

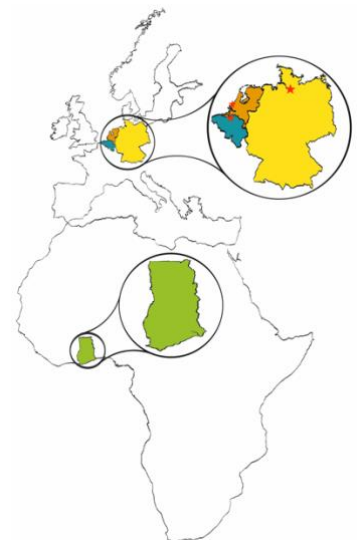
## Mobility Trajectories of Young Lives

### Life chances of transnational youth in the Global South and North

Today a growing number of young people have migrated themselves or their parents have. But migration is not the end of young people's mobility. Recent research shows that many young people travel regularly to their or their parents' country of origin. These young people are whom we call 'transnational youth'. While travels for youth of non-migrant background, in the form of secondary school exchanges or Erasmus+ programs at university, are perceived as having a positive impact on their lives, the same is not true for students of migrant background. There is widespread belief in European countries that high mobility hinders the educational progress and language acquisition of migrant-background youth and there are laws and policies in place to discourage such travels. Yet, little evidence exists about how international mobility actually impacts their lives.

The [MO-TRAYL project](#) (2017-2023), funded by the European Research Council (ERC), focused on understanding **how physically mobile young people are, why they move, and how this mobility affects their lives**. The project includes:

- 4 in-depth studies in Belgium, Germany, The Netherlands, and Ghana with 102 young people of Ghanaian background (aged 14-25).
- 3 high school surveys with 2,019 youth (aged 16-19), including both migrant and non-migrant background youth in the three European countries
- 1 follow-up survey with 359 high school graduates in three cities in Ghana.



### MAIN FINDINGS

*The results below pertain to the 3 European countries.*

#### MIGRANT-BACKGROUND YOUTH ARE VERY MOBILE

International mobility is frequent and common among all youth, irrespective of whether they are of migrant background. Migrant-background youth in particular travel often to their (parents') country of origin.

- As many as 61% of migrant-background youth visit the 'origin' country at least once every two years and 86% have visited once to twice in their lifetimes.
- This mobility occurs regardless of young people's socioeconomic status, their parents' educational levels or their 'migrant generation'.

Mobility takes many forms, including:

- Being mobile *within* the 'origin' country before migrating to Europe, e.g., moving between caregivers, schools, and neighbourhoods after their parents have migrated abroad.
- Migrating from one country to another.
- Visiting the 'origin' country on holiday, for family reasons, internships, and volunteer work.

Therefore, mobility is integral to young people's lives and the 'origin' country plays an important and ongoing role in the lives of migrant-background youth.

But what does this mobility result in?

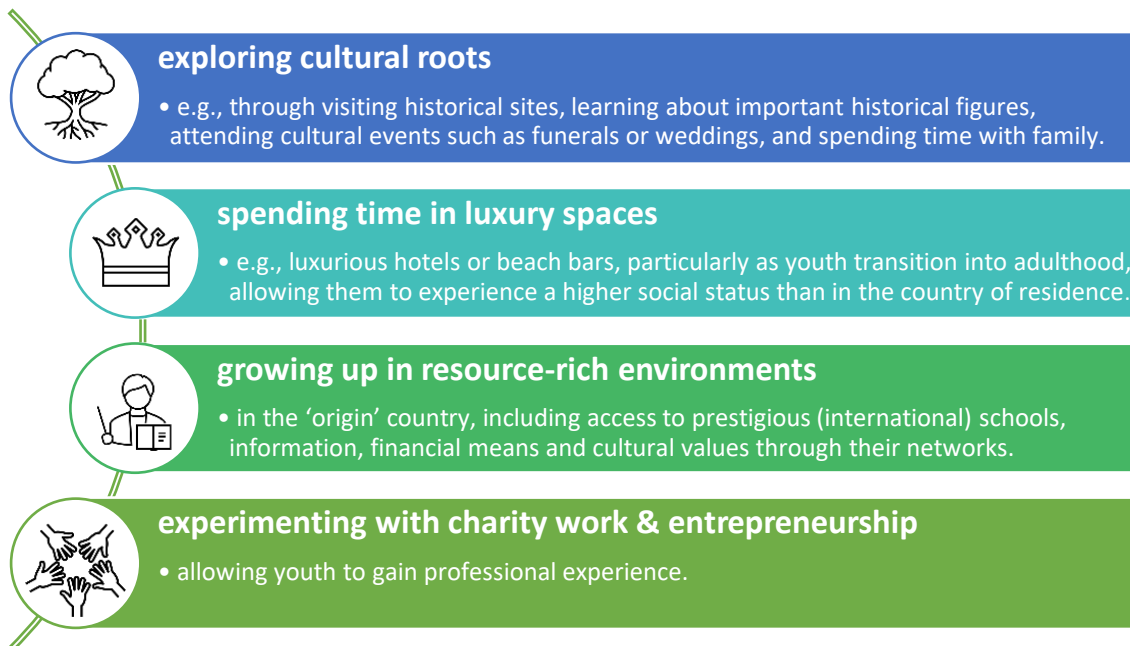
## VALUABLE NETWORKS AND EXPERIENCES ARE FOSTERED THROUGH MOBILITY

Migrant-background youth foster **transnational networks** through their physical mobility by:

- rekindling and maintaining supportive relationships with relatives, old caregivers, friends and partners.
- meeting new people on their trips, expanding their transnational social networks over time.

The emotional support, different perspectives, and practical opportunities (e.g., work experience, business opportunities) that young people gain from these transnational networks directly impact their lives in Europe.

Young people gain various **mobility experiences** by spending time in the 'origin' country, through both living there and visiting. These experiences relate to:



These mobility experiences enable youth to compare life and broader socio-political structures across contexts. They evaluate their own positioning in different parts of the world. We call this **comparative confrontation**.

## MOBILITY GENERATES RESOURCES

Through their mobility experiences and transnational networks, youth generate valuable **transnational resources**, including:

- **self-confidence** in their abilities and cultural and familial backgrounds, e.g., confidence in prior academic achievements in the 'origin' country help youth persevere when entering a new educational system in Europe; recognizing their positions in the world helps youth maintain self-confidence in the face of discrimination in the residence country.
- **adaptability** between different cultures and environments allow youth to deal with different sets of values, norms, communication styles and pedagogical approaches, e.g., adjusting to new classroom environments when moving between countries, and to new households where often they change caregivers.
- **motivation** to reach educational and professional goals.

These resources help youth face challenges and seize opportunities in the European countries they live in, where they sometimes face discrimination and other hurdles.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Most professionals who work with migrant-background youth do incredible work under enormous workloads and significant resource constraints, while operating in complex policy environments. Debates continue on how to foster equity in education by catering to the varying needs of a diverse young population, including migrant-background youth. At the MO-TRAYL Policy Day, we aim to discuss how acknowledging and valuing transnational youth mobility and the resources they gain, can contribute to policies that foster equity.

### VALORISING OR PENALISING MOBILITY?

The Netherlands, Belgium and Germany currently have policies in place that penalize absences due to mobility, e.g. through fines or disciplinary actions. In practice, some schools already deal with travel to the country of 'origin' in a more discretionary way, allowing students to make trips to the country of 'origin' because they acknowledge the importance and value of such mobility.

- ***How could school attendance policies take into account the role and value of mobility?***
- ***How could the educational benefits of 'origin' country trips be formally recognised (e.g., through credit points) similar to other forms of international student mobility (e.g., school trips, exchange programs)?***

### TODAY'S MOBILITY IN DEVELOPING TOMORROW'S CITIZENS

Increasingly, employers seek workers with 'soft skills' that relate to intercultural communication and global competencies – exactly the kind of skills that our research shows transnational mobility generates in youth of migrant background. For example, the [World Economic Forum's 21st Century Skills](#) identified skills that employers look for in their employees. These include 'curiosity', 'social and cultural awareness' and 'adaptability'.

- ***How can the resources migrant-background youth gain through their mobility be recognised and rewarded in the classroom, like other international experiences (e.g., school trips, exchange programs)?***
- ***How can migrant-background youth's transnational social networks be drawn upon as sources of support (e.g., emotional support and role models) and opportunities (e.g., internships, education, entrepreneurship, volunteering)?***

More information on the **MO-TRAYL** project can be found on our website [www.motrayl.com](http://www.motrayl.com), such as [academic publications](#) based on our research, the [illustrated e-book](#) 'Finding Your Voice' (available in English, Dutch and German) which is based on a storytelling workshop with research participants, as well as a [podcast](#) produced by some of our respondents.