced migration movements, the paper discusses the possibilities as well as challenges in the study of TNF using quantitative methods, as well as ways of developing data sources that can at least to some extent track and record their complex dynamics.

Keywords: transnational families, migration, mobility, data sources