Extended Kinship and Mobility: The Influence of Non-Nuclear Family Ties on the Migration of Young Ukrainians

Luděk Jirka

Abstract

The nuclear family, consisting of children, mother and father, is often the primary unit of analysis in migration studies. However, this approach has been criticised for its normative context. More recently, scholars have emphasized the relational perspective and multi-layered family ties when debating the notion of family. Based on qualitative anthropological research in Western Ukraine and in the Czech Republic, this article adopts this approach by focusing on how the family practices of young Ukrainians (aged 15–16 at the time of migration) challenge the nuclear family framework. These young people are the first migrants from their nuclear families in the Czech Republic, while their parents have remained in Ukraine. The text focuses on the financial support, emotional support, and practical assistance provided to them by their relatives, demonstrating that parents were still important in all three categories, while cousins were significant in providing emotional support and practical assistance.

Key words

Ukraine, nuclear family, migration, Czech Republic, family practices, relational perspective

Acknowledgment

Contact

Mgr. Luděk Jirka, Ph.D., Department of Studies in Culture and Religion, Faculty of Education, University of Hradec Králové, Rokitanského 62/26, 500 03 Hradec Králové, Czech Republic; e-mail: ludek.jirka@uhk.cz
ORCID iD 0000-0002-2630-4550

Jak citovat / How to cite

Introduction

Historically, the Ukrainian family has been shaped by many social, political, and economic factors. For example, the urbanization process in the 1970s reduced the originally extended family ties of Ukrainian families in the western part of Ukraine (Burlaka et al. 2018). Furthermore, inappropriate Soviet household policy forced many Ukrainians to live in small, urban flats in an intergenerational co-residency system consisting of two or three generations in the same unit. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union (1991), the social and economic situation in independent Ukraine did not lead to the abandonment of the intergenerational co-residency system, and Ukrainian families became even more vulnerable due to the increasing age of marriages, lower fertility rates (Vseukrajinskyj perepys naselennja 2011), and higher divorce rates (Tolstokorova 2009). This is an example of how the Ukrainian family has changed historically. Despite these changes, scholars often analytically focus on the Ukrainian nuclear family as a bounded unit, and the influence of the intergenerational co-residency system or the continuing importance of extended family ties is less stressed (Burlaka et al. 2018; Hosnedlová – Stanek 2014; Khrenova – Burrell 2021; Mandebura 2018; Nour 2002; Slusar 2007). However, the family ties of Ukrainians may be "unbounded" from the "nuclearity" of the family. In this article, the nuclear family is understood as the classic sociological unit consisting of mother, father, and children. It is important to note that the nuclear family is generally preferred by scholars, as it is commonly used in official statistics and quantitative studies.

A more inclusive understanding of family is needed to "unbound" the nuclear family ties. In this regard, young people in particular may provide this perspective (Montero-Sieburth et al. 2021) by referring to the multireferentiality of their family ties (Merla et al. 2021). Young people often find it complicated to incline towards the rigid structure of the nuclear family because for them, living in the same residence as others is not the same as "living with" them. Moreover, they may criticize the boundedness of the conventional nuclear family structure because they may perceive life in a more socially non-conforming way than adults. This is related to the bottom-up perspective that shapes traditional nuclear family norms and reveals the variabilities and relationality of family relationships based on individual subjectivity. Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore how family practices in migration, based on the bottom-up perspective, reshape the traditional meaning of the nuclear family by highlighting the relevance of family practices to relatives be-

yond the nuclear unit. To achieve this objective, the article emphasizes the relational, subjectively important ties to non-nuclear family members of young participants from Ukraine studying in the Czech Republic. It is worth mentioning that the participants are the first migrants from their nuclear family in the Czech Republic while their parents decided to stay in Ukraine, and that family reunification, as guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights in the European Union, does not apply to parents. This family arrangement means the young participants could not rely solely on parental support during their migration process (or could only do so transnationally), and some referred to practices involving extended family members who live in the Czech Republic or in other countries of the European Union. This article contributes to studies discussing the decentralization of the traditional nuclear family framework in the migration process. It is necessary to note that the research was completed in 2021, a year before the full-fledged Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the data do not cover the war-torn situation.

Ukrainian migration to the Czech Republic is widely debated. Prior to the Russian invasion in 2022, scholars primarily focussed on labour migration (also termed economic migration) from Ukraine, discussing the position of Ukrainian migrants in the Czech labour market (Drbohlav et al. 2015), particularly on construction sites, in hotels, and in restaurants (Malynovska 2008). Research also addressed their integration in the Czech Republic, with an emphasis on working conditions and accommodation (Drbohlav et al. 2008; Schebelle – Kubát 2017). Some authors explored their irregular position in the labour market (Čermáková 2008; Rumpík 2015) or the mismatch between their education and employment (Leontiyeva 2014). Others focused on student migration and transnational ties (Ezzeddine 2019; Jirka – Leontiyeva 2022). While Ukrainians prior to the invasion mainly arrived from Zakarpattia Oblast (Uherek et al. 2008), recent studies have examined Ukrainian refugees fleeing from various parts of the country (Novotný – Drbohlav – Levová 2023; Racko – Mikulcová 2024). According to these studies, the focus on young Ukrainian migrants and their family ties has generally been underrepresented, which makes this article relevant. Furthermore, even studies which do reflect family ties analytically emphasize the bounded nuclear family.

The following sections review theoretical implications, the methodology of the study, and its findings. The theoretical section introduces non-traditional approaches to studying the family. This is followed by the methodology and findings.

A relational approach to the study of the Ukrainian family

As a framework, the nuclear family is challenged by approaches focussing on the variability of family relationships. The first such approach centres on the study of a complex range of relationships, including nuclear family ties. In this respect, the nuclear family is considered, but extended family ties are at the centre of the debate (Merla et al. 2021). The second approach suggests studying family practices within a broader set of practices. Specific points of departure at a specific time and in a specific space, such as for employment, are analysed, and the focus is on life trajectories, to decentre the notion of the nuclear family (Morgan 2011). The third approach elaborates on the culturally-defined configuration of the family, but its application could convey the petrification of cultural models which might not explain real relationships (ibid.). To avoid such petrification, it is necessary to study the bottom-up perspective, family practices, and social actions in order to recognize not just how cultural conditions change, shape, or fulfill (nuclear) family ties, but also how (or if) individual experiences and actions do not necessarily correspond to cultural conditions at all (Montero-Sieburth et al. 2021).

The term "family practices", important to this article, has already been mentioned, but this notion requires further clarification. Family practices, primarily related to the second approach mentioned above, refer to actions by which people affect their family members (Morgan 2011). Family practices can be linked to the concept of social networks as developed by Louise Ryan (2023). She discusses how social ties help migrants adjust to a new environment, such as finding a place to live, or overcoming barriers through the advice, information, and practical support from their family members. As stated by Morgan (2011) and Smart (2007), family practices are based on interactions and connections, and what is important is "to whom" the practices are directed and in what way (talking in person, gifts, calls, contact through the internet or social media), because engaging in these interactions and connections is a certain affirmation of the strength (or weakness) of a particular affiliation (Morgan 2011). This is also linked to caring (Nedelcu – Wyss 2016). Family practices allow us to explore specific forms of belonging and intimacy (Montero-Sieburth et al. 2021) and they help us to understand specific affiliations (Holdsworth 2013).

The notion of family practices may also benefit from transnational studies. Scholars debating such ties which cross national borders refer to the concept of transnational family, when family members are dispersed across different countries but maintain mutual bonds. Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick-Schiller (2004) discuss the "ways of being" and "ways of belonging" within transnational families. The former refers to the social relations and practices ascribed to individuals, while the later pertains to their subjective identification, relating

to their actions toward and awareness of other family members. Therefore, the latter is closely associated with family practices and touches upon the variety of ways in which individuals establish relational ties with specific family members (Bryceson – Vuorela 2002), leading to dynamic social entanglements (Cienfuegos-Illanes – Brandhorst 2023). However, authors discussing the Ukrainian family, even in its transnational form, often analytically stress the pre-set normative framework of the nuclear family (Hosnedlová – Stanek, 2014; Khrenova – Burrell 2021; Nešporová – Kuchařová 2009; Nour 2002; Slusar 2007), even as they are also aware of family practices toward non-nuclear family members. Nevertheless, the variability or the role of family practices in reshaping nuclear family ties are not usually discussed. By using this framework, it is not possible to comprehend affiliations with different non-nuclear family members based on choice and subjectivity (Huijsmans 2011; 2017). Thus, the analysis in this article discusses the family practices of young Ukrainian participants with different family members in a specific situation, using a bottom-up perspective to highlight the impact of their various relatives on their migration trajectories.

Methodology

This research focuses on participants who migrated from Ukraine to the Czech Republic and who study at a high school in Uničov, a smaller town. There were two main criteria for selecting the participants. First, the participants had to be enrolled in this high school in Uničov, as it represents a unique destination. Second, the participants had to be from Western Ukraine (Rivne Oblast) due to its distinct social and economic milieu, which is different from other parts of Ukraine. However, two of the interviewed participants were from Central Ukraine (Zhytomyr Oblast). While the first selection criterion was crucial for this article, the second was less significant, though it remains important to the overall research. The selection of the participants did not primarily target young participants without nuclear family members in the Czech Republic; separation from their parents was common among other foreigners studying at the high school in Uničov. Ukrainian parents can afford to send their descendants abroad while still maintaining their own livelihoods in Ukraine. The majority of young participants had long term visas for the purpose of study, but the research also included two former students of the high school in Uničov with employee status. The interviews were conducted from 2015 to 2021. The reason for the long duration of the research was the intention to expand the sample, since the participants enrolled as students gradually over the years. In total, 19 interviews with young Ukrainians were conducted.

The long duration of the research impacted the data consistency and analysis. First, the COVID-19 pandemic was a significant breaking point for the participants. The pandemic led to online education, and some participants returned to Ukraine to study remotely. This negatively affected three participants, who never finished their studies and remained in Ukraine. Second, the interviews were influenced by the war in Eastern Ukraine (since 2014), as participants expressed nationalistic sentiments in their narratives. Third, a significant milestone was the establishment of the visa-free regime for Ukrainians (since 2017), which allowed visa-free entry and a stay of up to 90 days in the Czech Republic, making travel between Ukraine and the Czech Republic much easier.

Nine young participants were interviewed in the Czech Republic, specifically in Uničov and Brno. Five interviews with young Ukrainians were conducted in the Rivne Oblast during the summer holidays. Conducting the interviews in Ukraine was not required, but for the author and some participants it was less demanding to conduct the interviews in the Rivne Oblast as both they and the author typically spent July and August there. During the interviews in the Rivne Oblast it was possible to observe the households in which the participants had lived before migrating to the Czech Republic. Moreover, it was possible to speak with their parents, but they were not included as participants for this article. While the parental perspective is relevant, it could be viewed as external and adult-centric. Therefore, the decision was to focus only on the perspectives of the young participants.

Additional interviews were conducted with participants from specific institutions. Three teachers from the high school in Uničov were interviewed and one interview was also conducted with the head of the Czech diasporic associations in the Rivne Oblast. Interviews with such representatives served to help us understand the context of the participants' migration trajectories, including their family ties. For example, the school representatives provided their interpretations of how the participants performed in the high school. The average interview lasted 60 minutes per person and all participants, both the young Ukrainians and the organizational representatives, were interviewed only once.

The location of the interviews with the young Ukrainians depended on the participants' preferences. The interviews were usually held in cafés, both in Ukraine and in the Czech Republic, as well as in the high school in Uničov with the teachers' permission. Most participants were interviewed face-to-face, but interviews with teachers (with one exception) were conducted online due to their time constraints. The places selected for the interviews were typically calm and quiet, as Uničov and the participants'

towns of origin are small, quiet towns. However, some interviews were interrupted by waiters or phone calls.

The young participants were recruited through the author's contacts with Czech diasporic associations in Western Ukraine. The head of one of these associations provided the phone numbers of two students attending high school in Uničov, who then shared the names and Facebook contact details of other potential participants. This is a classic example of the snowball method. Afterward, the author reached out to these participants via Messenger to arrange interviews. In some cases, the author himself searched for participants directly on Facebook and contacted them via Messenger.

Qualitative methodology is well-suited to studying the bottom-up perspective, due to its validity. The method used was a semi-structured interview, as the pre-set questions, along with additional questions asked in the context of the interview, could explore the subjectivities and meanings of the family practices described (Montero-Sieburth et al. 2021). The interviews could therefore reveal the dynamic, contextual, identificational aspects of the family practices reported, as well as the emotions and intimacies involved. This method enables the understanding of participants' attitudes and relations with different family members (ibid.). Importantly for this article, some authors have discussed that such interviews are influenced by cultural and social conventions (Atkinson 2005). The same set of questions was used for each young participant, with differences only in the supplementary questions, which were based on the context of each interview. The author chose this approach to ensure that the responses would be easier to code and analyze. All of these participants were asked about their decisions to migrate, their arrival, and their adaptation in the Czech Republic, followed by questions on whether they had any relatives who might have assisted them in the Czech Republic or in the European Union after their arrival, and questions on their financial, emotional, and practical ties to their nuclear family members, other relatives, and friends in the Czech Republic or in the European Union. These ties are shown in Table 1 (along with the characteristics of the participants). The participants were also asked about their everyday situations in school and leisure activities. It was important to explore which kinds of family ties to specific family members were subjectively significant to the participants (and why) during their migration.

The ethical principles of informed consent and personal privacy were adopted. Participants had the right to withdraw from the research; their names were replaced by pseudonyms; specific Oblasts in Ukraine were referenced instead of the participants' towns of origin to protect their privacy; and the material was used only for the purposes of the research. Informed consent was signed by participants over the age of 18 at the time

of the research. Interviewing young people under the age of 18 was ethically problematic, and in these cases, it was the parents who signed their informed consent to the research on behalf of the young participants. This is in accordance with Czech legislation. Regarding the European Convention on Human Rights, the participants have the right to conceal the particularities of their family and private life.

The interviews were transcribed and saved in the author's archive. The author assigned codes to identify topics useful for analysis. Some information was gathered through short conversations with the participants before or after the interviews, and this information was recorded in the field diary. The author spent one month in Uničov to get acquainted with the local environment. Although the interviews were conducted in Czech, the author is fluent in the Ukrainian language, and this reduced misunderstandings. The participants' Czech language proficiency varied.

The author is Czech by nationality, but he had previously conducted research on Czech diasporic associations in Western Ukraine, where he established contact with the first participants. It is worth mentioning that, as an academician, while the participants were students in high school, he was generally seen as person with high social status. As a result, some participants were shy and less talkative, while others spoke politely.

Participant	Date of birth	Gender	Age at time of interview	Non-nuclear family members in the Czech Republic/European Union
Ivan	1995	Male	23	–
Albina	1996	Female	19	Cousin in Austria
Julia	1996	Female	17	–
Lera	1996	Female	17	–
Elena	1997	Female	18	–
Nikolaj	1997	Male	17	Cousin in the Czech Republic
Valerie	1998	Female	15	Grandfather in the Czech Republic
Alexander	2000	Male	17	Uncle in the Czech Republic, cousins in Poland
Jana	2000	Female	18	Uncle in the Czech Republic
Viktoria	2001	Female	16	Cousin in the Czech Republic
Anna	2001	Female	16	–
Lara	2001	Female	18	–
Evdokia	2000	Female	19	Cousin in the Czech Republic
Vasyl	2002	Male	19	Aunt the Czech Republic
Denys	2000	Male	21	–
Olena	2003	Female	18	–
Vladyslav	2002	Male	19	Aunt in the Czech Republic

Jaroslava	2004	Female	17	–
Emma	2002	Female	19	Cousin in the Czech Republic

Table 1 Non-nuclear participants' family members in the Czech Republic/European Union. Listed by recording date. Source: author.

Name	Parental working status (F – father, M – mother)	Where parents live
Lera	Worker on construction site (F), translator and private teacher of Czech language (M)	France
Julja	Worker on construction site (F), translator and private teacher of Czech language (M)	France
Valeria	Does not take care about her – divorced (F), mailman (M)	Ukraine
Albina	Doctor – stomatologist (F), doctor – senior official in state institution (M)	Ukraine
Elena	Engineer in a private company in Poland (F), lower-ranked policeman (M)	Ukraine
Nikolaj	Owners of restaurant (F-M), also entrepreneur with meat (F)	Ukraine
Alexander	Entrepreneur with cars, windows etc. (F), official in passport office (M)	Ukraine
Viktoria	Local director of Ministry of Education and Science (F), bank accountant (M)	Ukraine
Anna	Entrepreneurs (F-M)	Ukraine
Ivan	Entrepreneur (M), does not take care about him – divorce (F)	Ukraine
Jana	In Great Britain, without work (M), does not take care about her – divorced (F)	Ukraine
Lara	Truck driver (F), entrepreneur (M)	Ukraine
Evdokia	Janitor (F), accountant in a school (M)	Ukraine
Vasyl	Entrepreneurs (F-M)	Ukraine
Denis	Owners of a restaurant (F-M)	Ukraine
Olena	Owners of a restaurant (F-M), also worked as entrepreneur with meat (F)	Ukraine
Vladyslav	Teacher (F), entrepreneur (M)	Russia
Jaroslava	Pensioner (F), accountant (M)	Ukraine
Emma	Entrepreneurs (F-M)	Ukraine

Table 2 Parental working status. Source: author.

Table 1 shows that 10 participants had non-nuclear family members in the Czech Republic or in the European Union (Austria, Poland). Participants without any non-nuclear family members abroad were not directly excluded from the analysis; the interviews with them served to study family practices related to their parents. Table 2 presents the participants' parents' professions, providing insight into the social and economic background of the participants.

The relevance of the nuclear family

It should be emphasized that the participants in this research stressed the importance of nuclear family ties. The influence of their nuclear family was crucial at the beginning of their migration process. While some participants expressed their own intentions to migrate and others were encouraged by their parents to study abroad, their migration would never have been realized without parental involvement. At the Czech Embassy in Lviv, their parents applied for the long-term visas the children needed for the purpose of studying and had to show sufficient finances in their bank accounts (a visa policy requirement meant to guarantee financial support for the initial months of their children's stay in the Czech Republic), as well as arranging their children's accommodation in Uničov. The specific motives for migration among the participants included the desire to explore a new environment, to live in an economically-developed country, or to obtain a high-quality education abroad. Economic disparities between the countries were also an important factor.

After migration, mainly due to the separation from their parents, the participants realized the extent of their parents' self-denial in supporting their education abroad. This was evident, as the parents monthly sent reverse remittances to the participants in the Czech Republic, which worsened their parents' financial situations back home. The participants' realization of this parental self-denial changed their relationships, and the participants underlined that their ties towards their parents became more positive. Some also stated that they had wanted to leave their parental home before migrating to the Czech Republic, as they no longer wanted to follow their parents' rules. However, they also noted that this feeling now belonged to the past. The participants looked forward to the summer or Christmas holidays to visit their parents in Ukraine. Their parents were usually mentioned as the main driver for why the participants visited their hometowns. In turn, separation from their parents contributed to the development of the participants' personal independence, as they had to negotiate with Czech institutions and learned how to manage their basic needs in the host

country without their parents' physical presence. As these family practices show, their parents played a crucial role for the participants, especially when considering that the nuclear family is regarded as the most-trusted institution for Ukrainians (Diuk 2012; Kostenko 2021). Nevertheless, their claimed ties to non-nuclear family members also underscore the importance of these relations in the migration process.

Financial support

The participants were financially supported by their parents, who sent them reverse remittances each month. These remittances covered basic living expenses such as accommodation and food, but the participants worked part-time jobs to secure additional financial resources. A better living standard is enabled by such earnings from their part-time jobs:

> "I *have money. I can afford something more, more food or other things, but I work from six in the morning until eleven at night, and I get home at midnight.*" ("Jana", 27 September 2018, Uničov)

The average amount of reverse remittances was 200 euro per month, but this amount later increased to 250–300 euro. As participant "Alexander" mentioned, the lower cost of living in the Czech Republic made it affordable for parents in Ukraine to support their children there. Some participants' parents had well-paid jobs, while others held worse-paid jobs, and this created social inequalities among the participants. However, all remained financially dependent on their parents and the nuclear family was still significant in that regard.

Only one participant mentioned financial support from a non-nuclear family member. "Lara" referred to her 55-year-old grandfather who had been living in the Czech Republic before her arrival and provided her financial support during her studies in Uničov. "Lara's" parents are divorced, her father does not take care of her, and her mother had a poorly paid job as a postal worker. The financial assistance from her grandfather was crucial. "Lara" did not even know her grandfather personally, the financial support he provided was organized by her mother. "Lara" also remembered that her grandfather used to supported her mother financially (or through gifts) when he would occasionally return to Ukraine for a few days. However, this form of support was exceptional among the participants. Others did not mention any similar help from their non-nuclear relatives. Therefore, financial family practices were primarily associated with parents and not with non-nuclear family members.

Emotional support

The participants were in transnational contact with their parents on a daily basis. They used social media platforms such as Viber, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook, as well as traditional phone calls, to communicate with their parents. Participants were mainly asked by their parents about their living situation in the Czech Republic:

> "*Mother calls me every five minutes after school. I finish* [school] *at two, and my mother calls me: 'What are you doing now? And what will you eat? And what are you doing this evening?'*" ("Jaroslava", 17 November 2021, Uničov)

This mutual transnational contact generated social affection and emotions, and the frequency of communication also reflected a form of parental care. Although the participants acknowledged that calls could not replace physical contact, they also noted that video calls, due to the face-to-face engagement, enabled them to feel close to their parents. Therefore, ties to the nuclear family were intense, and these family practices reflected signs of care.

According to the participants, non-nuclear family members, particularly cousins, also provided them emotional support. "Nikolaj" had a close relationship with his cousin, despite their living in different towns in the host country:

> "*We have known each other very well since we were two years old, you know? We just did stupid things together. We are together when I visit him and when he visits me. This is good for us.*" ("Nikolaj", 26 July 2014, Rivne Oblast)

"Evdokia" also described receiving emotional support from her cousin: "*She did not laugh when I tried to speak* [Czech]*, she supported me, as did the teachers.*" ("Evdokia", 27 March 2019, Uničov) Cousins were also supportive at the beginning of participants' arrival in Uničov: "*We were often together. We studied together, asked people things on the streets, tried to get to know something new, and she was helpful.*" ("Viktoria", 18 August 2017, Uničov) Therefore, cousins also contributed emotional support to the participants, although parental affections seemed to be more significant. It is worth noting that emotional support cannot be strictly distinguished from practical assistance; the difference is more analytical. To sum up, emotional family practices stemmed from the parents, but cousins were also involved in these practices.

Practical assistance

This category means participants more likely emphasized practical support over emotional support when describing such aid. Practical assistance means non-financial help, such as providing accommodation, information, material aid, or help with school-related activities. Parental roles were also decisive in this regard, with participants mentioning their parents' involvement in arranging accommodation in Uničov or obtaining visas in Lviv. Participants also noted their parents accompanied them and spent the first one or two weeks after the participants' arrival in Uničov with them to make the transition easier. While this list of parental assistance is far from complete, attention should now be paid to the role of non-nuclear family members.

Regarding such family members, "Alexander" noted that these ties could have even influenced his choice of a destination:

> "*There was a possibility that I would go to Poland. This could have been an even more logical opportunity because I have family there. I have two cousins there on my mother's side.*" ("Alexander", 18 August 2017, Uničov)

A similar sentiment was expressed by "Albina": "*I could study in Vienna. I have a nice* [second] *cousin* [in Vienna], *and she is actually the daughter of my mother's cousin.*"[1] (Albina, 23 February 2015, Uničov)

Although their expectations were never tested, "Alexander" and "Albina" expected their cousins could provide accommodation and practical help with settling, making their potential impact on these participants' migration trajectories noteworthy. Furthermore, the affiliation with them was based on close family practices. This was also demonstrated in the participants' statements that they frequently communicated with their cousins through

---

1 The participants originally used the term "sisters" instead of cousins. These "sisters" are non-nuclear relatives, and understanding this requires considering it within the context of the Ukrainian kinship system. In the case of the first participant, his "sisters" are the daughters of his mother's sister and in English terminology would be classified as cousins. For the second participant, her "sister" is the daughter of her mother's cousin and in English terminology would be referred to as a second cousin. In the Ukrainian language these relatives are referred as "dvojuridna sestra/dvojuridnyj brat" (cousin) and "trojuridna sestra/trojuridnyj brat" (second cousin). While "sestra" translates as "sister" and "brat" as "brother", in the Ukrainian kinship system these terms refer to both siblings and cousins. These are cultural implications based on the Ukrainian kinship system.

social media, primarily to receive advice and information, and that they often visited each other. However, the participants further stated that such close family practices between cousins are not unequivocally common in Ukraine, as they depend on specific family ties. The cohesiveness and proximity of ties among cousins could vary considerably, therefore. Also, changes over time were important. "Evdokia" was persuaded by a cousin to migrate to the Czech Republic, but over time their mutual ties soured and they lost contact with each other. Although "Evdokia" mentioned that she arrived in the Czech Republic as a "*family member*" and that she communicated with her cousin "*frequently as family member*s" ("Evdokia", 27 March 2019, Uničov), their ties deteriorated. Before this shift, her cousin had provided her useful information about a Czech-language teacher in Ukraine (prior to her migration), about the living conditions in Uničov, and about possible accommodation in the town. Living together was not an option, as the cousin already shared an apartment with a friend. Similarly, "Viktoria" migrated to the Czech Republic with a cousin and they lived together in the same flat, doing their homework and cooking together. However, the relationship soured due to personal differences, and "Viktoria" specified the reasons:

> "*She is good friends with a girl from Moldova. This Moldovan girl lives alone and my sister is often with her. They are also together in one class. And she* [the cousin] *is just different from me. She wants to – I guess she does not think about the future. She is a person who lives from day to day. And I am – I do not like it, and to be honest, it annoys me.*" ("Viktoria", 18 August 2017, Uničov)

That cousin later returned to Ukraine due to homesickness. These citations illustrate the migration experiences and the practical assistance available to the participants from family during the migration process. The negative shift in their ties does not invalidate the claim. The closeness among cousins also has cultural roots. Although cultural norms should not serve as the sole explanation, such closeness was likely due to the extended family ties which remain important in Western Ukraine. However, the confirmation of this proximity depends on the bottom-up perspective, subjectivity, and family practices.

Some participants also encountered their aunts and uncles in the Czech Republic, but contacts with them remained weak in terms of practical assistance and emotional support. "Vasyl" referred to his aunt who owned a hotel in a small village near Uničov. He said this aunt once provided him accommodation during the summer holidays but was unable to offer him

lodging during the whole school year, so he had to pay for a dormitory in Uničov. Other participants also mentioned their uncles and aunts in even less significant ways. "Alexander" did not even know, prior to moving there, that his uncle was living in the Czech Republic. After he arrived in Uničov, he visited his uncle in the South Bohemian Region. This was a one-time visit, solely for the purpose of getting to know each other:

> "*I only realized* [that my uncle is in the Czech Republic] *in the second month after my arrival. My grandmother said my uncle is in České Budějovice. After two weeks I visited him and saw him for the first time in my life. I just wanted to get to know him.*" ("Alexander", 18 August 2017, Uničov)

As this participant further explained, he refused offers of help from his uncle. "Jana" also had an uncle in Prague and mentioned that he allowed her to sleep in his flat a couple of times, but they did not maintain significant contact.

Discussion and conclusion

The findings show that the participants acknowledged the importance of their nuclear family, but they also referred to family practices with cousins during their migration. The findings explored the significant roles of cousins in providing emotional support and practical (non-financial) assistance, while parents provided financial and emotional support, as well as practical help (Table 3). However, the importance of the emotional ties to and practical assistance from the cousins suggests that these ties challenge the exclusive focus of research on the nuclear family, as is traditional. This focus emphasizes the intimate, close ties among nuclear family members (Khrenova – Burell 2021), but intimacy and closeness in family should not be limited to bounded nuclear families, as ties with other relatives can be equally, or even more, significant. An analytical focus on the nuclear family in migration might therefore be challenged by the significance of non-nuclear family ties, as explored in this article in the context of participants from Ukraine. Overall, it is necessary to adopt a bottom-up perspective, based on subjectivity and identification, to explore the significance of family practices involving other relatives if such practices exist (Montero-Sieburth et al. 2021). While these ties are also influenced by cultural conditions, cultural traits should not be taken for granted, as they are based on bottom-up practices rather than cultural classification within the kinship system.

Relatives	Financial support	Emotional support	Practical assistance
Nuclear family	+	+	+
Cousins	-	+	+
Aunts/Uncles	-	-	+

Table 3 The relevance of family ties (+ applicable; - non-applicable). Source: author.

This research has several limitations. First, although this study focussed on family practices, ties to non-related peers were also relevant for the migration process (ibid.). Peers in this study were found to be particularly supportive to the participants in areas such as finding accommodation, overcoming visa restrictions, and translating, thanks to their shared experiences (Robila – Taylor 2004). However, they were excluded from the analysis as they were not family members. Participants' partners were also omitted. Second, most participants were from a small town in Western Ukraine, and Ukrainians from larger cities, such as Kyiv, may have had different experiences. The nuclearization of families may have advanced further in larger cities than it has in smaller towns, where more traditional understandings of family still prevail. Third, while the geographical and linguistic closeness between Ukrainians and Czechs also influenced participants' decisions about migration, this factor was not analysed in the study. Fourth, only half of the participants in the sample had extended family members in the Czech Republic or the European Union, which limited this study, although the strength of this article does not lie in numbers, but in admitting the possibility that non-nuclear family members are important to Ukrainian migrants.

Research on the family is essential for understanding social processes. This is not just important for academic purposes, but also for governments and for migration management. However, the state-centric view often prioritizes the nuclear family.

May 2025

References

Atkinson, Paul. 2005. Qualitative research-unity and diversity. *FQS: Qualitative Social Research* 6, 3: 1–15. https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-6.3.4

Bryceson, Deborah – Vuorela, Ulla. 2002. *The Transnational Family: New European Frontiers and Global Networks.* New York: Routledge.

Burlaka, Viktor – Serdiuk, Oleksii – Nickelsen, Tetiana – Tkach, Bohdan – Khvorova, Hanna. 2018. Family Life Education in Ukraine. In: Robila, Mihaela – Taylor, Alan C (eds.): *Global Perspectives on Family Life Education*. Cham: Springer: 329–343.

Cienfuegos-Illanes, Javiera – Brandhorst, Rosa. 2023. Transnational Families: Entangled Inequalities and Emerging Challenges on the Global Scale. In: Cienfuegos-Illanes, Javiera – Brandhorst, Rosa – Fahy Bryceson, Deborah (eds.): *Handbook of Transnational Families Around the World.* Cham: Springer: 3–18.

Čermáková, Dita. 2008. Klientský systém a jeho specifika. In: Drbohlav, Dušan (ed.): *Nelegální ekonomické aktivity migrantů. Česko v evropském kontextu.* Praha: Karolinum: 167–175.

Diuk, Nadia M. 2012. *The Next Generation in Russia, Ukraine, and Azerbaijan: Youth, Policy, Identity and Change.* Lanham, Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Drbohlav, Dušan (ed.). 2015. *Ukrajinská pracovní migrace v Česku: Migrace – remitence – (rozvoj).* Praha: Karolinum.

Drbohlav, Dušan (ed.). 2008. *Nelegální ekonomické aktivity migrantů. Česko v evropském kontextu.* Praha: Karolinum.

Ezzeddine, Petra. 2019. Sentimentální peníze aneb jaká je cena transnacionálního mateřství. *Gender a výzkum* 20, 1: 68–90. https://doi.org/10.13060/25706578.2019.20.1.463

Holdsworth, Clare. 2013. *Family and Intimate Mobilities.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hosnedlová, Renáta – Stanek, Mikołaj. 2014. Analysing Selected Transnational Activities among Ukrainian Immigrants in Spain. *Central of Eastern European Migration Review* 3, 1: 99–114.

Huijsmans, Roy. 2011. Child Migration and Questions of Agency. *Development and Change* 42, 5: 1307–1321. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2011.01729.x

Huijsmans, Roy. 2017. Children and Young People in Migration: A Relational Approach. In: Caitriona Ni, Laoire – White, Allen – Skelton, Tracey (eds.): *Movement, Mobilities and Journeys*. Singapore: Singapore Springer: 45–66.

Jirka, Luděk – Leontiyeva, Yana. 2022. Transnacionalismus, integrace a identifikace: Diskuse o proměnlivosti a dynamice sociálních procesů na příkladu studentské migrace z Ukrajiny. *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review* 58, 1: 29–51. https://doi.org/10.13060/csr.2022.009

Khrenova, Lyudmila – Burrell, Kathy. 2021. Materialising Care Across Borders: Sent Things and Family Ties between Sweden and Ukraine. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 11, 3: 250–264. https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.399

Kostenko, Nina. 2021. Zminy informacijnoho klimatu: Ukrajinski media mizh istynoju i pidozroju. In: Valerij, Vorona – Shulha, Mykola. *Ukrajinske suspilstvo: Monitorinh Socialnych zmin 30 rokiv nezalezhnosti.* Kyjiv: Nacionalna Akademija Nauk Ukrajiny: 512–533.

Leontiyeva, Yana. 2014. The Education–Employment Mismatch among Ukrainian Migrants in the Czech Republic. *Central and Eastern European Migration Review* 3, 1: 63–84.

Levitt, Peggy – Glick-Schiller, Nina. 2004. Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society. *International Migration Review* 38, 3: 1002–1039. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2004.tb00227.x

Malynovska, Olena. 2008. Migrace z Ukrajiny (s důrazem na Česko jako cílovou zemi). In: Dušan Drbohlav (ed.): *Nelegální ekonomické aktivity migrantů. Česko v evropském kontextu.* Praha: Karolinum: 211–224.

Mandebura, Olesja. 2018. Simja jak Cinnist u Ploshchi Suspilnych Cinnostej. *Naukovy Zapysky* 54, 4: 99–111.

Merla, Laura – Nobels, Bérengère – Murru, Sarah – Theys, Coralie. 2021. "Doing family" in and through space: towards a multilocal habitus? *Recherches sociologiques et anthropologiques* 52, 1: 25–45.

Montero-Sieburth, Martha – Mas Giralt, Rosa – Garcia-Arjona, Noemi – Eguren, Joaquín. 2021. *Family Practices in Migration*. Oxon, New York: Routledge.

Morgan, David. 2011. Locating 'Family Practices'. *Sociological Research Online* 16, 4: 1–9. https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.2535

Nedelcu, Mihaela – Wyss, Malika. 2016. "Doing family" through ICT-mediated ordinary co-presence: transnational communication practices of Romanian migrants in Switzerland. *Global Networks* 16, 2: 202–218. https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12110

Nešporová, Olga – Kuchařová, Věra. 2009. *Rodiny přistěhovalců II*. Praha: VÚPSV.

Nour, Andrij. 2002. Ukrajinska simja v sučasnomu sociumi: Realiji i tendenciji. *Ukrajinskyj socium* 1, 1: 104–110.

Novotný, Josef – Levkova, Anna – Drbohlav, Dušan. 2023. *Váleční uprchlíci z Ukrajiny v Česku (2022-2023): Situace a subjektivní postoje.* Praha: Přírodovědecká fakulta, Univerzita Karlova.

Racko, Veronika – Mikulcová, Kateřina. 2024. Voices of Refugee Families from Ukraine Currently Living in the Czech Republic. *The*

British Journal of Social work 54, 8: 3550–3567. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcae119

Robila, Mihaela – Taylor, Alan C. 2018. *Global Perspectives on Family Life Education*. Cham: Springer.

Rumpík, Viktor. 2015. „Махінаціце я не…" Klientský systém v České republice a jeho současná transformace. *Lidé města* 17, 1: 109–136. https://doi.org/10.14712/12128112.3413

Ryan, Louise. 2023. *Social Networks and Migration – Relocations, Relationships and Resources*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.

Schebelle, Danica – Kubát, Jan. 2017. *Proces integrace rodin cizinců do majoritní společnosti České republiky s ohledem na jejich sociokulturní specifika a role žen v procesu integrace*. Praha: VÚPSV, v. v. i.

Slusar, Ljudmyla. 2007. Simja Suchasnij Ukrajiny: Instytucijna Kryza Chy Postindustrialna Transformacija. *Demohrafichni Procesy Ta Tendenciji* 30, 1: 28–38.

Smart, Carol. 2007. *Personal Life*. Cambridge: Polity.

Tolstokorova, Alissa. 2009. Costs and Benefits of Labour Migration for Ukrainian Transnational Families: Connection or Consumption? *Cahiers de l'Urmis* 12: 1–16. https://doi.org/10.4000/urmis.868

Uherek, Zdeněk – Valášková, Naďa – Bělohradská, Kateřina – Mušinka, Mikuláš. 2008. Pracovní migrace ze Zakarpatské Ukrajiny do České republiky. In: Uherek, Zdeněk – Korecká, Zuzana – Pojarová, Tereza (eds.): *Cizinecké komunity z antropologické perspektivy: vybrané případy imigračních skupin v České republice*. Praha: Etnologický ústav AV ČR: 119–146.

Vseukrajinskyj perepys naselennja. 2011. Kyjiv: Derzhavna sluzhba statystyky Ukrajiny.