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**SOCIAL REMITTANCES AND MODIFICATIONS OF POLISH  
INTERGENERATIONAL CARE CULTURES.  
POLISH MIGRANTS IN AUSTRIA AND ICELAND  
AND THEIR ELDERLY PARENTS**

The change of the Polish cultures of old age is taking place as a result of intense international movement of Poles, which affects the recomposition of family ties. The effect of international migration is the emergence of transnational families that operate across borders of nation states. The purpose of this article is to present – on the basis of both quantitative and qualitative research – a transnational family functioning in the early phase (70–79 years) and advanced (80+) ages of the generation of grandparents. In this article I show transnational forms of intergenerational care of elderly parents and the changes taking place in Polish cultures of old age as a result of international migration of a generation of adult children. The analysis presented in the paper expands the knowledge about intergenerational transfers in the context of international migration. In addition, by focusing on transnational practices, the impact of cultures of the host countries (Austria, Iceland) on changes in the Polish culture in the area of care on ageing people will be examined, thus enriching the literature on social remittances.

Key words: cultures of old age; transnational family; social remittances; transnational caregiving.

### **Introduction**

The Polish culture of old age (see Krzyżowski, Kowalik, Suwada and Pawlina 2014) shows who should take care of elderly dependent parents in poor health, and how it should be done. Analysis of the available quantitative data (SHARE, PolSenior) clearly indicates the family as the most important group of persons to which older people bind their expectations of care. The qualitative research in this field shows that such support should be provided primarily by a daughter, helping in all the aspects of daily functioning of elderly parents, independently of any other, familiar or professional, commitments (Kotowska, Sztanderska

and Wóycicka 2007; Krzyżowski 2013; Perek-Białas and Stypińska 2010). The cultural imperative of taking care of elderly parents by women is primarily due to the reciprocity norm, which requires daughters to “repay” previous aid that mothers often give them in childcare. This type of intergenerational contract can be honoured as long as many children are born. Meanwhile, in Poland we are dealing with a low reproduction rate, the result of which will be a scarcity of resources in informal family care for the elderly in the near future. This is illustrated by two measures: the potential support ratio<sup>1</sup> and the ratio of care for parents.<sup>2</sup> The potential support ratio was five people in Poland in 2008. According to forecasts, in 2035 this ratio will be less than three people. The indicator of caring for parents in Poland in 2008 was marginally more than a dozen people. According to the forecast in 2035 it will be 26 people – twice as many as in 2008 (Józwiak and Kotowska 2010). The changing of informal care resources is a result not only of the low reproductive rate, but also of continuing economic international migration.

Based on data from the National Population and Housing Census (2011) it is worth noting that migration does not only still have a high position in the life strategies of Poles – every tenth household in Poland is a migrant household – but it is also changing the Polish culture of old age and the care of the elderly. This change is taking place as a result of intense international movement of Poles, which affects the recomposition of family ties. The effect of international migration is the emergence of transnational families that operate across borders of nation states. The purpose of this article is to present – on the basis of my own quantitative and qualitative research – a transnational family functioning in the early phase (70–79 years) and advanced (80+) ages of grandparents. In this article I show transnational forms of intergenerational care in the care of elderly parents and the changes taking place in Polish culture of old age as a result of international migration of a generation of adult children. The analysis presented in the paper expands the knowledge about intergenerational transfers in the context of international migration. In addition, by focusing on transnational practices, the impact of cultures of the host countries (Austria, Iceland) on changes in the Polish culture in the area of care on ageing people will be examined, thus enriching the literature on social remittances.

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<sup>1</sup> The number of adult children and grandchildren (aged 15–64 years) per person of the generation of „grandparents” (persons aged 65 and over).

<sup>2</sup> The number of people aged 80+ per 100 people in the oldest years of a working age (50–59/64).

### **A transnational family. Intergenerational relations and social remittances**

Steven Vertovec writes, „most of the daily practices of transnational migrants is related to the family; in many cases due to these practices a family life has been a subject of a substantial modification” (2012: 68). The families of migrants, although geographically dispersed, often “stick together” and establish a sense of community and a mutual concern for the safety of their members across the borders of nation states (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002: 3). Cooperation within transnational families is often described in the context of migration studies by remittances between migrant and non-migrant family members. The previous studies of migrant remittances focused mainly on their economic dimension, which means mainly the transfer of money by migrants to their close family in a sending society (Adams 2009). In this trend there are two forms of economic transfer: the abovementioned cash remittances and remittances in kind. The flow of economic transfer usually takes place within family remittances or collective remittances. Since the early 1990s the economic theories of transfer have been gradually supplemented by research considering their social dimension (Rahman and Fee 2012). According to the research conducted by Peggy Levitt (Levitt 1998; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011), migrants send not only money and various types of products and items for their close relatives, but also ideas and behaviour patterns. This paper will present how migration changes practices of taking care of elderly parents. Those changes, according to the results of the analysis in the stream of *social remittances*, take place as a result of cultural contact with receiving societies, where culture of old age is, to a greater or lesser extent, different from in Poland.

Not all the aspects related to the culture of old age are necessarily different in the particular cultural areas in Europe to which Poles migrate. For example, an analysis of the various forms of intergenerational transfers in Europe shows that in all countries the older generations hand down much more to younger ones than vice versa (Künemund, Motel-Klingebiel and Kohli 2005). The study of elderly people living in Poland indicates the same functioning of the asymmetry of benefits – therefore Poland in this aspect is no different from other European countries. It applies particularly to financial and material support (Halik 2002: 39–44, 62; Dyczewski 2002: 82). In analysing German society Andreas Hoff comes to the conclusion that financial and material remittances flow more often (and in higher quantities) from the older generation to the younger than the other way around, but the other forms of care flow in two directions, and are broadly balanced (Hoff 2007). Financial support is only one of the aspects of care for the elderly. The researchers on old age usually distinguish five dominant forms of care for the elderly who are in a difficult health and living situation in their

family: a) economic support (financial and material), b) practical domestic help (help with cleaning, cooking, shopping, etc.), c) personal care (assistance with hygiene), d) monitoring and emotional support, and e) advice and assistance in official issues, help with paperwork and obtaining information (Attias-Donfut 2003; Hoff 2007). Taking into consideration five of these forms of care for the elderly, I will present in this paper strategies to help older parents undertaken by migrants living in Austria and Iceland, identify those areas of transnational care when it comes to the occurrence of social remittances, then consider changes in the Polish culture of old age which have resulted from the cultural contacts of Polish migrant workers.

### **Methodology of the research**

The results of the further analysis are derived from field studies conducted in Iceland, Austria and Poland in 2010-2012. As part of the qualitative research fifty-six in-depth interviews with migrants living in Iceland (N = 36) and Austria (N = 20) were conducted. The informants in the group of migrants were mainly people of working age who do not plan to return to Poland within the next five years. Purposeful selection was conducted, and the researched subjects were recruited with the use of the snowball method and by contacts on Internet migrant forums, with ecclesiastical institutions and in labour offices. Using a *matched-sample methods* strategy, migrants were asked during the interview to contact their parents living in Poland. This resulted in 36 in-depth interviews with parents of migrants who were more than 75 years old.

The qualitative data was subject to a systematic analysis carried out in the paradigm of cross-case analysis (Khan and VanWynsberghe 2008), which allows for a theoretical generalization of results based on the multistage process of comparing of the individual cases. The use of such analytical procedure allows us to deepen and clarify the relationships in qualitative data by discovering which sets of structural factors are reinforced, and which ones are weakened emerging from the analysis concepts, applications and theoretical generalizations. Qualitative data analysis was performed using the MAXQDA program.

The second stage of the project was the quantitative research. Because of the widespread access to the internet in Iceland and Austria, I decided to use online survey technology using the service [www.ebadania.pl](http://www.ebadania.pl). The questionnaire was prepared on the basis of analytical categories that emerged from the analysis of qualitative data. Invitations to participate in the study with an attached link were sent to all the members of the migrant forums. Leaflets with information about the research and the link were also handed out in front of churches after Mass celebrated by Poles, in front of consulates, in Polish

schools, in front of job centres, and among participants in training for unemployed Poles. Finally, 454 questionnaires were filled out in Iceland and 383 in Austria. Although the study was covered by a large part of the Polish migrant, (in Iceland about 4%), the results are not representative due to the non-random sampling techniques, and can be recognized only by the people who had participated in the research.

A quantitative study was also carried out in Poland. After a preliminary analysis of the qualitative data a questionnaire was prepared for the quantitative study of people over fifty-five years old with at least one child migrating for work purposes. I decided to use the CATI telephone interview technique. Similarly to the online survey tool, CATI was created after a preliminary analysis of qualitative data, and conclusions of the material collected during the telephone interview are justified only in the context of qualitative research. It also must be emphasized that these conclusions are not representative (therefore, generalization is not possible) of the entire population due to the lack of sampling mechanism. Such a sampling method should cover the population over fifty-five years old with at least one child migrating. The research company implementing quantitative research identified respondents according to defined characteristics. On the basis of the existing census data and large sample surveys conducted in the general population of older people (e.g. the study *Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe*, which will be presented in the next paragraph) two quotas were selected: gender (300 women, 200 men) and age (225 people aged 55–64 years, and 275 people aged 65 years and older). In total, five hundred telephone interviews were completed.

### **The forms of transnational care for elderly parents**

The use of a transnational perspective allows us to show how the socio-cultural practices associated with caring for elderly parents in transnational social spaces are implemented, modified and replaced by others. The implementation of these practices is also a confirmation of the thesis formulated by those researchers on migration who argue that the frequency of contacts (direct and indirect) is not as important in the analysis of transnational life as the range or intensity of these contacts, that is, for example, a variety of forms of taking care of migrant parents „at a distance”. This part of the paper will describe – based on the analytical categories emerging from the qualitative research conducted among migrants and verified on a larger scale in quantitative research (online survey) – a variety of forms of transnational involvement of migrant children in the care of elderly parents. The quantitative research carried out in the framework of the project shows that the majority of respondents help their parents

living in Poland in various activities related to daily functioning. Answering the question whether in the past twelve months the subject helped his/her parents, **70% of researched migrants in Austria and 66% of researched migrants in Iceland** marked the affirmative answer. Caring for parents of migrants beyond the borders of the nation states takes the form of eight dominant sets of practices: 1/ practical (instrumental) domestic help 2/ assistance in dealing with administrative matters (assistance with documents), 3/ personal (caring) aid, 4/ advising, 5/ supervision of a health situation and living conditions, 6/ emotional support, 7/ financial aid and 8/ material aid.

**Table 1.** The forms of help to elderly parents practised by migrants – % of answer “yes”

	Countries of migration	
	Austria (N = 383)	Iceland (N = 454)
Practical domestic help	<b>55</b>	<b>42</b>
Assistance in filling in documents, administrative matters	30	28
Personal aid	5	1
Advice	<b>48</b>	<b>40</b>
Supervision of a health situation	32	28
Emotional support	<b>60</b>	<b>49</b>
Financial support	45	<b>56</b>
Material aid	<b>53</b>	45

Source: own research (online survey)

Analysis of Table 1 shows that the most common forms of assistance performed by migrants from Iceland and Austria are: financial and material assistance, emotional support (caring for and monitoring life situations), advice, and practical domestic help. The practices shown in Table 1 create a continuum, from relatively undemanding (although highly rated by the parents of surveyed migrants, e.g. advice and emotional support) to those that require many sacrifices and cause tensions in family networks (e.g. practical domestic help and financial support). The remainder of this article will present frequent transnational forms of care for elderly parents. Personal care will be also considered, as this is the aspect of aid most difficult to provide at a distance. All of these forms are carried out largely by new communications technology.

### **The new communication technologies in the process of advising, monitoring and caring for the lives of the parents of surveyed migrants**

The geographical distance between Poland and Iceland makes the frequency of direct contacts lower than in the case of migrants living in Austria. Meanwhile, the opportunity to make frequent international calls, not very popular in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the high cost of calls, is considered as one of the most important changes deepening transnational activity in terms of communicating with members of relatively immobile members of kinship networks, including elderly parents. In other words, as frequent (and long) stays of migrants in the sending country community and non-migrants visit the country of immigration where live their close relatives live, they construct patterns in the real world and crystallize the structures in transnational spaces, so frequent (and long) conversation (via phone and internet communicators) maintain activity and commitment on both sides at times when direct contact is not possible. Monitoring of life situations with the help of frequent telephone contact is particularly highly estimated by parents of migrants:

<b>Daughter</b> – 41 years old, secondary education, working in Austria as a clerk in a grocery store	<b>Mother</b> – 80 years old, basic education, before her retirement was a cook in a kindergarten
<i>I call to my mom very often and we are talking. Does she need my support? Well, a conversation is also a kind of support. Very important support, it is needed to talk with elderly people.</i>	<i>My daughter calls and also sends me some money to pay for one lady coming to me every night. I receive some money for it. But money is not the most important. I am very grateful to her. Yes, first of all. And she mmm knows I need talking. She knows this help is very important for me. Somebody... Well, not only physically, but to be aware that I am here and I am waiting, and the most important thing for me is that somebody will call and ask me if I am still alive.</i>

From the quantitative research carried out with the help of the online survey it can be deduced that indirect contact of Polish migrants in Austria and Iceland with their parents is relatively common. Regardless of the method of contact, almost 70% of migrants in Austria and 83% of migrants in Iceland communicate with their elderly parents at least several times a month. Based on the data from the SHARE research it can be concluded that people who do not migrate do not interact with their parents more often than migrants. Two-thirds of relatively immobile Poles contact their parent(s) at least several times a month. According to Elzbieta Tarkowska (2005), in addition to families with financial problems, at

risk of poverty, where adult children live together with their parents is a difficult life necessity, and rural communities in which several generations cohabit are partly due to a traditional way of life, as we observe in Poland a tendency towards nuclearisation of the family (cf. Slany and Kluzowa 2004). In other words, daily personal contact is not as common in situations where children and parents do not live together, and the frequency of conversations with elderly parents via phone or computer does not differ between the migrant and non-migrant children. The results of this comparison show that migrants through their frequent communication compensate for their absence and relatively infrequent visits to parents. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the case of migrants in Iceland who were in frequent contact with their parents but visit Poland less than the Polish migrants in Austria.

Indirect communication allows migrants to control the lives of elderly parents in Poland. Not only conversations with parents, but particularly with siblings and sometimes their children, allow for constant monitoring and management of social security of elderly parents:

*At distance you can organize something for this person not to be alone or without financial means, it can be done from a distance or during my short visit in Poland. But what can you do when you are 300 kilometres from home and your mother has got a fever, what can you do in this moment? I am in panic and call everybody and ask: do you know my mother has got a fever? Maybe somebody can go and visit her, make a tea or soup? [woman, 46, higher education, works in Austria in a public institution].*

This quotation illustrates how migrants, particularly women, are trying to manage the network of support for their parents from a distance. This of course sometimes raises tensions and conflicts when a migrating child, usually a daughter, is trying to influence the behaviour of non-migrating persons.

Indirect communication between migrant children and elderly parents is important not only because of the abovementioned compensation for a physical absence. The analysis of qualitative and quantitative data shows that migration to a country where the use of the Internet is as common as the use of mobile phones impels migrants to acquire some new skills and use new communication technologies in the process of maintaining communication with the country of origin in order to monitor the lives of the elderly parents and possibly provide them support when they need it. The following table shows percentage data associated with this group of respondents who are in contact with their parents at least several times a week. As you can see, the differences in the choice of the medium of communication in intergenerational and international contacts are significant (table 2).

The surveyed migrants in Austria and Iceland making frequent (daily or several times a week) contact with their parents use different communication



tools. In the case of Poles living in Iceland, the use of new communication technologies is noticeably more common than among Poles living in Austria<sup>3</sup>. Iceland is one of the leading countries in the world when it comes to percentage of people using the Internet. According to data from Statistics Iceland (2012), almost 98% of the population of Iceland used the Internet in 2011. 93% of households have got a broadband Internet connection. 93% use the Internet every day. This can explain the popularity of the Internet among migrants. According to the representative surveys conducted among Polish migrants by Helga Olafs, access to the Internet is very common, at 96% of respondents. Moreover, these studies show that the Internet is primarily used to maintain communication with Poland (cf. Olafs 2011).

**Table 2.** The new communication technologies in transnational intergenerational contacts (%)

		Country of migration	
		Austria (N = 383)	Iceland (N = 454)
The form of contact and frequency: daily/a few times a week	Phone call	<b>64</b>	46
	Skype	29	<b>51</b>
	Text message	20	24
	E-mail	7	8
	Traditional mail	1	1
	Instant messageing (e.g. WhatsApp)	13	20

The researched migrants in Austria use the phone (or call via Skype to a mobile phone or landline of their parents) two times more often than migrants from Iceland making contact with their parents. In the intergenerational relationship between Poles living in Iceland and their parents computer hardware is very often used. It is worth taking a closer look at how the computer and instant messageing for communication (Skype, WhatsApp) differentiate among surveyed migrants:

<sup>3</sup> These results should be certainly treated with the appropriate caution, since they refer only to those respondents who use the computer, what significantly affects how they interact with their parents.

**Table 3.** Skype in transnational intergenerational communication (%)

		Country of migration	
		Austria (N = 383)	Iceland (N = 454)
Conversation via Skype (migrant's computer-parents' computer)	Every day/several times a week	29	51
	Several times a month	15	24
	Several times a year	11	10
	Never	<b>40</b>	<b>12</b>
	No data	5	3
In total		100	100

The first thing to look at is the category „never”, which shows the actual use of computer equipment in the process of intergenerational communication. Skype is not used by almost half of the surveyed migrants from Austria. This means that half of those respondents who use a computer (which allows them to, for example, participate in the online survey) have parents who talk to them via Skype. However, the qualitative research shows that essentially only the categories „every day” and „several times a week” (these categories in the table have been combined in this analysis for clarity) allow an estimation of the popularity of computer use by elderly parents in Poland. Those respondents who talk with elderly parents via Skype several times a month, and several times a year, in fact, rarely call on their parents' computer. The most common way of using Skype is on a computer of family members with whom the migrant's elderly parent lives. However, such a situation sometimes causes tensions resulting from a lack of autonomy and limited freedom in the use of new technological devices. Migrants' siblings in this situation act in the role of a *gatekeeper*. The parents of migrants from Iceland use a computer in communication with their migrant child to a greater extent. This is confirmed not only by the small percentage (12%) of those respondents who declare that they never use Skype in conversations with their parents, but also the high (slightly over 50%), percentage of those who talk with their parents via this communicator daily, or several times a week. The higher percentage of Poles in Iceland – in comparison with surveyed migrants' parents in Austria – who communicate with parents via Skype has numerous consequences, including the possibility of taking care for the elderly from a distance. Not only is controlling (content and frequency of calls) the role of siblings weakened when older parents have free access to the Internet, allowing migrant children a more complete monitoring of the life situation of parents, but also, because

the service is free of charge, transnational intergenerational communication is becoming concentrated.

In the statements of interviewed migrants (especially those from Iceland) noticeable attention to the diversity of communication channels can be observed. Thanks to this situation, as respondents stressed, they are sure to do everything possible to monitor the living situation of their parents. Due to the frequent and diverse contacts the surveyed migrants in the host country experience a „substitute of their home”. The new communication media not only allow them to „control” and to be present „out there”, but also to move a family home „here”. It is also worth indicating the practical dimension of that diversity. It results from the fact that the more tools for communication, the more likely that one of them will be within the reach of the parents. However, the most important process of diversification of communication channels is attributed to the fact that the subjects who communicate with their parents through a variety of methods express their concern for their health and well-being, thereby reducing the guilt resulting from their physical absence during the end-stage life of their parents.

Indirect communication, specifically as implemented through web-based tools, also has important consequences for the functioning of intergenerational kinship networks in transnational social spaces. In my research migrants often emphasised that they introduced their parents to the world of the Internet to play a greater role in their lives. It is very important that in Poland the percentage of people using the Internet is a little over 50%, and people over sixty-five years of age make use of this medium to a very small (5%) extent (cf. Kowalik 2011). Meanwhile, as mentioned above, a significant percentage of the parents of the respondents (just over 50% of the elderly parents of migrants from Iceland and just over 30% of parents of migrants from Austria) uses the Internet, as proved by frequent use of Skype and e-mail (every day or several times a week).

In situations where adult children migrate the parent may feel a lack of support, assistance and care, which according to Polish culture should be provided mainly by children. Thus, migration can lead to the social exclusion of old parents. At the same time acquiring, with the help of migrant children and grandchildren, new skills related to the use of computers and the Internet, reduces this exclusion.

### **Personal care**

As shown in Table 1, personal care is the least frequent form of assistance provided to parents by migrants. This is primarily a result of the fact that not all elderly parents need this kind of support and assistance. In a situation where parents need personal care, it usually is delivered by a child nearby. When

a daughter leaves – and according to the dominant model of supporting elderly parents in Poland (and more broadly in those countries where the care of the elderly is rooted and recognized as an obvious model family), women should deal with personal care – the problem is generally solved in two ways. Implementation of the first strategy requires that one of the children must live close to his/her father or mother. If it is a son, it is usually his wife (the daughter-in-law) who deals with the care of an elderly person. This situation creates tensions and conflicts, even when a son is dealing with his parents, because it is in conflict with the existing pattern of „normal” intergenerational relations:

*When my mother had an accident, it was needed to wash her, my children were not strong enough to take my mother to a bath tub and wash her, therefore my brother had to do it, and the brother accused me that **the mother should be washed by a daughter, not a son**, or by daughter-in-law, but I had no other option, I had to go to job, I had to work, and I had no job in Poland [a woman, 41 years, secondary education, works in Austria as a clerk in a grocery store].*

The other solution, particularly often supported by the migrants from Iceland, was paying for somebody to help, hiring a person to tend to the personal care of an elderly parent:

*Well, she needs some help, there is our cousin there and we pay her and she cares. Because mum cannot do many things anymore. Well, here lives all my siblings, my brother and sister with their families [a man, 35 years, secondary education, before the crisis worked as construction worker. Currently unemployed and taking unemployment benefits.]*

Researcher: [...] *So after your departure your wife has been caring for her, hasn't she?*

Subject: *Yes, but there was also a nurse, then my wife cared only a little bit, she delivered meals, made breakfasts and suppers, lunches were from the canteen. She was buying what was needed, even diapers, because he [subject's father – ŁK] lies in bed all the time [a man, 52 years, secondary education, works illegally in Iceland as a plumber]*

*I pay for a hired nurse who cares for my parents. I live here [In Austria – ŁK] working from a sunrise to a sunset, but I'm not going to send them to a nursing home. I don't know how it would look like if they lived here, maybe it would be a solution, but for today I wouldn't let my mum to go to a nursing home [a man, 44 years, basic education, works in Austria as a carpenter]*

More frequently than in the case of migrants from Austria, the hiring of outside help by migrants from Iceland results from observation of the Icelandic non-family care system for the elderly. But this is not a simple case of Poles copying the Icelanders. As it was emphasized by those surveyed in Iceland, the Icelandic solutions lack emotional support from family members. Therefore, the

solutions used by Poles living in Iceland are a mix of the Polish and Icelandic systems. One example here would be the fact that when migrants hired help, it was not from a complete stranger, but someone from the family or in the neighbourhood. In Austria, the outside-the-family solution was generally practiced exclusively by men. If a woman hired assistance, it was only for work within the household, and she tried to organize personal care in a different way, usually by negotiating with her siblings a division of labour needed for the elderly parent. In a situation where the outcome of the negotiations was the attribution of personal care to siblings residing permanently in Poland, migrant parents usually supported them with material help and financial support. There are also a number of indirect forms of support to reward siblings for difficult personal care, such as paying for their holidays in the country where the migrant lives and inviting their children for a vacation (often combined with the provision of casual summer jobs).

To sum up the issue of personal care it should be stressed once again that a small percentage of people declaring giving personal care to ageing parents is caused not only by difficulties in providing such support „at a distance”, but also because parents rarely require help with their hygiene. Social panic in this area is usually exaggerated. If there is a need to provide personal care for the older person in a range of activities which they cannot handle (bathing, dressing and moving around the house), they will most often be helped by non-migrating family members. There are also intermediate solutions in the maintenance of personal care in the form of hiring outside help. Let us now proceed to the next forms of assistance provided by migrants to elderly persons in Poland.

### **Practical domestic help and material aid**

Practical domestic help, which very often involves material aid, is more frequently provided by migrants residing in Austria (55%) than by those in Iceland (42%). The main method of providing this type of support is to carry out activities related to the management of the household, such as cleaning up, washing, cooking and shopping during visits to Poland. A large number of Polish respondents coming back to Poland live with their parents or their in-laws. During their stay grandparents often take care of their grandchildren, with whom they have no possibility to contact daily. However, children help in carrying out those activities which the parents cannot handle. Such activities often include major shopping („in reserve”), mowing lawns and trimming bushes, thorough cleaning of the apartment (including, very often brought up during the interviews, the problem of washing windows), redecoration of a flat (painting, changing carpets, furniture), minor repairs, and carrying out renovations which will help

parents in their functioning. In parents' houses, often associated with the help of the migrants, technologies are implemented with the goal of helping elderly parents, such as the installation of a dishwasher or handles in the bathtub, or the elimination of barriers.

In a situation where the parents have no children who did not migrate, or their other children live far away, migrants sometimes hire help for the household. Depending on the financial situation of elderly parents, siblings and the migrant, the housekeeping costs are covered in whole or in part by a migrating child.

Practical domestic help involves numerous tensions. Older parents who are accustomed to their many long-term possessions rarely agree to change them, especially when the „new things” often require new skills and service: for example, a new washing machine or dishwasher can be the cause of some anxiety. Migrants, on the one hand, want to help parents in their lives, but also recognize that many facilities are intended to reduce their workload. Some respondents clearly remarked during interviews that when they return to Poland they feel as if they travelled home just to work in another country. The burden of helping their parents is particularly noticeable when visiting their parents is included as part of their holidays. Instead of taking a rest, the respondents end up working in their parents' home. To reduce this burden (but also simply to help parents), the respondents modernize houses, and this is not always met with the approval (and gratitude) of their parents. Such situations cause tensions, as migrants „want to do the right thing,” and parents are unhappy with the changes. Respondents' parents in such situations justify their dislike for the new arrangement, not so much by expressing concern that instead of making things easier it will be harder for them, but by expressing a fear that the migrant child cannot afford these changes. Nevertheless, in a parent's relationship with his friends or relatively immobile family members, providing household improvements can be held up as proof of the migrant child taking care of the parents and are legitimacy for the child's absence. Boasting, sometimes even about minor improvements, can cause tensions between migrant and non-migrant children. This is particularly the case when a non-migrating child helps the parent(s) daily, including maintaining personal hygiene. From the point of view of children who live near their parents, the assistance provided by the migrants to their parents is too highly valued.

In practical domestic help a variety of items purchased by migrants are often used. Material assistance is very frequently used as a form of support for parents. The majority of respondents in Austria (53%) and a large portion of migrants from Iceland (45%) provide this type of assistance to parents. Those migrants from Austria who provide material assistance to parents do it no less frequently than once every six months. Migrants from Iceland usually give such support once a year, during their stay in Poland.

Material support from migrants in Iceland and Austria usually means buying cleaning products, food and clothes. Migrants from Austria bring cleaning products and others directly from their country – they are highly valued by parents. In one case, washing powders supplied by the daughter in Austria were sold to neighbours because, as the subject mentioned, they are superior to those ones sold in Poland, even if from the same company. Migrants from Iceland, due to the restrictions on luggage on planes, limit shopping to some souvenirs and products associated with Iceland (e.g. fish oil and smoked salmon). Larger purchases are made by these migrants on arrival. Material aid is usually provided when migrants are in Poland. Sometimes, however, it takes the form of a kind of indirect material aid. It happens in two versions. In the first, migrants transfer funds to a sibling's account in Poland to purchase some fuel for the winter. In the second version, occurring frequently among migrants in Iceland, material assistance is provided by shopping for parents in online stores. Such a strategy is, of course, possible only for those parents who live in large cities in which online stores operate. In rural areas, indirect aid in shopping is done with the help of siblings or neighbours. Material aid is to the parents often under the guise of commemorative gifts. In such situations, typical objects which are given to parents include TV sets, dishwashers, microwave ovens, washing machines, massage machines, refrigerators, computers, cosmetics, and jewellery. The researched migrants explain that this type of support is important, because their parents' pension is sufficient, at least in principle, only for current needs.

### **Material support**

In the analysis of transnational intergenerational remittances support is particularly noteworthy. Helping parents by taking care of their financial security is a sensitive topic. Such support is based on the assumption that if assistance to parents in Poland is impossible, it is necessary to take care of their welfare indirectly, with the help of remittances. Money is most often transferred during visits to Poland, and, therefore, the amount of money transferred by migrants in Austria differs from the value of remittances made by migrants in Iceland. Migrants in Austria are usually in a more stable situation in the labour market and come to Poland more frequently (albeit for a short time). In their case, there is a noticeable tendency: the more remittances made (and therefore the more often a migrant goes to Poland), the smaller the individual amount of transfer, while those who financially support parents once a month usually makes regular transfers of a fixed value. For the Iceland respondents, the opportunities to support parents (and to visit them in Poland) are closely related to the situation of migrants in the labour market. Those who work (and in fact earn more than

migrants in Austria), are more likely to visit their parents and give them money. Migrants who are unemployed and collect unemployment benefits (often supplemented by additional illegal, casual work), must report each trip to the Polish employment office and their benefits are frozen for the period of stay in Poland. In this case, it seems reasonable to give up the frequent visits to Poland. For this reason, money transferred less frequently to parents (as the migrant comes to Poland less often), is transferred in greater amounts in order to compensate for these absences.

From the research different meanings emerge regarding economic support, which is the most common form of assistance provided by the migrants to their elderly parents. Money (in an direct or indirect form) is not evaluated by the parents only in terms of quantity, but also quality. In other words, remittances are ascribed a high sentimental value and become a symbolic expression of concern and care of the children for their parents. For migrants (especially women) financial support is compensation for a lack of a physical presence, lack of help with parents' personal hygiene (usually the mother) and lack of practical domestic help in the parents' household in Poland. The value and importance of cash transfers is also being negotiated, and the tendency of migrants to provide financial support for parents is regulated by the norm of reciprocity.

### **The Polish culture of old age – modifications of eldercare in transnational social spaces**

Concerning care for older people, the Polish culture of care indicates the closest family members as those who should support elderly parents when they need it. How does this dimension of intergenerational relations change when is transferred to transnational spaces?

The table above (Table 4) shows the changes that occur during migration in terms of perception of who should deal with the elderly in the three dimensions of everyday life. In all areas the most apparent differences between the national, familiar (Polish) culture of care for the elderly and the transnational culture of care, which includes the opinions of migrants operating in a non-familiar (Iceland) and a supported-from-the-outside (Austria) system of care for the elderly. In almost every aspect, except for personal care, the parents of migrants declare greater acceptance of non-family forms of assistance than those respondents whose children do not migrate.

The slightest differences can be found in the case of a financial support. Here, the respondents largely agree that the financial security of elderly parents should be primarily provided by the state under the public pension system. However, as it was pointed out in in-depth interviews in Iceland, when direct assistance to



parents is impossible, the implementation of the duties by sending them money to reduce guilt over leaving their parents in old age was used.

**Table 4.** National (Poland) and the transnational (Polish-Austrian and Polish-Icelandic) culture of care for the elderly (%)

		Countries of migration		Sending country	Sending country
		Austria (N = 381) migrants	Iceland (N = 430) Migrants	Poland (N=1593) national sample	Poland (N=500) parents of migrants
financial support	Totally/mainly a family	10	11	23	19
	Equally a family and the state	60	60	49	45
	Totally/mainly the state	31	30	28	36
practical domestic help	Totally/mainly a family	45	57	70	60
	Equally a family and the state	48	38	25	31
	Totally/mainly the state	7	5	5	9
personal care	Totally/mainly a family	20	23	47	48
	Equally a family and the state	65	59	43	41
	Totally/mainly the state	15	18	10	11

Source: own study: conducted among migrants (online survey) and the elderly, where at least one child migrates (telephone interview) and SHARE

In the aspects of practical domestic help (cleaning, cooking, laundry, shopping) the first major differences between Polish (in total) and migrant respondents appear. The respondents in Poland, especially those whose children do not migrate, first choose members of the family as persons responsible for assisting the elderly with everyday tasks, such as laundry, cooking, cleaning and shopping. The surveyed migrants are in favour of a more balanced distribution of work between the family and the state in terms of practical help at home.

Personal care is similarly evaluated (assistance with personal hygiene, assistance in standing up and going to bed, help in moving around the flat). In the opinions of the surveyed migrants there is ambivalence whereby on the one hand, they were brought up in the Polish culture of a family care and feel a strong commitment to elderly parents, and on the other hand, contact with the different systems of the organization of care for the elderly makes the naturalized social

expectations regarding the care of elderly family members in Poland, the subject to deconstruction and are negotiated in transnational social spaces. Interestingly, personal care is also for parents of migrants the (only) area in which they agree with the rest of the elderly, regarding who should help parents maintain personal hygiene. These statements are the confirmation of analyses of care practices, which showed that if a woman cannot carry out personal care, the first social expectations (family) are directed toward the son. Hiring outside help is the worst solution, according to respondents, and is accepted mainly when it is someone from the extended family or the local community.

The analysis of the socio-cultural practices and attitudes in the area of helping elderly parents shows some contradictions. Migrants declare that the state should do more to support the elderly in Poland, although the range of activities that migrants undertake testifies to the fact that, despite some changes at the level of attitudes regarding the practices, migrants fulfil family responsibilities while implementing them differently than non-migrants in transnational social spaces. Helping the elderly parents of migrants is sometimes very onerous. Poles working in Iceland and Austria have their own families (sometimes in Poland, and sometimes in the host society), and the additional burden of caring for elderly parents has forced surveyed migrants to undertake a number of strategies to maximize opportunities to support dependents, including elderly parents in Poland. These activities are not always met with acceptance by the host society. This is particularly evident in the case of the surveyed migrants in Iceland, who are in a relatively difficult situation resulting from problems in the labour market, and yet they support dependents, including their elderly parents, often by taking advantage of charitable assistance and unemployment benefits to which they are entitled. Migrants in Austria generally do not experience such problems. This is firstly because they have been legally employed without major problems only since 2011. Secondly, even if before 2011 migrants were working in Austria, within the framework of coordination of the social benefits system unemployment benefits may be taken in Poland. Those migrants who have lost their jobs in Austria and are not entitled to support from the state also return to Poland. In the meantime, migrants in Iceland must stay in the host country to collect their benefits. Departure to Poland means withholding the allowances for these migrants, which negatively affects the social security of dependents, including elderly parents.

## **Conclusions**

Migration is a decision undertaken by an entire household, in which the negotiations are subject to the direction and scope of a migration, as well as,

specifically in the case of migrant women, the extent and form of implementation of intergenerational obligations. Migrants are usually responsible for the financial support of parents, help them in paying their bills and fund additional visits to doctors. Those who do not migrate mainly assist their parents by helping in the household. Migrants in this area also help parents with the use of new communication technologies, so that it would be possible for parents to shop online. Therefore, it is a relatively new phenomenon, emerging from the implementation of family commitments in transnational social spaces practice, of modifying stationary methods to help parents. Migrants also introduce changes related to the furnishing of their parents' households. Some „new” socio-cultural practices which are associated with the most intimate dimension of helping parents, personal care, appear in the support network due to migrants coming into contact with different systems of care for the elderly operating in the host societies. Contact with the other systems affects the transnational family in yet another way. It changes attitudes towards the Polish culture of care. This affects not only the migrants themselves, but also, interestingly, their parents, who to a greater extent than the majority of the population accept non-family forms of assistance. Nevertheless, in spite of the changes at the level of declarations, the socio-cultural practices associated with taking care of elderly parents are still undertaken by migrants, though sometimes in a different way than in households where nobody migrates. Fulfilling of family obligations in relation to elderly parents sometimes requires many sacrifices on the part of migrants, particularly if they relate to the double burden of caring for their own children as well. This situation causes not only the necessity to make difficult choices related to whom to help and to what extent, but also requires the necessity to acquire additional financial means.

The results of the research complement current results of research, conducted both in studies on migration as well as in the area of research on old age and ageing. The researchers of phenomena associated with social remittances in migration studies (cf. Levitt 1998; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011) tend to focus on the general social changes in the sending country associated with international migration. In my research I focus on those modifications which relate to old age, particularly care for the elderly. Although the state of the literature on this subject (cf. Baldassar, Baldock and Wilding, 2007; Baldassar 2007; Baldassar 2008) concerns a different cultural area. The work of Loretta Baldassar explores the issue of Italian migrants in Australia and focuses on the enormity of emotional work that is necessary to maintain transnational ties. In my article, I focus more on these aspects of intergenerational relationships that are related to physical labour and investment of time and money, which raises a number of tensions and conflicts.

On the one hand, labour migration of an adult child means leaving for another state where the chances of earning a financial means are greater than in

the country of origin. As a result, the number of those who stay in the country and can support elderly parents is decreasing. On the other hand, the child's departure usually increases not only his/her own social security, but also the safety of all the generations, as the migrant's own children (if existing) benefit as well. The practices of migrants can be analysed from this perspective in terms of the metaphor of „seekers” of new sources of social security. However, state institutions would prefer adult children to stay in a sending society, because it usually guarantees the provision of care for older parents (and emigration reduces the local unemployment rate as well). Assuming that nobody in the family undertakes transnational activity, a process counterproductive to the expectations of the state may occur, and despite the fact that all the children would be close to their elderly parents, they would not have adequate resources to provide them assistance. It also should be remembered that elderly parents often help their adult children, both non-migrant (often) and migrant (rarely). A larger number of children „on the spot”, close to their parents, can lead to a situation where older parents with a modest retirement income would have to financially support more children than they would have had one of them left the country to work.

The presented research also extends the analysis of intergenerational flows with regards to migration. Adult children migrating to another country leads to the emergence of a new configuration of families, where the mechanisms of the flow of economic and social remittances are different than when adult children merely live in another village in the same country. It results from migrants experiencing cultures which are more or less different from the Polish culture of ageing. Labour migration also changes the ‘objective’ possibility of taking care of elderly parents, changing the direction of migration transfers. My studies show that migrants more frequently support their elderly parents by providing them with financial and material assistance than with providing them other benefits. Pensions supplemented by remittances from overseas not only ensure the financial security of the elderly, but also often of those children who do not migrate.

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### **Transfery społeczne i modyfikacje polskich kultur opieki międzygeneracyjnej. Polscy migranci w Austrii i Islandii oraz ich starzy rodzice**

#### Streszczenie

Zmiana polskich kultur starości wynika między innymi z intensywnych migracji zagranicznych Polaków, które modyfikują więzi rodzinne. Efektem migracji zagranicznych jest pojawienie się transnarodowej rodziny, która funkcjonuje ponad granicami państw narodowych. Celem tego artykułu jest przedstawienie (na podstawie danych ilościowych i jakościowych) transnarodowej rodziny z uwzględnieniem tych jej członków, którzy znajdują się we wczesnej (70–79 lat) i zaawansowanej (80+) starości. W artykule opisuję transnarodowe formy opieki (realizowane przez dorosłe, migrujące dzieci) nad starszymi rodzicami oraz przedstawiam zmiany, jakie zachodzą w polskich kulturach starości w wyniku migracji. Wyniki badań poszerzają wiedzę na temat transferów międzygeneracyjnych w kontekście zagranicznych migracji zarobkowych. Dodatkowo, poprzez skupienie się na praktykach transnarodowych, na wpływie kultur państw przyjmujących (Austria, Islandia) na zmiany w sposobie opiekowania się osobami starszymi w Polsce, wyniki wzbogacają studia migracyjne o wiedzę na temat międzygeneracyjnych transferów społecznych.

Główne pojęcia: międzygeneracyjne transfery społeczne; kultury starości; transnarodowa rodzina; transnarodowe formy opieki.