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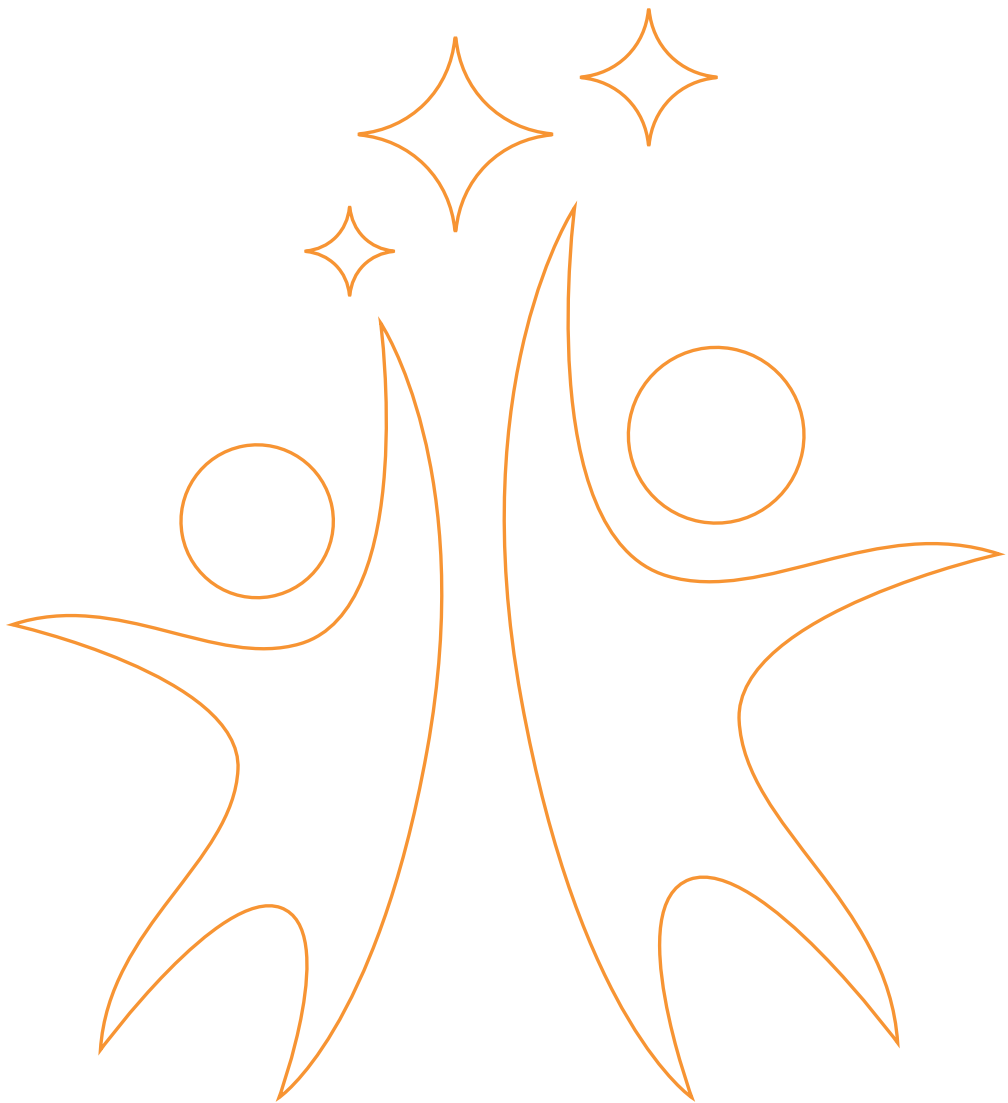
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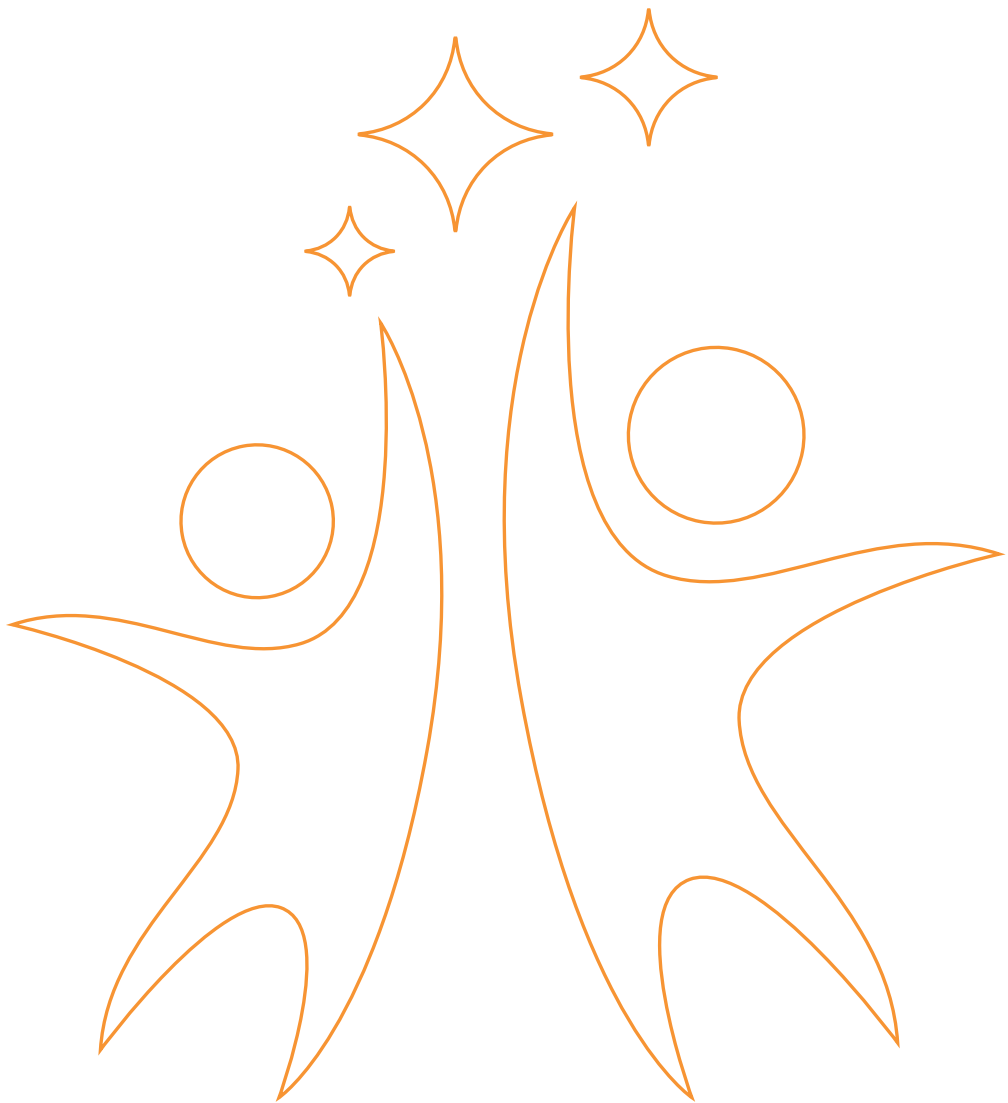
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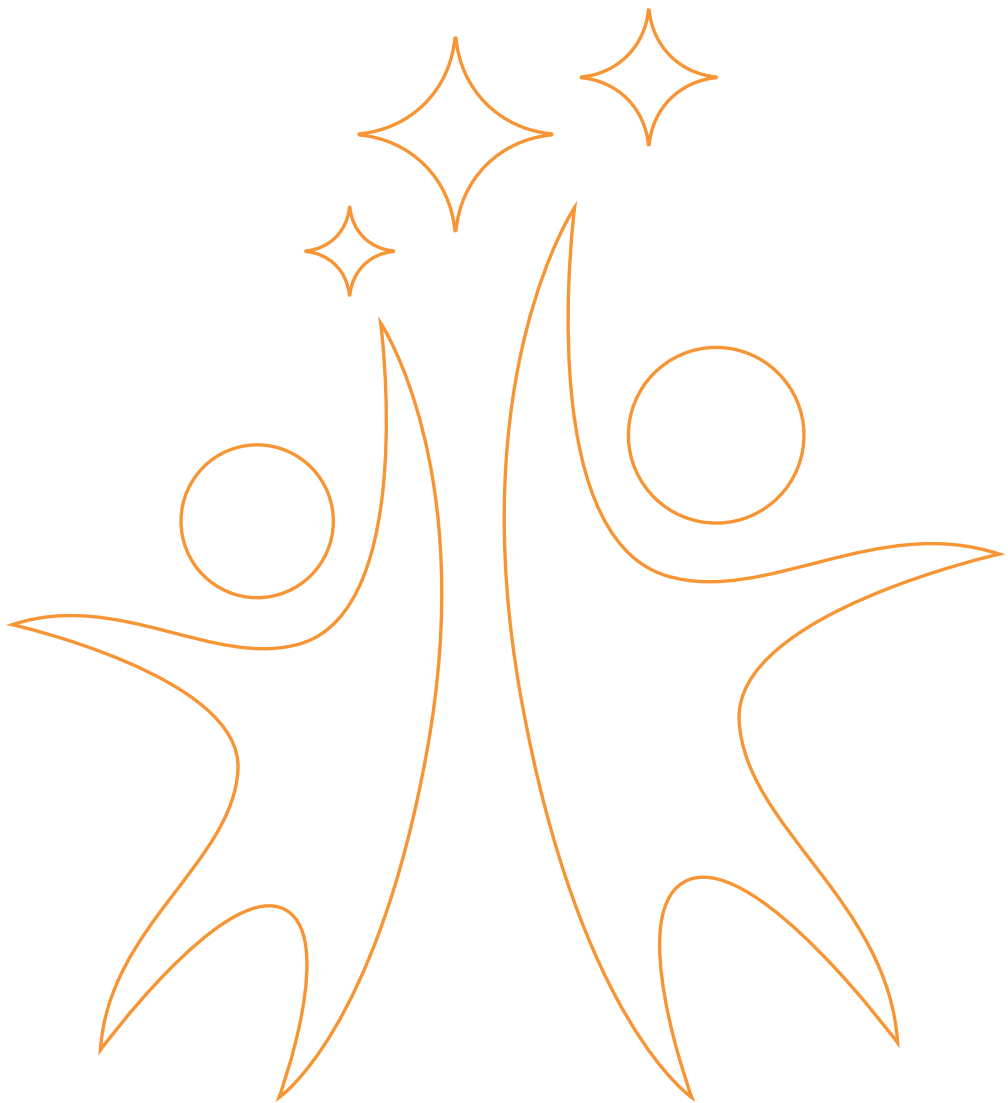
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**Children Left Behind by Labour Migration:
Supporting Moldovan and Ukrainian
Transnational Families in the EU (CASTLE)
ICMPD / 2021 / MPF-357-004**

Opening Report
(AUGUST, 2022)

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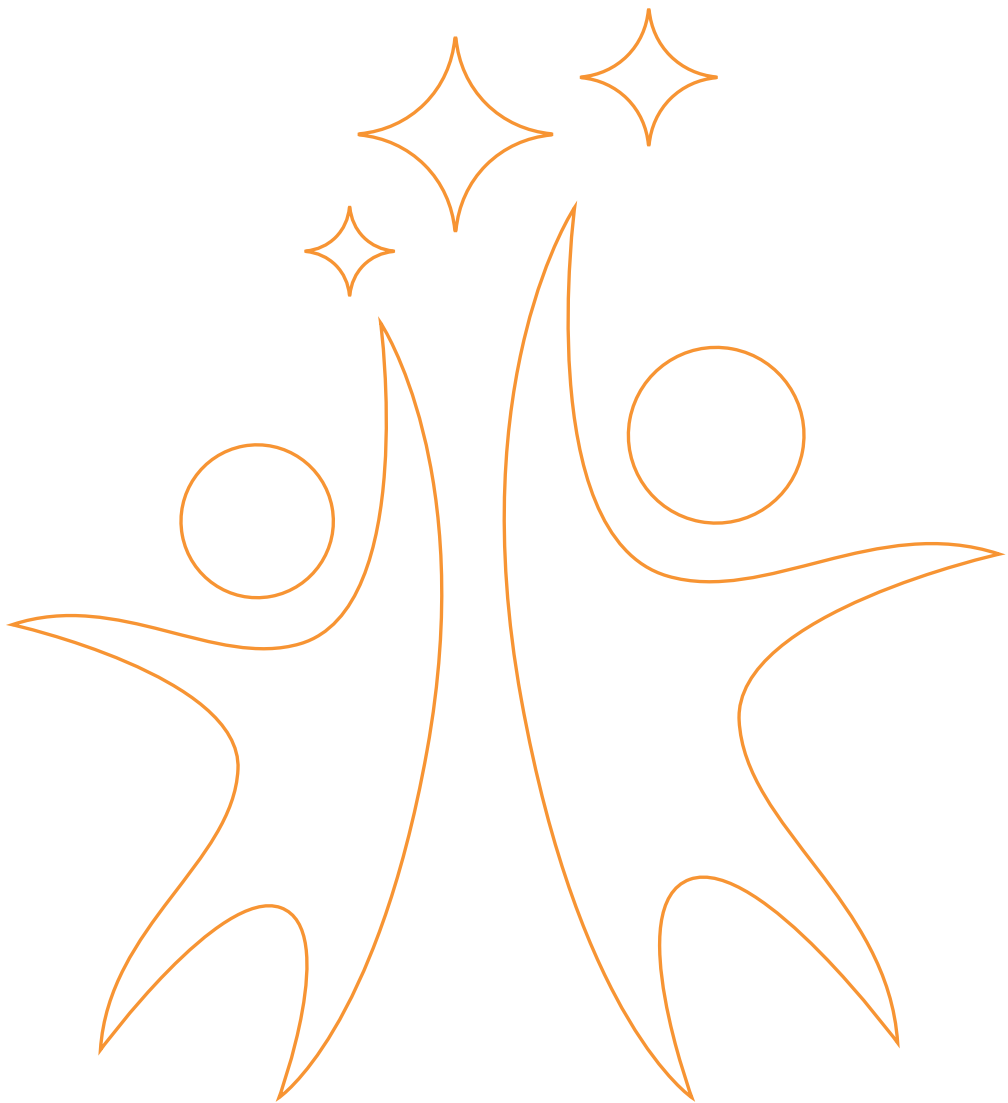
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Introduction

General description of the research

While our research is one that addresses stay-behind children’s situation in the context of migration, it also has its limits hence many aspects of migration that come into play cannot be addressed therein. Also, while we acknowledge the priorities of societies in foregoing migration as such, we also understand the necessities forcing family members to migrate, therefore accepting what has been called the transnational situation as a reality, and namely, an extremely extensive one.

Within that reality, our research, being part of an action research project that also involves co-researchers, aims to function as the voice of beneficiary groups—stay-behind children and their families—therefore aiming, beside signaling issues and calls for support, to also highlight family practices that may function as examples to be disseminated.

Scientific context

Qualitative social research, as employed in our project, is a tool aiming to identify situations, issues and practices not deductible from existing scientific data, therefore not yet quantitatively verifiable. In our case, it employs semi-structured interviews—where the respondent may speak their mind freely along certain guiding questions—and focus-groups—where they may discuss among themselves and reach shared positions.

Transnational families, the object of our research, are families living habitually in different countries, who nonetheless maintain strong family ties and therefore function as an exemplary entity (Greschke and Ott 2020) for a real, functional global society—one that performatively unites belonging (as a family) and global participation (being a part of more than one society).

More on the scientific context of transnational families in the section *Literature review*.

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Aim of the research

As originally stated, the CASTLE action “aims to support the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in improving their child protection frameworks and migration and mobility policies, with a focus on the social and legal impacts of labour migration on transnational families. The action analyses the situation of children left behind by their parents who engaged or are engaging in labour migration from the perspective of their rights and possibly within transnational family practices that create, observe and enforce such rights. For this purpose, the intervention aims to develop a multigenerational, intersectional and participative qualitative analysis of child rights in a transnational family context.”

For this purpose, namely, to create the socially inclusive epistemological background for supportive action aimed at improving the rights situation of children left behind, the research segment of the CASTLE action aims at several focal points of labour migrants’ families’ lives. Namely, the scientific, legal and policy context of the field are analyzed; transnational families are researched—with an emphatic co-research component—concerning the main factors that impact children’s wellbeing and rights therein. Such factors range from general awareness and performance of child rights principles, through effective child participation, family communication and the social dynamics of care to self-awareness, social inclusion, recognition of functionality and capabilities of coping and self-assertion.

Methodology

Due to its inclusive epistemology, the research has employed involvement of co-researchers already at the level of interview guide creation and in respondent identification, interviewing and evaluation. Also, the research being inscribed in an action-research pragmatics, it has aimed at possible change from the outset, incorporating hints towards action in its research design, including desk research, co-researcher training, interview guides and mode of interviewing. For a better understanding of the pragmatic context, experts were also interviewed beside transnational family members and carers. The methodology has primarily relied on semi-structured interviews led by category-specific interview guides based on the analysis of the relevant literature and the demands of the project at hand, complemented by focus-groups with family member categories led by guides incorporating feedback from the former. The relative freedom of interview/focus-group guide employment was given to national research teams, who elaborated their own versions of generic documents. Ethical approvals were requested and received according to each country’s specificity. Given that COVID-19 pandemic restrictions were introduced in a temporal overlap with the fieldwork, and in the last stage of fieldwork, Russia invaded Ukraine, a majority of interviews and focus groups were conducted online. Focus group and interview

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audio recordings were transcribed, the transcriptions machine translated to English, coded and analyzed.

Respondents

Respondents included four groups, namely:

- family members of transnational families with children in which one or both parents have been going abroad for a significant amount of time during the recent past:
 - migrant parents;
 - stay-behind parents (or other caregivers); and
 - stay-behind children.
- experts, namely officials, employees of state institutions and NGOs as well as other professionals who are knowledgeable in the issues of transnational families.

Coordinates of the fieldwork

Temporal: In-depth interviews with family members of migrant workers: November–December 2021; Focus groups with parents and children: April–May 2022; In-depth interviews with experts: May 2022.8.2.

Numerical:

- 102 interviews with family members—stayer parent/caregiver, stayer child, migrant parent;
- 10 focus-groups with family members, of which 5 with children;
- 23 interviews with experts from authorities, institutions, NGOs, working with transnational family members family member interviews/focus-groups have been collected by the 3 national teams (Ro, Mo, Ua) with Moldovan and Ukrainian transnational families with at least one parent abroad in the EU a significant amount of time during the recent past expert interviews have been taken by the 3 teams, with Mo and UA as well as Ro experts, a large majority of interviews have been taken online (Facebook messenger, Zoom, WhatsApp, Viber, etc.). The languages were Ukrainian, Russian and Romanian, and in one case, Hungarian.

Data collection methods and the research population (Table 1)

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Table 1

		Interviewees /FG participants' country of origin		
		Republic of Moldova	Romania	Ukraine
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS				
Interviewees' status				
Family members	Adults (migrants and caregivers)	50		26
	Children/teenagers with one parent/both parents abroad	12		14
Experts		11	10	3
Total number of interviews/country		73	10	43
FOCUS-GROUPS (10 sessions)				
Participants' status				
Family members	Adults (migrants and caregivers)	2 FG sessions (13)		2 FG sessions (11)
	Young adults with one parent/both parents abroad	1 FG session (7)		
	Children	3 FG sessions (16)		2 FG sessions (13)

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1.

Literature review

Mihaela HĂRĂGUȘ

1.1 Methodology of the studies

There exists a series of **quantitative research**, based on nationally representative surveys on school children, most of which were conducted in the 2000s or early 2010s. Such surveys were conducted also in Moldova, Ukraine and other former Soviet republics. These studies focus on effects on CLB's health, mental health and well-being, school performance, or multi-dimensional wellbeing index, and some of them compare results in two or more countries.

Much of the research on children with migrant parents is done with a qualitative methodology. Through **qualitative research**, a more in-depth view on topics such as: children's and parents' agency, care arrangements, constructed image of parents, coping strategies, etc. is achieved. However, the comparative dimension and the generalizability of results are lacking this time.

1.2 Main findings

The multitude of existing studies shows that the impact of migration on the family in the home country is complex, multi-channeled and context-dependent (Démurger 2015). There are many intervening factors that may translate the migration experience into negative consequences or, on the contrary, parental migration may induce also positive consequences on family members in the home country. Among the highly important mediating factors are: the reason of migration, who migrates (age and gender), duration of migration, who's the carer (continuity vs. discontinuity of care), relation with parents before departure, legal status/working arrangements of the migrant, transnational communication practices. These factors will be detailed in a subsequent section of the report.

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Given the role of all the above-mentioned factors, there is no clear-cut positive/negative impact on migration on CLB. Therefore, it is rather a discussion of risks vs. benefits (or disadvantages vs. advantages, negative vs. positive outcomes).

1.3 Risks of parents' migration on CLB

Migrant parents face a migration paradox: they migrate to improve their children's economic welfare, but this often comes at the cost of children's emotional wellbeing (Bryceson 2019; Lam and Yeoh 2019; Botezat and Pfeiffer 2019). Negative outcomes or risks of parental migration received more attention in the literature than the possible benefits. Main vulnerabilities are connected with emotional wellbeing and all the subsequent problems that may arise.

Many studies point to the unmet emotional needs of CLB, such as security, affection, and safety, so they face emotional deprivation. The most likely type of harm is connected with children's emotional and developmental wellbeing (Gheaus 2014). CLB do not have the emotional experiences necessary for a harmonious development of personality (Report Moldova 2011). Regarding this matter, we also should consider the recent developments of digital transnational communication practices and their role in creating various forms of co-presence and in fulfilling emotional needs (see the respective section of the report).

Some quantitative studies, based on surveys with various scales for measuring **emotional wellbeing**, found limited differences in the well-being outcomes of children with and without migrant parents (Cebotari *et al.* 2018; Gassmann *et al.* 2017). Others found significantly higher levels of anxiety and depression among LBC compared with children residing with both parents (yet both groups had similar coping strategies) (Tomşa and Jenaro 2015) or negative association between missing parent and self-reported mental health and well-being (Leskauskas *et al.* 2017). Parents' migration is linked to more serious health problems and to an increased likelihood of suffering from depression, the effect being larger for children from rural areas (Botezat and Pfeiffer 2019). The quantitative design allowed researchers to control for different transnational characteristics when assessing the wellbeing outcome of the migration. However, for the generalizability of results, studies must include an appropriate control group against which the outcomes for CLB could be compared.

Another risk for the emotional wellbeing of CLB is that most often migration is understood exclusively as a matter of family economy and migrant parents often invoke children's needs when explaining to them the decision to migrate and consequently, a sense of culpability may develop in children (Pantea 2011; Cheianu *et al.* 2011).

Earlier studies emphasized negative effects on CLB's **educational development**. However, recent studies point to the resilience of children in face of the negative educa-

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tional outcomes when parents migrate (Cebotari 2018). It is important which parent has migrated, as children, especially girls, are less likely to lag in school when their mothers or both parents migrate (Cebotari 2018), a result that challenges the earlier (taken for granted) assumption of negative educational consequences when mothers migrated. Other recent studies also found a positive effect of parents' migration on school performance of children as reflected in higher school grades (Botezat and Pfiffer 2019): parental migration has an impact on the time allocation of children for study and homework, especially for children from urban areas. Also, CLB from the urban areas are significantly less likely to be bullied at school.

Children that remain at home take over household tasks and sometimes children, especially girls, transform into "wives" who are responsible for the behavior of the parent who is at home. This affects the perception of girls about family life, increasing the risk of premature marriages as an escape from their own father (Cheianu *et al.* 2011). CLB are pushed toward growing up prematurely, thus they are a generation learning to play social roles that are not specific for their age. Conversely, this may have a positive implication, as their parents start to talk to them as to their peers (Cheianu *et al.* 2011). These new roles taken up by CLB, especially looking after and educating their younger siblings, have a negative impact on their school attendance (including late arrival) and performance.

1.4 Benefits of parents' migration on CLB

The most evident benefits are economic in nature. Many parents resort to migration to escape poverty or the threat of poverty and most often their motivation to migrate comes from the desire to meet their children's interest for a better life (Gheaus 2014).

Besides increased financial possibilities, research mentions benefits for CLBs gained liberty, independence in their decision-making process, their agency, resilience, and creativity in influencing caring practices in their migrant family (Lam and Yeoh 2019). Regarding children's agency, it is integral to also view children as agents of change often involved in the migrant transnational caring context and not simply as passive recipients of migration, parenting decisions and practices (Christou and Kofman 2022). Children are shown to be very aware of the different persons catering to their needs and able to identify and navigate around the diversity of care in their daily lives (Lam and Yeoh 2019).

Migrant mothers themselves notice some benefits of their migration for their children in home country: increased sense of autonomy, independence, and responsibility; the emigration experience brought brothers and sisters closer together, increasing the chains of support between their older and younger children. Some of them referred to the broadening of their children's worldviews by engaging with children in constant travel abroad (Juozeliūnienė and Budginaitė 2018). Children with migrant parents perceive themselves

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smarter and more independent compared with children not affected by migration and claim with a certain pride their autonomy from the adult world, emphasizing at the same time their participation in activities connected to the household and work environments (Bezzi 2013).

However, researchers point out that the positive aspects of parental migration on CLB "do not necessarily negate the vulnerability of children in transnational care stemming from past research. Rather, advances in communication technologies have made the transnational lives of migrants and children significantly easier" (Cebotari 2018, 21). Indeed, internet-based communication and new information and communication technologies (ICT) is essential in sustaining family relationships (Baldassar 2016b, 19–20) and any discussion about care towards family members that stayed in the home country cannot exist without addressing it. Therefore, a special section of this report is dedicated to the role of digital transnational communication.

1.5 Mediating factors

It has been already mentioned that a multitude of factors (characteristics of the transnational family) mediate the relationship between parental migration and children's outcomes and therefore the causal effects are not clear-cut. Details about how these mediating factors act are presented further.

√ *Reason for migration*

Increased vulnerability for family members remained at home exists when migration is motivated by poverty, corruption and structural unemployment or underemployment in the place of origin (Gheaus 2014). When having to choose between poverty and migration, parents' agency is rather impaired and therefore should not be blamed for their decision to leave their children in home country (Gheaus 2014).

Individual experiences of left-behind children are strongly shaped by the family backgrounds and the socio-cultural contexts of belonging (Bezzi 2013): in some contexts, negative outcomes of parental migration may be more present than in others and this is connected with other hardships and dysfunctionalities that may exist prior to migration.

√ *Who migrated/how long/how soon in the life of children*

Differences in impact on CLB are linked with the role of mother and father in child-care, respectively on how traditional the gender roles in society are, with the mother as the prime caretaker. When the mother is the primary caretaker, her migration implies a more diversified care arrangement involving a web of carers (Lam and Yeoh 2019) and more difficulties may appear. Often, the maternal grandmother takes over the care of CLB, as an

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extension or temporary replacement of the migrant mother, which reinforces the traditional gender roles in the family, with woman's and mother's continued responsibility for the care of the LBC (Fan and Parrenas 2018).

However, in contexts where the women are responsible for the care of children and elderly in extended families, migration of a father may leave the mother with increased care responsibilities and therefore with less focus on the children's educational development (as shown by Cebotari *et al.* 2016 for Georgia).

The elder the child is the higher the probability of an easier acceptance of their parents' migration. Children feel more affected immediately after their parents' departure and this period is considered the most difficult one. A decrease in emotional sensibility of the child towards parents' absence has been noted (Cheianu *et al.* 2011).

Although the new communication technologies and the co-presence feeling that they create allow mothers to closely monitor and surveil the activity of their CLB, digital mothering from a distance may pose certain challenges when the children back home are small or in connection with the digital literacy of the caretaker, especially grandmothers (Frenyo 2019; Madianou 2016b). Mothers are rather enthusiastic about embracing new communication technologies as these offer them the opportunity "to perform intensive mothering at a distance" and to be in control of life back home (Madianou 2016b, 83). Through video-calls, mothers supervise and assess children's wellbeing, as practices as 'good' and 'involved' parenting (Frenyo 2019).

√ *Who's the carer—continuity vs. discontinuity of care*

In the case of parental migration, children usually remain in familiar family settings. If the father migrates, the mother will continue to perform her caring role. If the mother migrates, organizing caring arrangements for the stay-behind children is more complex, but a kin family environment has been shown to be protective for these children (as, for instance, no detrimental effect on school performance when children remain with fathers and grandparents, in Moldova and Georgia, Cebotari *et al.* 2016).

However, sometimes the decision to migrate is taken on a very short notice and consequently the caring arrangements for the stay-at-home children may not be optimal. Given the nature of work of many migrants (relatively precarious employment as seasonal agricultural laborers, workers in construction, or caregivers in private homes) and possible job opportunities in short notice, sometimes the departure and the care arrangements for children that remain at home are not sufficiently planned (Gheaus 2014). And this may favor negative children's outcomes.

On the other hand, the existing support from the extended family (i.e., involvement of grandparents in childcare) may contribute to parents' decision to migrate. It appears that the continuity of care is highly important (Gheaus 2014; Cebotari 2018), rather than who

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specifically take it over. Household level coping and coordination mechanisms may act as a buffer between parental migration and CLB's wellbeing (Gassmann *et al.* 2017).

Children exert their agency within the web of home care, while they are similarly and simultaneously powerful and powerless (Lam and Yeoh 2019). In relation to other persons at home, of differing ages and power, children are constantly experimenting, adjusting, resisting and reworking plans independently. They seem to be very aware of the different persons catering to their needs and are able to identify and navigate around the diversity of care in their daily lives (Lam and Yeoh 2019). Their autonomy and role in the web of care amplifies as they grow up.

√ *Transnational communication*

The accelerated development of "communication technologies [is] transforming ways of 'being together' and forms of 'co-presence' in families and communities separated by distance and over time" (Baldassar *et al.* 2016, 134). Care becomes "a mediated emotional experience" (Alinejad 2021, 444). The internet is an environment that is crucial in providing emotional and practical support for children and other family members back home (Frenyo 2019) and for the practice of 'digital kinning' (Baldassar and Wilding 2020), understood as engagement with new technologies for the purpose of maintaining support networks. Through ICT-mediated 'family practices' (Madianou 2016a; Nedelcu and Wyss 2016) and transnational communication, families manage to obtain a co-presence among nuclear transnational family members (Ducu 2014, 2018; Madianou 2016b).

Migration today takes place in a polymedia environment that offers a great variety of new media and ICT to facilitate family practices (Madianou and Miller 2012; Madianou 2016b) and various types of co-presence or 'being there' for each other (Baldassar 2016b). Virtual co-presence, mediated through ICT, is different but not less real than physical co-presence (Baldassar 2016b). The polymedia environment allows family members to be in touch instantaneously and in real time (Baldassar 2016a, 160). Through 'ordinary co-presence' (Nedelcu and Wyss 2016), migrants and their parents in home country achieve "a subtle sense of each other's everyday life [and] a feeling of being and doing things together" (2016, 216), and a transnational everyday reality emerges (2016).

Another form of co-presence, 'ambient co-presence' (Madianou 2016a), is not based on direct interactions but on the peripheral awareness of the actions of distant others and is made possible through the affordances of polymedia environments (2016a, 186). Ambient co-presence reassures distant family members of each other's regular routines being followed and that there are no reasons to worry (2016a, 191). However, the boundaries between ambient co-presence, monitoring and surveillance aren't always clear cut and this background presence of distant family members may lead to tensions and conflicts (2016a, 195), as changes in routines may indicate that something is wrong.

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Achieving different types of co-presence and ensuring care from a distance requires certain resources and capabilities—financial/material to afford new technologies, knowledge to use them, as well as time availability for permanent communication with family members in home country. Certainly, not all families enjoy the conditions of polymedia (Baldassar 2016b, 30; Frenyo 2019). Among the most disadvantaged are lower-socio-economic families, persons who may not be as familiar with using new media (e.g., elderly), refugees. However, migrants are among the early and enthusiastic adopters of new technologies, on which they depend to maintain transnational family relationships (Madianou 2016b, 76).

The access to ICT enables left-behind children “to exercise their agency in initiating and shaping the flow of transnational communication” (Acedera and Yeoh 2021, 187) and to fulfill their right to participate in decisions. Cheap communication technologies and internet allow children to develop coping strategies to overcome their challenging circumstances (Nazridod *et al.* 2019). The agency of children without their own electronic devices is heavily constrained, as they have disadvantaged positions in the hierarchy of care; although the communication with their parents is frequent, they have a rather passive role in their care arrangements (Acedera and Yeoh 2021). Moreover, it is difficult in such cases to enjoy an ambient co-presence (2021). When communication ways are limited, another form of co-presence emerges: ‘imaginary co-presence’ (Robertson *et al.* 2016), which is not synchronous in time and space, but rather an imagined one, based on the links with a shared past, as documented by photographs (2016, 231).

ICT facilitate a “connected presence” (Licoppe 2004) of different groups, not only of family members, and wider social networks experience a ‘digital togetherness’ (Marino 2015). Besides portability of family care, ICT use allow the “portability of the networks of belonging” (Diminescu 2008, 573) and maintenance of social relations with those at home. Moreover, new media allow a connectiveness with migrants with the same origin, hence with the country of origin and its culture (Sinanan and Horst 2022). On the other hand, involvement in online networks and communities contribute to migrants’ empowerment as they interact with each other, increasing their feeling of belonging to a group, making the integration process into the local community easier and less traumatic (Marino 2015).

√ Relation with parents before departure

The situations that children have to confront are very different depending on the stability of the pre-existing family network at the parents’ departure (Bezzi 2013). In case of existing conflicts, migration can amplify existing tensions in the pre-existing web of care (Lam and Yeoh 2019). These relate to the issue of continuity of care.

The impact of new communication technologies on transnational family life depends on the previous quality of the relationships. When this is good, polymedia environment allows care from a distance and being there for each other, while existing difficulties and

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conflicts could be brought to surface and even accentuated (Baldassar *et al.* 2016; Madianou 2016b). A downside of this 'always on' culture that is facilitated by new communication technologies is that it makes visible problems or conflicts that could have been kept out of sight in the past (Madianou 2016b).

√ *Legal status/working arrangements of the migrant*

Working generally in constructions (men) or as caretakers for elderly persons or domestic workers (women), migrant parents enjoy little enforcement of labor protection laws, which can negatively impact on performing parental roles from a distance. The degree of informality of working arrangements of the migrants (especially mothers that work as domestic and care workers) may pose increasing difficulties on the regularity and synchronicity of contact with children left at home (Baldassar 2016b; Frenyo 2019; Greschke 2021). Rapidly changing working hours or sharing an apartment with several other persons are both additional obstacles that migrants may face in communication with family members (Greschke 2021).

1.6 Conclusions

There are many intervening factors at child/parent level, household level and existing ties between migrants and the household members remained at home and therefore many studies did not find a clear-cut positive/negative impact of migration on children remained at home.

The most recent studies show that the view of children with migrant parents as "social orphans", a syntagm that dominated the Ukrainian media in particular, viewing those children as abandoned and neglected, is obsolete and inadequate. As a matter of fact, any positive perspectives are completely absent from the orphan debate in Ukraine (Lutz 2017).

The development of communication technology made the digitally mediated provision of care to clearly be a reality of the present world, and much more so in mobility and migration contexts. Care moves across transnational spaces, is carried out in different spheres and at different care sites, which delineates its portability (Huang *et al.* 2012). Under these circumstances, the call for "de-demonizing distance, or at least removing the assumption that distance is implicitly a barrier to care exchange" (Baldassar 2016, 161a) and, we may add, to children's rights fulfillment, appear as self-explanatory. Migrant parents continue to pursue the goal of providing a better life for their children from a distance, only in a manner different from physical copresence, adapted to the reality of transnational practice (Juozeliūnienė and Budginaitė 2018).

In the same line of thought, researchers point that the public discourses about migration that emphasize merely the negative consequences on CLB must be reconsidered. The idea

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is not to dismiss the fact that parental absence through migration can erode child well-being, but to emphasize the need to understand how migration, family systems, and societal processes intersect to bolster or undermine child wellbeing and its various expressions and domains (Gassmann *et al.* 2017, 438). Such a vision leaves room for public policies to reduce vulnerabilities of children that remained in home countries and shifts from blaming parents for their decision to migrate, which often is rather a constraint than a free choice.

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2.

Regional synthesis of relevant legislation

Daniela ANGI

2.1 Rationale

To outline and critically discuss the legal provisions that are relevant in relation to the phenomenon of labor migration and children left behind as a result of their parents working abroad.

2.2 Approach

A research team from each country (Moldova, Romania, Ukraine) was in charge of drafting a summary and critical discussion of the national relevant legislation. In addition, EU legislation and international provisions are consulted and discussed.

Structure of the review:

2.3 International and European Union Legislation

- International documents relevant in relation to cross-border circulation of migrants, child protection and child rights;
- EU Legislation on Migration, left-behind children and family reunification.

Country Analyses:

- Republic of Moldova;
- Ukraine;
- Romania.

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a. Republic of Moldova

- **2008**—first time when the national legislation addressed the issue of children left without parental care as a result of their parents’ migration abroad;
- Relevant provisions within the national legislation;
- Relevant provisions as part of international normative acts ratified by the Republic of Moldova;
- Additional provisions stemming from a number of human rights conventions to which the Republic of Moldova adhered as a member of the Council of Europe (since 1995).

b. Ukraine

- The issue of labor migrants’ children has been addressed repeatedly in Ukraine, since mid-2000s, becoming a salient topic on the public agenda;
- Beginning with **2016**, the law “*On external labor migration*” specifically mentions, for the first time, the children of labor migrants and their rights;
- While the enforcement of the law signaled an important advancement, its outline fails to address a number of important issues, which hinders its ability to fully cover the complex phenomenon of children left behind.

c. Romania

- Two-folded status: sending country in the context of EU-level labor migration and (more recently) destination country;
- Categories of issues addressed in the review: provisions on the residence and employment of foreigners; protection of children whose parents are abroad for work; migrant parents’ rights in the countries of destination.

2.4 Challenges related to legislation and their potential sources

2.4.1 The attributes of the legal framework

The intrinsic limitations of the existing legal framework (lack of clarity, partial coverage of issues, practices and particular situations, insufficient adaptation to meet the dynamic nature of labor migration and processes that stem from it, etc.)

2.5 Challenges related to the non-EU status of home countries

EU citizenship simplifies mobility between member states, however for migrants whose home countries are outside EU’s borders, the situation is comparatively more complex¹.

¹ European Parliamentary Research Service. Legal migration policy and law. European added value assessment, 2021.

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2.6 Limited awareness of the existing legislation

Some labor migration contexts generate significant vulnerability among worker migrants who, for a variety of reasons (linguistic barriers, insufficient access to information, etc.) operate with seriously limited awareness of their legal rights and obligations in the host countries.²

2.7 The dynamic regional political context—the mechanism of temporary protection

The ongoing situation generated by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine exerted a rapid response on the part of the European Union. Soon after the military assault, and in the context of a predictably large outflow of Ukrainian citizens fleeing the war, the Commission proposed the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive.³ The approval of the said Directive⁴, on March 4th, 2022, was soon followed by a set of guidelines⁵, to facilitate the implementation of the Directive in the member states. Whereas from a legal perspective the status of the implementation guidelines overtly underlines their non-binding nature, their role is to help member states apply the Directive and the existing EU level legal instruments relevant for the newly created context.

2 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. Protecting migrant workers from exploitation in the EU: workers’ perspectives, 2019.

3 https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/temporary-protection_en.

The Directive has been established in 2001.

Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32001L0055&qid=1648223587338>.

4 Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2022.071.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AL%3A2022%3A071%3ATOC

5 Communication from the Commission on Operational guidelines for the implementation of Council implementing Decision 2022/382 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection 2022/C 126 I/01, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52022XC0321%2803%29&qid=1647940863274>.

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The guidelines include specific recommendations and provisions in relation to children and, importantly, elements specifically focused on children’s rights. “Full protection and swift access to the specific rights of children (education, healthcare, including preventive care and mental health care, and, psychosocial assistance) as well as any necessary support services to secure the child’s best interest and wellbeing to all children fleeing from the Ukrainian conflict, must be ensured. The opinion of the children must be heard and taken into account, in accordance with age and degree of maturity. An integrated child protection response should be ensured, with the cooperation and coordination of relevant authorities [...] Member States are encouraged to ensure that all children are provided, in a child-friendly and age- and context- appropriate manner, with relevant Information on the situation, their rights and on procedures and services available for their protection. Member States are also encouraged to ensure that those working with children—from their arrival at EU borders—are appropriately trained and child protection professionals are involved where relevant.”⁶

⁶ *Ibid.*

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3.

Primary analysis of field data

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What follows below are the findings of the BBU team following primary analysis of data. The data has been analyzed with use of the MAXQDA 2022 software, through coding text segments of the transcripts from recorded interviews / focus-groups by 32 thematic codes divided into 6 groups.

The analysis is not and cannot be exhaustive. We prioritized perspectives such as children’s voice, digital communication, family issues, ones suggested either by the priorities of the project, by co-researchers or by the acuteness of the situation.

The recommendations that follow have been based on these findings.

3.1 First section: The situation and views of children in the context of migration

Here, we present a number of perspectives with an emphasis on children’s views; these are not contrary—rather, they are supported by—adults’ testimonies; however we find it important to prioritize them in order to follow the action’s focus on children’s voices.

3.1.1 Perceptions and projections of “abroad” and of “home”

Prior to views on migration itself, children’s perspectives on their geographical space is important.

As we have found, numerous children have, on occasion, visited their migrant parents’ country of stay or even other countries on trips. Beside personal impressions, perceptions

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are predominantly formed by projections through parents’ and peers’ stories, or even social or broadcast media. Moreover, since socially, migration is usually the norm in these children’s communities, the foreign nature of “abroad” is entirely domesticated (“normal”, “not worth mentioning”).

What seemed striking in children’s accounts is the lived, direct, aesthetic rather than economic, cultural or political nature of their perception of abroad (and home) that is usual with adults, and this may happen regardless of their physical presence there (a transnational imaginary):

“Dad [in Germany] has shown me that roe deer come in some cities and people don’t hurt them at all. At us, if you see a deer, we hunt them down immediately. Where Dad was working, there was some old, historical building. There is much where you can see the history through some buildings that have been repaired as they were before.” (Md).

- inspiration drawn from the architecture of a Ukrainian city by an art student;
- living close to nature in the Ukrainian countryside as recounted by a Ukrainian youth;
- the self-explanatory character of “home” (“Kharkiv is Kharkiv” [city]);
- one Moldovan youth found (his mother’s) migrant living conditions so repulsive that he chose to return to an uncle;
- in memories from the era when Russia was the main target of a Moldovan youth, it felt almost like “being there” through personal bonds, stories and objects.

3.1.2 Children’s agency and voice regarding migration

Children are mostly just told, sometimes in advance, but not involved in, decisions relating to migration; however, they all contribute, first of all passively, through understanding and accepting adult arguments and decisions, which are mostly economic, while still undergoing a strong feeling of loss and missing the parent. These arguments may become internalized to the level where they disturb togetherness though (see in section on secrecy).

As a consequence of migration, second, children also acquire increased self-management, mutual support among siblings and peers and they actively participate in the family through additional contributions to household and even support given to adults including the migrant.

Compared with adults, children and youth see leaving and staying in a more nuanced, open and fluid manner and are often covertly critical of them, viewing migration as apparently not necessary or one that should be limited to a certain goal and to a certain amount of time (they “should leave for a certain amount, and for a certain goal, then return”—stay-behind child, Md—“he knows that a family is waiting for him at home”, stay-behind

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child Ua). They are sometimes even perplexed—in more affluent families—by what they perceive as the superfluity of migration.

Study plans abroad (or the plan not to leave) is the issue that is most frequently discussed, indeed a norm, with a large proportion of youth having a definite study abroad plan even from high-school or later, a minority refusing to leave, while some are ambivalent (“*I might study here or there, haven’t made up my mind yet*”—stay-behind child, Ua). For Ukrainians, the language barrier represents an impediment, preferring Poland or the Czech Republic where they may receive native-language education, Moldovans traditionally targeting Romania as foreign citizens on a stipend being a decreasing tendency now.

Economic difficulties to study elsewhere represent an issue. Moldovans, having such difficulties to a moderate degree, follow mostly Latin language migration patterns, but some plan as far as US college education. The presence of (free) sports teams in school curricula was also mentioned as an argument for the qualitative superiority of American schooling (Ua), pointing for the need of belonging (see below at the youth activities section).

3.1.3 Relationship with caregivers

Overall, we have observed that the relationships of stay-behind children with persons in their environment (especially caregivers) improve due to necessity; however, they all make the cognitive effort to keep the caregiver role as it is (namely, as a caregiver, not a surrogate of the distant parent, since “*you cannot replace a person*”—stay-behind child, Ua), however, recognition is given to their effort and to the difficulty of their multiple roles.

In this process however, issues about caregivers may arise; namely,

- they may become role models (an over-identification in detriment of nuclear family bonds, such as the case of a Moldovan youth whose uncle, a lawyer, became a role model for him, his parents being of more modest professions); or
- on the contrary, abusers (morally, psychologically, physically, up to the level of legally addressed abuse (as in the case of the extremely harsh involvement by a grandmother resulting in state care of children in a migrant mother—alcoholic father family in Ua);
- in some cases, they may be physically distant or overwhelmed, hence offering deficient care (lone adolescents at home with a grandmother at 2 hours by bus and a woman family friend in the village, Md; a stay-behind caregiver mother with a migrant husband also caring for her adolescent brothers in another home than her own);
- selectivity of caregivers based on their own social status (parents of young children in Moldova who leave children with others prefer mothers with children of their own).

We have found that the involvement of maternal (or paternal) grandmothers in care transfer arrangements that was previously the rule has abruptly decreased in both Ua and

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Md (more pronounced in the latter), with almost no mention of grandmothers active in families, with issues and negative experiences in some cases (Md) (called “Soviet grandmothers” by youth). This suggests a change in generational patterns both in the active and grandparent populations as well as changes in intergenerational bonds, today’s grandparents being socialized during the 1970s and 1980s, the dark era of Communism, while today’s parents, during the 1990s and 2000s, a much more liberal and cosmopolitan period.

3.1.4 Youth activities, compensation strategies, support groups

Overall, children and youth report that the vast majority of families in their environment have migrant adults, this being the predominant normalcy within peer communities - hence mutual acceptance, indeed support is natural among them. No knowledge, instead distrust is reported concerning rights, laws or institutions and organizations (including the state) that might support stay-behind children or their families. Indeed, targeted help is mostly perceived as unnecessary since “*it was their [the parents’] own free decision to migrate*” (stay-behind child, Ua) hence the intention of help is felt as patronizing, intrusive and inappropriate: these families deal with their situation by themselves, even though “*morally, you can’t help—you cannot replace a person*” (stay-behind child, Ua).

On the other hand, this does not mean a categorical reluctance to any kind of support; numerous children and youth acknowledged the need for support by peers, social media groups, teachers and possibly organizations (although the latter was unclear) (Md, Ua), while also reporting interest and support by teachers, neighbors, adult acquaintances, church community or psychologists as offered and accepted.

Most importantly and more emphatically, it was the belonging, the accomplishments and rootedness provided by peer groups—organized around hobbies, sports, cultural events, etc.—that was highlighted. Reports indicated that while one cannot compensate for a parent’s absence, children and youth need to build self-esteem and personal embedding through other means and groups to compensate for their feelings of loss or loneliness: “... *since I was always busy with homework or training and I tried to eliminate these thoughts with the help of time when I was busy*” (stay-behind child Md). This often comes from peers: “*Nothing changed with respect to friends, they also encourage me and support me in my mother’s departure... I discuss with classmates about my mother’s departure, since they too have parents abroad. We try to help and encourage each other, to support and help each other in our needs, since we understand how difficult it is with no parents around.*” (stay-behind child Md).

In contrast with functional support however, and in line with transnational families’ suspicions, in one case a teenager with previous psychological issues ended up suicidal after psychological counseling (Md).

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Also, in contrast with general support by peers, in one case, the need for anti-bullying education in schools was expressed relating to children of migrants as victims (stay-behind child Ua).

3.1.5 Temporality, age, transnational suspension

The transnational suspension in temporariness (Ducu, 2018) has remained typical with adults, plans to emigrate or return remaining constantly postponed (“plans—they have been there all along,” Ua), but some steps towards self-conscious transnationalism have been taken and the unpredictability of migration assumed as such. Constant communication also adds to a “normalization” of transnationalism.

With children however, this is not the case when young - they tend to adapt to a parent’s absence (“cry it off”) and hope for his/her return, while the feeling of loss and distance remains.

Indeed, children often don’t even remember the time before migration, hence this situation is all the more “normal” and temporally indefinite. This is not the case vice versa however, in one case, the mother insisted that the father returns every two months so that “children don’t change that much” in the meantime.

In respect of children’s and youth’s attitudes towards migration, differences were shown in correlation with age—adolescence (from 12 to 16) being more problematic since it enters the temporality of planning hence the awareness of temporal suspension. Also, issues correlated with the person migrating, gender and age-specific relationships being highlighted by respondents (“*girls grow closer to their mothers at this age*”, “*boys need their fathers at his age and I’m not there*”). In another case, a report was given about a return migrant adolescent girl (other than the respondent) who had been in the suspension of awaiting her mother’s constantly postponed return for years, causing extreme distress. Further, it is in adolescence that the need for a parent becomes more conscious “... *since when I was young I didn’t realize, because I was constantly with my sister, always, everywhere, [but] I have already grown, when this development school already begun, when I felt that I need my mother beside me, since I cried during the nights, I had a period of anxiety, and I really needed her and she somehow understood this and didn’t leave anymore*” (Md).

In the temporal respect—beyond the obvious employment and movement issues—COVID also created unexpected travel situations that were difficult to address—leaving a constant sense of readiness in entire families including children.

Further, given the sudden nature of travel and crises within the lives of migrants, children have suggested that economic support should be provided to migrants at home on request (similar to target countries) generally (Ua, Md) and for crisis situations (Md).

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3.1.6 Transnational relationships and communication as perceived by children

Overall, there is very abundant communication involving much Internet access and usage, a high degree of co-presence and interest, sometimes group communication or through third persons (adult at home); also, much Internet use by children for other purposes to replace parent as an information source. In a number of cases, long-distance communication also happens with the school of the child.

In some cases, previously dysfunctional relations improved due to distance and to the “value of time together” (Ua, Md): “*My relationship with Dad improved once he left to Belgium. It was a very weird thing for me, there were issues and in order not to bring them home and tell Mom, he told them to me. He saw that I had matured, that I have my own point of view*” (Md).

However, communication is not always welcome (since not credible), and in some cases, online communication degenerates into addiction (Md), or non-communication itself becomes the subject of communication (they call me to ask why I haven’t called, I tell them they haven’t called me) (Ua).

– in one case the caregiver forbade direct communication with the migrant parent and controlled the rest to the point of psychological issues in the child (Md).

At the co-researcher suggestion, the issue of non-transparency was addressed—either due to discretion (not to let the other party worry) or due to distrust or not feeling its relevance or not hoping for possible understanding—and found to be somewhat frequent (see the section on secrecy).

3.2 Second section: Communication practices of transnational families

3.2.1 Transnational families’ information practices

Using the Internet to navigate their daily existence is commonplace in the lives of many migrants: “*we live with the Internet...*” (migrant parent MD); “*Uncle Google will help with everything*” (migrant parent UA); “*For me, Facebook is the biggest source of information. I have it for this reason. I haven’t disconnected, since you may find information. I lived with Moldovans in the same courtyard when I came, they didn’t really want to tell you anything, then through Google Maps, I got all I needed, where is the Mayor’s office, where is the school. On the groups, I read all the information posted by mothers.*” (migrant parent MD).

At the same time, a certain caution is practiced, some of the online information being presumed to be unreliable. Accordingly, verifying the information by directly talking to people is a common strategy: “*I follow Facebook and Instagram, I am up to date with what is going on in Moldova. I read the comments, and what people say. There are different opinions, you don’t know which to believe. What you read and see on the Internet, is one thing*”

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(migrant parent MD). *“I look on the Internet, obviously. You call the person on WhatsApp and learn most of the information. I wouldn’t say that there is much information on the net, there are many fakes, even today there was one. The best information is from person to person. Even with people, you ask them if it is true.”* (migrant parent MD).

Often, for various reasons, parents do not use the online environment to learn about the obligations or rights resulting from their status of migrant parents, preferring to go and ask directly or to call the relevant authorities and verify the information.

Whether as a result of modest digital skills or simply because face-to-face interactions seem more reassuring, some people refrain from using the online milieu to inform about procedural aspects. Additional challenges arise when the correctness of information passed online is not properly verified: *“social networks, they are fine, but from time to time, come and ask, inform yourself properly (...) they lack the correct information”* (Expert, MD).

The awareness about the requirement of notifying the authorities on the situation of their stay-behind children (who is going to be responsible for their care) seems to be widespread among migrant families. The procedural aspects are often flexible enough to allow communication outside the traditional face-to-face encounters. Apart from written notifications, sending documents electronically to the municipality’s email address is the encouraged practice, while also offering other channels such as Viber as an acceptable alternative: *“We ask nicely, we inform... Especially now, as the law has been modified, they have the possibility to send from abroad, to send the sheet written by them, namely, they send it... They also have the possibility through Viber, as well as via mail, I mean there are several (possibilities) in the law”* (expert MD); *“Yes, I introduced Bianca too (i.e., took her guardianship) and through Viber, they sent the agreement and the mayor accepted it all and made the documents”* (caregiver MD).

3.2.2 Access to Internet & technology

Ukrainian and Moldavian labor migrants, not being EU citizens, do not enjoy free roaming services and mobile Internet from the home country, while the entitlement to an advantageous Internet subscription in the destination country is not easy to obtain. Some of them are dependent on the wi-fi networks from the accommodation, a fact that restricts the availability of the migrant parent for their children at home: *“I can’t afford mobile Internet, because I save money”* (migrant parent Ukraine (UA)). *“Anna (child) calls me, she has Kyivstar, and there are 300 minutes for 6 countries of the world. And when there is a need, they call me”* (migrant parent UA). Sometimes the quality of the connection is poor and they rely on voice calls only, unable to use the video options.

Economically, it may take a while until the migrant parent could remit enough money for the acquisition of a computer or a laptop, and certain areas may have difficulties with

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Internet access: “*Only in my ninth grade my father sent me a laptop, and only after two years I could use the wi-fi, there was no wi-fi at that time*” (child Moldova (MD)). However, in spite of the difficulties migrant parents face nowadays in communicating with their children, the situation was much worse before the wide availability of new ICTs, and reports are of much improvement in this area. “*It happened (in the past) that we spoke even once a month, because I had free days only on Sundays and I could go to that phone place (i.e., a place where they could access cheaper international calls) only on Sundays and sometimes I was calling and nobody was home. (...) Then, when (mobile) phones appeared, we didn’t see each other, but we spoke more often. We didn’t speak too long, just more often, because the minute was expensive.*” (migrant parent MD).

3.2.3 Availability of the distant adult and children’s agency

The nature of their work, their working schedule and time differences hamper the permanent connectivity between migrant parents and their children back home, although they make efforts to ensure a permanent communication. Their migrants’ working arrangements may interfere with the children’s agency in initiating the transnational communication practices. “*We spoke once every 2–3 days, depending on his schedule. If he worked until late at night, we could speak to each other once every 3–4 days. If he worked in the second shift, we spoke little in the morning or evening. Not very often.*” (migrant parent MD). “*(...) he works and gets tired. Once, while being on the phone, it fell over him and I was hearing him snoring. I was shouting and he didn’t hear me.*” (caregiver MD).

Most of the children in our research, especially when older, can initiate the interaction with their parent(s) abroad: “*Through the camera, we talk on Messenger. The boy has his own phone, calls me whenever he wants.*” (migrant parent UA); “*Every day, before school and after homework. The homework we sometimes do together.*” (migrant parent MD). However, other children perceive and accept the limitations that work imposes on the availability of their parents: “*My mother works in Germany (...) and she goes to work in the morning and comes back in the evening and during the week we speak seldom because she arrives late, but on Sundays we speak more often*” (child MD).

As a result, their agency in initiating interactions is often self-limited since they define their departed parents through their work and only approach them in emergency situations. Sometimes they approach them differently, depending on their availability for daily communication (or several times a day). Sometimes they do not approach a certain parent and instead passively wait to be approached by them: “*With my mother (I speak) daily, with my father once every 2–3 days because he has more intensive work, he is always tired, and we speak when he calls. I don’t call him because I know he is always busy or tired, but I know he will call.*” (child MD).

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These situations are accompanied by diverse emotions ranging from extreme concern to tolerance, as they come to understand the parents’ need to rest: *“If they didn’t call one night I was like “What happened? Is everything ok? Should I call them? Did something happen? Now I begin to understand them, because they work, they are tired and maybe they need a break.”* (child MD).

3.2.4 Limits of online communication for doing family

Virtual communication, especially when it does not rely on a solid history of the relationship, cannot fully replace face to face interactions and might create distorted expectations and representations of the other: *“I was seeing them joking on the camera, that is how I was seeing them, that is how I knew them, but when they returned home and I came to know my grandmother’s character, God, you don’t even imagine how many quarrels, how many disagreements, how many tears. It was different. A person in reality and in virtual space are completely different.”* (child MD). The reunion after a long absence might mean *“a take from the beginning to know each other because in the meantime we both grew, me as a mother, he as a child, so it was a bit hard because we needed to know each other as two strangers, although we spoke regularly on the phone, but it is a different thing to hear on the phone and to live together”* (migrant parent MD).

When children know their parents exclusively from virtual communication, as they were very young at the time of migration, the reality of face to face encounter may create negative feelings: *““Why are you crying?”, ‘Because my mother is coming [home from abroad]’, ‘But why are you crying? You should be happy!’, and she responds ‘But I don’t know my mother!’”* (migrant parent MD).

Physical and virtual co-presence is not the same and children sense these differences, although they acknowledge the huge improvement ICT brought in communication: *“We could tell that it partially replaces, but still, it isn’t complete... when you see your parents, when your mother comes, when she sits in front of you and you can hug and kiss her, this is something, but when she simply talks and you hear her voice, this is something different. Well, there is the bonus, there is video, I mean you could talk to her through video and then you see her.”* (child MD).

Both children and parents miss the corporality of the other, such as touching and hugging, while their stories show that various forms of co-presence at a distance are not completely acquired, such as omnipresent or ordinary co-presence. Consequently, there is a permanent worry about the everyday life of their children: *“Many tears shed on the pillow, because you think ‘what are they doing, what they had eaten’, more, to help them do their homework, to be next to them, to take them somewhere, to walk with them, and mostly, to hug*

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them... because we talk, we talk on social media, but it is not like being there next to him to hug, to caress and to tell them how much you love them” (migrant parent MD).

3.2.5 Transparency of transnational communication

The transparency of transnational communication practices is a key constituent of these relationships, but it is something that must be worked out, not considered a given. Indeed, self-conscious secrecy may become part of such communication, an issue highlighted by a co-researcher—an adolescent girl—at a consultation session.

As such, it may be dominated by adults around children (caregivers), whether through censorship or limitation: *“My aunt stood beside us when we talked to our mom on the phone and told us what to tell her...”* (child MD), indeed to forbid such communication: *“Grandma didn’t let us talk to our mom on the phone”* (child, MD). By contrast, “healthy” caregiver roles do not interfere, indeed respect distant parent—child communication: *“... they talk about whatever topic they wish, I mean if they want, they tell me, if they don’t, they don’t”* (caregiver, MD).

Although secrecy amounts to practice of caring about each other through (perhaps excessive) protection—hence a positive act—in transnational family members’ perception, both adults and children, it may turn into its opposite and withhold important support and access to essential information, hence, participation.

“No, I avoid telling the problems that..., it is perhaps hard enough for them as it is that I am not at home, but to tell them my problems too, I don’t think it works” (migrant parent MD).

“(I do) not (share with them) too much, because I keep my problems to myself. I try to protect them from these problems. I don’t want trauma for my children. I already traumatized them, because I left abroad.” (migrant parent MD).

Children also “protect” parents:

“C.C: Why don’t you tell them (...)? C: I don’t know, because they were not beside me and I couldn’t open up towards them (...) because they were working and I realized that they are not exactly happy that they have to work and I thought that if I tell them it will sadden them more, etc.” (child (C) MD interviewed by a child co-researcher (C.C)),

“... because I don’t even want to talk about any quarrels, because I don’t want her to worry” (child UA).

At the same time, they are aware of the parents’ secrecy:

“She doesn’t tell (about problems) often. She tells me what food is there, what kind of drinks, what toys and other things.” (child, MA).

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Some parents highlight the benefits of an opposite stance though:

“We have accustomed them from a young age, that no matter if it is a problem or a joy, we need to share it; we need to discuss it, analyze it ..., to rejoice together for success. A problem has arisen, we need to untangle it, to see from what direction to solve it. (...) I can (sometimes) make a parenthesis, I mean (to tell about) something that happened to me, to calm the waters a bit, if something very serious happened there. I mean to make a comparison—that it is not that severe, not that serious. I mean to tell an example—what has happened to me... I don’t know if it helps her, doesn’t help her, but I see that the situation changes. We calm down and we go on.” (migrant parent MD).

Indeed, parents empower and ally with children to protect the other parent:

“My relationship with dad improved once he left for Belgium. It was a very weird thing for me, there were problems and in order not to bring them home and tell mom, he told them to me. He saw that I had matured, that I have my own point of view.” (child, MD).

Children, in turn, raise their voice in defense of their capabilities as agents within the family, hence for more participation, implicitly, information:

“... we are old enough and we understand, we need to know about all the problems that exist in our family and we need to somehow try to do something for the best, to solve it together, because if it were only the parents fighting [over an issue] it would get much worse and would get farther, because now there are many children who stay with their mom only or their dad only, but it is best that the children know, too, and children somehow unite the family” (child MD).

3.3 Third section: migration and family issues

Work-related migration of family members—while maintaining a transnational relationship within the family—often brings about positive outcomes, at least economically, but sometimes also with regard to family dynamics including communication, autonomy, emancipation and participation. Quite often however, it brings about negative ones, in obvious ways such as rupture, distancing, lack of direct (embodied) togetherness as well as less obvious ones such as inability to manage or cope, relationship issues including in couples and towards children, especially towards adolescents, communication issues such as lack of access, availability, empowerment to communicate and non-transparency of communication (secrecy).

While in our research, our focus is the general situation of stay-behind children, some marginal but critical cases might better highlight the specifics of the difficulties involved in

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labour migration in transnational families. The crisis in these families may or may not be related to migration, but the two are clearly mutually exacerbating. Tracing the dynamics of the crisis and of migration may shed light upon this interrelation.

We shall present cases grouped according to the issues involved, namely:

- migration motivated by severe illness of a child;
- divorce after starting migration with severe consequences for the child;
- single mothers forced to migrate without taking their child along.

3.3.1 Migration motivated by severe illness of a child

Liuba was diagnosed with kidney insufficiency when very young. She underwent costly treatment in Moldova and Turkmenistan, her father working in Portugal and her mother caring for her and also working from 8 to 22 as an English teacher at a school, as a private tutor and for company employees. Liuba was often interred to hospitals, at home alone in the mornings, then with her older sister Catalina. The mother left them diet food cooked at night. When in Turkmenistan for treatment with their mother, Catalina stayed at relatives and was monitored by her father from abroad. When they entered adolescence, they all moved to Portugal for access to better treatment. Catalina didn’t adapt and moved back to Moldova alone. She finished school and went to university in Romania. (Catalina, now adult, MD).

Sabrina is married, but her husband has been abroad most of their marriage. “*In the 14 years since we have been together, he has left periodically, i.e., every 3 months. (...) I have a boy who is now 13, he has had health issues since he was born, and he (my husband) was forced to leave, (the child being) mostly in hospitals. And he keeps on leaving. We add something to the house, better living conditions, and he has to leave. The child has had 4 surgeries, at the hospital nobody does a thing until you put something into their pockets.*” The migration of the husband is not enough economically, she also needs to work, and in her free time, she handles their family greenhouse to make extra money. They are saving for a major surgery for their son Costel that needs to be done once he turns 18. (Sabrina, caregiver, MD).

Carolina and Stanislav had three children when the 9-year-old Natasha’s (the eldest child) eye was attacked by a disease that required many trips to Odessa. During treatment, they discovered another, more serious kidney problem. There followed a long period, more than 2 years of hospitalizations in Kiev. The interventions and treatment were very expensive. Carolina had to move to Kiev, to a rented flat to be near Natasha whose health deteriorated, and other health problems arose after the dialysis. She needed a kidney transplant. Carolina and Stanislav have had the support of extended family, relatives and friends during this time, but even so the financial costs have been beyond their means. They organized fundraising events to cover the costs of Natasha’s treatment, but it was not enough.

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Stanislav had to go abroad to work after Caroline returned home from Kiev with Natasha. With Natasha’s condition unstable they chose the nearest country so Stanislav could get home quickly if needed. The transplant operation went well, but Natasha still needs treatment which is not fully covered by the insurance system. The family is waiting for travel to be possible for Stanislav to return to work abroad. (Carolina, stay-behind mother, UA).

3.3.2 Divorce after starting migration with severe consequences for the child

Alisa had to leave for work in Poland since her husband, Olexandr, didn’t have a job and they had to provide for 3 girls. They stayed at home in their city apartment, and in weekends they visited Olexandr’s mother in a village. The transnational relationship of the couple was working at first, but the husband’s mother couldn’t accept that the wife migrated and called social services to initiate the revocation of her guardianship over the children. In this context, Olexandr’s alcohol problems soared and he was interred in a rehabilitation centre. The girls were first in local administration care, then placed with their grandmother. The parents divorced, and Alisa remarried. Now she is in a legal dispute with her ex-mother-in-law to regain her parental rights and retake her daughters. The transnational relationship with them has been good, the oldest, Kira, now 12, being the main supervisor of her sisters. (Alisa, Olexandr and Kira, UA).

Mihail and Elena married out of love, but without the consent of Michael’s mother, who tried to separate Elena from her son even after their child was born. When Daniela, Elena’s daughter was 7, Elena went to work abroad. Mihail’s mother accused Elena of not being a “good mother”, neglecting her children through migration, or a “good wife”, since “who knows what she is doing there” (i.e., infidelity, a stigma also confirmed by adolescent co-researchers: “*of women it is said, that they go abroad and will find someone there immediately. They go there to marry an Italian.*”

After a while, Mihail went to work together with Elena and Daniela was left in the care of her paternal grandmother, who also behaved inappropriately with the child. “*I can’t say otherwise ... she (the grandmother) was bad. She is a bad person. She was also very severe, she wouldn’t let me go anywhere, she even beat me, she talked badly about my mother. I missed her (my mother) very much.*” After a short time Mihail returned while Elena stayed for another 2 years, only coming for visits. After Elena’s return, at his mother’s insistence, Mihail divorced Elena. Daniela was very affected by her mother’s absence, her grandmother’s abusive treatment and the divorce. For a long time she couldn’t understand why parents who seemed to love each other and were fighting to remain a united family divorced. (Daniela, former stay-behind child, MD).

Nicolae, divorced from his migrant wife started to migrate when his daughter Natalia turned 3 and left her under care of her grandparents. He tried to be an active father for

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his daughter, while her mother also tried to be present. As she grew into adolescence, she has had soaring issues coping with being the child of divorced migrant parents in different countries and even attempted suicide. Nicolae’s brother stepped in and called on him to return. He moved to Romania where he could bring his daughter along to study due to the lack of a language barrier. His ex-wife periodically stays with them for longer amounts of time, although having no Romanian citizenship. The events made them reconsider their relationship and they decided to remarry after 17 years and to move together to Romania. (Nicolae and Natalia, MD).

3.3.3 Single mothers forced to migrate

Nadejda and her 3-year-old son Alihan were managing by themselves in a middle-sized town in MD with help from an NGO running a support program for single mothers by providing daycare so that they can work. The COVID crisis however changed their life dramatically, the program being discontinued. They moved to a smaller town hoping that their savings may cover the rent until the end of the crisis, but they were wrong, which determined Nadejda to migrate for work abroad. Alihan first stayed at Nadejda’s sister who had young children of her own but the arrangement didn’t work out. Nadejda legally placed her child at a woman friend who also had young children and a husband abroad. She wants to continue working abroad until she saves the money for their own apartment to avoid rent issues in the future. (Nadejda MD).

Doina was left alone and without their own apartment with her 3-year-old disabled and developmentally delayed son Mircea, and decided to migrate for work. The boy remained in the legal guardianship of her mother. She wants to save enough money to take him to therapy in Italy and to buy their own apartment. Mircea, abandoned by his father and then left behind by his mother is strongly attached to his grandmother and fears losing her as well. (Doina MD).

Elena has left her 11-year-old son Vladimir in the care of a sister for 2 years, whereas in the last 3 years, at her brother who is a lawyer. She tried to take him along to Italy, but her refused when witnessing the hard living conditions of migrants there. He prefers to stay with his uncle at home and wishes to continue his studies in law to step in his uncle’s footsteps. (Vladimir, MD).

Elmira left her daughter Emilia at the age of 4 months in the care of her sister, the child growing with her aunt and having an excellent transnational relationship with her mother. The pandemic left Elmira stuck in Moldova for several months, whence her relationship with her now adolescent daughter severely deteriorated, the latter feeling she demands exaggerated control over her decisions. Emilia developed a “phone addiction” (social networks and games with friends in other locations), has deteriorating school

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results and is refusing to communicate with mother who now migrates again. (Ludmila, Elmira’s sister, MD).

Ana raised her 5 children alone after divorcing Nicolas, the children’s abusive father. Nicolas drank and was violent towards both Ana and the children. After the divorce, Nicolas deserted them entirely. Later on, Ana was diagnosed with cancer and needed surgery and treatment. After her recovery, she was unable to provide for her children and had to go abroad to work. Her five children ended up in state care. Ana kept in touch with the children and was sure she would return. When the eldest daughter came of age, she took the younger siblings into her care. The children coped with the challenges of this situation in different ways. Some of the older ones became more autonomous, more responsible, including towards the younger ones, but also in school and in household activities, others ended up in an inappropriate entourage with negative influences. “*The entourage was very negative. [...] They were older and did things... They used alcohol, drugs. They even ended up stealing. We worried about it ... it was hard... We worried about my mum as well because there was a risk of cancer relapse.*” (Rodica, one of five siblings, MD).

3.3.4 Intersection of family issues and migration

As we could observe through the overlap—cumulative nature, reciprocal strengthening, interrelation—between migration and other family issues, situations in each individual case are complex and hence emphatically needing intersectional consideration.

Among such cumulative phenomena, we may mention:

- economic difficulties paired with the singleness of a parent lead to situations almost impossible to manage;
- lack of medical support has extreme economic consequences upon families, forcing them into migration and to subsequent rupture;
- corruption exacerbating existing difficulties;
- where relationships remain “quite healthy” between family members there is an extensive and secure support network;
- lack of a strong social embedding leaves families in crisis with no functional support;
- gendered stigmatization of migrant mothers puts a strain on transnational relationships to the point of divorce;
- disruption in migration flows such as COVID turning physical co-presence into an adverse factor within the relationship;
- while children are empowered in the process, this intersects with extreme situations when they still face lack of tutelage and take their capacities to the limit.

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3.3.5 Consequences of family issues and migration

- extreme burden on parents;
- decay of family relationships on the whole;
- children growing up entirely without one or both parents;
- breakdown of relationships once physically co-present;
- external interference in the rights of the child to their own family;
- social isolation and fear of further separation in children;
- children’s loss of trust in migrant parents and alienation, especially when adolescent;
- trauma and a decreased sense of belonging due to separation and divorce soaring to the level of suicide.

3.3.6 Recommendations

Note 1. Recommendations have also been included into the CASTLE Policy Brief: https://fspac.ubbcluj.ro/castleaction/application/files/3916/5693/9657/CASTLE_Policy_brief.pdf.

Note 2. Recommendations within each category are ordered from urgent/short-term to essential / long-term.

Legislative recommendations:

- Simplification and acceleration of the institutional process for orderly departure, including digitalization of bi-directional institutional communication (access and response) and of decision-making;
- Creating a dedicated institutional body to process (full, temporary or partial) delegation of parental authority in order to streamline the process and avoid reluctance towards traditional judicial forums;
- Creating a legal instrument of “hybrid” co-guardianship, whereby the migrant parent exercises authority, responsibility, and full participation in communication, monitoring, decisions, and significant events within children’s lives from a distance, in partnership with the stay-behind parent or caregiver who represents and complements his/her presence, without replacing it.

Recommendations for institutions and organizations:

- To organize experience exchange meetings for community representatives who have established successful work with TNFs;
- To create awareness-raising campaigns for acknowledging the TNFs phenomenon, to initiate constructive interest and dialogue, and prevent the bullying of migrants’ children;

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- To encourage the direct involvement of transnational family members and children in communication, administrative and research initiatives that concern them;
- Specialized training in migration and TNFs, including legislation, data, practices, and policies should be provided for professionals dealing with TNFs with children: this can start in the very short term with training courses, then in the long term with MA or postgraduate courses;
- Institutions to initiate partnership with beneficiaries through community information meetings and communication on social networks;
- Campaigns should be organized to promote the partnership where beneficiaries themselves present success stories;
- For the credibility of the initiative, reliable and up-to-date online information and a consistent openness to real-time digital communication must be provided.

Recommendations for actions facilitating transnational togetherness of families:

- Awareness-raising and training campaigns on children’s participation in transparent and functional transnational communication;
- Employers in target countries to be incentivized to offer convenient phone/internet packages and time/flexibility of connectivity within working hours;
- To facilitate regular visits (minimum 3 full days together every 3 months) between home and destination country through paid days off and travel vouchers offered by employers or authorities;
- Setting up community centers that facilitate the online communication for TNFs with limited access to internet;
- Provision of quality audio/video communication kits and internet access for families in need, at least in the early stages (3–6 months) of migration, similar to the approach used during the pandemic period.

Recommendations concerning national programs for TNFs:

- Creation of online platforms where children can express themselves, share their concerns and provide reciprocal support in groups moderated and monitored by public authorities, educational institutions, NGOs, which also collect anonymous data on issues to be fed back to research;
- Training programs for family members left at home, including caregivers, extended family, grandparents and supportive families;
- Emergency economic intervention packages for TNFs for economic, medical or legal crisis situations, with special focus on single-parent families and chronically ill children.

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Country report: Republic of Moldova

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Labour migration from the Republic of Moldova, which is registering a further intensification after the COVID-19 pandemic, generates new social and behavioral phenomena, including the phenomenon of transnational families. The phenomenon of transnational families and children left behind as a result of labour migration is a phenomenon already known in the Republic of Moldova to which several studies and research in the field have been dedicated, and public authorities have developed policies and intervention tools in order to manage more efficiently this phenomenon. Various strategic documents were developed, such as the Strategy for child protection for 2014–2020, the regulatory framework has been improved through the launch of Law No 140 of 14.06.2013 „On special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents”, several social services provided at community level by social workers, school psychologists, etc. have been developed. This becomes increasingly important as the phenomenon of transnational families and children left behind acquires new forms and can generate new social risks.

Contemporary migration from the Republic of Moldova that has entered the next phase of maturity can be seen as a challenge to social cohesion at the community level as well as to the integrity of the family institution. And the phenomenon of transnational families and children left without parental care is becoming more widespread. At the beginning of 2021 according to the CER-103 survey (Children at risk and children separated from their parents) the total number of cases of children separated from their parents registered with local public authorities was 34,107 children, of which 24,763 children in rural areas. Of these 29,186, including 21,684 in rural areas, are children whose both parents/single parent are temporarily working abroad.

In order to highlight the problems faced by children left alone as a result of parental migration, a research project has been initiated with the aim of improving the legislative

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institutional framework for the protection of transnational families in line with similar practices and legal norms in the European Union, including on the basis of solid empirical research evidence. The research aimed to identify the potential negative impact of policies on child protection in the Republic of Moldova, better inform transnational families and representatives of public authorities regarding the realities and practical aspects of labour migration. Children left behind who participated in the research had the opportunity to come up with proposals and contribute to the improvement of policies and legislation on labour migration and child protection.

The research project was carried out in partnership with the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca and the Ukrainian Institute of Social Research "Oleksandr Yaremenko" who also initiated research on the given phenomenon in their countries.

The field qualitative research include 36 in-depth interviews with adults (parents working abroad, parents who stayed at home whose spouses went to work abroad, caregivers), 4 in-depth interviews with children whose parents went to work abroad, 11 in-depth interviews with representatives of public authorities (social workers, mayors, pedagogues/pedagogues, etc.), 4 focus groups (2 with adults and 2 with parents). The research also included an interview with two Ukrainian refugees, in the context of military actions in the neighboring country.

The research tools (interview guides) were coordinated with colleagues from Babeş-Bolyai University and adapted to the realities of the Republic of Moldova. Also, the research sought to relatively ensure territorial representativeness, as well as in terms of the social structure of the respondents.

It should be noted that research does not only focus on welfare issues but also includes such issues as education or access to education and health services, access to health services.

In order to obtain the most qualitative results possible, the research aimed at freely expressing the opinions of all respondents (research participants) in order to highlight the various possible negative aspects related to the phenomenon of transnational families and children left without care whose parents are working abroad, as well as the solutions or methods of intervention by public authorities to address them.

4.1 The impact of parental migration on children**4.1.1. Perception of migration by children and attitude towards the parental migration**

The perception of migration and the attitude of children towards parental migration is determined by several factors: (i) who left (mother, father, both parents, parent / parents with one of the children); (ii) age at which the child stayed with relatives / foreign persons

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or with a single parent; (iii) the period of migration; (iv) the person in whose care the child remained after the migration (parent, grandparents, other person); (v) friends of the children left behind and the support received from them. The mother's departure was felt more painfully by the children, compared to the father's departure, which is explained by the special connection between the children and the mother, including in the case of the boys *"I was used to dad leaving, bringing a backpack of chocolates and me being the happiest in the whole world, but when mum left I felt a rupture."* (FGD_1_C).

The situation was more complicated in the case of single-parent families when the only parent left or when the parents separated siblings, some being taken abroad with them, and others left in the care of persons in Moldova *"the anger has remained very strong on them. They took me then, and they didn't take her. And she didn't understand why they took me, but they let her..."* (FGD_1_C). However, the father's departure also affected the children very mutely. Regardless of who is gone—mother, father or both parents, the impact of migration on children profoundly affects their mental and physical condition.

The children's opinion was not sought in the vast majority of cases. Thus, when some children asked about leaving, the answer received was not a sincere one *"I'm leaving and I'm coming soon", "I'm fast coming."* This is why some children felt lied to, and betrayed by their parents: *"I was 11 years old, I was little. Now I'm 15. Back then I was angry with them because they lied to me."* (FGD_1_C).

Basically, the parents did not prepare the children for their leaving abroad, just explaining to them that they are leaving for the children *"they prepared me in a way, they told me that everything they do, they do for me, for my future and to make it better for me."* (FGD_1_C). The children's stories show that their opinions practically did not matter in the decision to leave, neither their emotions, nor the challenges they had. The research data show the children's desire for parents to discuss this with them and to be honest, this helping them to accept the parent's leave. Subsequently, the parents discussed with the children about migration, the reasons for migration. The children struggled to understand the reasons behind the parent/parents' decision to migrate and even to justify them: *"they had to migrate to have a better life, to give their children what they want"* (IIA_1_C); *"they left for money, house, food"* (IIA_2_C); *"they left to give a better life to children"* (IIA_3_C); *"parents work abroad because they may have a better salary there than in Moldova"* (FGD_2_C).

Children's views on migration are not always positive: *"I have a good opinion and a bad opinion"* (IIA_2_C); *"I don't have a very good opinion about my mother's departure because it's hard without her and I want to be with her... I don't have a very good opinion, because children need parents with them. The presence of a parent in my life is very important. I need support and I always want to be with her"* (IIA_4_C); *"I think it's very bad that the parents leave, because the children don't have enough support, especially during adolescence."* (IIA_6_C).

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These opinions are the result of the experiences lived every day by the children with departed parents, their emotional needs to which no one responded, the comparisons they made with the children who had their parents at home, etc. *"my father was gone and my older brother and I were staying with my mother. I still lived this experience a few years, my brother from an early age stayed with my grandparents. He practically lived among grandparents."* (FGD_1_C).

When asked about the benefits of parental migration, the vast majority pointed out that they are missing *"there are no benefits, only the fact that the material situation compared to 5 years ago has increased"* (IIA_6_C); *"I don't mourn, I don't come with torn clothes, I mean I always have tidy clothes, clean clothes, and that's an advantage"* (FGD_2_C).

4.2. Children's communication with parents abroad

The development of information and communication technologies has brought important changes and facilitated the parents' communication with children left behind by migration. The research data shows a nearly daily communication with the missing parent/parents *"every day"*, *"we communicate quite often, depending on the time available."* Some children who are left in the care of relatives communicate even more frequently *"every day 4-5 times."*

The initiation of communication depends on certain practices that have formed over time, but also on the particularities of the work of the parent who emigrated *"with my mum I communicate every day, with my dad over a day, over two because he has a more intense work, he's always tired and when he calls me then we talk"* (FGD_1_C).

Topics discussed relate to children's daily activities - school and school results, extracurricular activities, health, sometimes the joys or challenges they face: *"how I feel, how is school going"* (IIA_1_C); *"how are we doing, if we are all healthy, and what is happening at home"* (IIA_2_C). Some parents discuss with their children the cultural peculiarities of the country where they are *"about what traditions are in Italy. They tell me what food is there, what kind of drinks, what kind of toys and so on."* (IIA_5_C).

Frequently communication is a reserved one. On the one hand, children are afraid to say the challenges they have, personal emotions, but also parents are limited to a formal communication, without highlighting the problems they face in the countries where they are. In such situations, sometimes close relatives who are caregivers of the children get involved *"grandma knows, we talk to her, after that grandma shares with mom"* (FGD_1_C).

Reservations in communication and emotions' control are determined by social distance *"when you see your parents, when your mother comes, when she is in front of you and you can embrace her, kiss her, that's something, but when she just talks, just hear her voice, that's something else"* (FGD_1_C).

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Last but not least, the reservations in children's communication are also determined by the parents' openness to communicate with their children. The children reported that their parents "don't say much", "rarely when" they share the problems they have or "how hard life is there." Such situations are usually more characteristic of single-parent families or families in which the parents divorced after the migration "she tells me about the person she takes care of and I realize that it is difficult for her and I try to support her somehow. In a way mutual support? She doesn't always tell me, so as not to depress me and fill me with personal problems." (IIA_6_C).

The vast majority of children participating in the research showed that their parents strive to understand their problems. Frequently, the health problems or other challenges they went through convinced them that their parents understand them and they need to be more open with them "lately, my mother understands me very well... I had some health problems this fall. I, for the first time, was alone in the hospital, that is, somehow it was a fear for me, that what will be there, what will they tell me, but now I understand how from 16 years old I can go to the doctor alone somehow..." (FGD_1_C). There are also situations when they are not understood and even argue, being at a distance: "There are also moments when we have different opinions and we both hold our position. I can say that I, my mother, and my grandmother, that is, the whole family has characters, and we all hold our own opinion, I mean we do not give up so easily." (FGD_2_C).

Children with parents away prefer to tell their parents their successes, their joys, but they are not always the first. Thus, those who are close to children—siblings, grandparents, find out about the joys faster than parents who are far away.

Parents who have gone abroad strive to come home at least once a year, some come more often 2–3 times a year. Some parents strive to come to certain holidays, but others come when they have to solve certain problems "they have something to do in Moldova" (IIA_1_C); "He comes home if, for example, a trouble has happened" (IIA_2_C).

The return of the parent / parents' at home is welcomed by the vast majority of children because they see enormous differences in the communication process "when you talk on the phone it's one thing, and face to face it's completely different." Thus, returning home is expected by children to receive affection from their parents, but also to show them and offer their own affection. This denotes that children want to enjoy together with their parents, to feel an empathic, supportive, affective attitude on their part.

4.3 Relationships with family member / child caregiver

The research did not identify situations of tense relationships between children and their parent / caregivers. IIA_1_C "The relationship with my grandmother is very close, I feel more at ease with her and she knows me better I would say."

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4.4 Psycho-social effects

The departure of one parent or both parents has greatly affected the children's psycho-emotional state. Research data shows that parental migration has influenced various aspects of children's lives, leaving a strong mark on the attachment between children and parents, the primary emotional processes that govern family life, including the evolution of children's personality. The children recounted the following about their emotional state after their parents left: "*Sadness, you feel bad when there is no parent around... I remember how she went, emotions and sadness, I feel like crying a little*" (IIA_2_C); "*Feelings of sadness. I missed him. I miss her...*" (IIA_3_C); "*Sad. I missed him so much. if my father leaves, then I wait for him with a lot of love to come home*" (IIA_5_C); "*An emptiness for me because I knew since I was little that my dad was going abroad, but then I stayed with my sister, my grandmother and my younger brother and this emptiness was felt*" (FGD_1_C).

The absence of one parent or both parents led to the emergence of affective deficiencies, temporary and broken relationships between parents and children. Affective deficiencies are more severe and irreversible among children who have been left at an early age. **Sadness, longing, emptiness/lack** are the consequences conditioned by the lack of parents, the lack of maternal affection. Lack of a secure environment.

The departure of the parent / parents places them in an unfavorable situation, depriving them of their maternal affection. Emotional deprivation has a negative effect on children with departed parents, manifested by anxiety, restraint and hiding emotions. The children tried to develop self-defense mechanisms "*I tried to understand and not have depressive moods*" (IIA_4_C); "*when my mother left the first time, I was at the end of fourth grade and I was thinking that I would be more free. But I quickly realised that I had her support and motherly understanding.*" (IIA_6_C).

Children feel a lack of warmth and parental love, especially during the holidays, including birthdays. Usually, in educational institutions (kindergartens, schools), children prepare an artistic program for parents to watch. Namely at such manifestations, children can no longer control their emotions because no one comes to see them, parents do not see the effort they have made, they are not embraced by those close to them "*On New Year's Eve, 8 March, holidays are held in every institution. You sing, you dance, you make an effort and some strangers look at you because your parents are far away somewhere and they make money instead of coming and supporting you, seeing you, applauding you.*" (FGD_1_C).

The situation is similar when parents are not with their children here on the most important family holidays—Christmas, Easter, etc. "*The holidays are in the family. The children whose parents are in Moldova, they celebrate in the family, with parents. And we, those whose parents are abroad, do not have the opportunity to be in this spirit of family, with parents ... There is no pain and no resentment, this is simply missing.*" (FGD_2_C).

During the focus group discussions, the children mentioned that the migration affected their family unity "*my mom and dad are divorced. I don't talk to my father because he*

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doesn't really want to, I'm staying with a host family, the woman I live with takes care of me, my mother and father are divorced. My mother has been in Italy for 15 years, I live with my grandparents." (FGD_2_C). The given situation mentioned the participants in the focus group discussions is characteristic for approximately 30–40% of their peers.

An important moment is that migration has not only influenced the rupture of relations between parents, but often the communication of one parent with the child "now the father has no parental rights", including the child's communication with the parents' relatives "after my parents separated, my mother's relatives don't talk to me. I don't know what happened there, but neither do my father's relatives, I don't talk to them and I don't talk to them." (FGD_2_C).

The children's stories highlight the following aspects of the comparison they made in the case of children who have parents with them "life with parents together, I find it much simpler" (IIA_5_C); "All our personal worries are on us: we have to cook, clean, wash our clothes, take care of ourselves. Children who have parents at home, wake them up in the morning, make them breakfast, while we are responsible for ourselves, we have to do all this." (FGD_2_C).

The lack of parents thus contributes to a faster maturation, to an emotional control "we are colder", to contradictory feelings, but also to a certain degree of independence. But the souls of these children are full of revolt and often anger "I blamed the money, because they (the parents) left me, they left me for the money... I cursed the money because not everything consists in money. Anyway, the financial problems will always be anyway, it doesn't matter." (FGD_1_C). Children protest against such behavior on the part of their parents. For some this process is manifested itself in a refusal to communicate, for others in rebellious behavior. During the focus group discussions, participants provided examples of peers who protested against their parents' departure "a seventh grade girl wants to be with her mother and because her mother left, she does bad things, she behaves very badly. She said that until her mother comes home, she won't be like all children, that is, she won't behave decently, normally." (FGD_1_C).

As a result, some children became attached to the grandparents. They try to understand their grandparents, to listen to them and to help them in difficult situations, even if they also need moral support and help. The children learned to do things on their own, waiting for the parental love they do not have.

The data collected from the children attest that the parents' departure affects them psycho-emotionally through: deprivation of care, deprivation of affection from the parents and a state of sadness, nostalgia, longing. The emotions experienced by the children whose parents went abroad evidenced that the nuclear family is severely affected and does not provide the necessary support for the harmonious development of the child. These mentioned influenced the way of being of these children who noted "I have closed myself in more" (IIA_1_C); "I am a more independent person and I want to solve my own problems, I try

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to give myself advice... I am a more closed person and I don't really tell my secrets, fears and pains to other people. I can rarely tell my mother or older brother." (IIA_4_C).

4.5 Responsibilities within the household

The migration process of the parents conditioned the appearance of new worries for the children left in Moldova. There is an interdependence between the housework that was previously performed by the mother or father until departure, currently being taken over by the children left behind. Both girls and boys reported changes in their daily routine, including new household responsibilities: *"I take care of the house and household" (IIA_3_C), "now I do my mother's jobs every day" (IIA_4_C); "I've been given some duties that my mother used to do, like washing the dishes, cleaning the house" (IIA_6_C).*

The worries taken by the children depends on the number of children left and the parent gone. If the father is gone, the worries are most often taken up by the boys. The girls take over the duties of preparing food, cleaning and caring for the younger siblings *"my sister took care of me from 3 months because my parents went to work in Moscow and I stayed with my grandmother and sister. Every time she came home from school she had to feed me, cook for me, take care of me, but my grandmother went to the yard to clean."* (FGD_1_C).

In the case of rural children, children are also involved in tillage activities, even if they are left with elderly grandparents *"we have an orchard and the grandparents are always away with work and when they come, I always make food for myself and for them, this is the responsibility that came to me"* (FGD_1_C). The new responsibilities of children left behind as a result of the migration of parents often lead to a lack of time to prepare homework for school *"she (sister) failed to do lessons and had problems."*

The new duties have led children to appreciate more the work of their parents. Some mentioned that *"the weight of the situation after my mother left made me appreciate her work by saving and encouraging her"* (IIA_4_C).

4.6 The impact of labor migration from the Republic of Moldova on children left behind in the vision of adults (parents and caregivers)

Parental labour migration has a multitude of effects on children left without parental care, most of them—of a negative nature. Children are a vulnerable social category, and the departure of their parents can affect their psycho-emotional state, partially compromise the socialization process, impair their ability to communicate with peers and the ability to integrate comfortably into society.

Sociological methods were used in the research—in-depth individual interview and focus group discussions. In December 2021–January 2022, 35 adults were interviewed

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(migrant parents, parents left behind with their children and caregivers). And in April, during the focus groups, 13 migrant parents and parents left behind with their children participated in the discussions. The way in which adults look at the migration process is somewhat different from that of children and that is why capturing the perception of migration by adults (parents and caregivers) was important for the conducted research.

4.6.1 The general context of labour migration

Among the main reasons for going abroad to work, cited by most parents and caregivers, three, in particular, stand out: lack of jobs; financial reason: too low salary, with which they could not cover even the most necessary expenses; the desire to have a better life for oneself, but especially for the children: *"I left because in our country you don't make the money you need ... to support the family and the children grow up ... you can't support the family with the salaries that we have in Moldova"* (IA_PM_10). These reasons are found in the reports of most of the interviewed adults: *"Because I didn't have enough to support the children, because the salary in Moldova is low and ... in our country 2-3 thousand lei, but 2-3 thousand you don't buy, only on the bills they go and food there. And there is no money, you can't buy anything."* (IA_PM_27).

The departure of parents, even for a short period, is difficult for children, and going to work abroad for several months, or even years is even more difficult. In these circumstances, prior discussions with the children about the departure are welcome. The study reveals that most parents informed their children that they are going to work abroad, and if they did not do so, it was because of the children's age, who would not have understood anything anyway. Most parents had discussions in which they tried to explain to their children the necessity for labor migration: *"I told them that I was going to leave and that I was doing it for their own good"* (IA_PM_01).

Some parents even asked for the children's opinion and acceptance, which, even formally, leads to maintaining and strengthening trust between family members: *"I said that, look, daddy is leaving, so that we can try to make a better repair. That was our first intention. Let's get a better car. And the children accepted."* (IA_PM_20).

In some cases, however, the parents had to leave, even though the children were reluctant to accept: *"I told them I had to leave to make some money and make a house, and to buy a house to live better and they, like the child, do not agree with..."* (IA_PM_13). Sometimes, the parents had to leave their children at home crying and really depressed: *"a week before I left for abroad, she could not eat. Get depressed. Then I went with her to the psychologist and she has been suffering ever since."* (IA_PM_15).

Almost all parents in transnational families mentioned that their children remain sad when they leave. But it should be mentioned that going to work, leaving children behind

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is quite difficult for migrant parents as well: *"Very sad... My feeling is that I want to stay at home with the child, and work and have a salary like that normally, not the cosmic prices in Moldova so that I can support and raise the child, and he'll see that there is a future in Moldova."* (IA_PM_10).

The research shows that just as children can be psychologically traumatized, parents can also be psychologically traumatized: *"All the time, when I returned to the country, I was traumatized because I left my children. That, indeed, it was a great suffering"* (IA_PM_15). This should not be left unattended, because a traumatized parent cannot effectively perform his or her educational functions, cannot provide due support to children.

Parental labor migration leads to a weakening of family ties within the family, especially when children have been left with caregivers at a very young age: *"She knows she's mom and calls her mom, but you know, like in the wind. They're not close friends, no!"* (IA_Î_06). Some parents are also worried about the fact that in the case of international labor migration, the spouses have to separate: *"And that was a minus because I mean one on one side and one on the other is already not family. You know, they both have to be together."* (IA_PM_17). Separation of spouses from each other is an additional risk factor for keeping the family: *"... the divorce with my ex-husband followed, because he had left before me and as they say, followed the divorce with my ex-husband, because he had left before me, and as they say foreignness either binds couples together more or..."* (FG_A_01).

4.6.2 . Relationship with local public administration

The research showed that most parents notified local public authorities. But this is true for those transnational families, in which the children were left behind with their grandparents or caregivers: *"We went to the town hall, made a guardianship, I have signed myself, the children's father has signed that we are leaving them in the care of the grandmother"* (IA_PM_12). And if the children are left behind with one of the parents, then usually the local public authorities are not notified.

At the same time, almost all parents and caregivers report that representatives of the local public administration have never visited families where there are children left behind as a result of their parents' labor migration. Moreover, they were not even interested in these children or in the conditions in which they live: *"And the City Hall knows, but no one has ever controlled me. We really wanted someone to come and control me once, but no one came. He didn't control me. And the doctor knows, all of them, all of them, no one checked me because he knows that I am a caregiver, or how to tell you..."* (IA_Î_06). Parents and caregivers also say they have not received any help or advice from city hall workers.

The departed parents left the children in someone's custody only if they both left. Even so, about half of them did not leave the children in official custody, but only made an oral

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agreement with the caregiver. Parents who have not left their children in custody are usually not even aware of the need for it: *"Somehow I didn't even feel the need for something to be done and due to the lack of powers of attorney cannot be done..."* (IA_PM_21).

4.7 Caring for children left behind

Most children left behind with one of their parents or grandparents. But there are children who have been left in the care of relatives, cousins or neighbors. Choosing as a caregiver a suitable person, compatible with the child left behind (if the child does not stay with one of the parents) is very important for the wellbeing, for the comfort of the child. And some parents had a very responsible attitude towards this choice: *"Of course I talked to them first, before I talked to the children, I talked to them... If they can, they feel they have strength, they will can carry this task, because it is not an easy one at all and they support me in these beginnings... After the discussion with them I have already initiated the discussion with the children. Yes, of course I had their approval first."* (IA_PM_21). Parents are generally satisfied with the caregivers who have been left with the children, sometimes—with the exception of some aspects: *"... there were times when I was expecting more..."* (IA_PM_20). And the dissatisfaction seems to occur when the choice of caregiver was not the appropriate one: *"I left them with a cousin of mine. Yes, she was young, she was a big girl. In the father-in-law's house. He was the father-in-law. Yes, the children still suffered. When she's a mother, she's a mother and when... (cries)."* (IA_PM_15).

In the opinion of the parents, the grandparents are preferable as caregivers: *"I would advise the parents to leave more in the care of the grandparents, who are closer to their hearts, but who do not have other children in their care"* (IA_PM_20). Some parents report that their grandparents are too lenient with their grandchildren and they do not receive the necessary education: *"they are not properly educated, they are allowed to do what they want, we want for them to be educated from an early age"* (IA_PM_17). But even though grandparents usually love their grandchildren a lot, when children are left with grandparents, certain generational problems arise, such as: far too different interests and priorities, difficulties in helping children with lesson preparation, difficulties in offering advice related to modern computing technology, Internet, etc.

Most of the caregivers interviewed report that they had no problems with the children, who were left in their care. Only a few have encountered certain problems.

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4.7.1 The influence of labor migration on the physical health and psycho-emotional state of children

The parents and caregivers interviewed consider that the physical health of their children is good, the children did not have serious problems, only colds and other minor health problems. They did not see any changes in the physical health of the children after one or both parents went to work abroad. Some children had more serious health problems or even disabilities even before their parents left. They continued to be treated, and in their health, their parents either did not notice changes, or they noticed changes for the better.

Only in a few cases did the migrant parents make a connection between the deterioration of the child's physical health and the fact that they were gone: "*... girl ... when I came home, when I returned, there were big changes with the health. And to this day with diabetes. I had a time when I blamed myself that it was all my fault that it happened, but yes, stress is ...*" (IA_PM_11).

The departure of parents to work abroad and therefore, the separation from them for a long period, can negatively influence the development and psycho-emotional state of the children left behind. The imbalance of the psycho-emotional state can persist over time, even when the parent has returned home. For example, a mother who has been at home for some time now caring for children but has previously worked, including in Israel, mentions: "*Now when we go somewhere and she hears the specific music from the airport, she tells me she doesn't even want to hear it, and I realize that going to Israel for her has remained a trauma*" (IA_PM_11).

Separation from parents can cause psycho-emotional trauma, especially in younger children, who remain angry with their parents because they left and this can be manifested by the fact that on return, they do not want to communicate with parents: "*... when I returned at home after 3 months he didn't even want to come to me to hug me, I was coming I was taking him in my arms, he was pushing me...*" (IA_PM_14).

4.7.2 The influence of labor migration on school performance, activities in kindergarten, social integration of children

According to parents, children's performance in school and kindergarten, involvement in activities usually did not change or did not change considerably with the migration of parents. In some cases, parents consider that their children learn less or become less involved because they are boys: "*The girl attends with pleasure, but the boy... I'm thinking that he's a little bit lazy...*" (IA_PM_12). Parents relate the differences in learning performances not only with the child's gender, but also by the way he is, his character, and his perseverance: "*They are different characters: the adult likes to give his interest, to do, because*

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he understands something, but the little one often says, if I don't want to learn, I don't learn" (IA_PM_20).

The study shows that in the opinion of parents, if the performance of a child has become lower, among the reasons is the fact that he is more concerned with his parents and fails to focus: *"Yes, yes, the performance has changed a bit, as the teacher said, the class supervisor like when I was at home, the performance is weaker now, he is focused elsewhere"* (IA_PM_27).

Children left behind may find it difficult to communicate with peers, integrating into different social groups. The causes can be various: the lack of communication model of the parents with other people, the closure in itself due to the lack of parents next to them, the aggressive reaction as a form of defense. For example, a mother from a transnational family, who is also a school psychologist, states that: *"... children left in someone else's care are distinguished by outrageous behavior. It's not their fault, only they don't understand the situation, and the parents, often feeling guilty, compensate for their lack with money. Here, the children get out of control and get ugly behaviors."* (IA_PA_01). Sometimes, however, children can become more shy, which can also be an impediment to integration into society: *"For example, I noticed in the boy that he became a little more, more, more withdrawn, more silent. But even now, he is thirty-one years old, I think that the time since then has affected him, affected him, because as I tell you, he has withdrawn, he has been quieter, he has not communicated much, he is not like other children..."* (FG_A_01).

4.7.3 Communication between migrant parents and children left behind

In transnational families, communication is often reduced to communication via telephone and computer. Parents are aware of the limits of this communication: *"we talk on social networks, but it's not like being next to them, hugging them, stroking them and telling them how much you love them"* (FG_A_02), but because they have no alternative, except when they come home or when their children go to visit them, they use it.

Parents say they communicate with their children at least once a week, but most said they communicate once a day, or at least once a day: *"Every day, usually in the evening, we talk to the whole family for at least an hour"* (IA_PA_01). And if they have the opportunity, the communication is for several hours a day: *"... all day, about ten, twenty times a day as with my mother, but children when they come home until I go to bed"* (IA_PM_12). Routine issues are most often discussed: *"We were talking about how they feel, what they ate, who upset them, how was at school, if they were at school, if they were on vacation, have you been to your grandparents and the rest of your relatives?"* (IA_PM_11).

The impossibility of always being with children makes migrant parents try to educate their children through distance communication: *"We were talking about learning,*

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behavior, the hours they have to be at home, not to stop on the way to people and foreign cars, but to come straight home" (IA_PM_03).

In addition to remote communication, parents also communicate with their children when they come home. And most parents mention that in these short periods they try to spend as much time as possible with their children: "... *the boy is permanently with me as long as I'm home...*" (IA_PM_08). But even when they come to the country, parents sometimes encounter obstacles in communication, because children can move away from them and close in on themselves: "*I will tell you this: the children become distant towards their parents, with regret, as their parents are gone and I am very sorry that they do not want to talk, whenever I ask them something to tell me, they are very closed, they have become closed...*" (FG_A_02).

4.7.4 The influence of labour migration on the wellbeing of transnational families and the material support given to children

One of the reasons parents leave for work is the precarious financial situation of the family and therefore, the parents leave to earn more: "*Overseas you can save money and come home to do something bigger to accomplish your goals... That's why we're going over there...*" (IA_PM_23).

Some migrants have improved their living conditions in the Republic of Moldova: "... *I managed to buy an apartment in the country...*" (FG_A_01). Some parents managed to solve their children's medical issues, issues of such order that they would not have been able to solve them otherwise, due to lack of money: "*When I went abroad, I thought about this care, so that to put brackets on her, a lot of money, and little by little, I did it...*" (IA_PM_07). Several parents managed to take their children to the sea, on trips and excursions.

Solving material problems sometimes improves the relationship between spouses, which is beneficial for all family members: "*In our family, however, the financial situation has improved... I am not saying that we are ... yes, we are still ... there is some stability. This financial stability also soothes the 'climate' in the family ... as it is said.*" (IA_PM_26). Parents need to financially support their children, but this must be done with great care, developing all aspects of communication and interaction between parents, because otherwise parents are not appreciated, but only money is expected from them: "... *his mother said, that I am only 'coşolek' (purse) for her otherwise I do not exist*" (IA_I_06).

Usually, the wellbeing of transnational families' increases, but migrant parents are very aware of the price they had to pay for it: "*I earned some money, resources, a house; but, I lost the best years of my children's life, and first of all, my health*" (FG_A_02).

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4.8 Society's attitude towards transnational families and children left behind

Society's attitude towards transnational families and children left behind can sometimes be harsh and influenced by many prejudices. This was mentioned during the research by several adults. "... *society has a contradictory attitude towards these families—many consider that if someone from the family is gone, the family is well insured from all points of view*" (IA_PA_01).

It seems that the society, the local community does not intervene much and is not very interested in transnational families, in the children left behind. When asked if someone intervenes with help or advice in children's lives, for example, relatives, local authorities, the church, NGOs, etc., parents and caregivers usually said that no one intervenes except close relatives.

4.9 The effect of the pandemic situation on transnational families

It seems that the pandemic situation has not greatly affected transnational families in general and children left behind in particular. Most of the time, migrants continued to work, and even went to work abroad for the first time. However, there were also cases in which people could not return to work abroad due to the pandemic "*I can say that in some cases it has influenced quite a lot, people are outraged because they can't go abroad to earn a living*" (IA_PM_11).

Even though the pandemic has caused various restrictions, impositions and strict rules in all countries, both parents and caregivers say that it has not influenced in any way the relationships within transnational families or their relationships with caregivers. Some parents feel that online learning for their children during the pandemic was not as effective as teaching in the classroom: "*they don't do great work online... That's..., that's..., it's a tragedy after me, but we have nothing to do...*" (IA_PM_21).

4.10 Future plans, wishes and expectations from the state

More than half of the migrant parents would like to return to the country: "*back to Moldova, to come back, to buy a house to live with my children*" (IA_PM_27). Some would like to settle with living abroad, but having parents in the Republic of Moldova it stops them, because here are relatives and friends, here they understand the language, culture and traditions: "*My plans are to go and to go back home to my parents, to my family*" (IA_PM_16)

Almost all migrant parents interviewed in the study do unskilled work abroad, even though some of them have higher education. They earn quite a bit of money, putting in

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physical effort, sometimes combined with great emotional effort, especially when it comes to working as caregivers for the elderly in the family. That is why parents want a better future for their children. And in most cases they dream that they will go to college: *"I told them, you have to learn. I work for you. I make this money for you. I put all my money into your studies."* (IA_PM_15).

The study shows that some parents are very dissatisfied with what the state is doing: *"A foreign country helps a lot more than our country. Our country does absolutely nothing!!! Nothing!!! How did they help us? With nothing!"* (IA_PM_15). Adults believe that the state is largely to blame because citizens have to leave.

Parents believe that the state should help create more jobs: *"Maybe more jobs. Let the people have a place to work, that's why people leave the country because there are few jobs, you really don't have a place to work, there are not so many jobs, it's not even a job..."* (IA_PM_12). Having high expectations from the state, some denote, however, a passive attitude towards the problems of society: *"But we cannot do anything until they do something..."* (IA_PM_05).

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5.

The role of public authorities in the Republic of Moldova and Romania in supporting transnational families and managing the phenomenon of “children left behind due to labour migration”

Iulia HOSSU
Mara BIROU

The government and local public authorities have long recognized the need for enhanced measures to protect children left behind whose parents have gone abroad to work. In this context, several initiatives launched at the national level can be mentioned. Thus, various strategic documents were elaborated, such as the *Strategy for child protection for the years 2014–2020*, the normative framework was improved by the launch of *Law no. 140 of 14.06.2013 “On the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents”*, were developed several social services provided at community level by social workers, school psychologists, etc. However, the efficient management of this phenomenon becomes more and more important in the situation when, amidst the background of globalization processes, the migratory phenomenon will register an even greater intensity, and the given phenomenon—transnational families and children left behind will become more widespread and will acquire new forms of manifestation that can generate new social risks.

In this context, in Romania several initiatives launched at national level can be mentioned, such as the Strategy for child protection for the years 2014–2020, Law no. 140 of 14.06.2013 “On the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents”, etc. However, the more efficient management of this phenomenon becomes more and more important in the situation when, against the background of the globalization processes, the migratory phenomenon will register an even greater intensity, and the given phenomenon will become even more widespread.

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5.1. Data about the interviewed experts

The interviews have been conducted since April and are still ongoing. By the end of May 2022, 11 interviews were conducted in Moldova with representatives of public authorities and 11 interviews in Romania with representatives of public authorities and NGOs. The interviews were semi-structured, based on an interview guide that addresses the main dimensions of the topic: the phenomenon at national level and local, county level; legislation and policies (general and specific); collecting, centralizing and monitoring data on the situation of children left at home and the actors involved in this process, support groups for these children; the main issues specific to the cases that respondents came in contact with, recommendations for improving services and programs dedicated to these children as well as their families. A final dimension, created by the special socio-political situation, was the situation of families displaced by the war. In Romania, the research was extended to the NGO environment in order to capture all the actors actively involved in managing the situation of children left at home. The link between public authorities and non-governmental organizations, both parties involved in managing the situation of these children, emerged from the first interviews with representatives of public authorities.

The opinion of experts and decision-makers who are directly involved in managing the phenomenon of transnational families would be extremely important, in terms of improving public policies in this regard. In this context, the research aimed to involve as participants in interviews representatives of various institutions (representatives of central and local public authorities) that are related to the phenomenon of transnational families and the protection of children left behind whose parents are working abroad. Social workers, school psychologists, mayors, representatives of the district council, of the National Agency for Employment, in whose competence is the issue of labor migration, of the Diaspora Relations Office within the State Chancellery of the Government were interviewed. Territorial representativeness was also pursued, so that the problem of transnational families and its management manifests itself differently in urban and rural areas.

5.2. Assessment of the situation at national and local level

Despite the fact that the phenomenon of children left at home is present throughout the country, in Romania there are counties that seem more affected by this phenomenon. This fact is also caused by the level of economic development of certain areas / counties compared to others. The rural environment seems to be more drastically affected by this phenomenon than the urban environment, which is largely due to the lack of opportunities that life in rural areas offers to young families. In addition, institutional support for these children in rural areas appears to be more precarious than in urban areas.

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It is important to remember the epidemiological context of the last two years which has created another effect on this phenomenon, energizing it by increasing differences as the latest statistics indicate, both local and national.

For example, in a county considered economically developed such as Cluj County, where the mobility population is continuous, there were different periods, with very interesting dynamics. *“With the pandemic, they all came back because they were stuck there. The number has dropped from the 1,400 we had from 2015–2016, we have now reached 400 families reported by the institutions.”* (local authority representative).

Respondents expressed their opinion on the obligation to record and monitor children whose parents are working abroad: *“It would be good for parents to be asked at the border when they leave not for a period longer than 2 months, as stipulated in law no. 140, but even for a week, in whose care they left the children”* (IA_E_01); *“We have a big gap in our legislation, that when a parent or both parents are abroad they have to be asked right at the border: who did they leave the children with, if all the documents are in order, if the children are in school, they are not enrolled and so on”* (IA_E_03).

At the same time, if transnational families and children are registered and monitored in rural areas, the same cannot be said relating cities: *“Currently, there are over 100 families in the locality where both or at least one parent is abroad”* (IA_E_05). *“Social workers have a special register; in which they keep track of children who have been left without either a parent or without both parents. At the same time, there is a collaboration between the social worker, the family doctor and the police officer. The same goes for the record, if the parents leave with their children. When both parents leave, or in the case of incomplete families, one of the parents, the form of protection is established—custody, the package of documents is prepared, the person who will remain responsible for the child is determined, it is registered and a record is kept... Social workers visits their homes. Families can apply for social assistance. The fact that these families are in the sights of social workers is a help.”* (IA_E_01).

At the municipal level, the problem of monitoring children whose parents have gone abroad to work is difficult due to the large number of inhabitants, most often the records of this category are made at schools: *“At the municipal level there are quite a few transnational families, but there is no record at the management level, because parents are not obliged to inform the authorities about the fact that they leave their children in the care of other people. The evidence is made by the schools: the principals register the cases and send the lists to the Directorate of Education, Youth and Sports twice a year (October, March), respectively, a copy must come to us. In recent years, due to the pandemic, there have been no such records.”* (IA_E_08).

Representatives of public authorities from rural localities invoke other needs they face. For example, the lack of qualified specialists who could work with this category of people (children left behind): *“There is a lack of specialists in the field of psychology or psychopedagogy who would provide more assistance to these children. Even those guardians or custodians*

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need psychological assistance in order to be able to solve certain problems of these children, but also social workers, being daily involved in solving these difficult problems.” (IA_E_01); “We have town halls where we have practically no specialists in the protection of children’s rights. The case I told you about the family of five above is a blatant situation. Only the community social worker who has 20–30 beneficiaries per day, cannot pay enough attention to this case, therefore in town halls, it is mandatory to establish the position of specialist in the protection of children’s rights, at least in town halls with a population larger than 1,500–2,000 inhabitants.” (IA_E_03). “Unfortunately, the policeman is responsible for two villages, there is a doctor for two villages, the doctor is an elderly person, everything remains the responsibility of the social worker. But if these three came together and had an office, these three would have to work with children who were left without parents. In this way, I am firmly convinced that there could be good results.” (IA_E_05). “The policeman has two villages, he is a doctor for two villages, the doctor is an elderly person, everything remains the responsibility of the social worker. But if these three came together and had an office, these three would have to work with children who were left without parents. In this way, I am firmly convinced that there could be good results.” (IA_E_05). “The policeman has two villages, he is a doctor for two villages, the doctor is an elderly person, everything remains the responsibility of the social worker. But if these three came together and had an office, these three would have to work with children who were left without parents. In this way, I am firmly convinced that there could be good results.” (IA_E_05).

Also, the experts, especially those from the urban environment, invoke that not every time they can intervene to overcome some risk situations arising from the phenomenon of transnational families: “... but you cannot intervene. We have no tools. Even in the local community it is known that person X is gone, but it is not legalized and the state cannot intervene with material support, even if the people caring for the child are in difficult situations, because the child is illegally left in their care. The problems are very big due to this lack of tools regarding the obligation of the parents to leave... It is important to establish the obligation of the parent to support the host family.” (IA_E_08).

5.3 The community’s responses to the needs of children left without parental care

In Romania, some respondents pointed out that there are problems with the report of children by parents when they leave. This may be due to the fact that parents do not know, are not informed about these procedures, information campaigns are needed on what it means to delegate these rights and how these procedures can be done.

Involving social workers through fieldwork, communicating with local authorities and schools, identifying cases in the community and especially informing through friendly

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means are possible solutions to improve the services provided to children left at home and their families. “*We had 6 schools in evidence, we contacted the school directors, we told them why we want this information, what law, we agreed to send it to us; This happens at the end of the 1st semester, and then, at the beginning of the 2nd semester when there were the meetings with the parents, I decided that in each class at the parents meeting or at the school meetings I come to explain to the parents what it is about, or to the parents’ committee, to be able to explain. A social worker knows very well that he doesn’t work alone and he can’t be alone, that a child spins in all kinds of environments, that’s how the form is made, from the point of view of the law.*” (local authority representative).

At the rural level, local public authorities are trying to deal with the created situation in order to avoid the risks related to the phenomenon of transnational families. An effective communication with potential migrant parents is ensured: “*At the community level, social workers raise awareness among all parents who are going to go abroad. Parents are invited to the town hall to inform them about any problems that may arise*” (IA_E_01).

Also, social workers, mayors come with the proposal to organize training to improve the methods of intervention by social workers, psychologists, and if possible, the organization of teams of interdisciplinary teams, or the problem of transnational families and children left behind is much more complex than ensuring the wellbeing of this social group “... *there must be a collaboration between all members of the multidisciplinary team, including the doctor to know the situation from the sources, from the first source of what the teacher says, what the social worker says, the community worker and why not, the worker of police inspectorate and the psychologist if necessary*” (IA_E_03).

Experts participating in the research are also expressing the need for qualified intervention by local public authorities, especially in the event of serious situations related to the phenomenon of children whose parents went abroad to work: “*there are 3 children left behind. The eldest is in the 12th grade, she has a sister or a brother in the 6th grade and another little one at kindergarten. And then, the older one, in the 12th grade, is somehow put in the situation that she has to: cook food and wash, and clean, and take the little one to kindergarten, bring her, see if the second one is she is taken care of, she is washed, if she has done her homework ... and somehow she assumes the role of caretaker, although she is the only pupil in the 12th grade and ... she is a child and she needs care too. She’s exhausted.*” (IA_E_02). “*The specialists of the social assistance service visit the home of the children left behind. Pedagogues are also involved. But they need more help, respectively the involvement of several people, including the local priest, other people, opinion formers, local and district councilors.*” (IA_E_03).

Some mayors believe that in the locality there would be a need to develop a psychological service that will help children and minors to overcome problems more easily as long as their parents are not at home. Also, the psychologist, the social worker and the police officer must be subordinated to the mayor “*In our country, I think, as in all town halls, the*

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first privileges are given to children who are left without parents. Any package, any aid that is given first and foremost, is given to children whose parents have gone abroad.”

Experts suggest the development and diversification of extracurricular services for children to spend their free time that would make it easier for them to overcome the psychological shock they go through: *“It is necessary to organize extra-curricular activities for children (sports, creative), including attending creative centers, creative schools to have a higher involvement. In the district, there are only 2 such schools, respectively not all children can attend them. It would be welcome to organize training programs on vocational guidance for young people.”* (IA_E_03); *“If it were a sports club, for the children to be involved under the supervision of the teachers, those people would make it easier for them to get over the problems. If there are more clubs, I think they will be welcome.”*

5.4 Regulatory framework and support policies

Most respondents believe that Romania has legislation designed to provide a support framework for families who are in a position to leave their children at home when they go to work abroad. Moreover, in recent years, under pressure from the NGO environment and beyond, there have been a number of initiatives to develop the best possible legislative framework—some transposed into law, others currently under parliamentary debate.

However, the great shortcoming identified would be the implementation of this legislation and the reasons why the implementation leaves much to be desired on both sides of the barricade. On the one hand, competent institutions often lack the resources (financial, time and human resources) to advise and monitor these families, but also access to a single, compact and up-to-date database in which the situation of parents leaving for work abroad to be updated. This is mentioned by the representatives of the public authorities as being extremely important for a good and timely management of the cases. The existence of such a database could avoid wasting time and work for cases that have changed their situation before being contacted (parents return or take their children with them, etc.). Moreover, the complexity of the working tools applied, such as observation and monitoring papers, excessive bureaucracy and at the same time, the methodology of their application in the field when the main objective is to identify the problems directly through communication that requires gaining confidence, can hinder the activity of social workers. *“For a social worker who does not have specialized studies, it is very difficult to complete that observation paper because things should be a bit simplified and captured in an essential work procedure. We, for example, have had interventions on the observation paper before and we have tried to modify it, to make it more concentrated, so that it can be applied, so it is a procedure (no. 220, no. 221, etc.) which is very difficult to apply in the field. When walking in the field, you have to pay distributive attention, you have to see what happens to the child, to the family*

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environment. These procedures are very tough, the working documents, everything must be well summarized in one document, not thousands of files that practically do not use anyone at all and evade us from the real intervention that the child needs.” (representative of public authorities at county level).

Regarding the institutional-legislative framework in this field, the representatives of the local public authorities consider that this framework allows them to effectively exercise their competencies in relation to the phenomenon of transnational families: “*Law no. 140 solved several problems regarding children left behind whose parents are abroad. According to Law 140, social workers must inform custodians about their responsibilities. A welcome change to this law is the fact that the parent can send a letter to complete the documents for custody and by e-mail, Viber, etc. One proposal would be not to keep an elderly person in custody. At the central level, legislation should be adjusted so that the responsibility of parents abroad is not lost.*” (IA_E_01).

“In my opinion, I think that Law 140 has changed it nicely at the moment, that is, I like, so to speak... A moment only that the custodial parent does not have the right to go abroad with the child, but by the driver’s power of attorney, there you go... But a lot came out: before the tutor was a legal representative, I had cases when land was sold, when ... and so on ... wealth... But I appreciate it (the law) that it emphasis the safety, health, the life of the child and the school.” (IA_E_01).

The permanent legislative framework is being improved and responds promptly to the challenges of the phenomenon of transnational families: “*They are guided in their work by Law 212 of 2020 on Custody, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Civil Code, Law 140 for Children at Risk, the Law on Social Assistance, Charity Services, Framework Regulation on Day Care Service, etc.*” (IA_E_08).

At the same time, the representatives of the local public authorities also invoke certain gaps, such as the obligation for migrant parents to file for custody of children left behind: “*In our country, in the Republic of Moldova, the legislation is strong, but, unfortunately, we do not comply with it: our nepotism, friends ..., so in this field, the legislation is very good... Here we should all get involved in promoting the new generation, that is my opinion... If we do not pay attention to the young generation, we will not invest, we will not have results.*” (IA_E_05).

Experts believe that custody as a form of child protection is good, *but there is also the risk of what kind of person the child was left with.* “*When the parent leaves the child with an 80-year-old person, the child will not grow up at all. I mean, the custody has to have some criteria.*” (IA_E_10).

Experts suggest organizing systematic research in the field to improve both the legislative framework and the methods of intervention by public authorities: “*Now the legislation has been harmonized, namely for them this form of protection—custody—has been made specifically for migrant children, which is quite good. It would be good to amend the legislation to*

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monitor these children in order to close certain gaps, to develop legislative proposals. Similarly, the Migration and Asylum office, Terre des Hommes should do some research and on the basis of this research make proposals for improvement.” (IA_E_08).

The experts participating in the research communicated that at the municipal level the collaboration between institutions is good. Cross-sectoral meetings are convened, including on addressing the problems of children at risk, their schooling, children’s records, actions to prevent school dropout. *“There is a municipal psycho-pedagogical center, which is very active in providing support to families and children. The center carries out both training and assessment of certain situations.” (IA_E_08).*

5.5 Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be mentioned that the phenomenon of labor migration has greatly affected Moldovan society, and some aspects related to the degradation of human capital are not yet fully manifested. The migration picture has changed over the years, and if initially people left with the idea that they will return after solving their material problems, now the trend is to emigrate with the whole family. However, many children in transnational families, where one or both parents have gone, still suffer from their absence and cannot fully integrate into society. The consequences of this phenomenon can already be felt, when it will be too late and then it is not known whether it will be possible to make up for what was omitted in time. In this regard, the commitment of local public authorities to create better conditions for the social integration of children left behind by migration is necessary and welcome.

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Tetiana BONDAR
Oleksii HANIUKOV
Daryna PAVLOVA

Introduction

Ensuring children’s rights is one of the strategic directions for improving the activities of the state to assert and ensure human rights and freedoms. The National Human Rights Strategy⁷ acknowledges the need to ensure and protect the rights of children in Ukraine, in accordance with generally recognized international (especially European) standards, taking into account the interests and views of the child when making decisions concerning him or her.

Ukraine is taking systematic measures to integrate the protection of children’s rights into its national political and legal framework, ratifying numerous international conventions, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child⁸ and both protocols thereto. However, these measures are rarely accompanied by effective implementation and monitoring mechanisms, especially for vulnerable groups of children, including the children of migrant workers.

According to the World Migration Report⁹, Ukraine ranks 8th in the list of countries whose citizens travel abroad for work, with an indicator of 5.5–6 million people. Labour migration of one or both parents negatively affects their children’s rights. With the onset of Russia’s armed aggression, the situation with ensuring children’s rights has become even

7 Decree of the President of Ukraine “On the National Strategy in the Field of Human Rights” dated March 24, 2021 No. 119/2021. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/119/2021#n13>.

8 Convention on the Rights of the Child. URL: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_021#Text.

9 World Migration Report 2022. URL: <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022>.

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more complicated, as restrictions imposed by martial law often become an obstacle to migrant workers’ plans, destroying established communication and transportation schemes, interfering with the reunification of migrant workers’ families, minimizing the positive educational influence of parents on children.

These factors determine the relevance of the study, which is intensified due to the lack of reliable statistics on the number of children in a situation of labour migration of their parents, the need to analyze the relationship between labour migration and the Protection of Children’s Rights in Ukraine. The results will contribute to improving the political and legal framework for migration and mobility in Ukraine, with a focus on the migration of transnational families, as well as raising awareness of legal migration and providing assistance to returning migrant workers through the development of educational resources and information campaigns.

The vast majority of data were obtained before the start of the active phase of Russia’s armed aggression against Ukraine. Therefore, the information in this report does not take into account the changes that have taken place in the families of migrant workers since the beginning of the war. As a result of the battles, the situation with respect to the rights of migrant workers and their families has deteriorated significantly, and the particularities of their perception of the situation and plans for the future have undergone significant adjustments.

6.1 Methodology**6.1.1 Purpose and objectives**

The overall aim of the study is to find the relationship between labour migration and the Protection of Children’s Rights in Ukraine, which will contribute to improving the political and legal framework for migration and mobility in Ukraine, with a focus on transnational family migration and awareness on legal migration and providing assistance to returning migrants through the development of educational resources and information campaigns.

To achieve the goal, the following tasks are expected to be performed:

- analysis of the most common reasons and circumstances of labour migration;
- study of the impact of labor migration and the everyday life of parents and children;
- obtaining information on the peculiarities of child care in transnational families;
- study of the state of school education and extracurricular education of children of labor migrants;
- study of the impact of labor migration on communications and relationships in transnational families;

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- consideration of the situation in the communities in which labor migrants or their families live;
- assessment of the most urgent needs of labor migrants;
- obtaining information about migrants’ awareness of labour legislation;
- analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrant worker families;
- the vision of migrant workers’ families for their future and prospects;
- development of recommendations on strengthening the protection of the rights of children raised in transnational families.

6.1.2 Method

To achieve the goal and complete the tasks, qualitative methods of obtaining information were used: in-depth interviews and focused group discussions (focus groups). A separate set of tools was developed for each study target group. Due to the introduction of restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia’s armed aggression, focus groups and interviews were conducted online. Audio recordings of focus groups and interviews were transcribed, systematized, and used in the preparation of this report.

The ethical basis of research

The study was based on compliance with domestic and international ethical standards, participants are guaranteed the right to anonymity and confidentiality. The ethical basis of the research is developed based on the Code of Professional Ethics of the Sociological Association of Ukraine¹⁰ and is designed to comply with the requirements of the ESOMAR Committee for Professional Standards¹¹, in particular to address the following ethical issues:

- informed consent: before being involved in the research, the respondents were informed about all the conditions of participation in the project regarding the research procedure: the subject, aims and objectives of the study, the format of the survey, the time of the study. Concerning minor children under the age of 14, informed consent was obtained from their parents;
- voluntary participation: respondents had the right to express their views on all questions, as well as to refuse to answer the questions of the questionnaire. They also had the right to withdraw from subsequent participation at any time;
- confidentiality and anonymity: all participants were informed that participation in the study is confidential and anonymous. The information provided by the

¹⁰ Code of professional ethics of a sociologist. URL: <https://sau.in.ua/pro-sau/>.

¹¹ ESOMAR Guidelines for conducting surveys among children and young people. URL: <http://www.uam.in.ua/ukr/standarts/>.

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respondent is used without identification and in a generalized form. All research data will be stored in accordance with all principles of confidentiality. After data collection, all research tools are stored in a safe place;

- confidentiality: respondents are guaranteed the right to confidentiality (confidentiality for others) in connection with any personal information about their own lives, opinions and beliefs. In order to protect the confidentiality, it is ensured that informed oral consent is obtained from the study subjects to use the information they provide for the purpose of the study. Study participants were warned in advance about how the information will be used.

The protocol and tools of the study were examined by the Professional Ethics Commission of the Sociological Association of Ukraine and received a conclusion on compliance with the Code of Professional Sociologist’s Code of Professional Ethics were developed only in a generalized form, without the use of identifying information. Only aggregate analytical results without the possibility of identifying participants were used in the preparation of this report.

6.1.3 Study target groups

1. Family members of multinational families with children in which one or both parents have traveled abroad for at least 6 months in the last 12 months.
2. Family members have been invited to participate in the study, at least one of the members who has experienced traveling abroad for at least 6 months in the last 12 months.
3. The experts are civil servants, service providers of state institutions and public organizations, competent in providing assistance to the families of migrant workers with children, with work experience of at least 5 years.

A set of samples was implemented

- 12 in-depth interviews with children aged 10–17;
- 24 in-depth interviews with migrant worker parents and guardians of children.
- 4 focus groups (2 with children, 2 with parents or guardians);
- 3 in-depth interviews with competent experts in labour migration issues.

Geography of the study

5 regions from Ukraine:

- Transcarpathian region;
- Lviv region;
- Ternopil region;
- Kharkiv region;
- Chernivtsi region.

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6.2 Overview of the legislation of Ukraine

The legal basis of Ukraine’s state migration policy is the *Constitution of Ukraine*¹². The current regulation of migration processes in Ukraine takes into account the socio-economic and demographic development of Ukraine, the need to optimize migration flows and prevent uncontrolled migration, in accordance with the Constitution of Ukraine and the laws of Ukraine on migration, other legal acts and Ukraine’s international treaties. In 2007, Ukraine ratified the *European Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers*¹³. The Convention contains a large number of provisions on the information that States are obliged to provide to each other, in particular the assistance of migrant workers and free services in this field. In 2019, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine ratified the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child¹⁴. Until 2016, the legal framework of Ukraine did not provide for the formal status of “child of migrant workers” or “social orphan”. Only on January 1, 2016, the Law of Ukraine “*On External Labour Migration*”¹⁵ entered into force, which for the first time mentions the children of labor migrants and their rights. This law establishes the legal and organizational basis for state regulation of migration of external labour and social protection of Ukrainian citizens who have temporarily worked or are working abroad (migrant workers), and their family members. The law defines the rights of migrant workers to adequate working conditions, remuneration, rest, social protection, family reunification and establishes state guarantees for the provision of social services and assistance to migrant workers. In addition, it provides for the application of state control and liability for violations of labour migration legislation. The central and local executive authorities and the security service of Ukraine are obliged to take all possible measures to prevent the illegal migration of external labour and human trafficking.

Although this law guarantees the protection of the social rights of the children of migrant workers, in particular the right to meet their “national-cultural, educational, spiritual and linguistic needs”, the document does not define a mechanism by which these needs should be met. Moreover, the law does not provide solutions to priority issues. For example, unlike other countries, Ukraine does not yet have a temporary care unit for the children of migrant workers, i.e., a child whose parents have gone to work abroad may be left without legal representatives to protect their rights and provide guarantees that other

12 Constitution of Ukraine. Information of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. 1996. No. 30. Art. 141. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/254%D0%BA/96-%D0%B2%D1%80#Text>.

13 European Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers. URL: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/994_307#Text.

14 Convention on the Rights of the Child. URL: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_021#Text.

15 Law of Ukraine “On External Labor Migration” dated December 5, 2019 No. 341-IX. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/main/761-19#Text>.

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children already have. Among the main problems in working with social orphans is the lack of state social centers and organizations to help the children of migrant workers. Since 2007, the international human rights organization “La Strada – Ucraina” has been trying to initiate the creation of such an institution that would oblige the designated person to take care of the problems and needs of social orphans for a while. Unfortunately, when this initiative was proposed, not only did it not find support in the state, but it also met with resistance from groups who claimed that, under the guise of this institution, children would be taken illegally from their parents. Moreover, the creation of such an institution without concomitant solutions to other problems could lead to an increase in illegal labour migration or corruption on the ground, because parents will try to avoid placing children in foster families.

In 2017, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted the *Strategy of the State Migration Policy of Ukraine for the period until 2025*¹⁶. The strategy aims of the state and society in shaping and implementing the state migration policy, which will positively affect strengthening the nation and security of Ukraine, will accelerate socio-economic development, slow down depopulation, stabilize the quantitative and qualitative composition of the population. The workforce must comply with Ukraine’s international standards and international obligations. The strategy is designed to draw attention to migration problems, direct and unite society to solve them, ensure the interconnection of migration policy with other spheres of state activity and the transition from political response to internal and external factors in the field of migration to a more active and targeted policy.

The strategy provides for the implementation of such objectives:

Objective 1. In order to reduce administrative barriers to the free movement of the population of Ukraine, in particular activities in the following areas:

- accounting of the population of Ukraine;
- registration of the place of residence;
- protection of identity documents confirming the citizenship of Ukraine or the special status of a person.

Objective 2. To reduce the negative consequences of emigration from Ukraine and to increase its positive impact on the development of the state, in particular, activities in the following areas:

- development of opportunities for temporary legal employment abroad;
- promotion of educational exchange programs;
- increasing public awareness of migration opportunities;
- ensuring the protection of the rights of Ukrainian citizens who work and live abroad.

¹⁶ Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine “On the approval of the State Migration Policy Strategy of Ukraine for the period until 2025” dated July 12, 2017, No. 482. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/482-2017-%D1%80#n10>.

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Objective 3. To create the necessary conditions for the return and reintegration of Ukrainian migrants into Ukrainian society.

Objective 4. To promote legal migration in Ukraine, in line with the social policy and economic development of the state.

Objective 5. To ensure the successful integration of foreigners and stateless persons who are legally in Ukraine into Ukrainian society.

Objective 6. Effective use of the visa issuance system and consular institutions to manage migration.

Objective 7. Carry out border control, adapted to changing migratory flows and the possibilities for integrated border management.

Objective 8. Strengthen control over compliance with state migration legislation.

Objective 9. Ensure respect for the human dignity of returnees, in order to encourage them to return voluntarily.

Objective 10. To implement an appropriate mechanism and programs for regulating illegal migrants.

Objective 11. To ensure that foreigners and stateless persons who have applied to the relevant body of the migration service with an application for recognition as a refugee or a person in need of additional protection have the opportunity to consider their applications for recognition as a refugee or a person in need of additional protection, with the help of an effective and fair procedures.

Objective 12. To provide adequate infrastructure and create the conditions of residence of persons who have applied for recognition as a refugee or person in need of additional protection, as well as persons recognized as refugees or persons in need of additional protection.

Objective 13. To ensure the integration of refugees and persons in need of additional protection into Ukrainian society, as well as meet the integration needs of persons who have applied for recognition as a refugee or person in need of additional protection.

In 2018, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved an *Action Plan for the implementation of this strategy*¹⁷. The document stipulates that the Strategy of Ukraine’s state migration policy until 2025 will be implemented in two stages. The first stage is designed for 2018–2021 and aims to improve the regulatory framework in the field of migration and solve urgent problems in certain migration regions and for certain categories of migrants. At this stage, the efforts of state authorities will focus on the formation and implementation

¹⁷ Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine “On the approval of the plan of measures for 2018–2021 regarding the implementation of the State Migration Policy Strategy of Ukraine for the period until 2025” dated August 29, 2018, No. 602. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/602-2018-%D1%80#Text>.

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of the state migration policy, which we hope will have a positive impact on the strengthening of the Ukrainian nation and security, meet the needs of the economy in terms of labour and standards, and international obligations. During the implementation of the plan, measures will be taken to draw attention to migration problems, direct and unite society to solve them, ensure the interconnection of migration policy with other spheres of state activity, transition from a policy of responding to internal and external factors of migration to a more active and purposeful policy.

In 2017, the Cabinet of Ministers approved an *Action Plan to ensure the reintegration of migrant workers and their family members into society*¹⁸. The document is intended to promote the employment of migrant workers and their families and the involvement of migrant children in the educational process: conducting additional courses with them (primarily in Ukrainian, Ukrainian literature and history), in particular using internet resources. In addition, it is planned to strengthen the social and legal protection of Ukrainian citizens working abroad by stepping up international cooperation to protect the rights of migrant workers. The consular posts will introduce the registration of complaints of citizens of Ukraine abroad regarding the violation of their rights, including labour rights. Psychological support is provided to migrants for work and their family members who have become victims of labour or other forms of exploitation, taking into account international experience. The implementation of the measures will create additional opportunities for the returning of Ukrainian citizens working abroad, their further integration into the national labour market and active social life in Ukraine.

In 2019, the President of Ukraine approved the *Sustainable Development Goals of Ukraine for the period up to 2030*¹⁹. The document states that migration is an important driving force for development and is achieved through international cooperation for safe, orderly and regulated migration, in full compliance with human rights. The Global Compact reaffirms this commitment to safe, orderly and regulated migration, covers all aspects of international migration and is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights²⁰. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), address migration directly, recognizing migrant women, men and children as a vulnerable group that needs to be protected and migrants involved in the development process.

18 Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine “On the approval of the plan of measures to ensure the reintegration into society of labor migrants and their family members” dated April 12, 2017, No. 257-r. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/257-2017-%D1%80#Text>.

19 Decree of the President of Ukraine “On the Sustainable Development Goals of Ukraine for the period until 2030” dated September 30, 2019, No. 722/2019. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/722/2019#Text>.

20 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. URL: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_015#Text.

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Achieving these goals is crucial to achieving a wide range of development goals. Promoting orderly, safe, regulated and responsible migration contributes to reducing inequalities within and between countries (SDG 10). Remittances are vital for overcoming poverty (SDG 1) and for international student mobility—for promoting quality education (SDG 4). A well-designed migration policy is the key to effectively combating human trafficking and exploitation, especially of women and children, and eliminating forced labour.

Consequently, such policies promote peace, justice and effective institutional development (SDG 16). They are essential for achieving gender equality, empowering all women and girls (SDG 5) and promoting full productive employment and decent work for all (SDG 8).

In 2018, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the State Social Program “National Action Plan for the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child”²¹. However, this document does not provide for special measures for the children of migrant workers.

The issue of children of migrant workers in the education system is reflected in the order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine “About conducting socio-pedagogical and psychological work with children of labour migrants”²². In addition, in 2005 and 2008, these issues were discussed at meetings of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. However, today, the problem of labour migrants in Ukraine is primarily dealt with by public organizations that provide social services to migrants and their families. Public organizations note the need for state regulation of the problem of migrant workers’ children. The most appropriate solution to this difficult situation is the establishment of relations between state bodies of social protection of the population (regional, district, city, village centers of social services for families, children and youth) and public organizations, since the latter have significant practical experience in helping children of migrant workers.

6.3 Labour migration. Typical reasons and circumstances

According to experts, labour migration is a very common phenomenon, especially in rural settlements in the so-called “depressed” regions of western Ukraine, which are located

21 Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine “On the approval of the State Social Program “National Action Plan for the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child” for the period until 2021” dated May 30, 2018, No. 453. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/453-2018-%D0%BF#Text>.

22 Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine “On conducting socio-pedagogical and psychological work with children of labor migrants” dated 12.28.2006, No. 865. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/rada/show/v0865290-06#Text>.

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in mountainous areas and far from large cities and district centers. Due to employment issues in such areas, there is a mass departure of the skilled population abroad.

“In Starosambir district there were three villages, where, according to the register, there were almost 1,000 inhabitants, and there actually lived 30–40 people over 70 years old. All skilled population was employed in the Lviv region, 40–60% of the population was employed.” (expert, BF “Stabilization Support Service”).

Experts note that in recent years, before the outbreak of a large-scale war, the intensity of Ukrainians traveling abroad for employment has stabilized somewhat due to the opening of several large foreign-owned enterprises in western Ukraine, the development of the processing industry in the agricultural sector, small and medium enterprises. The ability to earn a stable salary (even slightly lower than abroad) and to provide a decent life for the family has served as an argument for many to give up labour migration in favor of work in Ukraine. *“I can say that in 2017–2018, the level of migration began to decline somewhat, because we had the opportunity to find a job that would allow us to live more or less decently. The Lviv region has attracted foreign investment, large enterprises began to open.”* (expert, BF “Stability support service”).

However, the departure of one or more family members abroad for employment is still very common today. The most popular areas of labour migration for men are Poland (mainly working in agriculture, processing enterprises), the Czech Republic and Portugal (construction), Scandinavian countries (fishery). Women are often employed in Austria, Germany, Spain and Italy—they are in demand in these countries as caregivers for the elderly, the disabled and sick people.

Despite the variety of stories and individual circumstances that forced one or more family members to go abroad, the main reason for migration of almost everyone is the economic factor: the desire to earn money, to get a better paid job compared to Ukraine, amid the inability of decent earners, in terms of respondents, in Ukraine, even if efforts are made to do so.

“You have no money. It just doesn’t exist. I was coming home (to Ukraine), I was not staying without work and despite all of this—debts, debts, debts... And the work is like this: from salary to salary.” (Vitalik, 44 years old, migrant worker).

In addition to the desire to improve the financial situation of the family as a whole, intentions to earn money to meet specific material needs have often been mentioned as arguments of the “second plan”: buying an apartment or a car, paying off loans or debt, educating children, starting one’s own business and the like. Quite often, the reason for employment abroad is the desire for a higher standard of living (compared to Ukraine).

“I want to make documents, work there and then reunite my family, take my children and my wife abroad. In the Czech Republic, people who work officially have support from the state, but not in Ukraine.” (Vasily, 33 years old, migrant worker).

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Some migrants from abroad do not work according their specialty (for example, a rural school teacher works at a construction site in Poland). Quite often, the first departure of a migrant worker abroad takes place with the advice of friends or relatives who have already found a job and can offer advice on finding a job, housing or establishing relations with the local police or employers.

About half of respondents said they would like to return to Ukraine, provided they can find a job with a decent salary on its territory. Some respondents stated that they intend to return to Ukraine after resolving the priority material issues: earning the money needed to build a new house, paying debts and the like. At the same time, others perceive labour migration as the first step to further integration into a more prosperous country—obtaining a temporary residence permit first, and then citizenship.

“Some of our friends want to stay in Germany, others in Switzerland, they still want to leave, they don’t see any prospect. I don’t really want to go back to Ukraine, nothing keeps me there.” (Ivan, 44 years old, married, 3 children, migrant worker, Poland).

Both children and adults, in addition to economic factors, sometimes remembered the desire to see a “different life”, perceiving migration as a way to broaden their horizons.

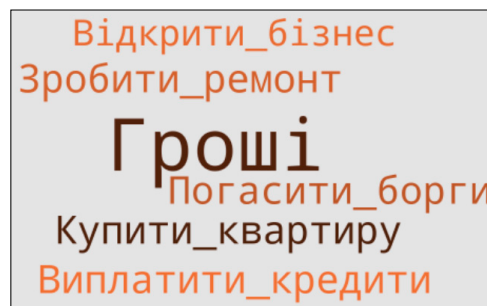
“There were discussions that we want to go to Poland, I always agree with such changes. In general, I agree with some changes in my life, I like to travel, so I would like to move.” (Anastasia, 13, daughter of a migrant worker).

“I learned a great lesson for myself from Portugal. First of all, I saw a new, very interesting culture. The cuisine in Portugal is still very interesting, I learned to cook a lot.” (Yana, 34 years old, works as a teacher in a rural school, she worked for 10 years in Portugal).

A large number of children have had the status of “children of migrant workers” for many years and cannot imagine their lives in any other way. Their upbringing, maturation and education takes place in the absence of at least one of the parents, during rare and short meetings with their parents—working migrants during their visits to Ukraine on vacation or during holiday breaks.

“My father was always abroad; I can barely remember him. I was two years old when he left” (Maxim, 10 years old).

Reasons for labour migration (opening a business, home repairs, money, paying off debts, buying an apartment, paying off loans).



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6.4 The impact of labour migration on the daily lives of families

The employment of one or more family members abroad implies, in most cases, a double impact on the daily life of the family: on the one hand, it allows to solve the issue of financial support and, on the other hand, it often has the consequences of breaking traditional ties, alienation and the emergence of various misunderstandings and even lawsuits. Some respondents reported the practical destruction of families, lawsuits against other family members and the like.

“My mother went to work in Poland. Because of this, my grandmother wrote a statement, she called the Social Service in the apartment where the nieces lived, after which the children were separated from their parents, now there are court hearings on this. She is in a rehabilitation center with her younger sisters.” (from the interviewer’s report).

There is a fairly common pattern of family relationships in which one family member (mainly the father) earns money abroad, and the rest of the family (mother and children) perceive it primarily as a source of funding, waiting for regular transfers. Personal encounters are quite rare—during vacations or holiday vacations. Some respondents reported that it is quite difficult for them to coordinate trips to Ukraine with their employer. Sometimes “guest visits” are practiced—family members make short-term visits to a migrant worker in their country of residence and stay together for some time.

“If a person works legally, then it is not so easy to free yourself to take a vacation - you have to agree with the employer a week or two in advance. When children come to me, it’s easier to take a day or two.” (Ivan, 44, labour migrant).

This format of family relationships inevitably leads to the alienation of family members of migrant workers from each other, with other family members often perceiving the father only as a source of funding. Sometimes, migrant workers complained about the sincerely consumerist attitude of their relatives who remained in Ukraine.

“When I’m home—‘I’m tired, I don’t have enough money.’ Julia (my wife) pushes me to leave... It’s hard to hear that” (Vitalik, 44, migrant worker).

For some male migrant workers, going abroad to work is a kind of way to get rid of everyday problems and family responsibilities at home.

“There are men who run away from home problems, somehow they are not accepted at home, because it is quieter here: you came home from work, you ate and rested but when you came home and you returned from work, for that you always have to either solve something or talk to the children” (Viktor, 47, labour migrant).

The migration and separate residence of one of the family members aggravates the existing problems in the relationships, leading to conflicts and raising children against one of

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the parents. As a result, some families are on the verge of destruction:

“He leaves it on me (the kids) every day. Saying, ‘Look, it doesn’t make sense to her, she’s a loser, look how shabby the house is.’ Well, she makes fun of me, even though she lives in my house.” (Svetlana, 39, migrant worker, husband with children in Ukraine).

The absence of one of the parents for a long time also determines a certain detachment of the children, the perception of the absent parent as almost a stranger to them.

“There is not enough live communication for children. For children to grow up well, it is necessary to have both parents. And here, if someone is with their mother or father, it is not as it should be. The children move away from him. More shy, shy.” (Maria, 37, wife of a migrant worker).

“Practically orphans with living parents. Parents went abroad and left their children for grandparents, aunts or other relatives.” (expert, “Stability support service”).

Some migrant workers believe that their prolonged absence will inevitably affect their upbringing, negatively affect their socialization and upbringing.

“Now the eldest will be 12. This age is adolescence. During this time, it must be close. If you waste time, you will not get it back. A mother is a mother; a father is a father. There will be problems, I understand that.” (Ivan, 44, migrant worker).

At the same time, thanks to modern technologies, many families manage to alleviate the negative consequences of separate life by using modern technologies, regular online communication using social networks and messaging.

Children in migrant workers’ families become independent early on, learning to solve everyday problems on their own. The long absence of one of the parents leads to a constant longing, leads to many household problems, difficulties in learning the curriculum.

“When my father leaves, I feel sad, there are more responsibilities, the care of a younger brother; when my father was at home, he helped me with lessons” (Daria, 11, daughter of a migrant worker).

The independent living of children with limited life experience determines an unmet need for advice from adults. The traditional needs of adolescents among migrant children often remain unmet and questions remain unanswered.

“It must have become more difficult to do something, when a question arose, there was no one to answer” (Nazar, 17, the father is a migrant worker, the mother died).

“There are some questions I can’t just ask. I think I can ask my colleagues, but for some reason I can’t ask my parents” (Izmail, 14, mother is a migrant worker).

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Women whose husbands are migrant workers also notice that, in their absence, they have become more independent and determined, having to solve problems that were previously the responsibility of their husbands (repairing household appliances, communicating with plumbers, etc.).

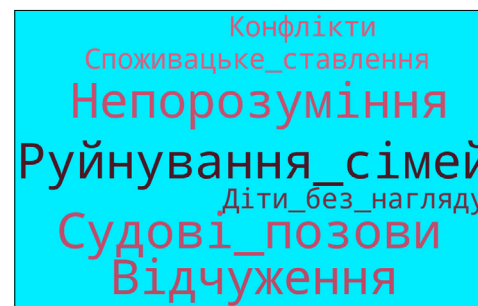
“It taught me somehow, it made me more mature, stronger. It taught me to make decisions on my own, to take responsibility.” (Natalia, 44, the wife of a migrant worker. She works as a salesman).

“I have to do without my husband. Then call a plumber, then bring water, then collect potatoes, buy them for the winter. Of course, it became difficult, there is not enough male strength.” (Yulia, 34, wife of a worker migrant).

It is quite common to understand the abnormality of the existence of disparate families, the separate residence of parents and children.

“The family should be a family, the family should be together all the time and not as if I were spending six months abroad and spending some time at home with my family” (Yuri, 41, migrant worker).

The impact of migration on the daily lives of families (conflicts, consumerist attitude, misunderstandings, destruction of families, children left without care, legal disputes, estrangement)



6.5 Child care in the families of migrant workers

The departure of one or even both parents to work abroad inevitably leads to the emergence of various problems associated with raising and caring for children.

Quite common is the practice in which childcare is assigned to one of the parents (mainly the mother) who remained in Ukraine. Participation in the education of the other is mainly limited to the provision of financial assistance or online communication or the organization of short meetings during the holidays.

Sometimes care is given to other relatives: grandparents, older siblings or sisters.

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With the departure of even one parent abroad, the child receives less attention not only because of his absence, but also because of the increasing burden on the parent who remained in Ukraine.

“I started devoting less time to the child, because I have to fulfill other duties that I previously shared with my husband. I have to solve everyday problems, cook, clean, go somewhere to pay or to solve something else. There is little time left for a child.” (Svetlana, 45, the wife of a migrant worker).

Even under the conditions of a warm and trusting relationship between a child and one of the parents, children often feel a lack of the other, which even daily online communication or rare personal meetings cannot fully replace.

“Children lack communication. We live on 2 lives: one is abroad, the second is in the family” (Ivan, 44, migrant worker).

The problem of education and care becomes more complicated when a child reaches adolescence, when he especially needs trust in communication and control from older family members.

“The older children helped me. When I was at work, the eldest daughter took the youngest from kindergarten. When they are older children, they can perform the duties of an absent father.” (Oksana, 50, three children, husband works in Poland).

“I have low self-esteem, because in order to have self-esteem, the ability to stand up for myself, my father must be there to help, and I don’t have that” (Hanna, 13 years old, daughter of a migrant worker).

Some of the children of labor migrants who are older teenagers are generally left alone with adult problems and are forced to overcome them on their own.

“There used to be an older person around the house and what they told me—I did, and then, when I was left alone—everything piled up at once: and around the house, and food to cook, and utility bills” (Nazar, 17 years old, mother died, father—migrant worker).

State institutions and public organizations—representatives of local self-government, social services, charitable foundations and religious communities—provide significant assistance to the children of labor migrants who are left without proper supervision.

“Marusya and Peter left, and the children were left with their grandmother. The authorities immediately take note of the nearest neighbors and the social service, all the time carefully to see what those children are doing there.” (expert, BF “Stabilization Support Service”).

“The public community works. There are a lot of public organizations that currently take care of children, I wouldn’t say abandoned, but children deprived of

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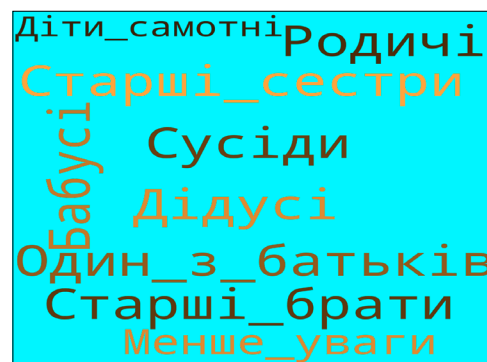
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parental care. And religious organizations in particular.” (expert, BF “Stabilization Support Service”).

Child care in the families of migrant workers (single children, extended family, older sisters, neighbors, grandmothers, grandfathers, one of the parents, older brothers, less attention).



6.6 School education and extracurricular activities of children of labour migrants

Migrant children, regardless of whether one or both parents are abroad, usually attending school. In regions where parents go to work is a common phenomenon (Western Ukraine), such children do not feel any special treatment from colleagues or teachers. In areas where such cases are isolated (for example, the Kharkiv region), children of working migrants sometimes feel somewhat special.

The main control over the children’s school performance and homework help is mainly performed by the parent who remained in Ukraine with the children.

At the same time, some migrant working parents, even if they are in Ukraine, are convinced that school chores and worries are women’s business. Therefore, with their departure abroad, practically nothing has changed in the relationship between family and school.

“I went to school a few times when the kids were little. All other issues are wife’s problems. Most mothers go to a parent-teacher meeting; I came once, I was alone among the women, so it was a little difficult for me.” (Viktor, 47, migrant worker).

“He never helped the children with school, he was employed and I helped at school. Nothing has changed here.” (Victoria, 43, the wife of a migrant worker).

Part of the money earned abroad is spent to pay for children’s participation in paid courses, sports and music classes. However, many migrant children attend free extracurricular

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courses of various types and, in this respect, do not differ from other classmates. Some migrant workers are regularly interested in children’s school success through messaging.

In some schools, teachers tend to pay more attention to migrant children, understanding their difficult family situation. Sometimes the participation of a school psychologist in providing such assistance was mentioned.

“Teachers try to pay more attention to these children, to talk to them on vacation, to caress them, to ask what bothers them, if they have to help in any way. We have a practical psychologist at our school, he leads conversations with such children.” (Larisa, 34, wife of a migrant worker).

The children of migrant workers feel their special position, they strive to meet the school requirements as well as possible, not to upset their parents and not to add unnecessary problems to them.

“I try to be polite at school so that my mother and father don’t have problems with teachers. I can do it.” (Maria, 17, the daughter of a migrant worker).

Sometimes children suffer from school insults from their peers, especially related to their father’s absence, they cannot count on his support and protection.

“There are a lot of cases in our school when someone who doesn’t have a father is offended. They need to be told that it’s normal for a father to go abroad to earn money, because there’s no opportunity here.” (Anna, 13, 8th grade student, daughter of a migrant worker).

6.7 Characteristics of communication and relationships in transnational families

The long-term absence of one or both parents due to earnings abroad inevitably leads to the destruction of established formats of interaction between family members and to the formation of new channels of communication between them.

In some cases, the prolonged absence of one of the spouses creates premises for the destruction of the family or at least for the emergence of problems in the relationship, especially if it was not possible to reach an agreement on the opportunity of a family member who is in abroad. Sometimes, during the interview, jealousy was mentioned as the cause of misunderstandings, some wives of migrant workers are upset by the inability to exercise daily control over their husbands.

“There was such a crisis situation, I already said that I don’t want anything anymore, I don’t want those money, come home. And he doesn’t want to come. So I thought, why is that?” (Mariana, 36, wife of a migrant worker).

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“There are a lot of divorces and a lot of misunderstandings and difficulties and all kinds of unpleasant situations. Therefore, we have to be together” (Victoria, 48, wife of a migrant worker).

“They don’t want to let me go. The wife lets go, but says: “That’s it, you won’t go again, for the last time” (Viktor, 47, three children, migrant worker).

Transnational families make extensive use of the possibilities of modern technology to keep in touch with absent family members. In many cases, spouses and children contact the absent parent daily or even several times a day through various channels (Viber, Telegram, WhatsApp, etc.). There is also communication during the holidays, some families practice visiting migrant workers abroad and common holidays in the host country. However, such communication formats do not always provide an opportunity for full communication, limiting family ties to a few minutes of online conversations.

“If there are problems with the study, then I call him, we solve it, we ask for advice, he tells me a lot. If necessary, he helps me” (Maria, 17 years old, daughter of a migrant worker).

Almost all children from migrant families have modern smartphones, sometimes purchased with the money earned abroad by one of the parents. The presence of smartphones among children, on the one hand, improves their communication skills with absent parents, and on the other hand, some fathers talked about the difficulties of controlling the online content consumed by teenage children.

“If a child doesn’t want to give you the phone, then he has something to hide there. And she doesn’t. I got into a scandal.” (Valentina, 40, wife of a migrant worker).

“He (the son) knows I checked. He asked me not to do this in the future. He didn’t talk to me for a few days.” (Ivanka, 35, the wife of a migrant worker).

Speaking about the peculiarities of relationships with an absent family member, the respondents recalled cases of visible alienation of children from their parents, the destruction of trusting relationships and the strengthening of mutual distancing.

“I often miss him. I’m used to living without him. When he comes home, it’s hard to adapt, it takes at least a month. I adapt to him for a week, then I get used to him and he leave again.” (13-year-old Hanna, daughter of a migrant worker).

Sometimes children manage to establish a trusting relationship with an absent father at a distance through regular telephone communication or using online communication channels. However, such situations are largely the exception, rather than the rule, and in most cases both children and parents (migrant workers) lose their close connection, they become accustomed to mutual absence.

“My father and I have a very good relationship, we communicate every night, he calls, and I talk. I don’t feel such a strong loss, because we talk constantly.” (Nazar, 17, son of a migrant worker).

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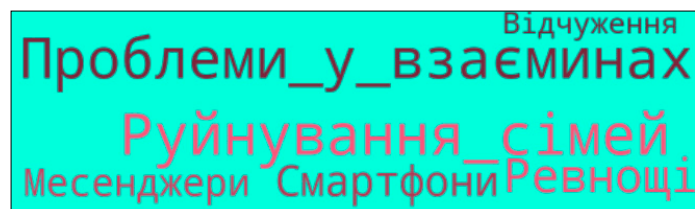
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Characteristics of communication and relationships in transnational families (estrangement, relationship issues, family breakdown, messenger, smartphone, jealousy).



6.8 Situation in the communities, the real needs of migrant workers

The social environment of the respondents perceives labour migration as a familiar and widespread phenomenon. Most migrant workers’ families live in settlements where the departure of one or more family members abroad is more the rule than the exception. In most families, one of the family members works so that the children live in an environment where the absence of at least one parent is the norm.

According to some respondents, only those who have health problems, old age or are forced to take care of children, older relatives do not go to work abroad.

“In our settlement, if not in every house, one of the family members is gone. They don’t go if someone is not healthy, someone has small children, older parents, and those who have the opportunity—everyone leaves, they ask for coordinates” (Oksana, 50, wife of a migrant worker).

Therefore, in most cases, the environment treats the families of migrant workers with understanding. However, some respondents noted isolated cases of conviction and negative attitudes due to the risks of family destruction.

“There are people who have a negative attitude towards this, meaning they do not understand why you leave your family and condemn you” (Andrey, 45, migrant worker).

Some migrant workers believe that there is a feeling of envy on the part of fellow villagers who have not been able to find a job abroad.

School teachers treat migrant children with understanding, and give them more attention. In small settlements, community leaders also monitor the situation in families where, due to the migration of parental labour, children may be at risk of being left without adequate supervision. At the same time, some respondents reported on the consumerist attitude of the heads of educational institutions: requests to provide financial assistance to the institution to meet its needs for equipment, repairs, etc.

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“I spent more time abroad, as a result, there was more money, so I bought this and that for school. And so the school does not help, but only asks” (Viktoria, 43, the wife of a migrant worker).

Being abroad often leads to the destruction, “freezing” of ties with the social environment in Ukraine. If communication with the family is largely quite active through the use of online formats, communication with friends, neighbors and former colleagues is sometimes reduced to nothing.

Some migrant workers, traveling abroad, do not have reliable information about working conditions and daily life, already learning about them on the spot. Therefore, the need for information support is urgent—migrants receive reliable information about working conditions and daily life, local legislation, the peculiarities of the activity of commercial and medical institutions, the legal status of a migrant worker in the host country and so on.

“It’s always like the lottery. You don’t know what your life will be like. You have been given a salary, but when you arrive, it is actually a completely different salary. They tell you good things, but in fact it is completely different” (Vitalik, 44 years old, labour migrant).

In many cases, migrant workers report exhausting working and living conditions, lack of time to recover.

“I wake up at 4:30 and go to bed at 23:00–24:00. I try to go to bed at 23:00 to sleep for at least 4,5–5 hours. It doesn’t always work. I have a terrible way of life” (Vitalik, 44 years, migrant worker).

Sometimes there are difficulties in adapting to the unusual living conditions in another country, problems with communication due to not knowing a foreign language. At the same time, after returning to Ukraine, some labour migrants need “reverse adaptation”—adaptation to living conditions in Ukraine.

“I feel like a dog here. I understand something, but I can’t say anything” (Vitalik, 44, migrant worker).

“A person from abroad rebuilds his way of life, gets used to the good and already in Ukraine many things seem inappropriate for a comfortable life for him” (expert, “Stabilization support service”).

In general, the families of migrant workers indicated that they needed different support:

- psychological—help in solving emotional problems caused by stressful situations;
- legal—possibility to obtain information about the legal aspects of staying abroad;
- legislative support for migrant workers by adopting legislation to protect their rights;
- tax—rejection of the state’s intentions to tax the money earned abroad;
- pedagogical—professional support of the education of children whose parents are abroad.

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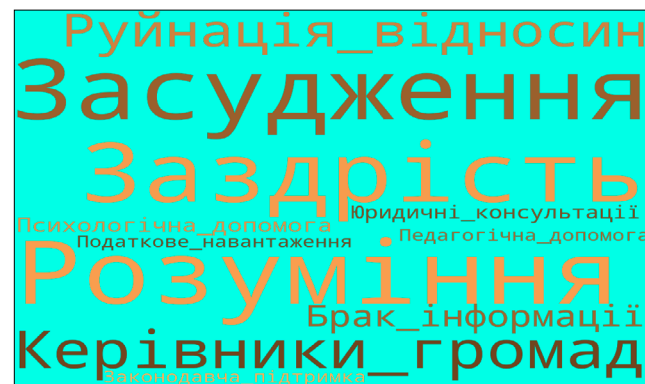
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The situation in communities, the real needs of migrant workers (broken relationships, judgment, envy, tax burden, understanding, psychological support, judicial advice, lack of information, managing organizations, pedagogical support).



6.9 Knowledge of the legislation and its assessment

Prolonged stay of one or more family members abroad inevitably leads to various legal conflicts. In general, a significant proportion of the interviewed labour migrants and their family members had difficulty in commenting significantly on their attitude towards the legislation governing the status, rights and obligations of labour migrants. The information available is often fragmented, contradictory and incomplete. Children’s awareness is largely zero, almost none of them know anything about their own rights and responsibilities even at the elementary level. An exception is one of the 11-year-old girls interviewed—she mentioned the Convention on the Rights of the Child and expressed confidence that she and the other children of migrant workers have the right to feel safe.

“In my opinion, we should be protected even when our parents are not at home. Social services should come home to these children and monitor how they are doing”
(Daria, 11, daughter and granddaughter of migrant workers).

Some migrant workers are concerned about the prospects of legalization in the host country and, in this context, need legal help and advice. The desire to have social protection and medical care at the level of host country nationals has been repeatedly expressed.

At the same time, fears were expressed that one of the consequences of legal employment abroad would be the need to pay taxes. Taxation of money earned abroad is considered extremely unfair and offensive by migrants. They do not think about the cause-effect relationship between the payment of taxes and the level of social protection and pension (own, parents and children).

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“I worked illegally, it suited me. I didn’t think about retiring because I was young” (Ivan, 44, migrant worker).

For some respondents, “the lack of awareness of the legal characteristics of labour migration is combined with an extremely negative attitude towards Ukrainian law in general; sometimes they expressed the belief that Ukrainian laws do not aim at protecting people, but are against them”, despair that Ukraine will provide protection and support to labour migrants.

“We no longer believe and rely on the country. We rely only on ourselves and this is not normal. No one needs you, and the laws will not help us” (Ivan, 44, migrant worker).

In cases where legal assistance is needed, migrant workers either rely on the advice of more experienced acquaintances or seek paid consultations from specialists - lawyers, notaries and the like. The negative experience of asking for help from the Ukrainian Consulate in the host country was mentioned. Some migrant workers suffer from the insincerity of employers and intermediaries abroad and, in such situations, require legal assistance.

“We have been taught that we have to solve our own problems, there is no support from the state. And the laws are not for us” (Viktor, 47, migrant worker).

“It often happens that people are cheated abroad or their money is not paid, there are all sorts of nuances. I think we need legal assistance to sign or prove something to someone” (Victoria, 43, migrant’s wife).

When officially employed abroad, migrant workers receive a package of social and legal assistance, consultancy and free advice. In this context, the situation with the provision of legislative support in Ukraine is perceived by many as inefficient and too bureaucratic.

“I had a process of interaction with the Swedish migration service. I had to go to the Swedish Tax Service and open accounts for myself. And for every problem I had, I was helped. If you don’t speak the language, I’ll give you an interpreter, a lawyer, if you need to sign some papers, to fill in questionnaires, he could even give you a psychologist” (Erica, 32 years old, two children, migrant worker).

Some of the wives of migrant workers sincerely believe that migrant workers’ families should benefit—when they pay for utilities, pay for transport, attend entertainment events, have expressed a desire to receive food packages and the like. However, this type of paternalistic feeling is not very common and is more the exception than the rule.

According to experts involved in the study, it may be useful to create a unified database (register) of data on Ukrainian labour migrants. This would make it possible in the future to systematise information on the number of migrant workers, their needs and the desired social support. At the same time, it has been noted that many migrant workers are not interested in formalizing their status due to fears about income taxation.

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“It is necessary to tighten the legislation on the duties of migrant workers or their responsibility, this will naturally raise the issue of a kind of register or database to understand who, what and how, what needs and what is the situation” (expert, “Service stabilization assistance”).

The situation with a low level of awareness of labor migrants in the legal aspects of their status is worsened by the lack of relevant knowledge among employees of state and local self-government bodies—even in those regions of Ukraine where labor migration is a common phenomenon.

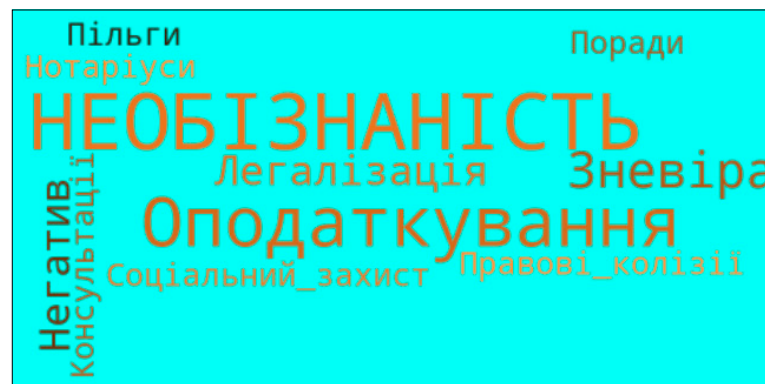
“I do not know the legislation specifically on migrant workers”;

“I am so busy now with other issues that need to be practically solved that I do not have time to consider this issue (about labour migration)”;

“I do not have detailed information to discuss (labour migration legislation)”;

“I cannot specify and now I give my advice, recommendations, I am not prepared” (expert, head of OTG in western Ukraine).

Knowledge of the legislation and its assessment (benefits, insecurity, mistrust, taxation, social assistance, legal collisions, consultations, negative, legalization, notary).



6.10 Covid and labour migration

The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in 2019 and continues to this day, has significantly complicated the situation of many families and their children. In addition to the usual problems with communication and parents, closed borders, the collapse of many companies, mass layoffs and staff reductions have been added. Some migrant workers have suffered from the inability both to find a new job abroad and to return to their homeland.

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Due to the introduction of distance learning in migrant working families where at least one parent is absent, the workload of another adult family member has increased due to the need to monitor training, to provide technical conditions for it.

In families where one of the family members has previously visited abroad, this opportunity has disappeared. Due to the lockdown, the practices of regular return of migrant workers to Ukraine have been canceled, communication opportunities have been reduced to online formats, which has aggravated the problems caused by the prolonged absence of one of the family members.

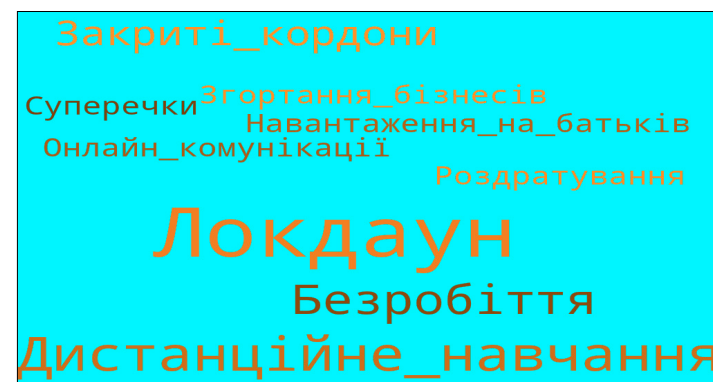
“We are having such a difficult time, we have not seen our 2-year-old son because of the epidemic, he cannot return” (Natalia, 44, the wife and mother of migrant workers).

Forced adjustment of plans, inability to make a previously planned trip abroad sometimes causes a deterioration of the psychological climate in the family, mutual irritation and disputes.

“Because of the COVID restrictions, they could not cross the border as much as they wanted. Therefore, they are dissatisfied” (expert, BF “Stabilization assistance service”).

In general, forced quarantine with limited social contacts and distance learning have negatively affected the psychological climate in families, complicating the relationship between parents and children.

COVID and labour migration (closed borders, winding down of businesses, disputes, burden on parents, online communications, lockdown, annoyance, unemployment, distance learning).



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6.11 Future and perspectives

Depending on personal circumstances, migrant workers and their children expressed different visions of their future.

Some of them perceive employment abroad as a forced, temporary step, striving to return to Ukraine, if possible; others focus on integration in the host country and intend to bring abroad those family members who still remain in Ukraine.

“I want to make documents, work there and then reunite my family, take my children and wife abroad” (Vasily, 33, migrant worker).

If men who are migrant workers tend to move abroad permanently in time, justifying such intentions by the lack of jobs in Ukraine with a decent salary, then women are largely more critical of such a prospect, thinking that staying abroad will have significant negative consequences—the rupture of ordinary social ties, difficulties in integrating into unusual conditions of work and life, lack of knowledge of foreign languages and the like.

“A great price is this welfare—the child grew up without a father, I lived without a husband. It’s not worth it” (Yulia, 34, the wife of a migrant worker).

Among people who intend to move to another country, a sense of despair in Ukraine, disappointment in the prospects of living in the country for themselves and their children are common. In particular, such intentions are characteristic of “experienced” working migrants who have been abroad for a long time, have experience of employment in different countries and, to some extent, have managed to adapt to living and working conditions, from there. The rupture of social ties with Ukraine due to a long stay abroad (loss of friends and acquaintances) leads to the desire to start a “new life”, despite numerous risks and difficulties.

“I don’t see any prospects. I don’t really want to go back to Ukraine, nothing holds me back” (Ivan, 44, migrant worker, Poland).

The decision on a possible move to another country is often made by the parents without the child’s participation, he is simply confronted with the fact and informed about the decisions of the adults.

“Nastya is a child. What can we talk about with her?” (Vitalik, 44, migrant worker, father of a 13-year-old daughter).

A fairly common format of employment abroad is a scheme by which money is earned in another country and spent in Ukraine (especially the purchase of a house, apartment or car). Such migrant workers do not perceive other countries as a place of permanent residence and focus more on the “temporary method”: they periodically go abroad to work for a few months, then return and after a while seek again employment opportunities in

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another country. The belief was often expressed that temporary travel abroad is a completely acceptable format to earn money, provided you return to Ukraine.

“At first I went for 3 months and I didn’t want to go back abroad. However, I came home, stayed two months, ran out of money and left again” (Ivan, 44, migrant worker, Germany).

“If you go, realize yourself and return home, that’s fine. And if it’s migration for life, it’s sad and wrong” (Maria, 17, the daughter of a migrant worker).

Whether they intend to move abroad for permanent residence, the vast majority of working migrants and their family members say they would be happy to live and work in Ukraine if they could find a decent-paying job in Ukraine, their homeland. Often, the reluctance to change the country of residence is explained by the need to take care of parents and other elderly relatives, the desire to maintain established relationships with friends and neighbors. Ready to live and work in Ukraine, provided there is a job, he perceives the forced migration of labour as unwanted.

“We do not want. My husband, in the first place, is against, and so am I. Family, relatives hold us, we can’t leave our parents” (Maria, 37, wife of a migrant worker).

“It is necessary to create conditions for parents, migrants, so that they no longer travel. If the state helps, migrants will not have to (leave) either” (Viktor, 47, migrant worker).

Some children of working migrants support their intention to eventually move to a permanent residence abroad, justifying such a desire with a higher level of education, the opportunity to work with a decent salary and everyday comfort that is unattainable in Ukraine.

“I think education is even better in the European Union than in Ukraine, and you can find a better-paying job there than in Ukraine” (Anastasia, 13, the daughter of a migrant).

“To be honest, I don’t want to live in Ukraine at all. I do not know why. I am more attracted to be abroad, it is more beautiful and better to live there” (Hanna, 13, daughter of a migrant).

Some teenagers, despite their parents’ position, would like to continue their studies in Ukraine. Children’s disagreement with the decisions and plans imposed on adults sometimes leads to family disputes, which intensify during the transition period of adolescents.

“My parents said it was better to go abroad to study, but I don’t want to. I would stay in Ukraine. In general, I don’t like new places, completely unknown cities and countries. However, the parents insist” (Nastya, 14, the daughter of a migrant).

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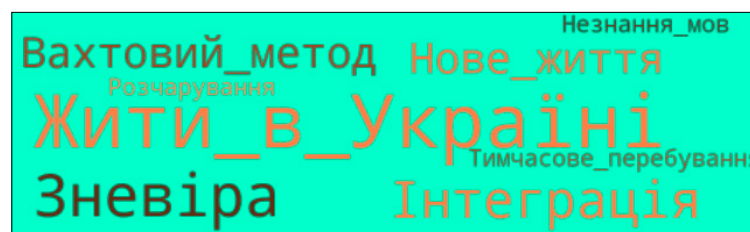
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The vast majority of research participants see their future in a free and prosperous Ukraine. Even those who focus on going abroad for permanent residence are ready to change their plans if there are conditions for a decent job in Ukraine.

“I would like my children to live and work in Ukraine, I hope that Ukraine’s economy will grow, that life will be better. I believe that Ukraine is a big, strong state, we need something more, the process has already begun, but it is difficult to change everything at once” (Vasyl, 46, labour migrant).

“It’s very good at home. Everything is better at home, we are very happy. I strongly believe that soon there will be no need to go to work” (Erika, 32, migrant worker).

The future and prospects of migrant workers (not knowing languages, temporary stays, discouragement, new life, integration, life in Ukraine, disappointment).



6.12 Conclusions

- The main argument for labour migration is the economic factor: the desire to earn money, to get a better paid job (compared to Ukraine).
- The families of migrant workers often live in settlements where the departure of one or more family members abroad is more the rule than the exception. In almost all families, one of the family members works abroad so that the children live in an environment where the absence of at least one parent is the norm.
- There is a fairly common pattern of family relationships in which one family member (mainly the father) earns money abroad, and the rest of the family (mother and children) perceive it primarily as a source of funding, expecting regular transfers of money.
- Family members often perceive the migrant father only as a source of funding, sometimes migrant workers complained about the open consumerist attitude on the part of relatives who remained in Ukraine.
- The employment of one or more family members abroad often results from breaking traditional ties, alienation and the emergence of various misunderstandings and even lawsuits. Some families are on the verge of destruction.

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- During the interview, jealousy was mentioned as the cause of misunderstandings, some wives of migrant workers are upset by the inability to exercise daily control over their husbands.
- Staying abroad often leads to the destruction, “freezing” of ties with the social environment in Ukraine.
- The absence of one of the parents for a long time also causes a certain detachment of the children, the perception of the absent father as almost a stranger to them, the destruction of relationships and the strengthening of mutual distancing.
- The decision on a possible move to another country is often made by the parents without the child’s participation, she/he is simply confronted with the fact and informed about the decisions of the adults.
- Some labor migrants are aware that their long absence will inevitably affect their children’s upbringing, negatively affect their socialization and growing up.
- Many children have been in the status of “child of a migrant worker” for many years and do not imagine their lives differently.
- The prolonged absence of one of the parents leads to emotional disorders in the child, constant pain, causes many daily problems, difficulties in learning process.
- The traditional needs of adolescents among the children of migrant workers often remain unmet and questions remain unanswered.
- Some children of labor migrants who are older teenagers are left alone with adult problems and are forced to overcome them on their own.
- With the departure of one of the parents abroad, the child receives less attention not only because of his absence, but also because of the growing burden of the parent who remained in Ukraine.
- Sometimes children suffer from school insults from their peers, especially related to their father’s absence and cannot count on his support and protection.
- As a result of the introduction of distance learning in migrant working families where at least one parent is absent, the workload of another adult family member has increased due to the need to monitor training, to provide technical conditions for it.
- Some migrants, when traveling abroad, do not work in their specialty.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly complicated the situation of many families and their children. Forced adjustment of intentions, inability to make a previously planned trip abroad sometimes causes a deterioration of the psychological climate in the family, mutual irritation and disputes.
- Often, migrant workers traveling abroad do not have reliable information about working conditions and living conditions, already finding out about them on the spot. There is an urgent need for information support—for migrants to receive reliable and up-to-date information on working conditions, daily life, local legislation, the specific activity of commercial and medical institutions, the legal status of a migrant worker in the host

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country and the like. In general, migrant workers and their families need the following types of assistance and support:

- psychological—help in solving emotional problems caused by stressful situations;
 - legal—the possibility to obtain information about the legal aspects of staying abroad;
 - legislative—support for migrant workers through the adoption of legislation to protect their rights;
 - tax—rejection of the state’s intentions to tax the money earned abroad;
 - pedagogical—professional support of the education of children whose parents are abroad.
- Migrant workers suffer from the insincerity of employers and intermediaries abroad, become victims and in such situations need legal assistance.
 - According to experts involved in the study, it may be useful to create a unified database (register) of data on Ukrainian labour migrants. This would make it possible in the future to systematize information on the number of migrant workers, their needs and the desired social support.
 - About half of respondents said they would like to return to Ukraine, provided they can find a decent-paying job on its territory.
 - After returning to Ukraine, migrant workers often need “reverse adaptation”—adaptation to living conditions in Ukraine.
 - Migrant workers are largely poorly informed about the legislation governing their status, rights and obligations. The information available is often fragmented, contradictory and incomplete. Children’s awareness of these issues is zero.
 - The level of awareness of representatives of local authorities and local self-government in the legislation governing the situation of labour migration is extremely insufficient, even in regions with a massive spread of labour migration.
 - Taxation of money earned abroad is considered by migrant workers to be extremely unfair and insulting. They do not think about the causal relationship between the payment of taxes and the level of social protection and pensions (for them, their parents and their children).
 - Sometimes migrant workers perceive temporary travel abroad as the first step to further integration into a more prosperous country, first obtaining a temporary residence permit and then citizenship.
 - Regardless of whether they intend to move abroad for permanent residence, the vast majority of migrant workers and their family members note that they would be happy to live and work in Ukraine if they could find a job with a decent salary at home.

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- Creating opportunities for retraining potential future migrants taking into account the current situation on the labour market.
- Increasing the level of legal awareness of labour migrants, the algorithm of actions in typical problematic situations.
- Popularize the experience of former labour migrants who returned to Ukraine and started their own business, using the experience and connections gained abroad.
- Creating and moderating groups in social networks, focused on providing the necessary information to the families of working migrants in solving domestic, legal and other problems.
- Create an online resource “migrant work counselor” that summarizes legal, household and other information that can be useful to migrant workers and their family members, with systematic answers to frequently asked questions.
- Organizing the psychological assistance of family members of working migrants, training in methods of prevention and overcoming crisis situations in relationships that occur due to migration.
- Creating a “club of spouses of working migrants” (provisional name), in which they can exchange experience, support each other, discuss typical problematic situations and ways to overcome them.
- Creating a telephone or online “hotline” for family members of migrant workers, including children, to call for advice or help.
- Initiating the granting of advantageous loans to former labour migrants to open their own business in Ukraine.
- Creation of a database of job vacancies for the employment of migrant workers who would like to return to Ukraine.
- Appointment of specialists responsible for working with migrant workers in the regional centers of social services for family, children and youth, social assistance departments.
- Initiation of the development of a separate database of vacancies in the State Employment Service targeting migrant workers and their family members.
- Development of a set of measures to promote the formal employment of migrant workers in host countries. Carrying out explanatory documents on the fact that formal employment is necessary to guarantee respect for the rights, freedoms and interests of migrant workers and their family members.
- In higher education institutions in the western region of Ukraine, initiate the creation of advisory groups of law students to provide free legal advice to migrant workers and their family members.
- Determining the appointment of one of the structures of the executive power to coordinate the activities of protection of the rights of migrant workers and their children

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(currently, these competencies are shared between social protection departments, education departments, family and youth; business departments, structures for the protection of the children’s rights, employment services, etc.).

- Providing a set of measures aimed at raising the awareness of representatives of state authorities and local self-government on the specifics of national legislation governing labour migration.
- Creation of an all-Ukrainian database of labour migrants, which in the future will contribute to the systematization and generalization of the situation with labour migration in Ukraine, to the centralization of the provision of services, consultations and assistance for labour migrants.
- Creating a “toll-free line” for migrant workers or their family members to contact in case of emergency.
- Developing a manual “Pensions for labour migrants” with information in an accessible form about the benefits of official employment abroad.
- Creating the “Migrant Labour Leaflet” with information about the most common problematic situations and possible ways to solve them.
- Organizing exchanges of experience of community representatives who have established successful work with the families of working migrants.
- Initiate the systematic work of updating and improving national legislation governing relations in the field of labour migration, in particular with regard to ensuring the rights of migrant workers and their children.

Conducting periodic studies to monitor labour migration in Ukraine and around the world.

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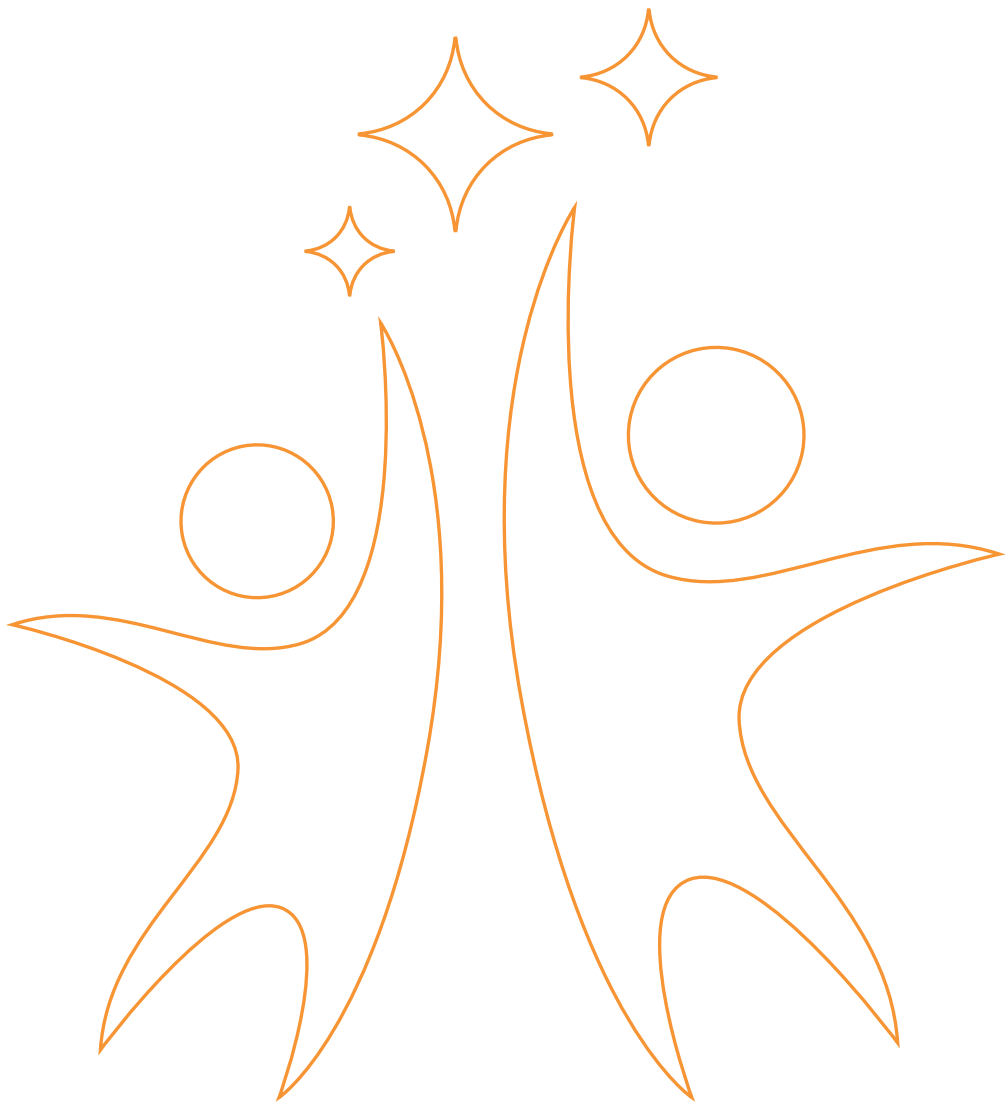
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**Children Left Behind by Labour Migration:
Supporting Moldovan and Ukrainian
Transnational Families in the EU (CASTLE)
ICMPD / 2021 / MPF-357-004**

Closing Report
(NOVEMBER, 2023)

Editors

Mara BIROU
Rodica NOVAC



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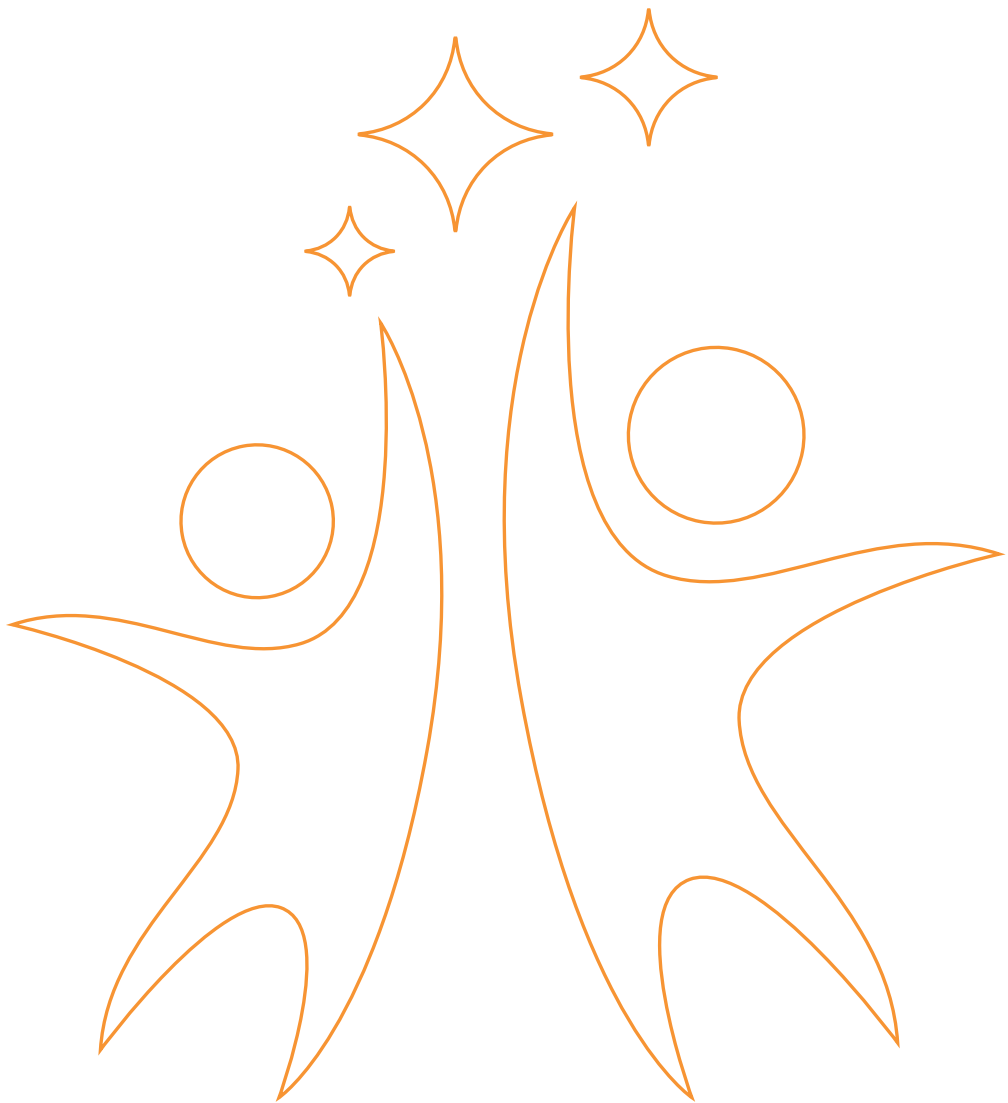
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Executive summary

The CASTLE action “aims to support the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in improving their child protection frameworks and migration and mobility policies, with a focus on the social and legal impacts of labour migration on transnational families. The action analyses the situation of children left behind by their parents who engaged or are engaging in labour migration from the perspective of their rights and possibly within transnational family practices that create, observe and enforce such rights. For this purpose, the intervention aims to develop a multigenerational, intersectional and participative qualitative analysis of child rights in a transnational family context.”

During two years and a half (June 2021–November 2023) the main activities of the action plan were successfully achieved by all the research teams from the three countries: Babeş-Bolyai University (Romania), Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova (ASEM) and Ukrainian Institute for Social Research, but also by the NGOs partners: Terre des Hommes–Terre des Hommes delegation Romania, Terre des Hommes Moldova and Terre des Hommes Ukraine.

The aim of this in-depth closing report is to highlight the results of the action research including all the publications following data collection and the findings, some of them already included in the ‘Opening Report’. As previously mentioned, the methodology has primarily relied on semi-structured interviews led by category-specific interview guides based on the analysis of the relevant literature and the demands of the project at hand, complemented by focus-groups with family member categories led by guides incorporating feedback from the former.

Coordinates of the fieldwork

Temporal: In-depth interviews with family members of migrant workers: November–December 2021; Focus groups with parents and children: April–May 2022; In-depth interviews with experts: May 2022. Part of a 2-stage data collection process involving a quantitative stage: May 2023, and a qualitative stage: July–August 2023, but also co-researcher capacity building, consultation and co-research.

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Numerical:

- 126 interviews with family members—stayer parent/caregiver, stayer child, migrant parent;
- 10 focus-groups with family members, of which 5 with children;
- 24 interviews with experts from authorities, institutions, NGOs, working with transnational family members family member interviews/focus-groups have been collected by the 3 national teams (Ro, Mo, Ua) with Moldovan and Ukrainian transnational families with at least one parent abroad in the EU a significant amount of time during the recent past expert interviews have been taken by the 3 teams, with Mo and UA as well as Ro experts, a large majority of interviews have been taken online (Facebook messenger, Zoom, WhatsApp, Viber, etc.). The languages were Ukrainian, Russian and Romanian, and in one case, Hungarian;
- 207 respondents to the survey.

The Closing Report seeks to present in the first part, the research results as contributions published by each academic partners from the three countries involved in the CASTLE action, but also in the second section, the awareness-raising campaigns, capacity building, dissemination, policy frameworks, etc., activities that were implemented by NGOs partners in each country: TdH Romania, TdH Moldova and TdH Ukraine.

Overview of the research results

A total of **16 contributions** (15 articles and 1 chapter) were either published, or sent for evaluation to different journals from researchers directly involved in our research from the three countries.

In order to reach the main goal of our research, more specifically, to function as the voice of beneficiary groups—stay-behind children and their families, we incorporated in our publications the most important issues, specific needs, effects of labour migration on CLB, children's rights and opinions, education, calls for support, family practices, but also recommendation and solutions.

We discussed how transnational parents represent their children by engaging in digital communication practices with institutions and maintaining family togetherness through involvement and support of children within transnational family relationships. We found that communication with institutions is burdened by distrust of and constraints regarding information and communication technologies (ICT) access, the limited availability of adults as interlocutors for daily communication, and deliberate non-transparency of communication at both ends.

Then, we evaluated the level of trust and we have presented all the sections to best capture practices that illustrate the presence of a certain degree of stigmatisation of parents

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in transnational families. We identified that fact that the inventory of all the stakeholders' attitudes shows the highest ambivalence conflating parental migration with abandonment. This characteristic of attitudes illustrates the considerable pressure placed on transnational families by society, representatives of the authorities, and by members of the immediate social environment by the family and the community. From our point of view, trust can be increased by: support measures aimed to support, not intervene in the family, positive interaction and efficient communication with representatives of institutions, transparency, less bureaucracy and more information on rights.

Another important contribution focused on four case studies of particularly difficult situations that Moldovan or Ukrainian families face—serious illness of a child left at home (two cases), Covid 19 lockdown, and war in Ukraine—and we showed how the insufficient resources and social support in their direct environment pushes these families to employ new, dynamic, indeed radical strategies to address their difficulties through enlarging and navigating their resource environment.

We also analysed the reality of today's national social policies in Moldova and Romania and we found that the measures of public authorities and NGOs are associated with their tendency to propose transnational welfare practices. With national policies relatively lacking in specifically targeting migration, Romania and Moldova are lagging behind in the development of the idea of welfare practices across borders. The tendency of public entities to plead for possible agreements, communication, monitoring and support relations between states is found in our results.

We studied the school-related practices and perceptions in Moldovan and Ukrainian transnational families, and discussed parents' and children's perspectives on the challenges that parental migration generates for children's school performance and activities.

Moreover, we included the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war and compared the external migration features before and after the start of the full-scale invasion, but also the attitude towards them problems of caring for children in migrant families, the peculiarities of realising children's right to education, communications and relationships in migrant families in this context.

Not least, we came up with contributions on research methodological aspects on the transnational families and CLB topics such as conducting focus groups interviews or the involvement of left-behind adolescents as co-researchers in the study of transnational families.

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Overview of the implementation results

Important results achieved by Terre des hommes (Tdh) Moldova, Tdh Ukraine, and Tdh Romania.

The CASTLE project has made significant strides in addressing the potential negative impact of labour migration policies on the protection of children in Moldova, Ukraine, and Romania. This comprehensive report outlines the progress made in achieving specific objectives related to research, policy frameworks, capacity building, awareness campaigns, and media sensitization.

Specific Objective 1: The potentially negative impact of labour migration policies and dynamics on the protection of children in Moldova and Ukraine is understood thanks to solution-oriented research structures.

In Moldova, Terre des hommes (Tdh) actively supported the ASEM Research Team, involving child co-researchers in workshops and focus groups. This initiative empowered children and contributed valuable insights to policymakers. In Romania, an International Conference disseminated research findings, policy recommendations, and practical implementations. Webinars explored challenges faced by transnational families, offering a nuanced understanding of family dynamics, social protection, and educational adaptations.

Specific Objective 2: Legal and policy frameworks impacting labour migration in Moldova and Ukraine are improved based on solid empirical research evidence, including in relation to circular and temporary labour migration. Moldova enhanced its legislative framework regarding custody for children left behind through Government Decision No. 81. This aims to provide stability, security, and a nurturing environment for children temporarily separated due to migration. Policy advice sessions in Moldova and Ukraine informed policymakers on child protection issues related to labour migration, emphasizing collaborative efforts.

Specific Objective 3: Transnational families and national stakeholders are better informed on the realities and practical issues related to labour migration.

The CASTLE project conducted comprehensive training initiatives for transnational families in Moldova and Ukraine. These sessions covered essential topics such as migration concepts, reasons behind migration decisions, and guidance on childcare arrangements. The sharing of good practices through conferences in Moldova, Romania, and Lisbon fostered collaboration among key stakeholders and enriched the understanding of challenges faced by children left behind.

Specific Objective 4: Children left behind and their families from Moldova and Ukraine are empowered to contribute to legal and policy reform on labour migration, with an emphasis on circular migration schemes and protection of children.

The project's awareness-raising campaign used participatory methods to engage communities. In Moldova, Ukraine, and Romania, policy advice sessions, research dissemination,

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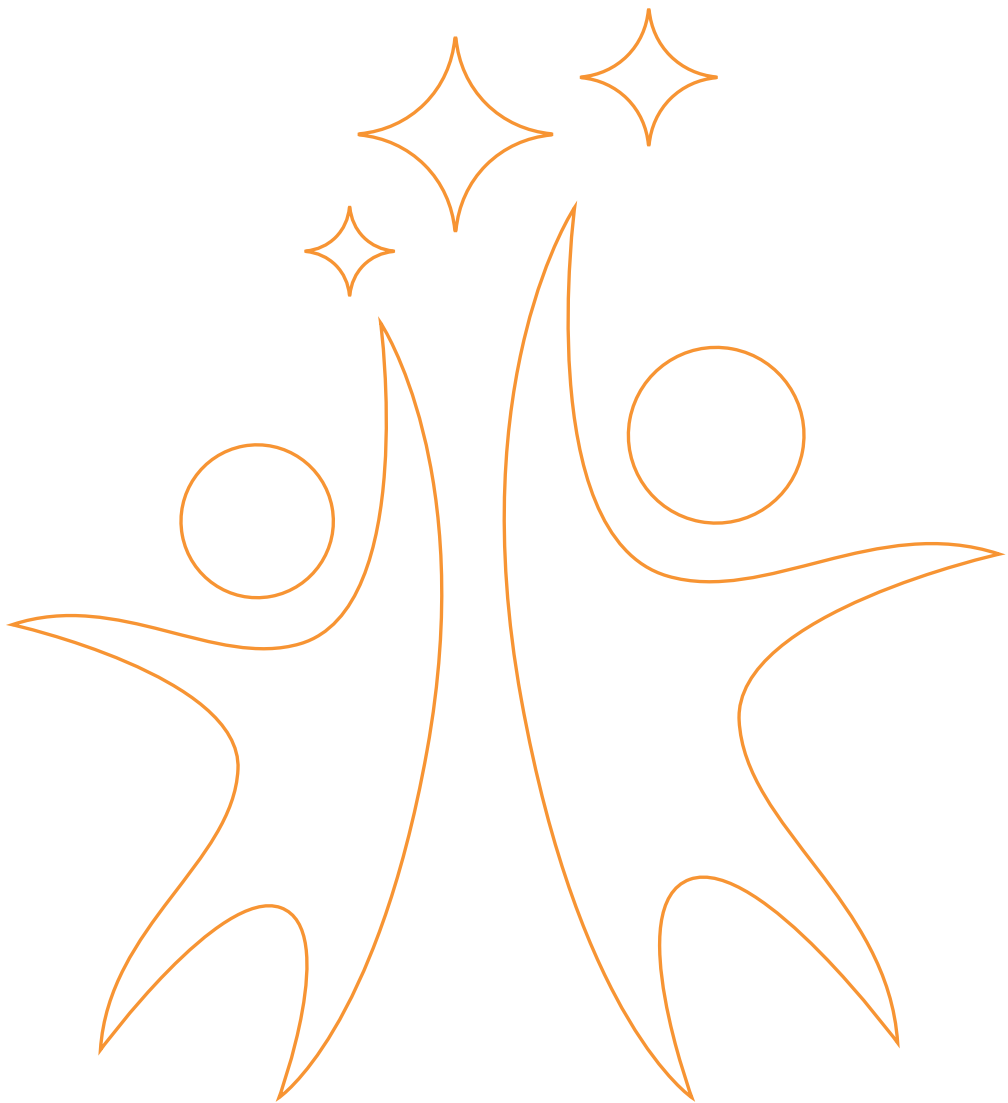
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and interactive materials development empowered transnational families. The project aimed to contribute to legal and policy reform on labour migration, emphasising circular migration schemes and the protection of children.

In conclusion, the CASTLE's multi-faceted approach, including research, policy advocacy, capacity building, awareness campaigns, and media sensitization, demonstrates a holistic strategy to address the complex challenges faced by transnational families in the context of labour migration. The collaborative efforts across Moldova, Ukraine, and Romania have contributed to a more informed and supportive environment for children left behind and their families.



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I. Research results

In this section we will describe the contributions that have been published or are in the process of being published by the research teams of each of the three countries: Romania, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, but also a common special issue edited by one of Babeş-Bolyai team researchers: Mihaela Hărăguş. Most of the contributions are open access and include all the results and recommendations that we worked on during the CASTLE research activities. These can also be found in policy briefs that are public and in the Opening Report that describes in detail the relevant literature identified on transnational families, methodological aspects and the most important results on various analysis sections.

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1.2 "Not like everyone else?" Transnational families's relationship with their home society between stigma and dialogue

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1.4 Local and transnational participation of families with stay-behind children in the hybrid transnational social protection nexus

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1.5.1 The Socialisation of Stay-behind Children in the Republic of Moldova Following Labour Migration of their Parents

1.5.2 Adjusting to change: school-related practices and perceptions in Moldovan and Ukrainian transnational families

1.5.3 Specific needs of children left behind by labour migration in the Republic of Moldova

1.5.4 Romanian and Moldovan Migrant Families between National and Transnational Welfare Policies

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1.

Country results: Romania

1.1 Asserting children's rights through the digital practices of transnational families

<https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12828>

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Daniela ANGI

Áron TELEGDI-CSETRI

We have investigated the way several rights stipulated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are observed in the context of children left behind through parents' labour migration. Parental migration implies changes in the circumstances of a family's life and consequently, in the way parents and children interact.

Under the accelerated development of communication technologies, family practices in transnational families take place through digital communication, in different forms of virtual co-presence. Children's right to family, contact, care, supervision, protection, home, safety, and physical and emotional well-being, each under the principle of the best interests of the child, are obvious segments where children's life is affected by transnational digital family practices.

In this context, stay-behind children manifest their agency in various ways: through the experiences of care provision, through coping with their stay-behind life, through initiating communication with migrant parents, or through actively getting involved in obtaining information about parents' conditions or disclosing information about their own lives.

We have shown how in the context of digital communication, Moldovan and Ukrainian transnational families manage to perform "doing rights" for their children both internally (at the micro level, within the family) and externally (at the meso-macro level, or outside the family) through creating or potentially constraining family togetherness. In doing so, we focused on the process through which parents in transnational families fulfil their parental responsibilities, even from a distance, in prioritising the best interests of their children.

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We first explored an external rights-related aspect: how the virtual environment facilitates or hinders migrant parents' actions in their relationship with institutions and authorities. We found that using the internet to navigate the complexities of their daily existence is commonplace in the lives of many migrants. However, for various reasons such as lack of skills or perceived unreliability of internet information sources, often parents prefer to go and ask directly, or to call the relevant authorities and verify the information.

The main part of our findings addresses rights aspects internal to the family itself, namely, how parents and children act co-agentically in managing transnational life. The new communication technologies and the ambient copresence, when it is achievable, allow parents to supervise and assess children's well-being back home. Interactions between migrant parents and stay-behind children are shaped by access to communication technologies and by parents' work conditions and schedule. The non-EU status of Ukraine and Moldova and the lack of mobile telephony agreements makes unlimited access to international phone calls difficult. Additionally, the nature of the work performed by Ukrainian and Moldovan migrant parents does not allow many of them to enjoy a permanent connectivity with and availability for their family members at home. Long working hours, hard work, and internet access confined to their accommodation make being in touch instantaneously and in real time hard to achieve. Not being constantly or consistently available for communication with their children hampers children's opportunities to initiate transnational communications. New ICTs certainly make distance and migrant parents' endeavours more bearable, but virtual and physical co-presence are still not interchangeable in the case of Ukrainian and Moldovan transnational families, where the degree of limitation in creating copresence routines is not negligible.

Essential for understanding children's participation in digital transnational family practices is the analysis of the transparency of communication—which interlocutors don't always respect. The geographical distance and the time limits of possible communication, the relative scantiness of communication channels, and the lack of perspective and control over the other end of the line make the comfort and openness of the connection significantly more fragile in transnational families and hence, more valuable. Both parents and children perceive keeping secrets as a practice of caring in the sense of "protecting them from trouble" but it may defy its purpose by depriving the party in question of essential support. By limiting the information disclosed, both parents and children implicitly exclude each other from possible family consultation and decisions, thereby limiting their participation in family life.

Based on our analysis, several recommendations for enhancing children's participation in digital communication, as promoting family togetherness, have been made, such as: free online communication centres in areas in need, provision of communication kits, and investment in the telecommunication infrastructure, convenient phone and internet access packages offered by employers, support for periodic mutual visits.

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1.2 "Not like everyone else?" Transnational families's relationship with their home society between stigma and dialogue

<https://doi.org/10.15407/socium2023.01.054>

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In the literature dealing with migration issues, researchers have addressed the negative perceptions towards parents who migrate and leave their children in the care of others. As studies have shown, the attitudes present in public discourse towards transnational family members are often negative (Parreñas 2001, 2005; Piperno 2007; Solari 2008; Tolstokorova 2008, 2009; Ducu 2013; Cojocaru, Islam & Timofte 2015). Regarding the interest of our endeavour, focused on the situation of parents in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, recent studies show that the public discourses about migration that emphasise merely the negative consequences on children left behind (CLB) must be reconsidered (Cojocaru *et al.*, 2015). Approaching the situation of children with migrant parents exclusively from the perspective of 'social orphans', a syntagm that has dominated the Ukrainian media in particular, is inadequate and fails to open the door to a real dialog between stakeholders, transnational families and authorities. Similarly, in Moldova, studies and consultative reports carried out by a number of NGO organisations (e.g., UNICEF) have largely focused on children from vulnerable communities, which has contributed to the construction of a negative discourse against transnational families. This image almost completely ignores the contemporary realities of family existence, which are often to a large extent interconnected with migration and care systems (Vanore 2015, 118).

The present study discusses whether and how Ukrainian and Moldovan migrant parents, some of whom had to leave their children behind in the care of other adults, are faced with a disapproving public discourse, while also facing a strong pressure both in their relationship with the public authorities and at the level of society, community, and family. Through this approach we aim to answer the following question: *Are members of Ukrainian and Moldavian transnational families subject to a process of stigmatisation at the level of society but also at the level of their immediate social environment?* In this view, we develop a qualitative enquiry based on in-depth interviews with respondents from Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. Our main research objective is to examine the attitudes encountered by members of transnational families in society, in their relations with the

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representatives of the authorities, as well as in their close social environment, community, and family. Specific research topics are explored, such as: reasons for migration, trust in public authorities, local community, migrants' community, and trust in the host country's state and society, the attitudes towards the most important key stakeholders involved in the migration process, as well as the support measures proposed by migrants and their families. The findings concerning the attitudes, level of trust and proposals suggest the presence of a certain degree of stigmatisation of parents from transnational families. Our study underlines the need for transnational transfer of good practices and real-life experiences, such as those of migrants, in order not to remain an empty imitation. This experience can only be transferred through dialogue, trust and acceptance—which is not the case at the time of our research. Therefore, it is imperative to continue dialogue-based fieldwork with primary stakeholders, the families themselves, in order to deconstruct and prospectively avoid the structural construction of stigma.

1.3 Left-Behind Adolescent Co-researchers' Participation in Studying Transnational Families

<https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80455-526-220231011>

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Áron TELEGDI-CSETRI
Maria ROTH

The article discusses the phenomenon of transnational families, where some family members live in another country due to work, while the family maintains a sense of unity and welfare. In countries like Romania, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine, labour migration is a significant issue. For example, in the Republic of Moldova, a quarter of the population lives abroad, leading to a separation of parents from their children, especially in rural areas. In Ukraine, millions of people worked abroad prior to Russia's invasion in 2021. Migrant parents are often criticised for neglecting their left-behind children, who are sometimes labelled as "social orphans." Media coverage has highlighted extreme cases, but research shows a more nuanced impact, with different responses within families and communities. Parental migration has complex effects on family dynamics, roles, responsibilities, and children's well-being. Other research outcomes generally indicate negative effects on the mental health of left-behind children, including anxiety, depression, health

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issues, risk-taking behaviour, and increased exposure to violence. These children are considered vulnerable due to temporary separation from parental care, leading to emotional costs. However, some studies in Eastern Europe have found no significant differences in the well-being of left-behind children.

Insufficient research on this phenomenon in Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine has focused on children's well-being from a care-oriented perspective, often viewing them as social orphans. Children's voices and opinions are rarely considered in decisions related to migration within transnational families, as adults underestimate their competence.

Involving children as co-researchers is essential in understanding their roles as agents of change within their societies and communities, particularly in the context of childhood and its interaction with society's structures and cultures. This approach acknowledges that children are experts in their own life experiences and have the right to participate in decisions affecting their lives. Co-research empowers children to actively engage in an epistemological research process, utilising their networks to access peers or key people, generating unique content through peer conversations, and facilitating listening to different perspectives on the same subject. The primary objective of including children as co-researchers is to uncover their views and behaviours concerning their daily challenges, encompassing various roles, including subjects, participants, and data producers. This approach is crucial when studying social problems from children's perspectives, emphasising the need to consider their subjectivity, agency, power, and influence, and involving them from the project's inception. In the context of studies addressing issues related to left-behind children due to parental labour migration, children's involvement as co-researchers is particularly vital, given their exclusion from the migration decision-making process as indicated by empirical data.

A participatory research design was adopted, emphasising the inclusion of all group members and a rights-based approach. The project's objective is to hear the voices of children, ensuring their input is shared with policymakers to guide policies and practices. Ethical considerations were central, respecting human dignity, focusing on utility and benefit, taking precautions to protect participants from harm, and ensuring justice through fair remuneration. Co-researchers were recruited based on specific criteria and consent, with the team comprising adolescents from the Republic of Moldova studying in Romania, who had experienced being left behind due to parental labour migration. Their involvement throughout the research process was integral to the project's success.

The results and discussion of the research involving teenage co-researchers are presented in six stages: preparatory work, research design, recruitment, data collection, analysis and interpretation, and dissemination. Preparatory work involved continuous training for co-researchers and professional support, with the training focusing on six modules covering various aspects of the research process. The research design phase included discussions

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on research topics and the interview guide, with adolescent co-researchers actively participating. The recruitment of study participants involved collaboration between researchers and co-researchers in reaching out to potential interviewees.

Data collection encompassed individual interviews, family interviews, and focus groups, with the adolescent co-researchers having the option to be involved in various aspects of the interviews. The analysis and interpretation of data were carried out in collaboration with seven of the co-researchers, highlighting key findings related to the parent-child relationship and the impact of parental migration on adolescents.

In the dissemination phase, the co-researchers are actively involved in developing information materials for children, parents, and caregivers in transnational families. They are also contributing to draft recommendations for supporting transnational families and left-behind children. The research experience has empowered the co-researchers, making them feel valuable and proud of their contributions. They emphasise the importance of helping others and making a positive impact. Their involvement has also helped researchers maintain sensitivity to children's experiences and perspectives, with the project continuing to use child-adapted participatory methods despite some criticism from experts. The co-researchers' insights have led to discussions on improving communication between parents and children and the roles of parents and teenagers in transnational families.

Concluding dilemmas and challenges in the study of parental migration and its effects on the family environment involve the evolving perspective on children and parents in such situations, with evidence from adolescent co-researchers revealing a more nuanced understanding of the impact. The main challenge faced was maintaining the interest and involvement of young co-researchers, who were not inclined to participate in the data collection phase. Possible reasons for this reluctance include their need for more training or their preference for making their voices heard without direct involvement in interviews. A question arises about whether to pressure co-researchers to participate more actively or respect their decision as a form of democratic collaboration. The study adheres to the principle of adapting to the needs of co-researchers.

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1.4 Local and transnational participation of families with stay-behind children in the hybrid transnational social protection nexus

Note. Under evaluation in Special Issue edited within the project by Viorela Ducu, Áron Telegdi-Csetri, Julia Rone, 'Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay', *Journal for Ethnic and Migration Studies*.

Viorela DUCU

Áron TELEGDI-CSETRI

Mihaela HĂRĂGUȘ

Under continuous economic difficulties that extended well beyond the transition period, a high number of individuals in Moldova and Ukraine had no other option for improving the economic prospects of their families than to temporarily migrate for work, while leaving their children behind. In this sense, migration is a form of social protection, as migrants pool together resources in destination and home countries. In this context, transnational families are agents of protection for vulnerable members (children left at home), trying to collect the elements of social protection they can access when needed from the resource environment they have (or don't have) at hand in different countries.

Migration appears as a solution for fulfilling basic needs, when the salary from low paid and unregulated jobs cover food expenses only, and people must figure out ways of supplementing their income. Their employment abroad is sometimes on short term contracts or include periods of irregular labour, and usually do not qualify for public social protection in the destination country, so they must rely on other sources of social protection. In several cases of crisis, such as the Covid pandemic or war in Ukraine, migrants resort to social protection as human rights, however this is otherwise a far-away possibility (since they see themselves as functional agents). Some good examples are connected with the temporary protection status within the EU after the outbreak of the war, which sets an example and an expectation for Moldovans too. One of the main and most common rationales of labour migration is using income earned abroad for the acquisition of market-based social protection, most visible in medical related issues. Our respondents rarely find support from NGOs, churches or religious organisations in their home country. Similar to the state's perception that migration automatically brings welfare, having a migrant family member brings the impression among the non-migrant community members as well that these families are not financially vulnerable anymore, and therefore they are not the target group of NGOs. Family networks (often from other localities) and sometimes friends are the most active supporters of these families. Other informal types of networks are rare because, as a result of massive migration from many localities in these countries, other close adults are no longer to be found in either Moldova or in Ukraine. Migrants receive support from civil

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or religious organisations in the destination country in liminal situations such as periods of unexpected illegal stay.

Through four case studies of particularly difficult situations that Moldovan or Ukrainian families face—serious illness of a child left at home (two cases), Covid 19 lockdown, and war in Ukraine—we showed how the insufficient resources and social support in their direct environment pushes these families to employ new, dynamic, indeed radical strategies to address their difficulties through enlarging and navigating their resource environment.

When the welfare state is weak and social protections as constitutional rights are not sufficient, such as in Moldova and Ukraine, a severe illness of one family member puts a severe strain on the family. The labour migration of a parent becomes the only solution to enable the family to access social protection as a commodity in the country of departure.

Under the Covid 19 lockdown, migrant members of transnational families had to use material aid received from NGOs in destination countries to support their family members in Moldova who were in an acute financial crisis and did not receive any external material aid. It is an instance where community as social protection in the destination country is transferred in times of crisis to migrant family members in the country of departure.

Many transnational families from Ukraine were forced by the Russian invasion to flee to third countries (other than the country of destination of their migration), falling under social protection as human rights (usually as temporary protection) there; but this proved insufficient.

Thus, migrant parents had no other choice than to continue their migration plan in order to support their families (now temporarily hosted abroad and increasingly vulnerable) and could not join them. It is clear that the social protection as human rights is insufficient and it needs to be supplemented by migration for work.

1.5 Special issue: "Children Left Behind by Labour Migration,"
Romanian Journal of Population Studies
<https://doi.org/10.24193/RJPS.2023.1>

Guest Editor

Mihaela HĂRĂGUŞ

The following articles are included in the Virtual Special Issue (SI): "Children Left Behind by Labour Migration," as a common result of the three research teams in Romania, Moldova and Ukraine. The special issue was published specifically for the CASTLE project in order to disseminate the results and increase the visibility of the project's research activities.

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1.5.1 The Socialisation of Stay-behind Children in the Republic of Moldova Following Labour Migration of their Parents

<https://doi.org/10.24193/RJPS.2023.1.01>

Elena VACULOVSCI

Galina ȚURCAN

The article **The Socialisation of Stay-behind Children in the Republic of Moldova Following Labour Migration of their Parents** examines how the labour migration of parents from the Republic of Moldova to the European Union influences the process of socialisation of stay-behind children and explores the involvement of public authorities in the socialisation of these children. Data on which the paper is based were collected in the Republic of Moldova from December 2021 through April 2022, in the course of the development of the CASTLE project. In order to study the impact of labour migration of parents on stay-behind children, a sociological investigation was conducted in the Republic of Moldova in the months of December 2021 to April 2022. In the course of the development of the CASTLE (Children Left Behind by Labour Migration: Supporting Moldovan and Ukrainian Transnational Families in the EU) project, in the Republic of Moldova 36 adults (migrant parents, parents who stayed home with their children, and caregivers), 11 representatives of public authorities (social workers, mayors, teachers/school psychologists, etc.) and 6 stay-behind children were interviewed. Also, 13 migrant parents and parents who stayed home with their children and 10 children participated in the focus group discussions. The in-depth interviews were based on a semi-structured interview guide that followed the topics proposed for analysis. Focus groups included open questions and exercises in the case of focus groups with children.

The authors emphasised that labour migration of parents influences stay-behind children, their state of mind and their socialisation process. The influences can be both positive and negative. One of the major challenges that stay-behind children encounter is the distortion of their socialisation process that can lead to the formation of a morally distorted personality, to conflicts of stay-behind children with the norms and values in the society and to deviant behaviours.

The authors pointed out that families should prepare children for life as a couple, to prepare them to be good members of their future families. If one or both parents are absent, it becomes difficult to achieve socialisation as a family member, to transmit to stay-behind children models of organising life as a couple, examples of relationships between spouses in the family, examples of resolving family conflicts, etc. This problem is mitigated if stay-behind children are left with their grandparents, who have a complete family, or in the custody of other people, also with a complete family. So, the socialisation as a family member of

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the children left at home is partially compromised because they do not have the possibility to directly observe the relationships and communication between their parents.

In the Republic of Moldova, traditionally, many grandparents help parents to raise and educate their children. That is why, when parents are working abroad, many children stay at home with their grandparents. Grandparents contribute to the socialisation of their grandchildren, but the differences in age and mentality create difficulties, sometimes quite great. Certain generational problems arise. For a successful socialisation, not only a good communication is needed but also a good understanding between the participants in this process.

The research reveals some cases in which parents try to compensate their absence with money, but the results of this action are not always the most successful. Some children start hating money because it ruined their childhood. The migration can generate negative psycho-emotional impact on stay-behind children. This, in turn, can negatively influence the socialisation process. A favourable psycho-emotional state is indispensable for achieving a qualitative instructional-didactic process, for successful integration in various collectives.

As a conclusion, the authors stated that the socialisation process of stay-behind children faces several challenges. The consequences of difficulties of the process of socialisation of stay-behind children will be felt over time in the society and they will not be positive. The knowledge of these challenges and of their causes can contribute to establishing the directions and mechanisms for the realisation of the public policy that must determine the ways of solving stay-behind children's social problems. The article pointed out several aspects related to the role of the local public administration in the Republic of Moldova in solving the problems faced by children left behind by labour migration. The authorities in many cases cannot intervene with various measures, because there are no tools to compel parents to inform the authorities.

1.5.2 Adjusting to change: school-related practices and perceptions in Moldovan and Ukrainian transnational families

<https://doi.org/10.24193/RJPS.2023.1.02>

Daniela ANGI

The article discusses parents' and children's perspectives on the challenges that parental migration generates for children's school performance and activities, with a focus on transnational families from the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. The study is based on interviews and focus-groups with children, migrant parents and parents who stayed at home to look after the young ones.

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By involving the temporary absence of one or both parents, labour migration can complicate the circumstances that enable children to follow a straightforward school trajectory. In the narratives analysed in this study, steadiness of school performance emerges as the prevailing description outlined by children and parents alike. Many parents declare themselves satisfied with their children's school results and appreciate their perseverance. The stability of results is enabled, according to some respondents, by children's own effort and diligence, while other informants stress parental monitoring and assistance as determining factors. However, declining results are also reported, both in contexts where children live without both their parents and in those where one parent stayed at home. What the two contexts seem to share above all is the fact that separation-related distress (resulting in children's decreased focus and motivation) can act as a cause for declining performance. Children looked after by caregivers other than parents also link their school difficulties with the absence of parental monitoring of school tasks and with not having someone to ask questions when needed. The intrinsic specificity of caregiving arrangements where no parent is present generates particular concerns about monitoring for parents, who attempt to compensate for their physical absence through regular communication with their children and with children's teachers. In contrast, supervision of children fulfilling their school-tasks and contact with schools are less challenging for families where one parent stayed at home. Mothers stand out as the primary performers of multiple types of educational involvement: keeping track of children's school progress, assisting with homework, attending meetings organised in school. While these are framed by respondents as *de facto* roles that mothers fulfil in relation to their children, gender-based delineations are also referred to from the perspective of normative expectations. Thus, fathers' departure is believed to have a potentially detrimental effect on children's discipline, for mothers are expected—by children and adults alike—to be less able to act as an effective authority figure. Conversely, representations of mother-figures tend to emphasise the nurturing qualities in relation to their children. However, one can retrieve in children's recollections references to fathers being an important source of encouragement and praise, as well as instances where father's absence is perceived to affect children's self-esteem. In their turn, migrant mothers, while attempting to stay involved from afar in their children's school-lives, acknowledge fathers' efforts back home to fulfil their duties in relation to youngsters' education.

The results highlighted in the study are nevertheless to be treated with cautiousness in terms of possibility to generalise the findings to all instances of parental migration; it is highly possible that many contexts where children are left at home by one or both parents are less conducive to favourable circumstances with respect to children's education.

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1.5.3 Specific needs of children left behind
by labour migration in the Republic of Moldova
<https://doi.org/10.24193/RJPS.2023.1.03>

Dorin VACULOVSCI

International labour migration from the Republic of Moldova, which registered a new intensification after the COVID-19 pandemic, caused new phenomena generating social risks, including the expansion of the number of transnational families.

It should be noted that during the last years international labour migration from the Republic of Moldova has reached an impressive level.

For the Republic of Moldova, international labour migration can be considered, in general, a beneficial phenomenon that has ensured a perspective of sustainable development. It contributed to the increase of incomes and the well-being of the population, to the reduction of the poverty level, while the foreign exchange resources entered into the country from abroad ensured economic growth, stability of the national currency, as well as a change in the consumption pattern of the population, characteristic of a standard of better life.

However, international labour migration from the Republic of Moldova has also produced new phenomena generating social risks, including the expansion of the number of transnational families. Currently, in the context of globalisation processes and the increase in the scale of migration, the phenomenon of transnational families is becoming a common global tendency, characteristic of practically any country, which does not necessarily cause serious social risks.

However, for the Republic of Moldova this phenomenon has become a negative one, which has led to demographic imbalances (accelerated ageing of the population²), to the increase in divorce, and to the decrease in the birth rate³, as well as to the problem of children left without care following the migration of the work-age.

The expansion of the number of transnational families caused by labour migration, as well as the problem of children left without care, constitute real challenges for social cohesion at the community level, as well as for the sustainability of the family institution in the Republic of Moldova. It should be noted that migration affects, first of all, the family balance, which has a strong impact on the psycho-emotional balance of children, husbands or wives who have gone abroad to support themselves and their families, as well as husbands and wives who remain home.

The phenomenon of transnational families and the problem of children left behind by labour migration are already known in the Republic of Moldova since the beginning of the 2000s, when international labour migration registered a strong intensification. During that period, civil society, the mass media, international organisations concerned with the

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issue of child protection and the phenomenon of migration alerted society and public authorities, indicating the consequences and social risks that these phenomena can generate. Several researches and studies were initiated, as a result of which the public authorities developed various policies and intervention tools in the field.

Policy documents were also developed in the field, such as the Child Protection Strategy for the years 2014–2020 (Decision of the Government No. 434 of 10-06-2014). The normative framework was perfected by the launch of Law no. 140 of 14.06.2013 "Regarding the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents" (Law no. 140 of 14.06.2013), several social services provided at community level by social workers were developed, school psychologists or social pedagogues, civil society representatives, etc. The most effective management of the problem of children left without care as a result of labour migration becomes increasingly important as international labour migration, respectively, the expansion of transnational families becomes more and more extensive. Currently, due to the fact that the issue has become so acute, central and local public authorities have started to implement a practice of monitoring children separated from their parents following migration.

The purpose of this article is to analyse the situation of children left behind by labour migration, highlighting the challenges they face, as well as the specific needs of this social group. Also, the normative framework regarding guardianship, conservatorship and custody as an official and unofficial measure for the protection of children separated from their parents, the attitude of social actors (local public administration, social workers, civil society, etc.) towards the practices is also reviewed.

The following can be mentioned as conclusions of the article:

Although international labour migration from the Republic of Moldova had a fairly beneficial impact on increasing the population's well-being and combating poverty, it also generated certain social risks, including the expansion of the number of transnational families and the problem of children left without care as a result of migration.

The most widespread problems and needs related to the issue of children left behind by labour migration are not so much material, but social and behavioural, such as children's self-isolation, the feeling of loneliness, anxiety, emotional deprivation, etc.

The central and local public authorities in the Republic of Moldova are aware of the risks of international labour migration and try to react promptly to overcome them, either by adapting the regulatory framework, by promoting coherent and efficient public policies, or by developing new social services intended for social groups affected by migration. In the situation where the public authorities do not deal with the new problems and needs related to children left behind by migration, the following are welcome:

- The development at local level, especially in rural localities, of qualified psychological services for children left behind by migration. These services can be provided, including, by representatives of civil society (NGOs, volunteers, etc.);

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- Increasing the social status of community social workers, which will generate a greater motivation for them in overcoming social risks related to labour migration;
- The expansion and development of civil society institutions at the local level, especially in rural areas (NGOs, volunteers, etc.), which could have a real impact in meeting the needs of children left behind by migration, including overcoming any social risks related to migration for work;
- The development of a well-functioning close cooperation between the representatives of the local public authorities and the civil society structures, in overcoming the problems related to the children left behind by migration. NGOs, being more skilled and flexible, are much more effective in overcoming the problems related to children left behind in migration and meeting the needs of this group of children;
- The organisation of systematic research related to children left behind by migration necessary to improve both the legislative framework and the methods of intervention by public authorities.

1.5.4 Romanian and Moldovan Migrant Families between National and Transnational Welfare Policies

<https://doi.org/10.24193/RJPS.2023.1.04>

Mara BIROU
Iulia HOSSU

The phenomenon of transnational families is one of the problems that postmodern Romania is facing, and the reaction of the state through social policies, should bring a range of possible solutions by granting rights, services, measures and assistance for those who are left at home (Voicu 2019). The case of Moldova is quite similar to that of Romania. According to the CER-103 survey (Children at risk and children separated from their parents) out of the total number of 34,107 children registered by local public authorities as separated from their parents, 29,186 were children with one or both parents temporarily working abroad (CASTLE Opening Report 2022, 48).

In this context, there is a need to analyse how the states respond to new social realities: the increase in the number of transnational families, the increased number of children living apart from their parents for shorter or longer periods of time etc. This study is carried out on the basis of the data collected within the action project 'Children left behind by labour migration – Support of Moldovan and Ukrainian transnational families in the EU' (CASTLE) by the Center for the Study of Transnational Families. Based on a set of interviews with key stakeholders collected in 2022 both in Romania and the Republic of

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Moldova, the article highlights the reality of today's national social policies in the two states and associates the measures of public authorities and NGOs with their tendency to propose transnational welfare practices.

The government and local public authorities of Romania and Republic of Moldova have long recognized the need for enhanced measures to protect CLB whose parents have gone abroad to work. However, the efficient management of this phenomenon becomes more and more important in the situation when, amidst the background of globalisation processes, the migratory phenomenon will register an even greater intensity, and the given phenomenon - transnational families and CLB will become more widespread and will acquire new forms of manifestation that can generate new social risks.

Findings:

- Most respondents believe that Romania has legislation designed to provide a support framework for families who are in a position to leave their children at home when they go to work abroad. In Moldova, the representatives of the local public authorities consider that this framework allows them to effectively exercise their competencies in relation to the phenomenon of transnational families. Despite the fact there is legislation in force, some of the stakeholders have doubts about how it is actually applied on the ground and some respondents point to the existence of a certain degree of corruption, the use of relationships, which often prevent the application of the law;
- Collecting data at the local level on children with parents across borders is one of the logistical challenges the authorities face in both countries. The law assigns the county social assistance departments the responsibility to collect data from all town halls that request data from local schools. Because of poor cooperation, there are gaps in the databases that are later sent to the national authority. Representatives of public authorities almost unanimously mention the need for a common database to centralize information on CLB;
- The collaboration and partnerships of public authorities with non- governmental organisations in order to improve the quality and efficiency of social services for vulnerable groups are increasingly visible in recent years both in Romania and Moldova. Support programs for children left at home have become a common objective on the agenda of state entities and non-governmental organisations;
- With national policies relatively lacking in specifically targeting migration, Romania and Moldova are lagging behind in the development of the idea of welfare practices across borders. The tendency of public entities to plead for possible agreements, communication, monitoring and support relations between states is found in our results.

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Recommendations:

- An international database that can be accessed by all states and bodies empowered to provide support to children left at home;
- The possibility for the national authorities to propose and apply supporting legislative frameworks that facilitate the departure of parents to work abroad with minor children;
- Local support groups and the international facilitation of communication and the relationship of both these groups and the families with the local authorities in the country/region of destination.

1.5.5 Participatory research and social action with adolescents concerning transnational families

<https://doi.org/10.24193/RJPS.2023.1.05>

Éva LÁSZLÓ
Cristina TRIBOI

Social community action initiatives for adolescents and children can promote civic involvement, self-efficacy, and positive youth development. Children who are disempowered by their age and dependence on adults may use social activism projects to improve or ameliorate social and community concerns (Torres-Harding *et al.* 2018; Willson *et al.* 2007) and contribute to the well-being and resilience of themselves and their peers.

One group for which social activism programmes are considered necessary and useful is the group of children from transnational families. The prolonged physical distance of parents is one of the challenges of childhood.

Although changes such as increased autonomy, independence and responsibility (Ducu *et al.* 2023; Cheianu-Andrei 2023) have been identified for children who stay at home, and a number of risky consequences for child well-being are also identified. The primary vulnerabilities of children related to parental migration lie in emotional well-being and associated challenges, such as deficiency in feelings of security, attachment, and safety, leading to emotional deprivation, loneliness, anxiety, depression, higher levels of responsibility, protection of parents, guilt, lower levels of social trust, and lower levels of social trust. Other major issues include health and learning difficulties, trouble with peers, and problematic behaviours (Cheianu-Andrei 2023; Turcan 2023; Wang *et al.* 2022; Pfeiffer 2019; Jenaro 2015).

Research indicates a moderating influence of resilience on the association between childhood adverse life events and mental health issues. Resilience theory emphasises

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adopting a strengths- based approach when designing preventative treatments, which is considered a promising approach in the case of children left behind to prevent the harmful effects of parents missing (Lee *et al.* 2019; Wang *et al.* 2015).

Children left behind have lower levels of psychological resilience, more fragile parent-child communication, and shallower resources compared to their peers whose parents did not go to work as messengers. Harmonious relationships with parents, supportive friends, and caring teachers are found to be supportive factors in studies. School belonging, supportive relationships with peers, and caring teachers positively impact the mental well-being of children left behind.

Trusting relationships with caregivers and neighbourhood social cohesion are well predicted for subjective well-being (Wang 2023; Chai *et al.* 2018).

Participatory action research and art-based community intervention with adolescents are promising methods to promote the development and well-being of young people and children. Children's participation can give researchers more direct access to information about their perspectives, leading to new insights that add to and improve research findings. Participatory action can enhance civic participation, self-confidence, and positive development, and empower children to address social and community issues that affect them (László *et al.* 2023; Lee *et al.* 2019; Ozer 2016; Raanaas 2020).

The current article focuses on presenting the outcomes of the YouCreate participatory action research model from the Republic of Moldova, developed by Terre des Hommes Moldova and the International Institute for Child Rights and Development and carried out by Terre des Hommes Moldova and delivered as part of the Castle project, as a promising method of involving young people in adolescent-led projects aimed at social change. At the centre of this programme is an empowerment intervention that provides adolescents from transnational families with opportunities for civic engagement with other young people in addressing issues of common concern in their schools and communities to improve the quality of life of children and young people whose parents are working abroad.

YouCreate trains young leaders to guide their peers in participatory 'Art Actions', which are arts- based activities designed to address issues important to young people in their community.

Teenage leaders returning to their communities formed local initiative teams, inviting teens aged 14–18 interested in improving the quality of life of transnational families and community action.

In five localities, 59 adolescents, guided by 10 allied adults, formed teams that implemented activities through YouCreate.

The teams worked with school communities and the whole local community to explore the situation regarding the phenomenon of adults leaving for work. They evaluated the answers they received and discussed them with their teachers. After analysing local resources, they chose creative intervention activities through art and developed detailed action plans.

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The aim was to improve relationships, particularly between children and adults. One team provided concrete support to parents and children in maintaining relationships using technological resources by organising training for younger children to develop digital skills.

Encouraging children and parents to create digital visuals and present them together facilitated the practice and use of digital skills by both children and adults.

Three of the five teams organised meetings with parents, carers, representatives of local child protection authorities and other community members to raise awareness of the needs of children left at home. The 19 activities involved 267 pupils, 30 psychologists and teachers, and 118 parents and carers. Exhibitions, Power Point presentations, and videos were produced and disseminated in open and closed social networking groups. The cumulative presentation of the results was made at an international conference in Chisinau with the participation of representatives of local and national authorities responsible for children's welfare and the academic world.

Results: The YouCreate programme has had a significant impact on young leaders, resulting in increased knowledge about the phenomenon, a more empathic approach, and the ability to offer support to children left at home. Participation in the program has made participants feel useful and contributing to change, as well as creating new relationships with others who are interested in similar topics. Peer-to-peer relationships are also important, as younger children are better open to teenagers than adults, especially if they have had similar experiences.

The YouCreate Castle community-art actions have positively impacted adolescent-adult relationships, also.

Young respondents believe that youth social action using artistic methods can act as an ice-breaker in schools and housing communities, leading to direct and concrete discussions, debates, and strategies to improve the well-being of children in transnational families. Participatory action research creates a friendly, supportive atmosphere in which opinions can be expressed, and experiences and feelings can be shared without labelling or blaming, which helps to facilitate community cohesion.

The YouCreate methodology provided many with the opportunity to speak openly with their parents about their experiences of physical distance between them, leading to intense emotions and positive reactions. Sharing the results with colleagues, children, and adults who contributed to the project has also been beneficial.

Reducing the harmful effects of parental absence, strengthening supportive factors, and improving resilience should be a priority for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. The presence of a caring adult is critical for children to successfully cope with challenges. The adult-child relationship is supportive when the adult can effectively treat the child or adolescent as a partner, listen, and provide concrete support.

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Conclusion: YouCreate is a promising program to enhance the well-being of left-behind children and their environment. The use of artistic methods and joint artwork creation helps create a family atmosphere in the team and community. The empowerment-based, resilience-focused methodology helps teenagers develop leadership, organisational, advocacy, and social skills.

The results of the project show that resilience factors, such as healthy self-expression, age-appropriate care, family, school, and neighbourhood care, moderate but do not replace the absence of parents. Awareness of this helps set realistic expectations and create an environment where children can express painful or ambivalent feelings.

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2. Country Results: Ukraine

2.1 Status and observance of the children's rights in the families of labour migrants in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war

Note. The article was submitted to the “Intersections.EEJSP”, but still is under the review and not published yet.

Tetiana BONDAR
Oleksii HANIUKOV

The article presents the main results of the comprehensive research (desk study and in-depth interviews with experts, in-depth interviews and focus group interviews with labour migrants and their children) of the war's impact on the situation of labour migrants from transnational families and the observance of their children's rights. The article contains an analysis of the main reasons and circumstances for labour migration, the impact of labour migration on the daily life of labour migrant families and the main problems of childcare. The most common problems in communications and relationships are considered and analysed, and the current needs of transnational families of labour migrants are determined. It is noted that labour migrants' awareness of legislation is fragmentary and incomplete, and the vision of their future and their children's future is very uncertain.

Background: According to the World Migration Report, Ukraine ranks 8th in the list of countries whose citizens go to work abroad, with an indicator of 5.5–6 million people. With the beginning of Russia's armed aggression, both Ukraine and other countries obtained new challenges, in particular regarding labour migration in wartime conditions, namely possible changes in labour migration patterns in wartime conditions among adults and their impact on compliance with the protection of children's rights. Labour migration of one or both parents has a negative impact on ensuring the rights of their children. Situation with the protection of children's rights has become even more complicated, as restrictions imposed by martial law often stand in the way of the plans of labour migrants, disrupting established communication and transport schemes, hindering family reunification and minimising the positive upbringing influence of parents.

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Main results:

- Employment of one or more family members abroad often results in breaking of traditional ties, alienation, various misunderstandings and even lawsuits.
- Staying abroad often leads to destruction, “freezing” of ties with the social environment in Ukraine.
- Absence of one of the parents for a long time also leads to certain detachment of children, perception of the absent parent as almost a stranger to them, destruction of trusting relationships.
- Parents often decide to move to another country without discussing it with a child.
- Many children have been in the conditional status of “child of labour migrant” for many years and do not imagine their life any other way.
- Prolonged absence of one of the parents leads to the emergence of the child’s emotional disorders, permanent longing, to numerous everyday problems, difficulties in learning at school.
- Adolescent’s traditional needs are often left unsatisfied, questions remain unanswered.
- Some children of labour migrants who are older teenagers are left alone with adult problems and are forced to overcome them on their own.
- With the departure of even one parent abroad, the child receives less attention and the burden on the parent remaining in Ukraine increases.

2.2 External migration of Ukrainians before and after full-scale aggression (comparative analysis)

<https://doi.org/10.15407/socium2023.01.032>

Tetiana BONDAR
Oleksii HANIUKOV

The article compares external migration features before and after the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The authors analysed the main reasons and circumstances of migration in each period, the impact of migration on the daily life of migrants, the realisation of the right to work, living conditions, the situation in communities and communities in which migrants live, and the attitude towards them. The problems of caring for children in migrant families and the peculiarities of realising children’s right to education are considered. The most common issues that arise in communications and relationships in migrant families are analysed. Recommendations are offered for improving the situation of migrants, realising their needs and interests, and ensuring compliance with their rights and that of their children. The authors compare features of

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external migration before the beginning of 2022 and with the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Russia into Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and reveal the common features and differences between these two stages of migration. The main reasons and circumstances of external migration in the pre-war period and after the full-scale invasion are determined. It is noted that before the beginning of the armed aggression of Russia, the departure of Ukrainians abroad had clearly defined signs of labour migration, and with the beginning of the war, the main argument in favour of leaving Ukraine became the desire to ensure security for themselves and their children. Three stages of the migration process are distinguished and characterised: the stage of relocation (evacuation), the stage of adaptation and the stage of integration. The authors analyse the leading causes and circumstances of migration in each period, the impact of migration on the daily life of migrants, the realisation of the right to work, living conditions, access to medical services, the situation in communities and communities in which migrants live, and attitudes towards them. Approaches to the segmentation of migrants are proposed depending on the circumstances of their departure from Ukraine, family status and the situation in the host countries. The peculiarities of the employment of Ukrainians abroad in the pre-war period and after the beginning of the war are given and the geographical, professional, gender and other parameters of labour activity of migrants are analysed. The specifics of the education and upbringing of migrant children, the peculiarities of children's right to education were analysed, the problems of education, interpersonal relations between different generations of migrants, the impact of migration on the psychological state of children and their socialisation processes were considered. The level of information and legal awareness of migrants was studied, and the lack of systematic knowledge of Ukrainian and foreign legislation regulating migration was recorded among many migrants. A list of the most urgent needs of migrants and their family members is given. Typical differences between migrants and their family members in their perception and planning of their future are analysed. Recommendations are offered for improving the situation of migrants, realising their needs and interests, and ensuring compliance with their rights and that of their children.

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3.1 The role of public authorities of the Republic of Moldova in supporting transnational families and children left behind by labour migration

<https://doi.org/10.15407/socium2023.01.074>

Dorin VACULOVSCI

The article **The role of public authorities of the Republic of Moldova in supporting transnational families and children left behind by labour migration** is dedicated to the analysis of the role of local and central public authorities in overcoming the problem of children left behind by labour migration. The article is based on the analysis of the results of a sociological study that reflects the impact of parents' work migration on the children left behind.

Generally, labour migration from the Republic of Moldova, which registers a new intensification after the COVID-19 pandemic, increased the number of transnational families and children left behind. During the last 20 years, international labour migration from the Republic of Moldova has reached an impressive level. Thus, in 2017, according to the Labor Force Survey, the number of persons who went abroad in search of a job was about 319 thousand or about 18% of the inactive population aged 15 and over. Men constituted 66.4%, while women, respectively 33.6% of the total number of migrants. The share of people who left rural areas was 70.5%. Less official sources, estimate the extent of labour migration from the Republic of Moldova at 1 million people.

It should be mentioned that the problems of transnational families and children left behind as a result of labour migration were already known in the Republic of Moldova. Several field studies and researches have been dedicated to this issue, and public authorities have developed policies and intervention tools to manage this problem as efficiently as possible.

Various strategic documents were developed, such as the *Child Protection Strategy for the years 2014–2020*, the normative framework was perfected by the launch of the *Law no. 140 of 14.06.2013 "Regarding the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents"*, several social services provided at the community level by social

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workers, school psychologists, etc. have been developed. The process of migration becomes more and more intense, especially taking into account the globalisation that can generate new problems for transnational families and children left behind. This requires a more efficient management and in-depth studies of migration-related issues to prevent new social risks.

In general, contemporary labour migration from the Republic of Moldova that has entered the next phase of maturity can be seen as a challenge for social cohesion at the community level, as well as for the integrity of the family institution. At the same time, the problem of transnational families and children left behind is becoming more widespread throughout the world.

In 2021, according to the CER-103 survey (Children at risk and children separated from their parents) managed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, the total number of children separated from their parents registered by local public authorities was 34,107 children, of which 24,763 children are from rural area. Of this number of children, 29,186 are children whose both parents/one parent is temporarily abroad, of which 21,684 are from rural areas.

It should be mentioned that migration affects, first of all, the family balance, which has a strong impact on the psychological balance of children and their parents, those who stayed at home and those who went abroad to provide for themselves and their families. One of the problems of transnational families is that the members of the families become “distant” from each other, because they can no longer see each other, they can no longer hear each other and they can no longer feel each other.

This article is focused on reflecting opinions of the representatives of the central and local public authorities participating in the CASTLE research project (mayors, social workers, specialists of institutions that deal directly with labour migration from the Republic of Moldova, etc.) regarding transnational families and children left behind. It is mainly about their attitude towards the normative framework and policies regarding guardianship, as an official and unofficial measure of child care and protection; the respondents' attitude towards the existing practices regarding parental responsibilities and official and unofficial guardianship within the system of child care and protection; the challenges faced by child protection authorities.

As conclusions, it can be mentioned that labour migration from the Republic of Moldova has solved many problems related to well-being and combating poverty. However, it also caused a number of problems, including the problem of transnational families and children left without care due to migration which became more and more pressing, taking on new forms of manifestation. Under the conditions of globalisation processes, over the years the picture of migration from the Republic of Moldova changes, so that migration enters a new phase of maturity. If initially people left with the idea that they would return after solving their material problems, now the tendency to emigrate with the whole family

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is becoming more and more evident. However, against the background of the intensification of migration processes, the number of transnational families, whose children are left without care as a result of labour migration, is growing rapidly. Many of the children from transnational families, in which one or both parents have left, suffer from their absence, cannot fully integrate into social networks, face various social problems, which requires prompt and effective intervention by public authorities. However, the consequences of this situation will already be felt, when it will be too late and then it is not known if it will be possible to make up for what was omitted in time. Central and local public authorities in the Republic of Moldova are aware of the problem of transnational families and children left without care due to labour migration and react effectively to all challenges related to the problem in question either by adapting the legal framework or by developing new public policies and social services .

The article comes with a series of conclusions and recommendations related to minimising the negative effects of the situation of transnational families and children left behind whose parents are working abroad, including the improvement of the legal framework, policies, procedures and practices in the field of official guardianship and unofficial in the child care and protection system, the development of social services necessary to prevent these negative effects.

3.2 The impact of labour migration from the Republic of Moldova on children left behind (perspectives from parents and caregivers)

<https://doi.org/10.15407/socium2023.01.088>

Galina ȚURCAN

In the article **The Impact of Labor Migration from the Republic of Moldova on Children Left Behind (Perspectives from Parents and Caregivers)** presents the results of a sociological study that reflects the impact produced by the labour migration of parents from the Republic of Moldova on left-behind children seen from the perspective of adults—migrant parents, stay-behind parents, and caregivers.

In December 2021 and January 2022, during the CASTLE (Children Left Behind by Labour Migration: Supporting Moldovan and Ukrainian Transnational Families in the EU) project, in the Republic of Moldova, 36 adults (labour migrant parents stay behind parents and caregivers) were interviewed. And during April 2022, 13 migrant parents and parents who stay home with their children participated in the focus group discussions.

Sociological research has primarily focused on the following aspects: the general context of labour migration; relations with the local public administration; caring for left-behind

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children; the influence of labour migration on the physical health and psycho-emotional state of children; the influence of labour migration on academic success, kindergarten activities, and children's social integration; communication between migrant parents and left behind children; the influence of labour migration on the well-being of transnational families and the material support given to children; plans for the future and expectations from the state.

The author states that among the main problems faced by children left at home and other members of transnational families, the following can be mentioned: communication deficiencies, the difficulties of remote education of children, the negative influence of migration on the psycho-emotional status of left-behind children, and the difficulties of left behind children's socialisation. Parents and caregivers report other problems, such as communication deficiencies with local public administrations, communication problems within the community, and problems related to caring for children left at home. The absence for an extended period of one or both parents can cause inadequate care and support for left-behind children and many other problems. The study shows that some parents are very dissatisfied with what the state does for them. Adults (parents and caregivers) believe that the state is mainly to blame because the citizens are forced to leave. Even if there are specific positive influences on left-behind children and transnational families in general, such as material well-being, the negative influences of migration prevail.

The article revealed that the impact of parental labour migration on children left at home is high. Members of national families, especially children, face a multitude of problems. Adults (parents and caregivers) are generally aware of the risks of migration and try to make efforts to minimise them and make children's lives better and more manageable.

In the article it is specified that considering the situation in the Republic of Moldova, the degree of development of the country's economy, and especially the tensions in the world, leaving for work abroad will not stop shortly. Moreover, as a result, many parents will face the same problem—either they go abroad to work and leave their children at home or stay home but have no financial resources to support their children.

The article concludes that the impact of the labour migration of parents on left-behind children is vital.

There are significant deficiencies in communication and collaboration between parents, caregivers, and representatives of local public authorities. This hinders the resolution of problems faced by members of transnational families. Therefore, the government and civil society must make joint efforts to support both migrant parents and left-behind children.

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3.3 Children's opinion about the migration of their parents (the case of the Republic of Moldova)

<https://doi.org/10.15407/socium2023.01.100>

Diana CHEIANU-ANDREI

The article reports the problem of children left behind by labour migration in the opinion of children. The Republic of Moldova continues to be one of the countries significantly affected by migration. Many people perceive this phenomenon as a chance to support their families, including giving their children a better education, as a way to assert themselves. The remittances of Moldovan migrants constitute an essential share in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – 15.1% in 2020, Moldova being in the top 10 countries with the most remittances in GDP in Europe and Central Asia (1.6 million USD). Labour migration abroad has positive and negative consequences in various fields—economic, social and political, including the demographic situation. However, the most significant impact is on nuclear and extended family members.

The CASTLE research on the situation of needy children and children left behind aimed to highlight the specific needs of children left behind after migration from the Republic of Moldova in the opinion of adults (parents, caregivers), as well as children. The different dimensions of children's well-being were empirically evaluated using qualitative research within the project. Migration was found not to be associated with negative outcomes for children's well-being in any of the dimensions analysed. However, children living in returned migrant households achieve higher rates of well-being in specific dimensions such as emotional health and material well-being. The specific needs of children and elderly left behind due to migration elucidates the psychological, social and economic impact of migration on children and older adults, revealing the implications for the family, community and society at large. Children and elderly people explain the migration of family members as being determined by the intention to escape poverty or improve their living conditions, the lack of employment opportunities, the inability to ensure children's further education, etc. Nationally representative research on migration and children's health in Moldova and Georgia highlights that children of migrants have overall positive or no different health compared to children from non-migrant households. However, significant gender differences are found in both countries. Often, girls from Moldova and Georgia are more at risk of poorer health when living transnationally. These results add nuance to an area of research that has mainly emphasised negative outcomes for children in transnational care. The large number of Moldovan migrants working abroad, including children left without parental care due to migration, has led the government to adopt specific legislative measures to minimise the negative effects of parental migration on children. Consequently,

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Law no. 140 on the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents¹, which requires the recording, monitoring and protection of children without parental care due to migration.

The parents' perception of the migration of the children left behind depends on several factors: who left, the age of the children left behind, the period of migration of the parents, the person who takes care of the children due to migration, friends and their support. Research data attests to the positive impact on children's well-being; however, children are affected psychologically. The psychological impact on children left behind is characterised by loneliness, lack of affection and emotional deprivation, complemented by early maturity and anxiety. Children are frustrated not only because they cannot receive affection, but also because they have to give it. These emotional disadvantages leave an imprint on the child's psychological development, influencing self-perception and preventing social integration and the assimilation of social roles. The child's communication with his parents through technical means reduces the effects of emotional deprivation.

The problems and difficulties that children must face make them think of their values and future. Thus, the family and its integrity are at the top of their priorities.

The research reveals that peers and sometimes teachers do not understand children left behind. Support networks for these children are less developed and prove the necessity to undertake new measures within the educational institution in order to reduce the negative impact of migration on children: (i) compulsory introduction of psychological services that would help both children with migrant parents and children that have parents in Moldova, to provide them necessary support; (ii) organising social activities to reduce loneliness and Children's opinion about the migration of their parents increase the level of communication; (iii) working out and disseminating various information sources for teachers and other professionals; etc.

Keeping a record, monitoring, and protecting children left behind due to migration by social workers, teachers, etc., even though it was stipulated by Law No. 140 in 2013, still represents a challenge. Also, the forms of support and social services provided to children are less developed and limited to some civil society organisation's initiatives.

Finally, improving communication between parents and children is essential. Parents should be guided to be more sensitive to the subjects discussed by the children before and after their migration.

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3.4 Labour migration and the phenomenon of transnational families from the Republic of Moldova

<https://doi.org/10.53486/2537-6179.9-1.12>

Dorin VACULOVSKI

The article “Labour migration and the phenomenon of transnational families from the Republic of Moldova” analyses the impact of labour migration from the Republic of Moldova on the situation of transnational families and the children left behind by migration.

The contemporary era can certainly be called an era of migration. In 2020, according to United Nations estimates, international migration reached over 281 million people or 3.6% of the world’s population (IOM, 2022). Although the COVID-19 pandemic, in a way, has reduced the intensity of migration processes, the trend of increasing migration, especially labour migration, continues. The migratory phenomenon is characteristic of practically any state, and migration has become a defining feature of the modern global economy.

Currently, for the Republic of Moldova, considered as the country of origin, the migratory phenomenon, especially labour migration, has become a defining element of economic development. Labour migration processes from the Republic of Moldova have become an important factor in combating poverty and increasing the well-being of the population of the Republic of Moldova. And the economic growth registered by the Republic of Moldova during the last years is precisely due to the remittances of migrant workers who complete the economic circuit of the country.

According to the Labor Force Survey in 2022, the number of people who went abroad for a period of up to one year in search of a job was about 93 thousand people or about 7.5% of the population out of the labour force for 15 years and above (NBS, 2022). However, the cumulative number of labour migrants in the last 25 years from the Republic of Moldova is much higher. Various sources estimate the extent of labour migration from the Republic of Moldova from 400 thousand to one million people (Zwager N., Sințov R. 2014). According to data from the Population Census over 10 years, from 2004 to 2014, the population witnessed a decline caused by labour migration, from 3.3 million people to 2.6 million people NBS Yearbook, 2022. It should be noted that the share of people who left rural areas constitutes about 70% of all migrants (Labor Force Survey, 2022).

Although for the Republic of Moldova the migratory phenomenon has contributed to several beneficial effects, it also generates certain social risks, such as the decline of employment, the ageing of the population, the expansion of the number of transnational families, the problem of children left without care as a result of labour migration. It should be noted that the problem of transnational families is becoming more widespread throughout the world, becoming a global phenomenon.

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The problem of transnational families and children left without care as a result of labour migration is already known in the Republic of Moldova. During the last years, several researches were initiated in the field, and the public authorities, being aware of the seriousness of the problem, developed policies and intervention tools, including the Strategy for the Protection of the Child for the years 2014–2020 (Decision of Government no. 434 of 27.11.2014), the normative framework was perfected by the launch of Law no. 140 of 14.06.2013 “Regarding the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents” (Law no. 140 of 14.06.2013), several social services provided at the community level by the assistants were developed by social workers, school psychologists, etc.

The most effective management of the situation of transnational families becomes more and more important in the situation where, against the background of globalisation processes, labour migration from the Republic of Moldova will register an even greater intensification, and the problem of transnational families and children left without care will become even more widespread and will lead to the emergence of various new social risks.

In this context, current research into the situation of children left without care after migration becomes increasingly important. The purpose of the given article is to analyse the impact of labour migration on the expansion of the phenomenon of transnational families and the situation of children left without care following migration from the Republic of Moldova, to highlight the problems they face, as well as the specific needs of this social group.

Labour migration from the Republic of Moldova had a rather beneficial impact on the economic and social development of the Republic of Moldova. By increasing the volume of remittances, international labour migration has led to an increase in the well-being of the population and the fight against poverty.

At the same time, labour migration has also generated a series of social risks, such as the decline of employment on the labour market, the ageing of the population, the expansion of transnational families, the problem of children left without care as a migration result. The central and local public authorities in the Republic of Moldova are aware of the risks of international labour migration and try to overcome them quite effectively, either by the adaptation of the regulatory framework, or by promoting coherent and efficient public policies, or by developing new public services for affected social groups of migration.

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3.5 Methodological aspects and results of conducting focus group interviews in the study of the opinion of children left behind by labour migration

<https://doi.org/10.53486/2537-6179.9-1.05>

Elena VACULOVSCHI

The article Methodological aspects experience and results of conducting focus group interviews in the study of the opinion of children left behind by labour migration present the experience of conducting focus group interviews with children, carried out within the project Children left behind by labour migration: supporting Moldovan and Ukrainian transnational families in the European Union.

The article was structured in 6 chapters: Introduction, Literature review, Data and Methodology, The organisation and conducting of focus group interviews with children, The analysis of the focus groups' discussion results and Conclusions.

The author emphasised that one of the important characteristics of this technique is its complexity, both by the way it is carried out, but also by the method of achieving the proposed objectives, naturally bringing the participants together in a united group. The focus group technique is focused on the participants' development of pleasure for the discussion, which takes place in a positive climate and develops natural strategies to avoid or reduce communication misunderstandings regarding the discussed topic. A central role in the successful conduct of the discussion within the "focus group" technique as well as in achieving the research objectives belongs to the moderator, who can often be the researcher himself. The moderator is the one who provokes the expression of opinions and directs the discussion. The moderator's difficult task is to provide everything necessary for the interview and to prepare himself.

The author pointed out that in the researches that studies the opinion of children, the focus group technique is welcome, because it provides quite relevant results, due to the fact that children talk to each other and are more open. When the child's discussion with an adult takes place, a subjective barrier appears. Children may be embarrassed by some questions, they may try to say what they were taught by their parents, at school, etc. The focus group technique allows the generation of honest responses in a relatively free discussion among peers. Thus, the moderator (researcher) has the task of creating the necessary atmosphere and guiding the discussion in the necessary direction. In this context, I believe that in the research that adults do with children, those introductory discussions are welcome, which would relax the children and create a correct attitude towards their role in the research.

For developing this article, was analysed literature concerning the subjects of focus group method in research, studies about the situation of migrant people, transnational

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families and the well-being of children left behind by labour migration. Also was studied some articles concerned with the use of focus group discussion methodology.

In order to obtain better qualitative results, the research sought the free expression of the opinion of all respondents participating in the research. This aimed to highlight the

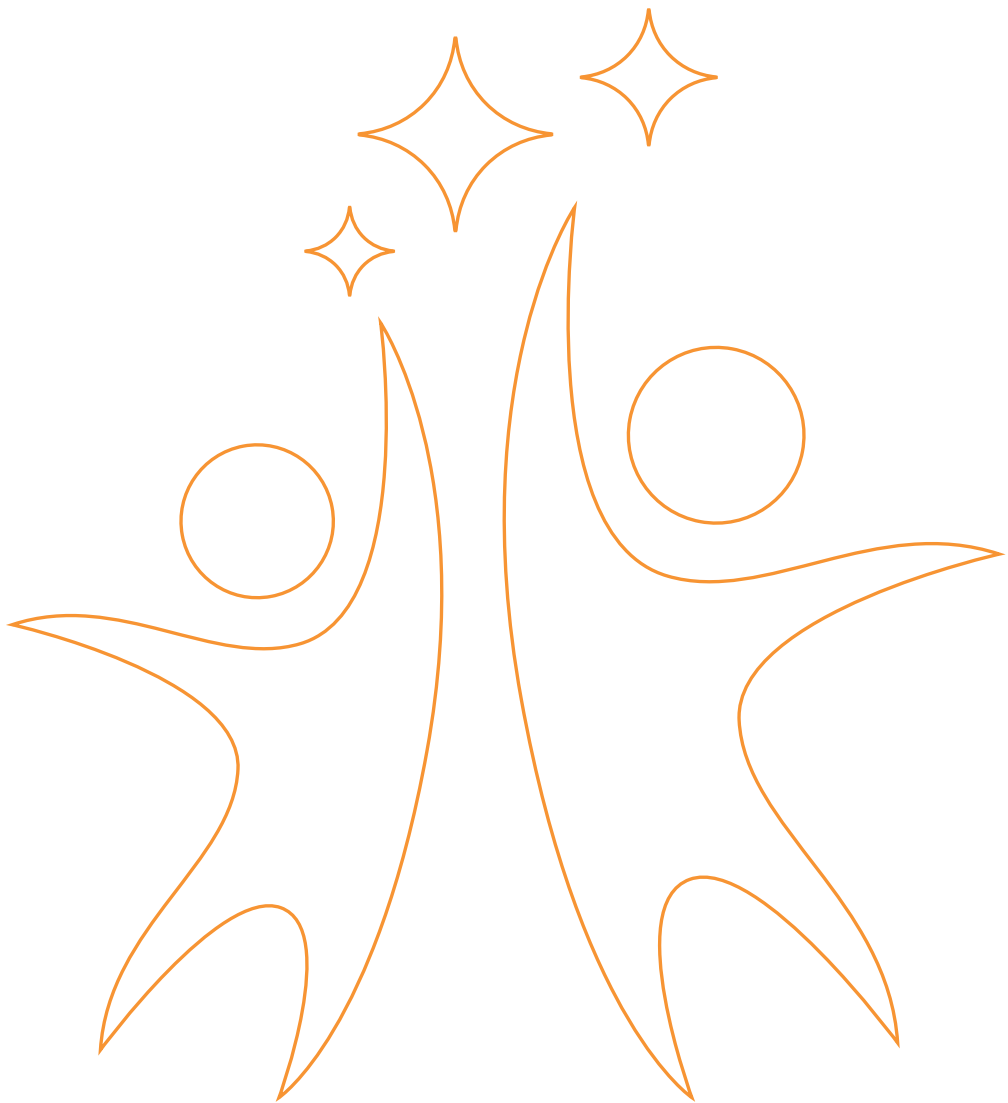
The research reveals some cases of possible negative aspects related to the phenomenon of transnational families and children left without care whose parents are away working abroad. Also, within the research, solutions or intervention methods from the public authorities were sought to overcome the problems faced by transnational families.

The guide for moderation of focus groups with children was structured in 5 modules and included the following topics:

Presentation of the participants and the discussion rules: Module I. *The perception of migration and its impact on transnational families and children left without parental care*; Module II. *Caring for the child after the parents leave*; Module III. *The changes that occur after the parents' migration*; Module IV. *Existing social services in the community*; Module V. *Future perspectives*.

In conclusion, it was mentioned that in focus group research with children it is very important to create an atmosphere of understanding. Especially since this technique allows the generation of honest responses in a relatively free discussion among peers. Children are more honest, and the behavioural stereotypes imposed by society are not yet so strong when using focus groups interviews. The age difference between the moderator (researcher) is a factor that demotivates children to be open in communication. The mature person is perceived by them as a mentor, not as an equal interlocutor. In this context, the moderator has the task not only to manage the existing relationships, but also to create a comfortable environment for the participants in the discussions.

The analysis of results of focus group interviews with children showed that children left at home without parents receive less love and warmth. These children develop and mature faster, they become more serious, more responsible. Directly or indirectly, the children feel responsibility for the situation related to their parents' departure. The majority of children do not expect special actions from the community, they rather want to receive emotional, moral and psychological support from the people around them. And, of course most children believe that it would be best for the parents to take the children with them when they leave, or not to leave at all.



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A5. Action Research in Moldova, Ukraine and Romania

A5.10. Interactive materials about the main findings of the research

A5.7. Dissemination of research reports

A6.2. Policy advice sessions

(A6.2. 10/15 national, regional, and local authorities from Moldova participate in yearly policy advice sessions concerning labour migration)

A7.1. Capacity building for service providers in countries of origin (A7.1. A minimum number of 75 local service providers in countries of origin (Moldova) have participated in online capacity building activities)

A8. Training resources for transnational families

A8.1. Training for TF in countries of origin

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A10. Awareness raising campaign designed using participatory methods

A10.2.4 Campaign materials created (digital art, animations, brochures, etc.) and distributed

A10.3.1 6 Brochures for transnational parents, children left behind due to labour migration, and child protection professionals produced in English, Romanian and Ukrainian and available online

A10.3.2 6 (3MD/3UA) Short news articles are written and shared on social media

A10.3.4 6 campaign videos created. 3 – UA; 3 – MD

A10.3. Campaign on the topic of transnational families of labour migrants

A10.4. Media professionals are sensitised/ trained

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Specific objective 1:

The potentially negative impact of labour migration policies and dynamics on the protection of children in Moldova and Ukraine is understood thanks to solution-oriented research structures.

A5. Action Research in Moldova, Ukraine and Romania

MOLDOVA

Since the project's inception, Tdh Moldova has been actively engaged in providing direct support to the ASEM Research Team. Specifically:

- **Child Co-Researchers:** Tdh Moldova played an active role in the identification and formation of a team of child co-researchers, consisting of five children.
- **Development of Interview Guides:** Tdh Moldova provided direct assistance for the development and validation of interview guides, designed for both children and their parents or caregivers. The interview guide for children was carefully consulted with the team of young co-researchers to ensure its appropriateness and relevance.
- **Capacity Building Workshops:** Between October and November 2021, two capacity-building workshops were conducted in an online format, actively engaging the young co-researchers. These workshops aimed to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to participate effectively in the research process.

Focus Groups with Children: Tdh Moldova also played an active role in identifying and involving children in two focus groups. Specifically, 17 children, whose parents (or a parent) were working abroad, participated as respondents. These children were carefully selected from three different regions of Moldova. The primary goal of all these activities was to familiarise children with the evaluation process and methodology. During these sessions, they gained valuable insights into conducting interviews with their peers, identifying potential challenges, developing strategies to overcome these challenges, and understanding the importance of meeting deadlines and the process for submitting their findings to the

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research team. These workshops were expertly facilitated by members of the research team (ASEM).

Thus, involving children and young people in the research process represented an innovative and empowering experience that equipped them with valuable practical skills for the future. It also positions them as active contributors to society, allowing them to recognize the significance of their opinions.

We have achieved success in integrating children into the research process by:

- Actively identifying child respondents, particularly those with parents working abroad, to provide a diverse perspective;
- Collaborating with child respondents to review and refine the question guide, ensuring it is appropriate and effective for children;
- Entrusting children with the responsibility of conducting interviews with their peers, fostering a more relatable and comfortable environment.

More specifically, following the comprehensive training, young co-researchers were empowered to:

- Clearly articulate the purpose of the interview, emphasising its aim to understand children's experiences, opinions, and potential solutions to various issues;
- Ensure that the interview conversations remain aligned with the research topic, promoting productive and relevant discussions;
- Assist young interviewees in expressing themselves confidently and engaging in deeper reflection on the subjects at hand.
- Employ open-ended questions that encourage thoughtful and comprehensive responses, avoiding simple, one-word answers such as 'Yes', 'No', or 'Maybe', etc.

These observations could be substantiated by the feedback received from the young participants during the interviews conducted, specifically:

{How did you feel during the interview?}

"During the interview I felt a bit nervous, I wanted to hide this from the interviewee to prevent them from experiencing the same emotions. The state of compassion was always there, thinking about my situation, somehow the questions also aroused in me a longing, a lack, but I tried to control my emotions, Usually, I let my emotions run freely, as I am a very emotional person, but I restrained myself to maintain a calm atmosphere."

"It was a nice experience, I felt at ease because I have conducted similar research, and there were no negative aspects."

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{What difficulties did you encounter in organising and conducting the interview?}

“Unfortunately, it was challenging for me to find a person because most of them were unwilling to discuss such a topic. It was also difficult to extract detailed responses from that person; they tended to provide very generalised and brief answers. Apart from that, everything else went well.”

{What would be your suggestions or important things in your vision that need to be communicated/brought to the attention of the Adult Researchers?}

“Putting these interviews in writing may be more comfortable for some individuals, as they may find it uncomfortable to speak directly. Children are very sensitive to this topic, and this might be the reason why they refuse to answer some questions about their parents’ migration.”

“Indeed, children do suffer due to their parents’ absence. Some may appear tough (like the child I interviewed), but deep down, they experience longing and remorse. This ache may not be evident at the moment, but as they grow into adulthood, they carry a profound and enduring wound that is challenging to heal.”

A5.10. Interactive materials about the main findings of the research

Interactive materials summarising the research outcomes have been developed in three languages: Romanian, Ukrainian, and English. The primary aim of these resources is to provide information to a wide audience on the perspectives of children left behind, the experiences of parents working abroad, and the viewpoints of local authorities regarding this critical phenomenon.

These interactive materials are designed for a diverse audience, including community members, stakeholders, policymakers, and anyone interested in understanding the impact of parental migration on children and their communities.

To ensure widespread dissemination and accessibility, the project partners distributed these materials through various channels, including social media platforms. Additionally, the materials were integrated into our ongoing project activities until the project’s conclusion, guaranteeing a continuous and effective dissemination process.

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A5.7. Dissemination of research reports

ROMANIA

To disseminate the opening report, an International Conference was organised in Bucharest, on 7 June 2022, titled “Families without borders in Ukraine and Moldova. Preliminary findings of unique research on transnational families.”

The symposium on the challenges faced by children left behind due to migration brought together a diverse group of participants, including researchers, policymakers, and representatives from Terre des hommes Foundation in Romania, Moldova and Ukraine. The agenda was thoughtfully designed to address critical issues, from research findings to policy recommendations and practical implementations.



The event commenced with insightful opening remarks from key figures:

- Tudor Roșu, Head of Eastern Europe Delegation at Terre des hommes Foundation, set the stage by emphasising the importance of addressing the challenges faced by transnational families in Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine.
- Ahmed Sharmarke, representing ICMPD, provided a broader context, highlighting the significance of international collaboration in addressing migration-related issues.
- Sandra Pralong, PhD, State Adviser at the Presidential Administration, offered a governmental perspective on relations with Romanians abroad, emphasising the need for comprehensive solutions.
- Maria Mădălina Turza, State Counsellor at the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, and Cristina Robu, Counselor at the Department for Romanians Everywhere, provided insights into the Romanian government’s approach to migration-related challenges.
- Viorela Telegdi-Csetri, PhD Habil, the project manager from Babeș-Bolyai University, introduced the academic perspective, underlining the importance of research in shaping effective policies.

Key Points of the Research Report and Policy Recommendations:

- Áron Telegdi-Csetri, PhD, the research manager at Babeș-Bolyai University, presented key insights from the research report, providing a foundation for the discussions that followed.
- The CASTLE research team presented detailed findings and policy recommendations, offering a comprehensive view of the challenges faced by children left behind

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in Moldova and Ukraine. The team included researchers from the Academy for Economic Studies in Moldova, the Ukrainian Institute for Social Research after Olexander Yaremenko, and Babeş-Bolyai University.

- Elena Madan, Director of Terre des hommes Foundation in Moldova, Olga Dombrovska, Deputy Director of Terre des hommes Ukraine, and Laura Sava-Ghica, Deputy Director of Terre des hommes Romania, shared insights on the practical implementation of policy recommendations within their respective regions.

The symposium concluded with a round table discussion involving CASTLE members and authorities from Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine. This engaging session fostered dialogue and collaboration on shaping effective public policies for children left behind by migration.

The symposium provided a platform for diverse perspectives, facilitating a holistic approach to addressing the challenges faced by transnational families and ensuring the well-being of children affected by migration. The discussions underscored the importance of research, collaboration, and informed policy decisions in creating positive outcomes for these vulnerable populations.

Participants received a feedback survey at the end of the conference. The survey had 40 respondents, 36 women and 4 men from which 20 of them with ages above 46 years old, 14 of them aged between 36–45 years old, 4 of them with ages between 25–35 years old. 25 participants from Romania completed the survey and 15 participants from Moldova. 95% were very satisfied and satisfied with the content of the conference.

The second webinar was organised on 6 October 2023, at the beginning of the International Conference “Children left behind. Best Practices of Protection and Challenges – Romania, Ukraine, and the Republic of Moldova.” The academic articles published during the project and presented during the webinar show that the challenges faced by transnational families are multifaceted. The first article, “Asserting children’s rights through the digital practices of transnational families,” delves into the initial findings on family cohesion. This research explores how digital practices influence the assertion of children’s rights within the context of transnational families. In contrast, the study titled “‘Not like everyone else?’ Transnational families’ relationship in their home society—between stigma and dialogue” sheds light on the adversity and distrust surrounding transnational families. It examines the complex dynamics these families encounter in their home societies, navigating a delicate balance between societal stigma and the need for open dialogue. The introduction of “Hybrid Transnational Social Protection” offers a novel perspective, exploring the intersection of local and transnational participation in the social protection nexus for families with stay-behind children. Additionally, a presentation on national public support policies in Romanian and Moldovan migrant families examines the delicate interplay between national and transnational welfare policies. Lastly, the discussion on “Adjusting to change: school-related practices and perceptions in Moldovan and Ukrainian

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transnational families” provides insights into the challenges and adaptations these families undergo within the educational sphere, shedding light on their experiences as they navigate change. Together, these studies contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced issues faced by transnational families, offering valuable insights for policymakers, researchers, and advocates alike.



Specific objective 2:

Legal and policy frameworks impacting labour migration in Moldova and Ukraine are improved based on solid empirical research evidence, including in relation to circular and temporary labour migration.

The legislative framework of the Republic of Moldova was improved in 2023 by Government Decision No. 81 of 22-02-2023. We welcomed this decision, as a result of the fact that this was the first legislative recommendation from Policy brief no 1 made within the Castle project: To refine and promote the law on guardianship and temporary custody.

Improving the legislative framework regarding custody in the Republic of Moldova

We welcome the initiative of the Government of the Republic of Moldova to adopt Government Decision No. 81 of 22-02-2023, approve the framework Regulation regarding the establishment of custody, and ensure the organisation and operation of the guardianship/guardianship service. The document has been Published: 04.07.2023 in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Moldova No. 119-121 art. 259.

The framework regulation regarding the establishment of custody and ensuring the organisation and operation of the guardianship/guardianship service establishes the way of organisation and operation of the guardianship/guardianship service and the procedure for establishing custody over children whose/whose legal representatives/sole legal representative is temporarily in another locality in the country or abroad or cannot fulfil their obligations regarding the child’s upbringing, care and education due to health problems.

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Legal framework regarding Custody in the Republic of Moldova

Custody is a form of temporary protection of the child separated from his parents due to the temporary location of his legal representatives/sole legal representative for a period of more than two months in another locality in the country or abroad or the impossibility of fulfilling the obligations regarding child rearing, care and education for health reasons.

According to statistical data, at the beginning of 2022, there were 28,015 children in the records of the guardianship authorities in Moldova whose legal representatives are temporarily in another place in the country or abroad, of which 10,775 children have been established as a form of temporary protection (9661 children in the extended family and 1114 children in the family of third persons).

The CASTLE Action research highlighted that the often precarious work of migrants (seasonal agricultural work, construction, care in private homes) and short-term employment opportunities sometimes make for insufficient planning of departure and care arrangements for children left at home. Continuity of care is also very important.

The potential advantages brought by this modification include offering a sense of stability, security, and a nurturing environment to these children, safeguarding their best interests as they navigate the complexities of temporary separation from their parents.

– Hotărârea Guvernului nr. 81 din 22.02.2023 pentru aprobarea Regulamentului-cadru cu privire la instituirea custodiei și asigurarea organizării și funcționării Serviciului de tutelă/curatelă.

A6.2. Policy advice sessions

(A6.2. 10/15 national, regional, and local authorities from Moldova participate in yearly policy advice sessions concerning labour migration)

MOLDOVA

The first policy advisory session, addressing child protection professionals, took place in Chisinau. It was attended by 16 representatives from Moldovan public authorities responsible for child protection:

- Ministry of Labor and Social Protection;
- Diaspora Relations Office of the State Chancellery;
- Chisinau Municipal Division for the Protection of Children's Rights;
- Republican Center for Psycho-pedagogical Assistance;
- Social Assistance and Family Protection Departments across various regions (Ștefan-Vodă, Călărași, Dondușeni, Fălești, Ialoveni);
- Representatives from educational institutions in Drochia;
- Academic professionals from the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova.

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This session marked the beginning of our ongoing efforts to engage with relevant authorities, fostering discussions and contributing to well-informed policymaking in the context of labour migration and child protection. In this context, the preliminary results of the Research and Policy Recommendations were presented to the participants.

During the session, participants were divided into working groups, each focusing on different topics. They engaged in an exercise where they placed themselves in the shoes of parents, children, and community actors. The aim was to reflect on the following:

- The positive effects of migration on the situation of transnational family members (children, parents, caregivers);
- The negative effects of migration on the situation of transnational family members (children, parents, caregivers);
- The identification of solutions to mitigate the negative effects while considering the positive aspects, as well as available community/national resources and recommendations provided by the researchers.

As a result of the presentations and discussions within each group, a set of recommendations emerged. These recommendations were further debated in the larger group, comprising all participants. The final recommendations submitted for supporting Transnational Families and specialists providing support to children left behind are as follows:

- The need for a child protection specialist at the community level;
- The need for the development of a training guide/handbook for professionals to enhance their knowledge in areas such as pre-departure preparation, childcare transfer, and legal protection of children left behind;
- The need for the development of a handbook for parents/caregivers to increase their knowledge on topics such as pre-departure preparation, legal protection of children left behind, childcare transfer, transnational communication tools, and psychosocial support.

A subsequent presentation and consultation session on Policy Recommendations 2 & 3 is planned until the end of the project as part of our ongoing activities.

UKRAINE

In September 2022, the initial consultations on Policy Brief 1 were conducted in Ivano-Frankivsk, and this marked a significant step in our collaboration. We were delighted to host 12 dedicated participants representing various communities within the Ivano-Frankivsk region, including Ivano-Frankivsk, Kolomyia, Kalush, Tlumach, Rohatyn, Burshtyn, and Nadvirna. The attendees comprised officials from children’s services, social policy departments, social service centres, and other relevant offices.

In a bid to foster comprehensive discussions, we also invited participants from the “Ukrainian Institute for Social Research” (UISR). These participants included Oleksi

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Ganyukov, PhD, Head of the Department of Socio-Economic Research at UISR, and Hanna Goryacheva, Manager of UISR.

The consultation session proved to be an invaluable opportunity for all participants. We commenced by providing an overview of the CASTLE project, ensuring that everyone had a solid understanding of its objectives. Subsequently, we delved into the contents of Policy Brief 1, discussing its primary findings and conclusions. To enhance our collaborative efforts, we proposed dividing into four groups, each focusing on specific aspects related to the Policy Brief:



- Group 1: Children left behind due to their parents' migration;
- Group 2: The role of public authorities in the context of migration;
- Group 3: The experiences and challenges faced by parents working abroad;
- Group 4: The contributions and perspectives of civil society activists.

In these varied roles, participants engaged in insightful discussions, considering both the positive and negative impacts of labour migration from different angles. Together, we brainstormed potential solutions, aiming to address the multifaceted challenges associated with migration.

A key highlight of the consultation was the invaluable experience shared by local authorities who are actively involved with transnational families. Their real-world insights greatly enriched the discussion.

We also had the privilege of receiving comments and recommendations from the engaged participants.

In conclusion, the collaborative spirit demonstrated during these consultations is a testament to the dedication of our participants and the commitment to making a positive impact.

Here are some comments from participants:

“Indeed, it happens that parents decide to go abroad and give their child a week’s notice or even less. After all, a child also has his or her own life: friends, school, hobby groups, etc. We also made a great contribution to IDPs, as we provided assistance in various areas, but our work is invaluable.”

“In order to bring labour migrants back to Ukraine, we need to create working conditions for them here so that they do not go abroad and stay with their families. They should invest their skills in working here. It will be better for children and for families in general. After all, there is virtually no family when one parent leaves,

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at best, when one of the parents leaves and the child stays with mom or dad. And when both parents leave, the child is effectively a social orphan. Therefore, we need to increase the number of jobs. And unfortunately, this statistic will increase, because of the war, they will not return now, or they have nowhere to go, or they have already found work in another country.”

“It would be good to organise psychological trainings for families where children stayed with one of the parents, or even with grandparents because the parents went abroad. For example, if we talk about topics, it depends on the situation, with whom the children stayed. After all, they lack the support of their parents, and this loss of connection between children and parents is a very big problem. Children have resentment, especially when at some point their parents were not present in their lives when they needed them.”

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MOLDOVA

One curriculum and training materials for service providers have been developed by a specialist from Romania. This course is specifically designed for authorities and service providers in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, addressing the challenges faced by transnational families who have migrated for economic reasons.

TdH Moldova has adapted this course to the Moldovan context, ensuring its relevance and applicability within the region. The course content serves the purpose of enhancing services in the countries of origin for transnational families. It achieves this by informing service providers about the distinctive characteristics of transnational families, their needs, and best practices observed in countries with experience in migration, whether as countries of origin or destination for migration flows.

A total of **105 local service providers** in the countries of origin have actively participated in **four offline capacity-building activities**.

Thus, these activities engaged:

- 18 specialists from the Social Assistance and Family Protection Departments;
- 50 social workers from three regions within Moldova (Ștefan-Vodă, Călărași, Donușeni);
- 37 specialists from regional/municipal psycho-pedagogical support services.

These sessions took place in an offline format (as organising them online presented logistical challenges and the potential for low event attendance). The offline format proved

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to be more timely, productive, and interactive. Participants demonstrated active engagement in discussions and reflection, making the learning experience more effective.

UKRAINE

Between August 3 and September 7, a comprehensive training series unfolded, bringing together 76 social sector professionals from three western Ukrainian regions: Ivano-Frankivsk, Khmelnytsky, and Ternopil. One of the primary objectives was to strengthen and foster networking among these professionals, nurturing a fruitful ground for future collaboration and the exchange of invaluable experiences within the social sector.

Notably, the brochures produced under the CASTLE project collected considerable attention. Participants showed an eager interest in these resources, expressing their intent to both peruse and share them with their absent colleagues. This collective enthusiasm culminated in the distribution of 100 brochures to eager hands.

The training sessions were organised with meticulous care. The trainer crafted a presentation, rooted in the training manual that had been meticulously assembled in Romania as part of the CASTLE project. These sessions delved into various aspects of labour migration to the European Union, defining the profile of a transnational family, expounding on the nuances of interaction with such families, and equipping participants with insights on preparing a child for their parents' departure.

Throughout the presentations, the trainer skillfully fostered an environment of open dialogue, encouraging participants to share their thoughts, experiences, and professional insights. As is often the case, it was the discussion of real-life cases that drew the most impassioned engagement.

It is interesting to note, that during one of the training sessions, a debate emerged concerning the impact of labour migration on children left behind. The audience found itself divided into two camps. Some asserted that parents working abroad represented a ticket to a brighter future, enabling them to provide their children with education and the resources needed for a successful start in life. They argued that this newfound independence was a valuable life lesson. In contrast, an opposing viewpoint claimed that this forced transition into adulthood could exact a detrimental charge on a person's well-being. An acute example was presented of a family where a mother had decided abroad for work, leaving her son in the care of an elderly grandmother. The teenager assumed the role of caregiver, ultimately affecting his academic pursuits.

During breaks for meals or coffee, participants naturally went to informal conversations, drawing upon their own professional experiences to discuss cases from life. This exchange of insights signified the acute relevance and urgency of the issue at hand. The prevalence of attitudes was that social workers had a wealth of knowledge to share, and a mass of insights to discuss, particularly in the context of children left behind by labour migration.

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The all-embracing judgement that was repeated in all the trainings was that children from transnational families are mostly well-off and financially secure. The physiological needs of a child left behind are usually met, but the problem is that in society, emotional needs are often relegated to the background, if not ignored altogether. And as we know from many studies, healthy childhood development is impossible without an emotional component. Therefore, it is crucial to familiarise the family with the proper planning of travelling abroad, which would address not only legal aspects but also psychological ones. Training for social workers is an educational practice that influences the formation of a system of values in society. A social worker at his or her level should convey to families the importance of protecting the rights of children whose parents have left or are planning to leave abroad. It is expected that such families will be better prepared for such a life change as labour migration.

ROMANIA

Period: May 9–June 15, 2023; 17 November, 2023

Participants: 120 persons

Trainer: PhD. Habil. Ecaterina Balica is a scientific researcher, and associate professor within the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work (Bucharest University), the Higher School of Journalism, and some faculties with a technical profile within the Polytechnic University of Bucharest.

The purpose of the course: Improving the services offered by service providers (local, regional, and national authorities, non-governmental organisations) to members of transnational families from Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova in the destination countries through adequate information on the peculiarities of transnational families, the consequences of international migration on the members transnational families, needs and best practice models for data collection and services offered to migrant families in countries with migration experience (destination countries for migration flows).

Training objectives:

O1. Informing the participants about the global, regional (Europe), and local (Ukraine, Republic of Moldova) trends and peculiarities of international migration for work (statistical data on international migration, the profile of the international migrant for work, etc.).

O2. Increasing the level of information of service providers regarding the types of transnational families, the particularities and needs of transnational families in destination countries.

O3. Informing service providers about the effects of international labour migration at the societal, community, and family level and on members of transnational families (children,

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(A6.2. 10/15 national, regional, and local authorities from Moldova participate in yearly policy advice sessions concerning labour migration)

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A8.1. Training for TF in countries of origin

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A10.2.4 Campaign materials created (digital art, animations, brochures, etc.) and distributed

A10.3.1 6 Brochures for transnational parents, children left behind due to labour migration, and child protection professionals produced in English, Romanian and Ukrainian and available online

A10.3.2 6 (3MD/3UA) Short news articles are written and shared on social media

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parents, and other family members) in destination countries. Case study: Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.

O4. Information on the potential risks to which members of transnational families are exposed (health problems, mental problems, violence, abuse, and human trafficking) in the countries of destination.

O5. Information on best practice models for data collection on international labour migration and transnational families in countries of destination. Case study: Romania.

O6. Information on best practice models in the field of services offered to transnational families in countries of origin and destination. Case study: Romania.

The course: The online course was structured on 7 teaching modules that represent important learning areas necessary to achieve the course objectives.

MODULE 1. International migration. Trends, migratory flows and the profile of migrants

- The participants were presented with information on the general context of international migration for work (trends, countries of destination and countries of origin, regional colour, particularities of migration from the European space, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova).

MODULE 2. The transnational family. Realities and myths

- The participants were informed about: the types of transnational families and the peculiarities of transnational families;
- The negative and positive effects of migration at the level of destination countries, at the level of communities, at the level of transnational families and at the level of each family member who emigrated or stayed at home;
- The needs of members of transnational families: the needs of children/adults/parents/grandparents/other relatives/elderly;
- The potential risks of labour migration for transnational families.

MODULE 3. Transnational families. Case study: Ukraine

Participants were informed about:

- The negative and positive effects of migration at the level of Ukraine, at the level of communities, transnational families and at the level of each family member who emigrated or stayed at home.
- The needs of members of transnational families in Ukraine: the needs of children/adults/parents/grandparents/other relatives.

Participants will be able to: develop measures at the national level regarding the reduction of the negative consequences of international migration on family members starting from the needs identified in the national studies on transnational families in Ukraine.

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MODULE 4. Transnational families. Case study: Republic of Moldova

The participants were informed about the results of the research carried out within the CASTLE project regarding:

- The negative and positive effects of migration at the level of the Republic of Moldova, at the level of communities, transnational families, and at the level of each family member who emigrated or stayed at home;
- The needs of members of transnational families from the Republic of Moldova: the needs of children/adults/parents/grandparents/other relatives.

MODULE 5. Data collection on transnational families. Case study: Romania

The participants were informed about the data collection model regarding transnational families in Romania (history of implementation, structure of the collection system, institutions involved, difficulties).

MODULE 6. Public policies regarding transnational families – Romania

Participants were presented with:

- Intervention strategy and public policy development regarding transnational families;
- How to develop public policy projects focused on the needs of migrants and their families, starting from the Romanian experience.

MODULE 7. Services offered to families

The participants were presented with:

- the types of existing services, the types of services needed, the need for specialists, the amount of human and financial resources needed to provide the necessary services to members of transnational families;
- service projects/programs focused on the needs of migrants and their families, starting from the experience of other countries of origin.

Another session will be organised on 17 November 2023, to complete the number of participants.

Here are some comments from participants:

“I now have information about public policies on transnational families, the services offered to them in destination countries, and the effects of migration on them.”

“I believe that the data presented helped me to understand the phenomenon of migration and even if the data collected on the phenomenon was for some reasons not up to date due to the international context given by the war and are in a permanent change they have very well portrayed the situation of transnational families.”

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Specific objective 3:

Transnational families and national stakeholders are better informed on the realities and practical issues related to labour migration.

A8. Training resources for transnational families

A8.1. Training for TF in countries of origin

MOLDOVA

Under this initiative, labour migrant transnational family members residing in the countries of origin have been invited to participate in a comprehensive training course. In this sense, a public call was made to invite participants to subscribe to the training sessions.

To facilitate this training, a qualified expert/trainer was hired who have developed the training materials.

The training materials have been designed for trainers and educators who engage in parental education activities with parents. These materials aim to empower adults/parents in transnational families to effectively manage migration, thus preventing adverse effects and nurturing positive outcomes that contribute to the psycho-emotional well-being of children left behind.

These training materials are a valuable resource for teachers and educators in both schools and pre-schools. They can be used to organise targeted sessions with parents who are either planning to migrate or are currently working abroad. The training content is structured to be adaptable for both offline and online formats.

Due to low attendance of participants in online sessions, we have revisited our approach to the delivery of these sessions.

An upcoming training session for parents/caregivers who are members of transnational families is scheduled for November 9, 2023, with a group of transnational family members, as part of our ongoing activities.

UKRAINE

Do you consider starting work abroad and you are concerned about childcare and maintaining a strong connection with your child from afar? These are questions that often weigh on the minds of parents thinking about labour migration. Unfortunately, answers to such vital questions can be elusive.

Our recent training sessions were designed for transnational family members, where we aimed to bridge this knowledge gap and provide practical solutions. Throughout these

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engaging sessions, 48 parents and caregivers had the valuable opportunity to connect, share their experiences of parenting from a distance, engage in thought-provoking discussions, find answers to their queries, and enjoy mutual support over a cup of comforting coffee or tea.

Our training covered a range of essential topics, including:

- Exploring the concepts of transnational families, labour migration, and internal labour migration.
- Engaging in practical exercises to understand the reasons behind parents' decisions to work abroad, the consequences of such choices, and the challenges they encounter.
- Delving into decision-making processes through group discussions, featuring personal stories of individuals who opted for work abroad.
- Highlighting personal resources that empower adults to overcome difficulties and challenges, encouraging participants to share their existing coping strategies.
- Offering guidance on preparing a child for their parents' departure, emphasising the importance of understanding a child's needs and perceptions.
- Group discussions aimed at addressing crucial questions, such as childcare arrangements, the timing of informing children about parental intentions to work abroad, and children's reactions to parental absence.
- Providing recommendations on legal aspects in terms of child protection when parents are away, along with reminders of parents' legal responsibilities to their children.
- Facilitating conversations about effective long-distance communication with children and offering practical exercises to help participants develop communication strategies for children whose parents work abroad.

At the conclusion of each session, parents came together for a tea gathering to share their insights. Many expressed the benefits of these meetings, referring to the invaluable support from the group and a newfound appreciation for the knowledge gained, which they believe will contribute to more harmonious family relationships.

A9. Sharing of good practices between Ukraine, Moldova and Romania

MOLDOVA

On June 8, 2023, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova, hosted an important “Conference that fostered collaboration among public institutions and academia from Ukraine, Moldova, and Romania.” The primary focus of this gathering was to exchange valuable insights and address the pressing challenges related to the protection of children left behind by parents working abroad. This collaborative effort is integral to the development and

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implementation of effective public policies aimed at improving the lives of these children and other members of transnational families.

The event in Chisinau brought together a range of key stakeholders, including representatives from state structures such as the Ministry of Labor, Migration, and Social Protection (MMPS), the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MAI), the Coordination and Response Action Plan (CRAP), the Bureau of Reintegration (BRD), the Child Advocate, and the National Agency for Social Assistance (ANAS). Furthermore, territorial child protection structures, including the Directorate for Social Assistance and Family Protection (DASPF) and the Department of Education (DE) from Moldova, played a pivotal role in the event. International delegations from the European Commission (EC), the European Union (EU), UNICEF, ICMPD, and IOM Moldova enriched the conference with their global perspective.

The conference had a total of **68 participants**, with **58 individuals attending in person** and an additional **10 participating online**. The discussions during the event focused on the growing phenomenon of children separated from parents who have migrated for work in foreign countries. This issue has gained significant attention, as governments seek sustainable solutions to address it. The migration of citizens from Eastern Europe to Western countries has seen a considerable increase over the last decade.

ROMANIA

Bucharest, 26 July 2023

The second International Conference “Children left at home. Good practices and challenges – Romania, Ukraine, Moldova” was held in Bucharest, Romania, on 26 July 2023.

The symposium brought together experts, practitioners, and policymakers to share insights and best practices. The event was structured around informative sessions and presentations, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and solutions in the field.

Dr. Viorela Telegdi-Csetri, the Project Manager at Babeş-Bolyai University, delivered the opening speech, setting the tone for the symposium. Her introduction provided context for the subsequent discussions, emphasising the significance of protecting children affected by labour migration.

Ahmed Sharmarke, ICMPD/MPF Representative

Following the introduction, Ahmed Sharmarke, Project Officer and representative of ICMPD/MPF, shared valuable insights into the broader context of international migration policies and their impact on children left behind.

Laura Sava-Ghica provided an overview of Terre des Hommes, shedding light on the organisation’s mission and its commitment to addressing the challenges faced by children in the context of labour migration.

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Dr. Anatolie Coşciug from the Center for the Comparative Study of Migration at Babeş-Bolyai University discussed Romania's role as a destination country for labour migration. His presentation delved into the complexities and implications of migration trends in the region.

The Ukrainian country team presented challenges in national policies for protecting children left at home due to labour migration. They outlined future actions to enhance the legislative framework and shared positive experiences in safeguarding these children.

This session focused on challenges encountered in Moldova's national policies for the protection of children left at home. Speakers from the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection and the Academy of Economic Studies shared insights into the CASTLE project, emphasising the importance of effective protection strategies.

The Romanian session covered public policy recommendations, challenges in national policies, and the experiences of migrant parents.

The event concluded with an engaging question-and-answer session, allowing participants to seek clarification and exchange ideas. Dr. Viorela Telegdi-Csetri summarised the key points, and the symposium concluded with insightful conclusions, highlighting the importance of collaborative efforts in safeguarding the well-being of children affected by labour migration.



The symposium was attended by 27 participants in person and 102 participants online.

Lisbon, 4–5 October 2023

The third International Conference “Children Left Behind. Best Practices of Protection and Challenges – Romania, Ukraine, and the Republic of Moldova” was held in Lisbon, Portugal, between 4 and 5 October 2023.

Áron Telegdi-Csetri, Ph.D., Research Manager at Babeş-Bolyai University, initiated the event with an introduction to CASTLE, setting the stage for the day's discussions. Online greetings followed from Cinzia Sechi, DG HOME, European Commission, and Jennifer Tangney, Senior Project Manager, representing ICMPPD/MPF.

Áron Telegdi-Csetri, in his role as a researcher, presented public policy recommendations for public institutions in Moldova and Ukraine, emphasising the importance of thoughtful policies in addressing the challenges faced by transnational families.

Following the presentation, participants engaged in a lively question-and-answer session, delving deeper into the presented recommendations and exploring potential implementation strategies.

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Viorela Telegdi-Csetri, Ph.D., Project Manager, and Mara Birou, Ph.D. student, presented key research findings on “Children Left Behind by Labor Migration,” focusing on supporting Moldovan and Ukrainian transnational families in the EU. The audience actively engaged in a question-and-answer session, demonstrating a keen interest in understanding the nuances of the research and its potential impact on policy.

Carlos Barros, Ph.D., from the Catholic University of Portugal, shared insights on navigating sensitivity and care for inclusive identities in transnational families, bridging the gap between generations and cultures.

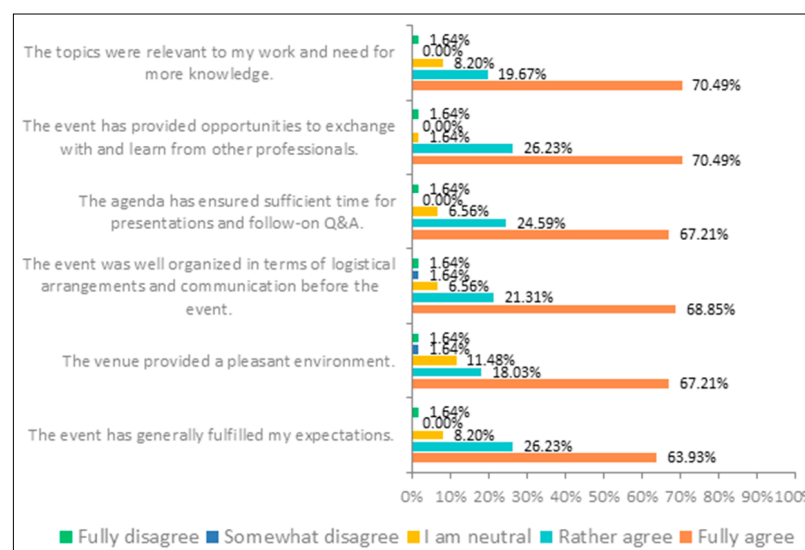
The session concluded with a dynamic question-and-answer period, fostering a robust exchange of ideas and perspectives.

On the second day, country teams from Ukraine and Moldova presented best practices in protecting children left behind due to labour migration. Topics included the link between child well-being and migration policies, labour behaviour research, and positive experiences in child protection.

TdH Romania team made a presentation of positive experiences and initiatives of the companies that can play a significant role in supporting employees who have children left behind due to migration for work. Mirosława Hreniuc, a young woman from a transnational family herself, spoke about the role of extracurricular activities in the process of accepting the “new normal” for children left at home in Moldova.

The day concluded with a comprehensive question-and-answer session, summarising key insights and closing remarks expressing gratitude for the invaluable contributions of participants.

The event successfully fostered collaboration, and shared knowledge, and highlighted effective strategies for supporting transnational families and protecting children affected by labour migration.



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The conference had a total of **120 participants**, with **20 individuals attending in person** and an additional **100 participating online**. After the conference finished, participants completed an online survey that had the purpose of registering the participant's level of satisfaction with the event. The survey had in total 76 respondents of which 31 of them were from Romania, 40 were from Moldova, and 5 of them from Ukraine. The conference had a diverse range of participants such as social workers from Romania, Ukraine and Moldova, researchers, academic and non-governmental professionals, students, community social workers, state child protection officers, etc.

Specific objective 4:

Children left behind and their families from Moldova and Ukraine are empowered to contribute to legal and policy reform on labour migration, with an emphasis on circular migration schemes and protection of children.

A10. Awareness raising campaign designed using participatory methods

MOLDOVA

For the implementation of the awareness-raising campaign, a consultant/trainer was engaged to facilitate training workshops based on the YouCreate Methodology. The objective was to work with groups of young leaders and provide guidance for the development and execution of civic initiatives within the framework of the YouCreate Campaign.

To engage communities effectively, a public call was issued to invite interested parties to participate. From the various initiatives submitted, 5 teams were selected to move forward with the program.

The training involved 10 teenagers and 5 teachers who received instruction in the YouCreate methodology. The primary focus was to empower young individuals with experience related to migration, particularly those whose parents work abroad. The goal was to equip them with the skills needed to develop and implement civic engagement initiatives. These initiatives encompassed peer-to-peer education, outreach activities, community projects, and more, all designed to address the needs of young people, including adolescents whose parents work abroad, within their respective communities.

The YouCreate CASTLE core team, comprising 10 youth/adolescents and 5 teachers, underwent training. This included 2 young individuals and a teacher from each initiative or community, totaling 15 participants from 5 different community initiatives. Subsequently, these core team members returned to their respective communities, where they conducted training sessions for the extended teams.

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Within these extended teams, the participants identified the challenges related to migration prevalent in their communities. This local training effort engaged a total of **59 young people/adolescents** and **10 teachers**, all of whom were involved in the training sessions organised by the core team consisting of 10 youth and **5 trained teachers**. Once again, this provided an opportunity to identify and address the challenges associated with migration within the community.

Under the YouCreate CASTLE initiative, a total of **19 activities were conducted**, involving **267 pupils/young people**, **118 parents and caregivers**, and **30 teachers**. These activities encompassed a broad range of engagement within the community.

Upon completing the implementation of their initiatives, the YouCreate CASTLE core team participated in a Reflection and Evaluation Workshop that took place on 07 June 2023. During this session, the participants assessed their initial state, their knowledge of migration, and their project management skills at the beginning of the experience. They also reflected on their current state and how they envision their future development.

During the discussion, the participants reported a sense of accomplishment and pride in the results they achieved through the program. They expressed a heightened sense of responsibility to share their knowledge and experiences in the future. Testimonies from the participants revealed the transformative impact of the experience, particularly in altering their attitudes towards the phenomenon of migration and the children in their school who come from families with migrant parents.

“This experience brought us the most valuable result - the change of attitude towards the migration phenomenon and the children in the school who are from families with migrant parents.”

A10.2.4 Campaign materials created (digital art, animations, brochures, etc.) and distributed

Under the 10.2.4 component of the project, various campaign materials have been created and distributed. Here’s a summary of the campaign materials:

- Interactive materials about the main findings of the research;
- Technical policy advice;
- Curricula and training materials for service providers;
- Curricula and training materials for members of transnational families;
- Curricula and training materials for Media Professionals;
- You Create Methodology;
- Awareness Video;
- Brochure for members of transnational families;

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- Brochure for child protection professionals;
- Good practices between Ukraine, Moldova, and Romania.

UKRAINE

10.2. Using the Terre des hommes “You Create – Methodology of Collaborative Research and Action to Develop Creativity and Change” methodology, we designed a program tailored to the needs of children and young people whose parents are engaged in labor migration to EU countries. Our approach actively involved young individuals in addressing critical issues associated with the challenges they encounter while their parents are abroad for work.

The initial phase involved the identification of schools with students whose parents were working abroad. Within these schools, we identified adult allies among the staff who shared a genuine interest and concern for the labor migration challenges faced by their students’ families. These adult allies subsequently identified two student leaders from each school and began preparations for a comprehensive youth leader and adult ally training session using the “You Create – Methodology of Collaborative Research and Action to Develop Creativity and Change.” (YouCreate).

Our activity was implemented across five schools in the Ivano-Frankivsk region, with each school contributing five adult allies and ten youth leaders for the training, which took place in December 2022.

So, what was the training all about?

For our youth leaders, the training centred around the “YouCreate” methodology, which equipped them with the skills to:

- Assemble groups of young individuals who shared similar concerns.
- Release the creative potential of the youth within their communities and schools.
- Gather data and conduct research on the primary issues concerning young people, specifically within the context of their parents’ migration.
- Effectively address these concerns.
- Provide support and guidance to their youth groups.

Simultaneously, the “You Create” methodology empowered adult allies to:

- Offer effective support to the youth teams.
- Assist in establishing connections with school and community administrators.
- Contribute to the organisation of group meetings, including logistical arrangements and equipment provision.

Following the training, the youth teams collaborated for a period of five months to bring their creative ideas to life. In spring 2023, these teams, alongside their youth leaders and adult allies, gathered in Ivano-Frankivsk to present their innovative concepts, each with

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its unique conclusions, perspectives, presentation styles, and originality during Town-hall events, where we gathered authorities' representatives and mass media professionals.

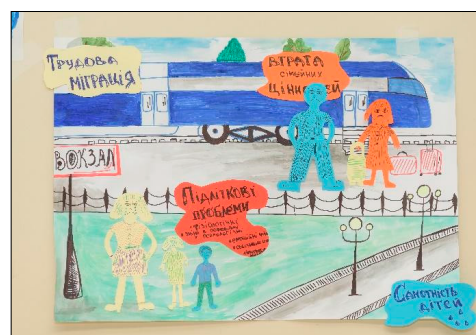
For instance, the Kolomyia team presented the video project “Illusion of Happiness,” shedding light on the loneliness experienced by teenagers whose families work in EU countries. The aim was to emphasise the importance of emotional support for young individuals during the transition from childhood to adulthood, fostering open communication among family members.

The Verkhnya team showcased their video project, “Captive to Their Own Illusions,” which employed theatrical performance to draw attention to the challenges faced by children of migrant workers, focusing on the loss of family bonds and values. Their project aimed to engage creative youth in various activities and highlight their creative potential and turn the situation around: not “children left behind” but “children in the centre of the process of decision making.”

The Dolyna team presented a short video research piece, delving into the circumstances of labour migration in their city. The objective was to understand the future aspirations of the city's young population regarding work abroad.

Meanwhile, the Bohorodchany team offered a positive perspective on migration through their video initiative, demonstrating how it enables young people to pursue their dreams, engage in education, excel in sports, and acquire valuable resources. Their goal was to showcase that labour migration has positive outcomes as well.

In conclusion, the “YouCreate” methodology empowered adolescents to channel their creativity into initiatives that reflected their thoughts, opinions, and voices regarding labor migration and its consequences. Each initiative offered a unique perspective on this complex issue, showcasing the diverse range of ideas and insights of our youth leaders and their teams.



Children developing a creative idea

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[A10.3.1 6 Brochures for transnational parents, children left behind due to labour migration, and child protection professionals produced in English, Romanian and Ukrainian and available online.](#)

The brochures were meticulously crafted through the collaborative efforts of an expert/consultant and the team members of TdH Moldova. Much of the information contained in these brochures has undergone revision, enhancement, and supplementation to ensure a comprehensive understanding and reflection of the migration phenomenon. These materials primarily focus on the situation of children left behind following their parents' departure to work abroad.

Brochure for Child Protection Professionals: This brochure serves as a valuable information resource for professionals in the field of child protection. Its purpose is to facilitate a deeper understanding of the circumstances surrounding children whose parents are working abroad and to guide professionals in taking appropriate actions on behalf of these children. By working together as a team, professionals can ensure the protection and well-being of children whose parents are working abroad.

Brochure for Members of Transnational Families: This brochure acknowledges the undeniable realities of migration and aims to provide guidance on building and maintaining quality relationships with children to mitigate negative effects. It emphasizes a seemingly simple yet intricate strategy that can be instrumental for parents: fulfilling children's needs. Regardless of their location, whether present or working abroad, all children have needs that, when met, contribute to their healthy development. In the case of children whose parents work abroad, certain needs become more pronounced, including the need for affection, approval, acceptance, safety, and protection. Authentic communication between parents and children is crucial for establishing a foundation of trust, built on understanding, esteem, honesty, and mutual interest. This brochure proposes several strategies for fostering co-presence in the child's life by comprehending and addressing the child's needs.

The design of these brochures drew inspiration from the materials collected during the "Families without Borders" campaign conducted by Terre des hommes Moldova in 2017. Additionally, insights gained from the Research component of the CASTLE project played a pivotal role in their development.

[A10.3.2 6 \(3MD/3UA\) Short news articles are written and shared on social media](#)

Tdh Moldova Facebook account:

March, 14: trainings for parents announcement

March, 29: talk for parents with the psychologist Tatiana Turchină about how to prepare children for the parents leaving abroad to work

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May, 16: post on participation at European Village on Europe Days mentioning CASTLE project (including photos with the roll-up)

June, 9: post about the international conference on good practices between Romania, Moldova and Ukraine

June, 22: trainings for journalists on reporting about transnational families

Tdh Moldova website:

March, 14: Trainings for parents: how to prepare children for their parents going abroad to work

June, 7: International Conference on good practices between Moldova, Ukraine and Romania:

1. News announcing the conference;
2. The Agenda of the Conference;
3. Study: How can children be supported after parents leaving abroad to work;
4. Romania, Moldova, Ukraine: good practices on protection of children left home by labour migration of their parents;

June, 16: Trainings for journalists on reporting about migration and transnational families.

Mass-media:

June, 8: JURNAL TV (national TV station): news about the international conference from June 7.

The awareness campaign is to take place that will involve a series of posts and news.

A10.3.4 6 campaign videos created. 3 – UA; 3 – MD

As part of the awareness campaign, an awareness video is in process of development. Thus, the video script has been developed, coordinated, and approved for production. This video serves as an important component of the project's awareness-raising efforts, and it aims to effectively convey important messages to its target audience: mainly the parents that have to leave abroad to work. The awareness video will contain messages for parents about the best ways to prepare children about their leaving and long distance connection, communication and support for them. The video will come in three language versions.

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A10.3. Campaign on the topic of transnational families of labour migrants

In September, we started a dynamic campaign aimed at raising awareness about labour migration and its far-reaching consequences. Our preparations for this initiative began in tandem with the launch of our activities.

To provide a comprehensive view of our efforts and the impact we aim to make, we initiated the filming of various activities. This footage encompasses a wide spectrum, ranging from the engaging YouCreate training for youth to interactions with transnational families, government officials, service providers, and representatives from the media. Our goal is to compile these segments into a compelling video that vividly represents the work we're doing with these stakeholders.

Our campaign materials are extensive and suitable for different target groups. We've collaborated with our colleagues from TdH Moldova in crafting several brochures, including one designed for professionals in protection and parents. We've also dedicated time and expertise to develop a specific brochure tailored for children.

These materials are information-rich, addressing a countless number of topics relevant to various audiences, including:

- Providing insights into current Ukrainian legislation.
- Offering practical approaches and valuable tips for effectively working with transnational families, encompassing assessments of family situations and the selection of suitable caregivers.
- Detailing step-by-step guidelines for parents departing abroad.
- Providing guidance on understanding and managing a child's emotions, preparing a child for their parents' departure, maintaining long-distance communication, and interpreting a child's emotional struggles from afar.
- Offering advice on staying connected with caregivers, raising a child across distances, planning for a future marked by separation, and resolving conflicts when miles apart.
- Outlining essential resources and contacts for children in need of support.

This impactful campaign is set to continue, maintaining its presence until the November. You can actively follow it on TdH Ukraine and TdH Moldova's social media channels, ensuring that you stay informed and engaged with our crucial mission to shed light on the realities of labor migration and its consequences.

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MOLDOVA

Under component A10.4, a consultant/trainer has been engaged to develop a Handbook derived from the “*A Handbook on Migration Reporting for Journalists*” by ICMPD. This handbook, designed to bolster the skills and understanding of media professionals, has been used as a foundational resource for the project. Training workshops based on the handbook have been conducted, targeting groups of 15 communication specialists and students of journalism and communication sciences.

The material created by the consultant is tailored to suit a diverse audience, including communication specialists from various media platforms like written press, online press, TV, radio, blogging, and vlogging. Additionally, it caters to students pursuing journalism and communication sciences, particularly those who interact with transnational families in different regions of Moldova.

The process involved issuing a public call to invite participants to enrol in the training sessions. Subsequently, **15 communication specialists** have undergone two days of intensive in-person training that took place on 22 June and 29 June 2023.

These training sessions serve the essential purpose of providing practical insights and recommendations for enhancing media coverage of migration. Key aspects emphasised in the training include clarifying specific terminology, advocating for the respect of human dignity, countering hate speech, ensuring balanced and fair coverage, promoting evidence-based and factual reporting, and fostering the inclusion of migrant voices within media narratives. The overarching goal is to elevate the overall quality and accuracy of media reporting concerning migration issues.

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UKRAINE

Within the framework of the project “Children left behind – support for Moldovan and Ukrainian transnational families involved in labour migration in the EU” Terre des hommes in Ukraine invited regional journalists to participate in an online training on “Peculiarities of media coverage of issues related to migrants, refugees and IDPs”.

The training for journalists was divided into three blocks of two hours each and took place from May 24 to 26, 2023. The main objective of the training was to familiarise participants with the history of migration and legislative aspects; to address the issue of labour migration, current problems and diversity; and to provide recommendations for journalistic work in the context of migration.

We invited Victoria Kharchenko, a human rights activist and advocacy manager at Fight For Right, with whom we have worked in other projects, to be our trainer.

The training was held online, on the ZOOM platform. This format was due to the current insecure situation in the country, with frequent alarms and rocket attacks. Therefore, it was decided to move this training to an online format in order not to expose participants to danger. All participants registered through an online form, which we published along with the invitation on our Facebook and Instagram as well as on the website the Tdh in Ukraine. A total of 25 people registered for the training.

After registering, participants received links to all three days of the training and were able to join it. The following issues related to journalism during migration were covered during the three days:

Block 1: May 24, 2023 (16:00–18:00)

- History of migration: migration processes and factors of migration;
- Terminology. Why does what we say and how we say it matter?;
- How to speak ethically about migration-related topics? International and national standards;
- International and EU law in the field of asylum and migration.

Block 2: May 25, 2023 (16:00–18:00)

- Forms of migration: labour, family, refugees and asylum, IDPs, etc.;
- Consequences and management of migration: expulsion or deportation;
- Diversity and minorities: talking about gender, the LGBTQ+ community and the community of people with disabilities.

Block 3: May 26, 2023 (16:00–18:00)

- Interview: How to talk to people with traumatic experiences?;
- The path “from anecdote to genocide”: hate speech and migration;
- How to work with sources correctly when preparing a story? Analysing sources and engaging experts: pitfalls;
- Data journalism.

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After completing the three days of training, participants received materials for review, video recordings of the training, and electronic certificates.

It was also interesting to know the participants' opinions after the training, so some participants answered the question "What are the 3 most useful things you learned in this course?"

"To prevent hate speech in journalistic activities; to understand vulnerable categories of the population; to deepen my understanding of the concepts of 'migrant', 'refugee', 'IDP'."

"For me, reminders and guidelines on consent to talk and use of data were important, and a reminder to refer to verified information and reports from the Ombudsman, fact-checking even on sensitive topics, was useful."

Regarding the question of topics that were not covered in this course, we received the following feedback:

"1. Today, there are migrants from the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine. In the context of Russian journalism's cancellation, they are not noticed. How do we talk about these Russians, or do we talk at all? 2. The war has driven many Ukrainians from their homes to other cities and places in Ukraine and abroad. In this situation, the elderly are the most vulnerable. Unfortunately, our society does not talk about this."

"All important topics were covered," "The course is quite broad."

Some participants also shared their suggestions for improving the course:

"It would be interesting to consider specific cases of the impact of journalistic texts."

"I want more courses on related topics."

"A presentation with data visualisation would be good."

The challenges we faced during the training included the security situation in the country, as well as a small number of people who are engaged in covering labour migration issues, as the media are currently focused on covering military operations, politics, and assistance from other countries.

On the other hand, we were able to attract a sufficient number of specialists who were interested in the topic of labour migration, not only local journalists, but also employees of higher education institutions (from the Department of Journalism) and representatives of NGOs, who asked many questions to the trainer and took an active part in the discussion.

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ROMANIA

Event

Navigating Sensitivity in Journalism: Reporting on Transnational Families and Trauma

The Terre des hommes Foundation in Romania invited 22 journalists and students to an online and offline training to introduce the concept of “trauma-informed journalism”, supported by Éva László, psychologist, PhD in Sociology, university lecturer, director of the Department of Sociology and Social Assistance-LM, Faculty of Sociology and Social Assistance, Babeş-Bolyai University. Eva Laszlo has participated in numerous research and intervention projects, the main areas of interest being: abuse/exploitation/neglect of minors; violence against women; victim protection; transnational families. She is a founding member of the Artemis Association of Women Against Violence and has been working in the field of victim protection for over 20 years. She worked in counseling centers for victims of violence, in the shelter for girls and young women—victims of sexual abuse and/or human trafficking, and in the shelter for women and children, victims of domestic violence. She participated as a collaborator/consultant in the making of two documentary films: *Hopes for Sale* (2012, director: Felméri Cecília) and *Too Close* (2022, director: Püsök Botond).

In the realm of journalism, the processes of documenting, interviewing, and publishing carry a weighty responsibility, particularly when dealing with individuals who have experienced trauma. This delicate relationship between the journalist and the interviewee requires a nuanced approach that balances the pursuit of truth with ethical considerations and legal safeguards.

Approaching Sensitive Topics:

1. Empathy and Respect

Journalists should approach sensitive topics with empathy and respect for the interviewee’s experiences. Establishing trust is paramount, as individuals sharing their stories often expose themselves to vulnerability.

2. Informed Consent

Obtaining informed consent is crucial. Journalists must clearly explain the purpose of the interview, potential implications, and the extent to which the information will be shared. This ensures transparency and allows interviewees to make informed decisions.

3. Trauma-Informed Reporting

Understanding the effects of trauma is essential. Journalists should be trained to recognize signs of distress and provide appropriate support. The goal is to minimise harm and ensure the well-being of those involved.

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4. Legal Considerations

Journalists must navigate legal boundaries to protect themselves and their subjects. Adhering to privacy laws, especially when dealing with sensitive information, is essential. Striking a balance between transparency and legal compliance is key.

Avoiding Activism/Sensationalism and Truth/Moralizing Discourse:

1. Objectivity

Maintain journalistic objectivity by presenting facts without bias. While it's crucial to evoke empathy, journalists should refrain from advocating for specific causes or sensationalising stories to garner attention.

2. Ethical Reporting

Ethical reporting involves a commitment to truthfulness and accuracy. Journalists should resist the temptation to sensationalise stories for dramatic effect and avoid imposing moral judgments on the subjects.

3. Contextualization

Providing a broader context to the stories helps avoid oversimplification or moralising discourse. Understanding the complexities of the issues at hand ensures a more nuanced and accurate portrayal.

Reporting on Transnational Families:

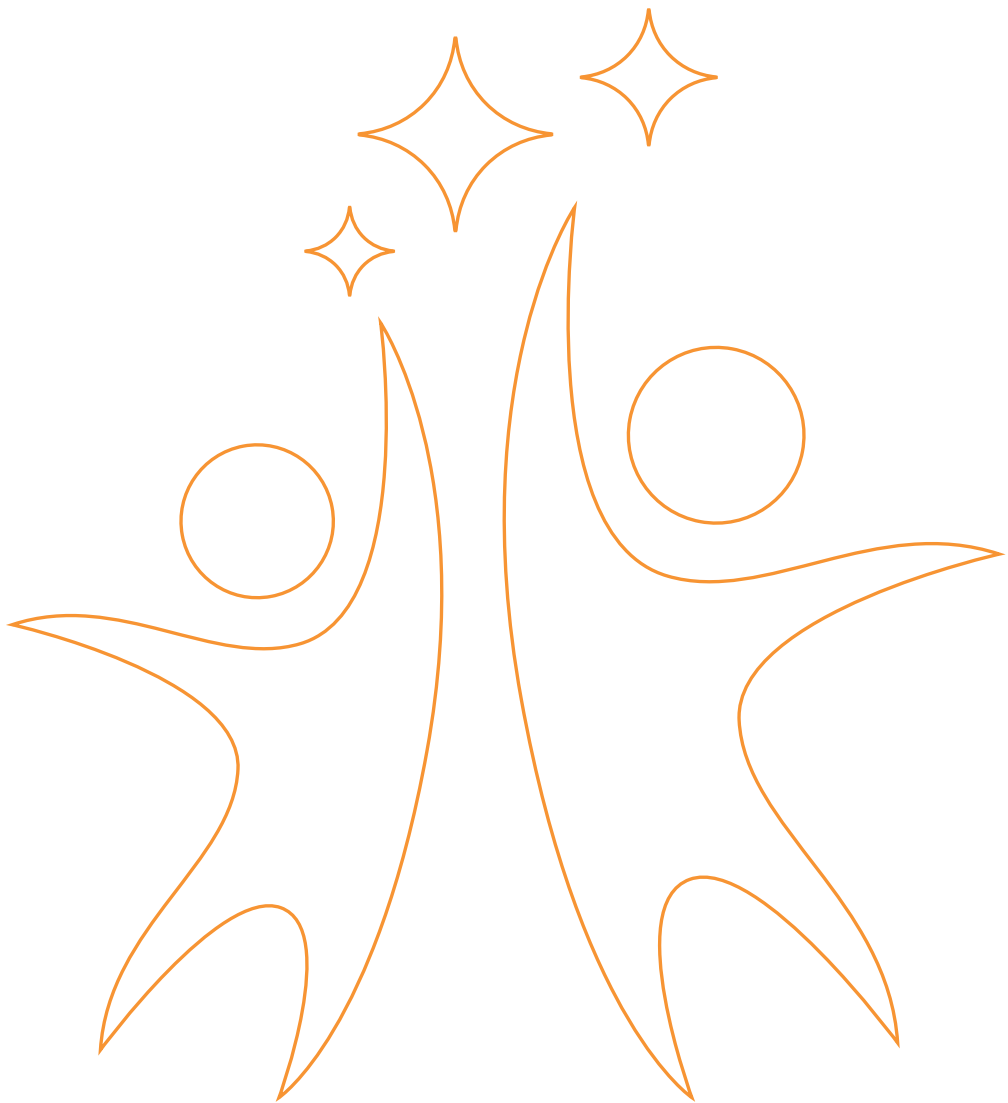
Unique Research on Children Left Behind:

The report delves into the lives of transnational families, specifically parents who have migrated abroad and the children left behind in the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Conducted by the Center for the Study of Transnational Families at Babeş-Bolyai University, this research sheds light on the challenges faced by these families, offering valuable insights into their experiences.

Conclusion:

In navigating the fine line between sensitivity and truth in journalism, a commitment to ethical practices, empathy, and legal compliance is essential. Reporting on sensitive topics, such as the lives of transnational families, requires a thoughtful approach that respects the dignity of those involved while upholding journalistic principles of truthfulness and accuracy.

The seminar was attended by 22 journalists from important written media and radio and students in journalism.



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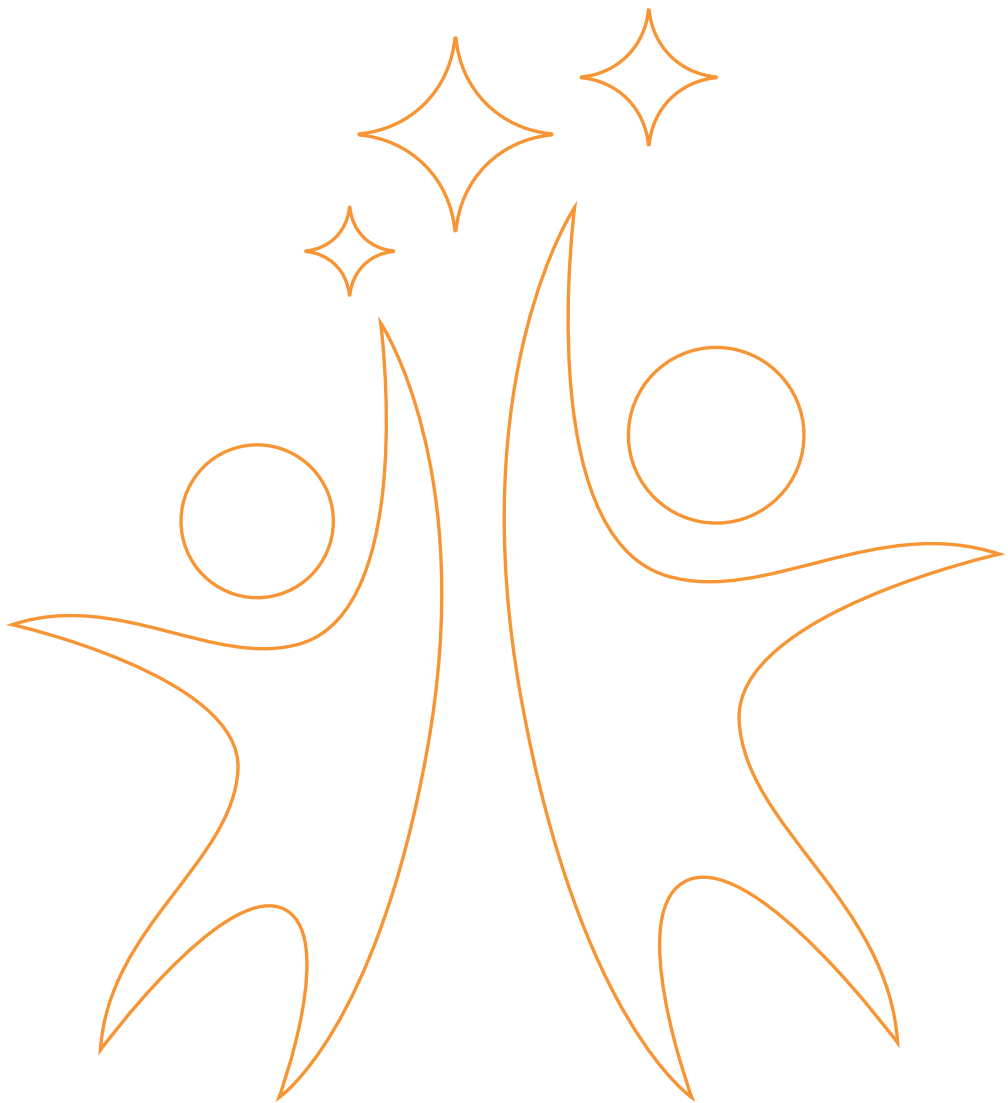
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Children Left Behind by Labour Migration: Supporting Moldovan and Ukrainian Transnational Families in the EU (“CASTLE”)

Policy Brief 1

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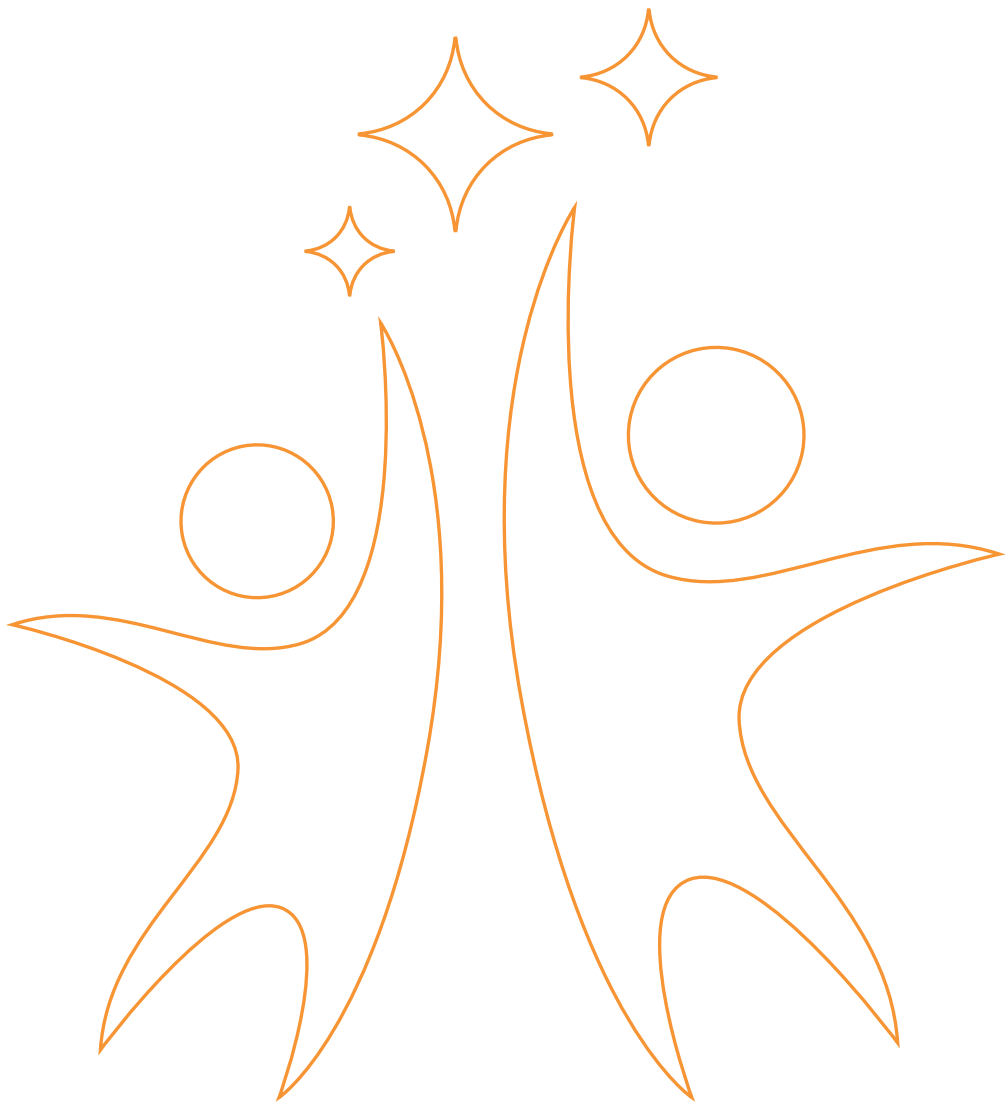
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Executive summary

Children Left Behind by Labour Migration' is a 30-month action that aims to support the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in improving their child protection frameworks and policies regarding migration and mobility, with a focus on the social and legal impacts of labour migration on transnational families. The project addresses the situation of children left behind (CLB) as a result of their parents leaving abroad for work, and approaches this issue from the perspective of children's rights and the ways in which these rights are created, observed and enforced in a transnational family context. Ensuring the rights of children is one of the strategic directions of improving the activities of the state, to promote and ensure human rights and freedoms.

Labour migration is a widespread phenomenon in Eastern European countries. Most migrant families whose members participated in the field-research conducted by CASTLE come from communities where it is very common for households to have at least one adult abroad for work. As a result, local communities perceive migration as a familiar phenomenon, and the absence of at least one parent in families with children is a frequent occurrence.

The policy brief at hand advances an introduction to the issue of CLB by labor migration and a concise discussion of the preliminary findings of research conducted within the CASTLE action. The description of research results is followed by a list of evidence-based public policy recommendations.

The text of this document is based on contributions by the research teams of CASTLE academic partners, namely the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania, the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova and the Ukrainian Institute for Social Research after Olexandr Yaremenko.

This policy brief has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union, contracted by ICMPD through the Migration Partnership Facility: ICMPD/2021/MPF-357-004. The contents of this article are the sole responsibility of the Babeş-Bolyai University and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union or ICMPD.

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Introduction

Transnational families (TNFs) are a functional category of families, with their own specificities and rights entitlements. Therefore, they need to be inquired, empowered, their life-world observed and addressed from a multitude of perspectives and in a diversity of intersections, such as: minority status of various kinds including ethnic and non-regular families, children as a vulnerable group, trafficking, divorce, gender, poverty, etc. Indeed, the practices of transnational family life reflect beyond its area proper, towards other social structures such as local communities, kin-like and friendly ties, organizations, workplace, education, the political community and society as a whole. These dynamics need to be addressed departing from the intimate experience of transnational family life through its perception and recognition in its local, societal and political context to the institutional capabilities needed to empower and protect its integrity and functionality.

Labour migration among citizens from Eastern Europe to the European Union has steadily increased over the past decade. Economic hardships and the search for higher living standards have led numerous Moldovan and Ukrainian citizens to seek employment on a permanent or seasonal basis in the European Union. While certain families migrate as a unit, many children remain left behind by one or both of their parents/caregivers, resulting in the growing phenomenon of TNFs. According to the latest available official data, in Moldova, 21 percent of children (150,000) have at least one parent living abroad, while 5 percent of children (35,000) have both parents abroad, whereas in Ukraine, under conditions of presumable under-reporting, 200,000 children are left behind by at least one parent, a phenomenon affecting up to 25 percent of all children in certain regions.

Against this background, the general objective of the CASTLE project is to support the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in improving their protection frameworks related to and knowledge of TNFs in the context of the social and legal impacts of labor migration to the European Union.

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CASTLE addresses stay-behind children's situation in the context of migration, acknowledging that many aspects of migration that come into play cannot be easily tackled. However, precisely because migration is a complex phenomenon that often results in creating vulnerabilities and sensitive contexts, our endeavor seeks to provide a voice for CLB and for their families. While calling attention to pressing issues and the need for support, CASTLE seeks to highlight family practices that may function as examples for further dissemination.

Beside desk research (social-scientific literature and legal / policy context of TNFs), recommendations in this policy brief are based on data collected by field-research conducted in the three countries:

- 102 interviews with family members: parents /caregivers who stayed in the home country, children left in the home country, migrant parents;
- 10 focus groups with family members, of which 5 focus group sessions with children;
- 24 interviews with experts from authorities, institutions, NGOs, working with transnational family members.

Family member interviews/focus groups have been conducted in approximately equal amounts by the 3 national teams. The interviewees/FG participants were Moldovan and Ukrainian TNFs with at least one parent abroad in the EU for a significant amount of time during the recent past. The research teams also conducted interviews with experts from the three countries. Most interviews have been conducted online (Facebook messenger, Zoom, WhatsApp, Viber, etc.), adapting the conversation language to respondents' linguistic abilities or preferences (Ukrainian, Russian, Romanian, Hungarian).

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		Republic of Moldova	Romania	Ukraine
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS (126)				
Family members	Adults (migrants and caregivers)	50		26
	Minors (stay behind)	12		14
Experts		11	10	3
FOCUS GROUPS (10)				
Family members	Adults (migrants and caregivers)	2 FG sessions (13)		2 FG sessions (11)
Family members	Young adults with one parent/both parents abroad	1 FG session (7)		
Family members	Children	3 FG sessions (16)		2 FG sessions (13)

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Research findings

The key findings are presented based on the topics identified in the literature review, legislation and field data analysis process.

A brief review of recent literature

The impact on migration on the family in the home country is complex, multi-channeled and context-dependent (Demurger 2015, IZA). Important mediating factors are: the reason for migration, who migrates (age and gender), duration of migration, continuity of care, relation with parents before departure, legal status/working arrangements of the migrant, transnational communication practices.

This is a discussion of benefits *vs.* risks (or advantages *vs.* disadvantages, positive *vs.* negative outcomes), not of good or bad *per se.*

Benefits of parents' migration on CLB

Such benefits are: increased financial capacities, increased liberty, children more independent in their decision-making process, children's agency, resilience, and creativity in influencing caring practices in their migrant family (Lam and Yeoh 2019).

In terms of children's agency, it is integral to also view children as agents of change often involved in the migrant transnational caring context and not simply as passive recipients of migration, parenting decisions and practices (Christou and Kofman 2022). Children were very aware of the different persons catering to their needs and are able to identify and navigate the diversity of care in their daily lives (Lam and Yeoh 2019). Benefits as seen by migrant (mothers) (Juozeliūnienė and Budginaitė 2018): increased sense of autonomy, independence, and responsibility; the emigration experience brought brothers and sisters closer together, increasing the chains of support between their older and younger children, broadening of children's worldviews by engagement with children in constant travel abroad. Children perceive themselves smarter and more independent, fairly proud of their autonomy from adults, emphasizing their participation in household and work activities (Bezzi 2013).

Cebotari 2018 points out that the positive aspects of parental migration on CLB "do not necessarily negate the vulnerability of children in transnational care stemming from

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past research. Rather, advances in communication technologies have made the transnational lives of migrants and children significantly easier” (p. 21). Indeed, internet-based communication and new information and communication technologies (ICT) is essential in sustaining family relationships (Baldassar 2016b: 19–20) and any discussion about care towards family members that stayed in the home country cannot exist without addressing it.

Risks of parents’ migration on CLB

Children who remain at home take over household tasks and sometimes children, especially girls, transform into “wives” who are responsible for the behaviour of the parent who is at home, sometimes leading to the risk of premature marriages (Report Moldova 2011). CLB are pushed toward growing up prematurely, learning to play pre-age social roles, paired with emancipation through parents treating them as their peers (Report Moldova 2011). These roles, especially looking after younger siblings, impact on their school attendance and performance.

Parents mostly view migration as a matter of family economy while invoking ‘children’s needs’, leading to a sense of culpability may develop in children (Pantea 2011; Report Moldova 2011).

Risks are mainly connected with unmet emotional needs of CLB, such as security, affection, and safety, so they face emotional deprivation. The most likely type of harm is connected with children’s emotional and developmental wellbeing (Gheaus 2014), due to lack of emotional experiences necessary for a harmonious development of personality (Report Moldova 2011).

Parents resort to migration with a special regard for children’s economic interests (Gheaus, 2014), but go on pursuing this goal from a distance adapted to the reality of transnational practice (Juozeliūnienė and Budginaitė, 2018), facing the migration paradox: they migrate for children’s economic welfare, but often at the cost of children’s emotional wellbeing (Bryceson 2019, Lam and Yeoh 2019).

Some quantitative studies found limited differences in the well-being of children with and without migrant parents (Cebotari *et al.* 2018, Gassmann *et al.* 2017), others found significantly higher levels of anxiety and depression in the former against the latter, but similar coping strategies (Tomşa and Jenaro 2015) or a negative correlation between missing parent and self-reported mental health / well-being (Leskauskas *et al.* 2017). Generalizability of studies is limited; few included an appropriate control group; the complexity of intervening social factors prevent outlining a positive/negative impact of migration.

Researchers point that the public discourses about migration that emphasize merely the negative consequences on CLB must be reconsidered. The idea is “not to dismiss the possibility that parental absence through migration can erode child well-being, but to emphasize the need to understand how migration, family systems, and societal processes

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intersect to bolster or undermine child well-being and its various expressions and domains.” (Gassmann *et al.* 2017: 438).

Mediating factors: reason for migration

Increased vulnerability exists when migration is motivated by poverty, corruption and structural unemployment or underemployment in the place of origin (Gheaus 2014). Individual experiences of left behind children are strongly shaped by the family backgrounds and the socio-cultural contexts of belonging (Bezzi 2013): in some contexts negative outcomes of parental migration may be more present than in others, connected with other hardships and dysfunctions that may exist prior to migration.

Mediating factors: who migrated, how long, how soon in the life of children

Differences in impact on CLB are linked with the role of mother and father in child-care, potential traditional gender roles with the mother as primary caregiver, leading to more diversified care arrangements involving a web of carers in case she migrates (Lam and Yeoh 2019). Often, maternal grandmother takes over care of CLB as an extension of the migrant mother, reinforcing traditional gender roles with women’s continued responsibility for the care of CLB (Fan and Parrenas 2018).

The elder the child, the easier the acceptance of parents’ migration. Children feel more affected immediately after their parents’ departure, a period considered the most difficult. A decrease in emotional sensibility of the child towards parents’ absence has been noted (Report Moldova 2011).

Although the new communication technologies and the digital co-presence allow mothers to closely monitor the activity of CLB and “to perform intensive mothering at a distance” (Madianou 2016b: 83, indeed to assess children’s wellbeing through video calls as practices as ‘good’ and ‘involved’ parenting (Frenyo 2019), this poses challenges with small children or modest digital literacy of caretakers, especially grandmothers (Frenyo, 2019; Madianou, 2016b).

Mediating factors: who’s the carer—continuity vs. discontinuity of care

The often precarious work of migrants (seasonal agricultural work, construction, caregiving in private homes) and job opportunities on short notice, sometimes makes the departure and care arrangements for CLB insufficiently planned (Gheaus 2014). Existing support from the extended family may contribute to parents’ decision to migrate. The continuity of care is highly important (Gheaus 2014, Cebotari 2018), rather than who specifically take it over. Household level coping and coordination mechanisms may act as a buffer between parental migration and CLB’s wellbeing (Gassmann *et al.* 2017).

Children exert their agency within the web of home care, being simultaneously powerful and powerless (Lam and Yeoh 2019), while with diverse persons at home, they are constantly experimenting, adjusting, resisting and reworking plans independently. They are well aware of the different persons catering to their needs and able to identify and navigate

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around the diversity of care in their daily lives (Lam and Yeoh 2019). Their autonomy and role in the web of care amplifies as they grow up.

Mediating factors: transnational communication

The accelerated development of “communication technologies [is] transforming ways of ‘being together’ and forms of ‘co-presence’ in families and communities separated by distance and over time” (Baldassar *et al.* 2016: 134). Care becomes “a mediated emotional experience” (Alinejad 2021: 444). The internet is an environment which is crucial in providing emotional and practical support for children and other family members back home (Frenyo 2019) and for the practice of ‘digital kinning’ (Baldassar and Wilding 2020), understood as engagement with new technologies for the purpose of maintaining support networks. Through ICT-mediated ‘family practices’ (Madianou 2016a; Nedelcu and Wyss 2016) and transnational communication, families manage to obtain a co-presence among nuclear transnational family members (Ducu 2014, 2018; Madianou 2016b).

Migration today takes place in a polymedia environment that offers a great variety of new media and ICT to facilitate family practices (Madianou and Miller 2012; Madianou 2016b) and various types of co-presence or ‘being there’ for each other (Baldassar 2016b). Virtual co-presence, mediated through ICT, is different but not less real than physical co-presence (Baldassar 2016b). The polymedia environment allows family members to be in touch instantaneously and in real time (Baldassar 2016a: 160). Through ‘ordinary co-presence’ (Nedelcu and Wyss 2016), migrants and their parents in home countries achieve “a subtle sense of each other’s everyday life [and] a feeling of being and doing things together” (2016: 216), and a transnational everyday reality emerges (2016). Another form, ‘ambient co-presence’ (Madianou 2016a), is not based on direct interactions but on the peripheral awareness of the actions of distant others through polymedia environments (2016a: 186), soothing distant family members through each other’s regular routines being followed (2016a: 191). The constancy of ambient co-presence may however lead to tensions (2016a: 195), as changes in routines may indicate that something is wrong.

Achieving different types of co-presence and ensuring care from a distance require certain resources and capabilities—financial/material to afford new technologies, knowledge to use them, as well as time availability for permanent communication with family members in home country. Certainly, not all the families enjoy the conditions of polymedia (Baldassar, 2016b: 30; Frenyo, 2019). Among the most disadvantaged are lower-socio-economic families, persons who may not be as familiar with using new media (e.g., elderly), refugees. However, migrants are among the early and enthusiastic adopters of new technologies to maintain transnational family relationships (Madianou 2016b: 76).

The access to ICT enables CLB “to exercise their agency in initiating and shaping the flow of transnational communication” (Acedera and Yeoh 2021: 187) and to fulfill their right to participate in decisions. Cheap communication technologies and internet

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allow children to develop coping strategies to overcome their challenging circumstances (Nazridod 2019). The agency of children without their own electronic devices is heavily constrained, as they have disadvantaged positions in the hierarchy of care; although the communication with their parents is frequent, they have a rather passive role in their care arrangements (Acedera and Yeoh 2021), with difficulties in enjoying ambient co-presence (2021). Then, another form of co-presence emerges: ‘imaginary co-presence’ (Robertson *et al.* 2016), not synchronous in time and space, rather an imagined one, based on a shared past, documented by photographs (2016: 231).

ICT mediated provision of care is clearly a reality of the present world, and much more so in mobility and migration contexts. Care moves across transnational spaces, is carried out in different spheres and at different care sites, which delineates its portability (Huang *et al.* 2012). Under these circumstances, the call for “de-demonizing distance, or at least removing the assumption that distance is implicitly a barrier to care exchange” (Baldassar 2016: 161a) and, we may add, to children’s rights fulfillment, appear as self-explanatory.

ICT facilitate a ‘connected presence’ (Licoppe, 2004) of different groups, not only of family members, and wider social networks experience a ‘digital togetherness’ (Marino, 2015). Besides portability of family care, ICT use allow the “portability of the networks of belonging” (Diminescu 2008: 573) and maintenance of social relations with those at home. Moreover, new media allow a connectiveness with migrants with the same origin, hence with the country of origin and its culture (Sinanan and Horst, 2022). On the other hand, involvement in online networks and communities contribute to migrants’ empowerment as they interact with each other, increasing their feeling of belonging to a group, making the integration process in the local community easier and less traumatic (Marino, 2015).

Mediating factors: relation with parents before departure

The situations that children have to confront are very different depending on the stability of the pre-existing family network at the parents’ departure (Bezzi 2013). In case of existing conflicts, migration can amplify existing tensions in the pre-existing web of care (Lam and Yeoh 2019). These relate to the issue of continuity of care.

The impact of new communication technologies on transnational family life depends on the previous quality of the relationships. When this is good, polymedia environment allows care from a distance and being there for each other, while existing difficulties and conflicts could be brought to surface and even accentuated (Baldassar *et al.*, 2016; Madianou, 2016b). A downside of this ‘always on’ culture that is facilitated by new communication technologies is that it makes visible problems or conflicts that could have been kept out of sight in the past (Madianou 2016b).

Mediating factors: Legal status/working arrangements of the migrant

Beyond internet access (cheap subscription may be conditioned by an official residence), the degree of informality of working arrangements of the migrants (especially mothers that

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work as domestic and care workers), with little enforcement of labor protection laws, may pose increasing difficulties on the regularity and synchronicity of contacts with children left at home (Baldassar, 2016b; Frenyo, 2019; Greschke 2021). Rapidly changing working hours or sharing an apartment with several other persons are both additional obstacles that migrants may face in communication with family members (Greschke 2021).

Remarks on relevant legislation and policies

Besides international documents relevant to cross-border circulation of migrants, child protection and child rights including EU legislation on migration, left-behind children and family reunification, a number of national legislation and policy entries in the beneficiary countries and Romania (as a sample of both sending and receiving EU country) have importance in our context.

Overall, challenges have been signaled related to the legislative and policy framework, its potential sources and structure, its application, and especially to the awareness of existing legislation and trust towards enforcing institutions, as well as to the non-EU status of the beneficiary countries.

Republic of Moldova

The first time when the national legislation addressed the issue of children left without parental care, as a result of their parents' migration abroad was in 2008. There are a number of relevant provisions within the national legislation, others are part of international normative acts ratified by the Republic of Moldova; additional provisions stem from human rights conventions to which the Republic of Moldova adhered as a members of the Council of Europe (since 1995).

Ukraine

The issue of labor migrants' children has been addressed repeatedly in Ukraine, since mid-2000s, becoming a salient topic on the public agenda. Beginning with 2016, the law "On external labor migration" specifically mentions, for the first time, the children of labor migrants and their rights.

While the generally weak enforcement of the relevant legislation and policy signaled an important advancement, its outline fails to address a number of important issues, which hinders its ability to fully cover the complex phenomenon of CLB.

Romania

In our context, Romania presents a two-folded status: as a sending country in the context of EU-level labor migration and (more recently) a destination country for migration from outside the EU.

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Among relevant provisions, there are those on the residence and employment of foreigners; protection of children whose parents are abroad for work; migrant parents' rights in the countries of destination.

The dynamic regional political context—the EU mechanism of temporary protection

The ongoing situation generated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine exerted a rapid response on the part of the European Union, leading to, among others, the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive also having relevance for safeguarding children's rights and well-being.

Primary analysis of field research

(1) *The situation and views of children in the context of migration*

Depending on personal circumstances, migrant workers and their children expressed different visions of their future. Some of them perceive employment abroad as a forced, temporary step, seeking to return to Ukraine if possible; others are focused on integration into the host country and plan to reunite, in the destination society, with the family members who stayed in Ukraine.

Children are mostly just told about, but not involved in parents' decisions related to migration; however, they all passively contribute through understanding and accepting adult arguments, which are mostly economic, while strongly undergoing a feeling of loss. As a consequence, they acquire increased self-management, mutual support among siblings and peers and actively participate in the family through additional contributions to the household and even support given to adults, including the migrant parent(s). Compared with adults, children and youth see leaving and staying in a more nuanced, open and fluid manner and are often covertly critical of them, seeing migration as apparently not necessary or one that should be limited by a certain goal to a certain amount of time.

(2) *Relationship with caregivers*

Overall, relationships with those in the environment improve due to necessity; however, an effort is made to keep the caregiver role as it is ("you cannot replace a person"), however, recognition is given to their effort and to the difficulty of their multiple roles. The caregivers may become role models, or on the contrary, abusers (psychologically or legally), or offering deficient care.

With the departure of even one of the parents abroad, the child receives less attention not only because of parental absence, but also because of the increasing burden on the parents who remained home. The problem of upbringing and care is complicated when children reach adolescence, when they especially need assuring communication and supervision from older family members.

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Some children of older migrant workers are left alone with adult problems and have to deal with them on their own. In Ukraine, significant assistance to children of migrant workers left without proper supervision is provided by state institutions and public organizations - representatives of local self-government, social services, charitable foundations and religious communities.

(3) *Youth activities, compensation strategies, support groups*

Overall: children and youth report that a majority of families in their environment have at least one migrant adult, this being the absolute normalcy, hence mutual acceptance or support is natural. Lack of knowledge and distrust prevail when it comes to rights, laws or institutions/organizations (including the state) who might support them or their families. Most importantly, the belonging, the accomplishments and rootedness provided by peer groups—organized around hobbies, sports, cultural events etc.—has been highlighted: while one cannot compensate for a parent’s absence, they need to build self-esteem and personal embedding through others.

Migrant children, regardless of whether one or both parents are abroad, tend to attend school. In regions where the departure of parents to earn money is common (Western Ukraine), such children do not feel any special attitude from peers or teachers. In areas where such cases are rare (for example, Kharkiv region), children of migrant workers report feeling perceived differently by others.

(4) *Transnational relationships and communication*

Speaking about the peculiarities of the relationship with a missing family member, respondents mentioned cases of significant alienation of children from their parents, the destruction of trusting relationships and increasing mutual distancing. Overall, the transnational communication is consistent and relies heavily on having access to Internet. Generally, there is a high degree of co-presence and interest, sometimes group communication or through third persons (adult at home); Children use Internet as information sources, since their parents are not immediately available to them for asking questions. In a number of cases, long-distance communication also happens with the school of the child.

In some cases, previously dysfunctional relations improved due to distance and to the “value of time together”, but in some cases, online communication degenerated into addiction, or non-communication itself was the subject of communication. Using the Internet to navigate their daily existence is commonplace in the lives of many migrants; at the same time, a certain caution is practiced, some of the online information being reckoned as unreliable. Accordingly, verifying the information by directly talking to people is a common strategy. For children, using smartphones for reaching their absent parents can improve their communication skills; at the same time, some parents mentioned the difficulties with controlling online content consumed by adolescent children.

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(4a) Access to Internet & technology

Ukrainian and Moldavian labor migrants, not being EU citizens, do not enjoy free roaming services and mobile Internet from the home country, while the entitlement to an advantageous Internet subscription in the destination country is not easy to obtain. Some of them are dependent on the wi-fi networks from the accommodation, a fact that restricts the availability of the migrant parent for their children at home. Our result identified that members from TNFs encounter *limits in online communication for doing family*. Sometimes the quality of the connection is poor and they rely on voice calls only, unable to use the video options. Virtual communication, especially when it does not rely on a solid history of the relationship, cannot fully replace face-to-face interactions and might create distorted expectations and representations of the other. Physical and virtual co-presence is not the same and children sense these differences, although they acknowledge the huge improvement ICT brought in communication.

(5) Migration and family issues

Some of the issues involved are:

- migration motivated by the severe illness of a child;
- divorce after starting migration with severe consequences for the child;
- single mothers forced to migrate without taking their children along;
- economic difficulties paired with singleness of a parent lead to situations almost impossible to manage;
- lack of a strong social embedding leaves families in crisis with no functional support;
- gendered stigmatization of migrant mothers puts a strain on transnational relationships to the point of divorce
- migrant parents' difficulties in adapting to living conditions in another country and "reverse adapting" when returning.

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Note: recommendations within each category are ordered from urgent / short-term to essential / long-term

Legislative recommendations:

- To refine and promote the law on guardianship and temporary custody;
- Simplification and acceleration of the institutional process for orderly departure, including digitalization of bi-directional institutional communication (access and response) and of decision-making;
- Creating a dedicated institutional body to process (full, temporary or partial) delegation of parental authority in order to streamline the process and avoid reluctance towards traditional judicial forums;
- Creating a legal instrument of “hybrid” co-guardianship, whereby the migrant parent exercises authority, responsibility, and full participation in communication, monitoring, decisions, and significant events within children’s lives from a distance, in partnership with the stay-behind parent or caregiver who represents and complements his/her presence, without replacing it;
- At the international level, the creation of legislative frameworks to make it easier for minor children to travel abroad for visits to their migrant parents.

Recommendations for institutions and organizations:

- To organize experience exchange meetings for community representatives who have established successful work with TNFs;
- To create awareness-raising campaigns for acknowledging the TNFs phenomenon, to initiate constructive interest and dialogue, and prevent the bullying of migrants’ children;
- To encourage the direct involvement of transnational family members and children in communication, administrative and research initiatives that concern them;
- Specialized training in migration and TNFs, including legislation, data, practices, and policies should be provided for professionals dealing with TNFs with children: this can start in the very short term with training courses, then in the long term with MA or postgraduate courses;
- To assign trained specialists in regional social service centers for families, children, and youth;

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- Institutions to initiate partnership with beneficiaries through community information meetings and communication on social networks;
- Campaigns should be organized to promote the partnership where beneficiaries themselves present success stories;
- For the credibility of the initiative, reliable and up-to-date online information and a consistent openness to real-time digital communication must be provided;
- To set up databases and joint international contacts on TNFs, accessible to all institutional stakeholders.

Recommendations for actions facilitating transnational togetherness of families:

- Awareness-raising and training campaigns on children’s participation in transparent and functional transnational communication;
- Employers in target countries to be incentivized to offer convenient phone/internet packages and time/flexibility of connectivity within working hours;
- To facilitate regular visits (minimum 3 full days together every 3 months) between home and destination country through paid days off and travel vouchers offered by employers or authorities;
- Setting up community centers that facilitate the online communication for TNFs with limited access to internet;
- Provision of quality audio/video communication kits and internet access for families in need, at least in the early stages (3–6 months) of migration, similar to the approach used during the pandemic period.

Recommendations concerning national programs for TNFs:

- Creation of online platforms where children can express themselves, share their concerns and provide reciprocal support in groups moderated and monitored by public authorities, educational institutions, NGOs, which also collect anonymous data on issues to be fed back to research;
- Training programs for family members left at home, including caregivers, extended family, grandparents and supportive families;
- Creation of “transnational parent/ caregiver clubs” where they can share experiences, support, problems, and solutions;
- Organize psychological support for transnational family members, training in methods of preventing and overcoming crisis situations;
- Telephone hotline or online chat where TNFs, including children, can seek advice or assistance;
- Create a digital resource called “Transnational Family Advisor” with a summary of legal, domestic and other information that can be useful for migrant workers and families, with systematic answers;
- Emergency economic intervention packages for TNFs for economic, medical or legal crisis situations, with special focus on single-parent families and chronically ill children.

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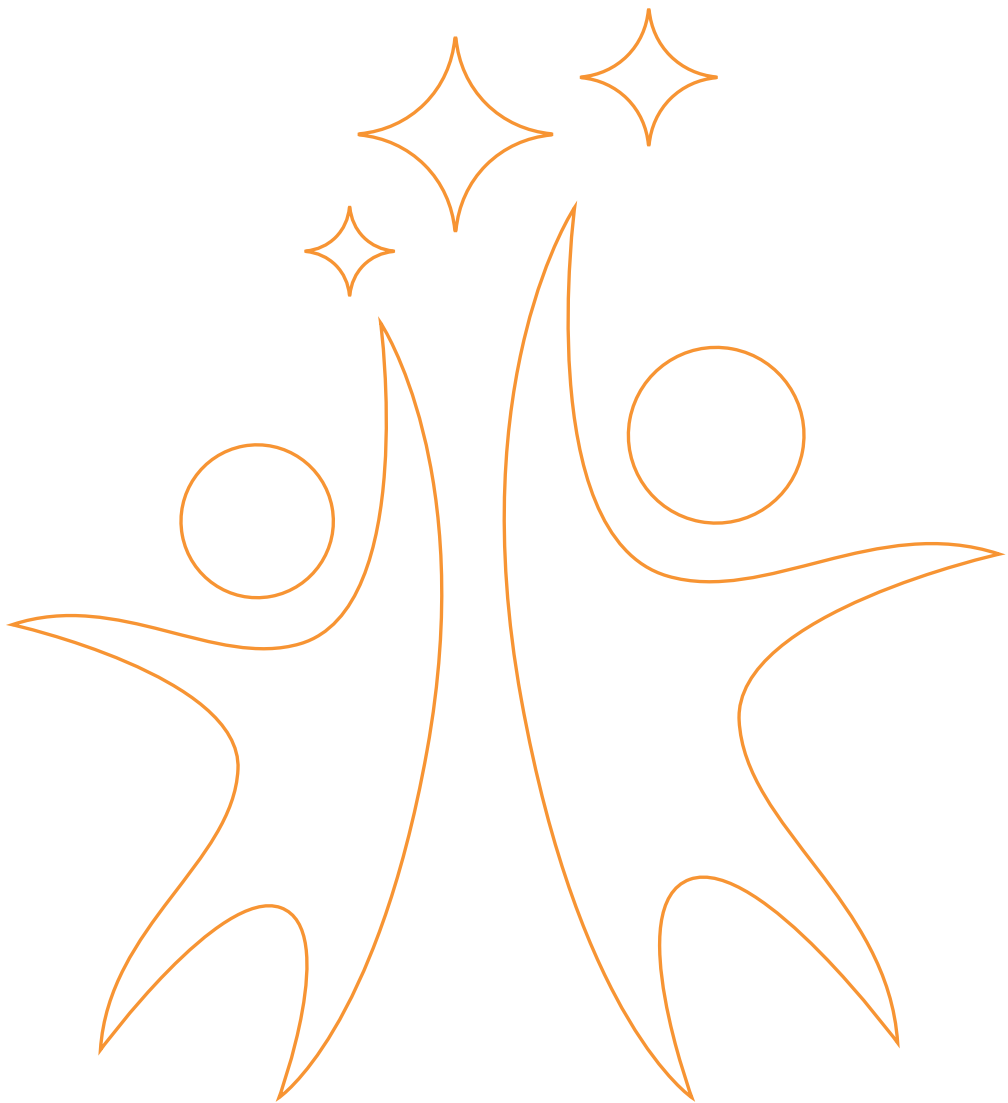
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Children Left Behind by Labour Migration: Supporting Moldovan and Ukrainian Transnational Families in the EU (“CASTLE”)

Policy Brief 2

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Áron TELEGDI-CSETRI
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CASTLE

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CASTLE

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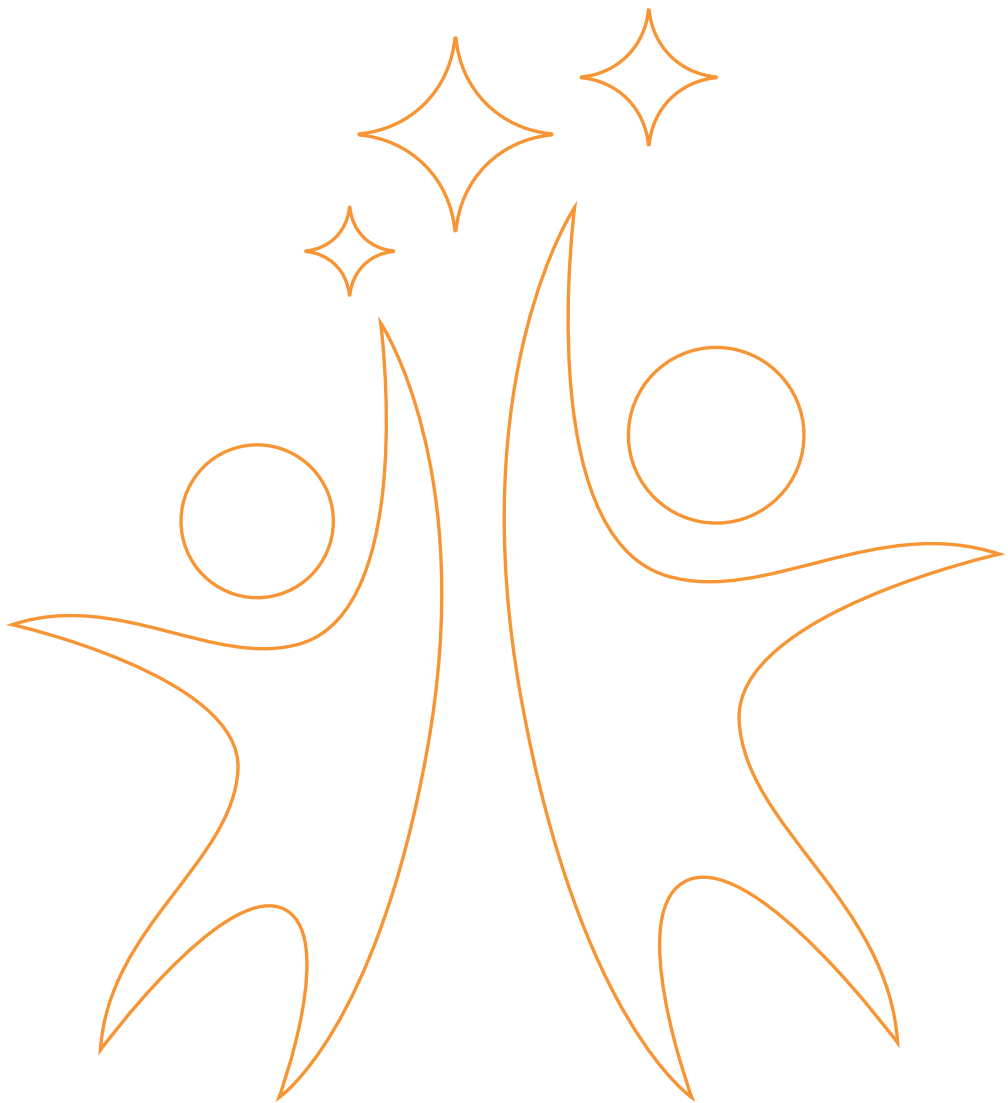
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1. Introduction

“CASTLE – Children left behind by labour migration: supporting Moldovan and Ukrainian transnational families in the EU” is an action-project that aims to support the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in improving their child protection frameworks and their migration and mobility policies, with a focus on the social and legal impact of labour migration on transnational families.

Transnational families are a functional *category of families, with its own specificities and rights entitlements. Therefore, they need to be inquired, empowered, their life-world observed and addressed from a multitude of perspectives and in a diversity of intersections, such as: minority status of various kinds including ethnic and non-regular families, children as a vulnerable group, trafficking, divorce, gender, poverty etc.*

The Research Centre for the Study of Transnational Families set up under the project within the Babeş-Bolyai University of Romania aims to promote research and to institutionalise the study of transnational families, which is currently not only rare and dispersed, but too often it is not solution-oriented and rather disconnected from the policy-making field, especially in relation to labour migration.

By creating and disseminating information, public policy recommendations and best practices that promote safe and ethical labour migration schemes aligned with child protection standards, this action directly supports Moldova and Ukraine as well as Romania and other Member States as destination countries for labour originating in these countries.

The CASTLE project is implemented by Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, in partnership with Terre des hommes Foundation Romania, Terre des hommes Moldova, Terre des hommes Ukraine, the Ukrainian Institute for Social Research after Oleksandr Yaremenko and the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova.

2. Hybrid Transnational Social Protection (HTSP)—framework of analysis

The main objective of the CASTLE project is to support transnational families with children left behind as a result of the labour migration of one or both parents, with a view to providing social protection in this context. After a general picture of the situation of these families presented previously, in the current phase of the action research we are addressing the issue from the specific standpoint of the social protection available to them.

With the recent increase in migration, the scope of application of social protection has also expanded; the social protection for the citizens of states has extended across borders as

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well as to non-citizens living within the borders. However, research on social protection has remained within a national plane, focusing in our context on the migrant and the role of the host state as formal and portable protection (Avato *et al.* 2010), while informal support networks are in fact an important complement to this (Avato *et al.* 2010). Moreover, the market of services and the third sector (NGOs, churches, etc.) also constitute important sources of protection in the given context.

Thus, the benefits accessed by individuals in this context can be seen as a “resource environment” of social protection, provided by various relevant actors: the state, the market, third sector actors and personal networks (Levitt *et al.* 2017) and accessed by individuals as agents in a syncretic, i.e., “hybrid” way depending on their own needs and capabilities and on the availability of resources, respectively. More recently, the totality of these resources in a transnational context has been termed by Levitt *et al.* (2023) “hybrid transnational social protection” (HTSP), structured according to four fundamental “logics” as follows:

- *the logic of citizenship* and social protection as a constitutional right. While the right to the social protection system of the nation-state is based on membership, this has recently been extended across borders through various diaspora policies, EU regulations and bilateral agreements. However, third-country nationals (without bilateral and non-EU agreements) remain largely uncovered by the social provisions of the state (Faist and Bilecen 2015). The actors providing this type of protection are the public institutions at home and abroad: the public administration, consulates and embassies (Levitt *et al.* 2023, 27–28).
- *the logic of humanity* and social protection based on human rights, as stipulated in conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The power of this logic is rather symbolic, generally not translated into meaningful sources of protection (Levitt *et al.* 2023, 23). States prefer to provide social protection on the basis of migrants’ employment status rather than personhood, emphasising the role of the market in regional economic integration projects (e.g., the European Union) over human rights (Paul 2017), and therefore for some migrants social benefits become restrictive. The providers of this type of protection are state institutions, intergovernmental organisations, the transnational civil society.
- *the logic of the market* and social protection services as goods. With the retrenchment of the welfare state and the rise of neoliberal economic policies in many countries, the market has taken on a more important role in the provision of social services. Service providers for immigrants, private firms or state institutions functioning as market actors provide such services, while access depends on the ability to pay, for both citizens and non-citizens.
- *the logic of community* and social protection as community. Providers are informal networks, family and friends, NGOs, churches or religious organisations, both in the country of origin and in the destination country. In many cases, this logic fills the

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gaps left by the others and is very significant in the lives of migrants and transnational families.

- Within these logics, the resource environment is formed by combining (hybridizing) “what is actually available to an individual in his or her protective toolkit, as opposed to what is theoretically or legally available” (Levitt *et al.* 2023, 30). In this environment, actors accessing resources should not be seen as mere recipients, but as agents actively seeking, requesting, obtaining and sharing resources.

3. The family as a unit

Families decide, communicate, share practices including care and support, access social protection resources and suffer or thrive together in a relational community, even across borders. That is why not individuals, but ultimately families are both the beneficiaries and agents of HTSP, especially on behalf of dependent family members such as children. Resources may be available in destination countries, countries of origin or even third countries, but they are accessed simultaneously by members for a better life for the whole family.

Various changes in state protection policies have led to an emphasis on personal responsibility and, consequently, on the importance of the family as the main safety net and provider of welfare, which is a driver of migration (Baldassar *et al.* 2018). Migration emerges as a form of social protection (Levitt *et al.* 2023) or as a ‘transnational resilience strategy’ through which individuals ‘cope with the challenges of social reproduction in the country of origin’ (Kilkey and Urzi 2017, 2582) by combining resources in the destination country and the country of origin. Previous research has also shown that ‘migration itself is a tool of social protection’, particularly for poorer families, where remittances are used for basic needs (Avato *et al.* 2010, 463) and the decision to migrate is made collectively.

In the process, migrants themselves remain responsible for the welfare of their family members back home by coordinating the multiple resources at their disposal, trying to maximize the resource environment available not only for themselves but also for the family members back home (Serra Mingot and Mazzucato 2019), where weak state support creates burdensome responsibilities for the migrant (Degavre and Merla 2016). Even if they qualify for some form of social support, migrants are not seen as family members with caring responsibilities in their country of origin (Degavre and Merla 2016), although the family-centered motivation for migration is a well-known phenomenon.

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4. Conclusions

It is important to see transnational families as active and responsible agents acting precisely to protect their children left at home. As such, we need to move away from the ‘abandoned children’ paradigm in relation to stay-behind children in transnational families, and move beyond the exclusive focus on the need to protect them from their own families.

In this spirit, the set of policies presented below aims to support these families to protect their children left behind.

5. New perspectives for policy recommendations

Given, on the one hand, the level of mistrust, persistent stigmatisation, defensive attitudes within the society of origin and, on the other hand, the situation of immigrant families, where support elements are deeply interlinked and not reversible—being in fact factors that actively shape the social environment they stem from—specific transnational solutions are needed so as to recognise the status of these families and, indeed, of their entire social environment.

In addition to dialogue and communication, as suggested previously, the transnational status must be formally recognised for all the families, not just their migrant members (as in the case of migrant workers’ rights). Thorough and detailed transnational protection measures should be pursued.

The transnational status of families should focus primarily on their family structure. This means that families are legal, economic and, above all, social and emotional units which function to promote the interests of their members, including dependent members, especially children, creating a social reproduction which is not in fact the reproduction of the society of origin but of a new, transnational society.

All recommended internal measures should be institutionalised at a transnational level.

- *the logic of citizenship*

The bi-national agreements between the main countries of origin and the main receiving countries should be publicised so that these families become aware of them. Children left behind in the country of origin should be the beneficiaries of these agreements:

- allowances can be given to parents who work legally for children left at home;
- access for these children (when necessary) to health services in the destination countries as co-insured persons;
- temporary free access to education systems in destination countries if for various reasons parents decide to bring their children with them (e.g., to rescue them from certain unfortunate environments).

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These benefits should be granted quickly and efficiently and should not be conditional on the family's integration in the host country. We need to be aware of the temporary nature of this labour migration.

We reiterate the need for a hybrid co-guardianship (when the child's/children's sole or both parents leave), see Policy Brief 1: the parent who has left should remain a legal representative with all the rights and duties regarding the child's life, as the main decision-maker, and the state/authorities in turn retain all obligations of information and collaboration with the parent, online and/or by phone. We recommend that this practice, already existing informally, now become formally legitimised and authorised. The caregiver left at home becomes a co-guardian, without individual decision-making rights, but involved in the information and decision-making process. Authorities in both countries, possibly through dedicated bodies/positions/centres, should be informed of this status of the migrant adult and the migrant adult should have responsibilities, but also rights, in accordance with this status, as follows:

- he/she should be available to these authorities (should be able to respond whenever approached)—transnational communication;
- state institutions (schools, hospitals, police, etc.) should have the right to use technology-mediated communication to communicate with these parents;
- the parent should participate directly in legal decisions concerning children left at home. A certified electronic signature can be introduced for these parents.

Citizens working abroad are still citizens of their country of origin and still have all the responsibilities towards this country, but they must also benefit from the rights of their country, and the authorities must find real solutions to interact with them.

Families whose migrant adults are performing seasonal work are a vulnerable group because their contracts are often not respected by employers; communication with those at home is more difficult due to the intense nature of the work. As stayaways are short, legal steps are often not taken to inform the authorities about the situation of children when it is the case. The situation is even more delicate here because employment agencies often deliberately select adults with children left at home to motivate them to return home. In these situations, states should oblige these companies to inform the authorities in order to monitor these children and even consider offering alternative programmes for them:

- summer camps - with supervision and activities during the day;
- sports, artistic programmes, etc.

Companies that massively recruit seasonal workers from certain areas/countries should collaborate with the authorities and could co-fund these programmes (the same applies to Romania with regard to the immigrants they have been intensively recruiting lately).

Jobs that require adults to be accommodated at the workplace or at a place provided by the employer (in-home caring for children or other vulnerable people; working in the hotel

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sector; accommodating several workers in one room, etc.) burden the transnational relationships of parents with their children at home, as they do not offer space for private virtual communication or potential visits, nor the necessary time off. Employers should be obliged and supported to provide time and space specifically designed for these transnational interactions. Authorities in destination countries need to be aware that it is not only the migrant adult who is under their protection, but together with him/her, also the migrant's relationship with the family members who remain in the country of origin.

- *the logic of humanity*

Refugees and forced migrants (as we are now witnessing in the case of the war in Ukraine) access rights derived from this logic. Unfortunately, we see too little awareness in these protection measures that these people are part of transnational families and still have family members left behind at home. Temporary protection offered by EU countries and, more recently, even by Moldova, on the other hand offers greater freedom of movement between the country of origin and the country of destination. But a framework for cooperation between destination countries and countries of origin, overseeing the relationship between the authorities and family members in the other country, is particularly necessary in critical situations, for example:

- refugee mothers together with part of the family, who still have children left at home (e.g., older boys who could not leave Ukraine);
- children together with one parent in one EU country and with the other parent in another country;
- children in an EU country without parents with them, who have parents in another EU country.

We recommend the amendment of the refugee protection/temporary protection laws, so as to make it easier for refugees to relate to family members in other countries.

Very often labour migrants with a legal contract, especially in the case of countries of origin outside the EU, end up in a form of illegal labour migration: contracts, visas, etc. expire. At that point, social protection in the country of destination for migrant family members disappears and makes it difficult to relate transnationally with the family left at home. Moreover, those at home hide the departure of a member in such a situation in order to protect them. We should be aware that this illegal labour migration is often not a choice and that in critical cases, families with members in such situations should receive humanitarian support both in the country of origin and in the country of destination.

- *the logic of the market*

It is natural and understandable that most labour migrants go abroad because their states fail to provide social protection to them and especially to their family members. The primary objective is to raise the money in order to buy protection (care services; medical services; money to support vulnerable family members, etc.).

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These elements of social protection are rarely bought in the country of destination (they are expensive). Even the migrant returns to the country of origin to access various services. This leads first to a strong privatisation of these services in countries with a high outflow of migrants, and then to a high price for these services in the country of origin. This is a vicious circle, because then migrants have to produce even more money to pay for them. Many residents (including family members back home) find it difficult to access these services. What's more, other foreign nationals also come to buy services from these countries (see medical tourism—e.g., dental services). Measures could be taken to protect against these high prices by setting a maximum threshold for various services for residents and, of course, it should be mandatory for these companies to offer a percentage of services to residents.

- *the logic of community and respective social protections as community*

In our experience, migrant communities (Moldovans, Ukrainians and even Romanians) are not especially functional as sources of social support. Few respondents report support from co-citizens in destination countries (with the partial exception of Ukrainian communities formed as a result of the common situation caused by the war). Individual networks do function, but community networks don't. Building a supportive diaspora in the destination country is also the responsibility of the countries of origin (funding programmes, religious services, etc.). In order to become civically active and in order to increase the supportive nature of migrant networks, these migrants must first integrate in a pragmatic manner and have financial security. But for these diasporas in the making there is a long way to go.

Community networks in countries of origin are also weak. For example, in Moldova and Ukraine (but not only here) there are entire villages without active adults (it is elderly people and children who stay at home). Here it's hard to get support when you need it.

In destination countries, there are often NGOs that provide support to migrants in distress, but the services are not sufficiently publicised. Many do not learn about their services in a timely manner.

In the countries of origin (Moldova and Ukraine), there are very few NGOs providing services/support to families with children left at home. The existing organisations, limited in number, are rather funded from outside the country. Measures to support these types of activities through NGOs could be useful. This is what Romania has done in the past and has recently strengthened this support through special funding programmes, which can be accessed for this category of beneficiaries.

Transnational NGOs could provide services to these families, both in destination countries and in countries of origin. Funding programmes (e.g., CASTLE/ Terre des Hommes) for such transnational projects are very useful.

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6. Takeaways

- EU transnational social protection across borders (in predominant countries of origin), including institutional communication, common databases, hotlines, mutual information on legislation, collaborative policy development teams.
- Unification of family policies between countries.
- Informing migrants about rights: they ought to be informed about their rights and duties in the country of destination (even if they are illegal migrants), in addition to those in the country of origin, including services available through country offices.
- NGO action: raising awareness on services provided by NGOs for migrants in destination countries. The actions are weak in the countries of origin, therefore they need to be strengthened and be promoted.

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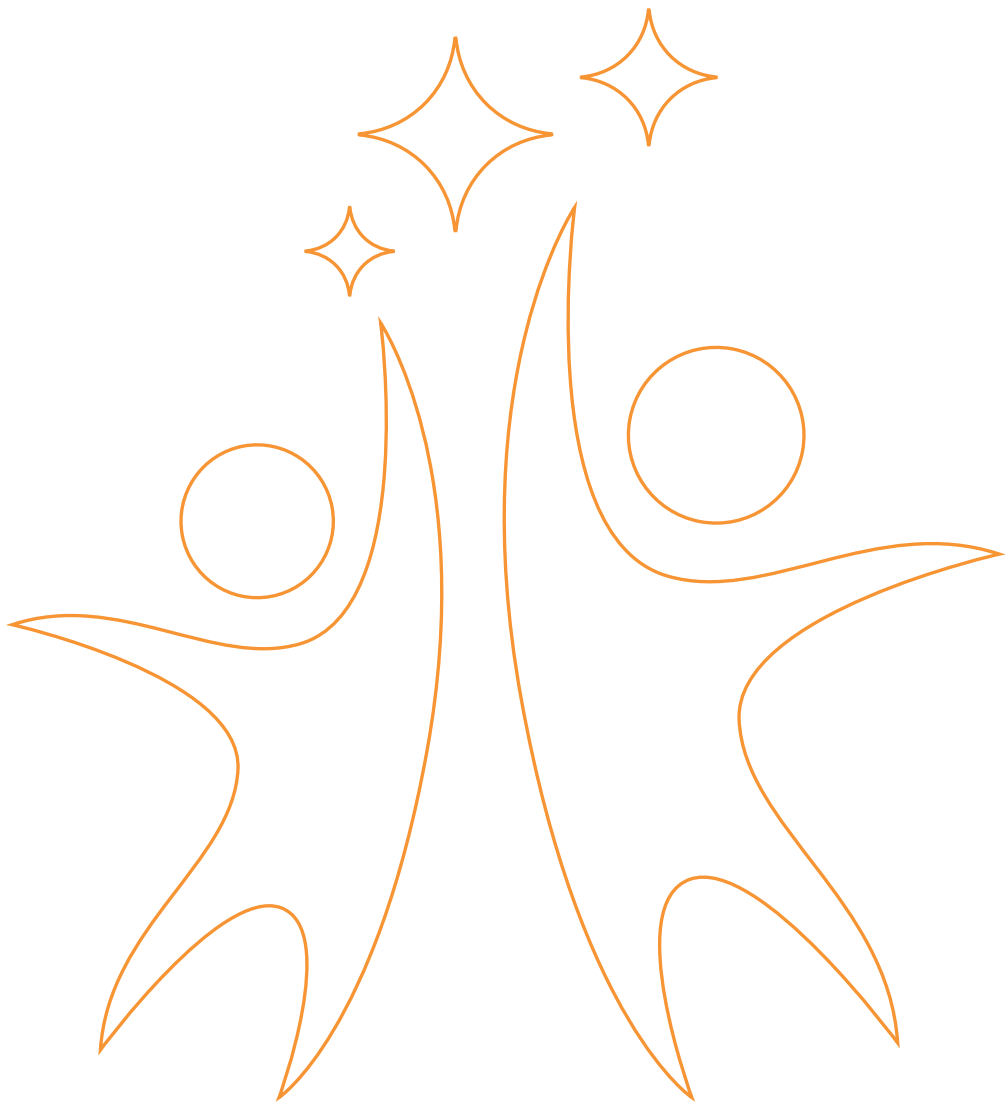
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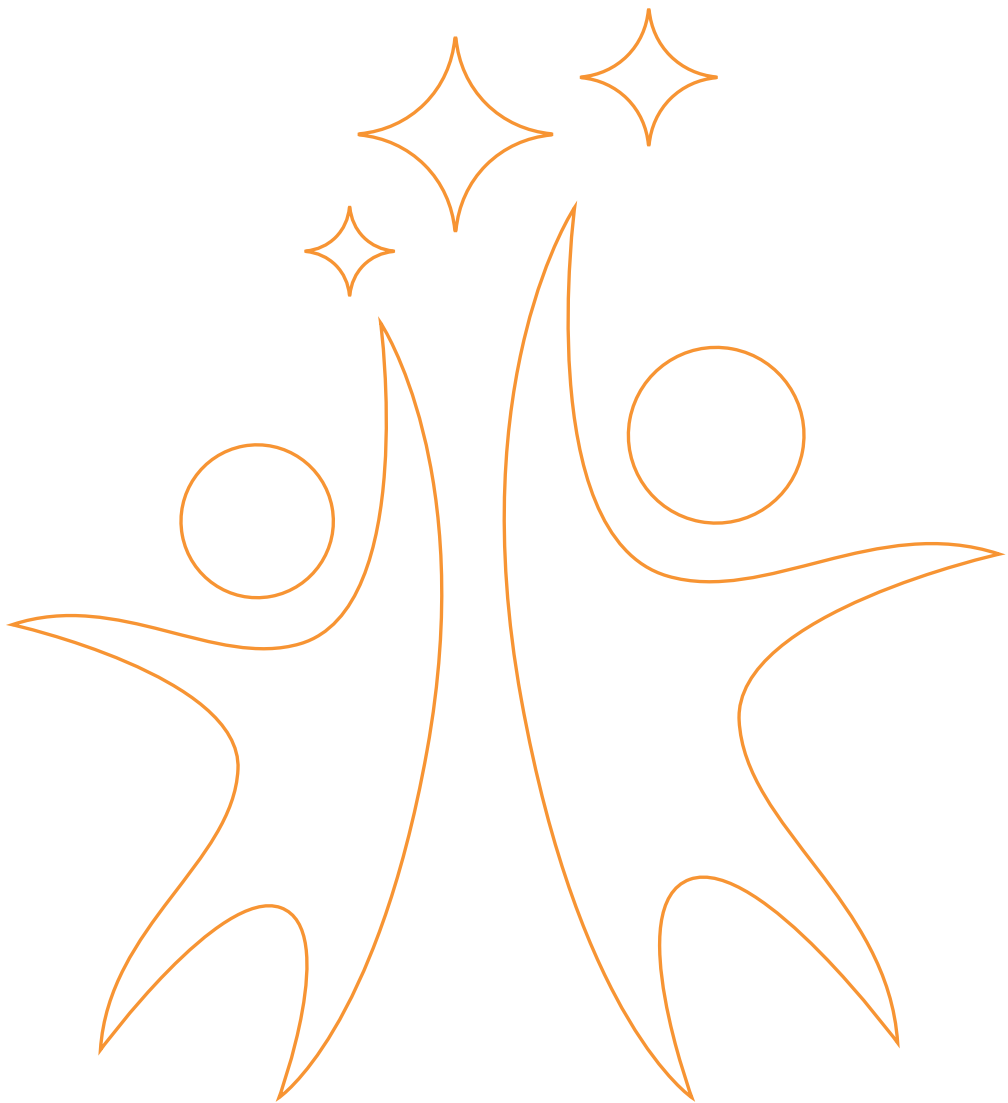
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Children Left Behind by Labour Migration: Supporting Moldovan and Ukrainian Transnational Families in the EU (“CASTLE”)

Policy Brief 3

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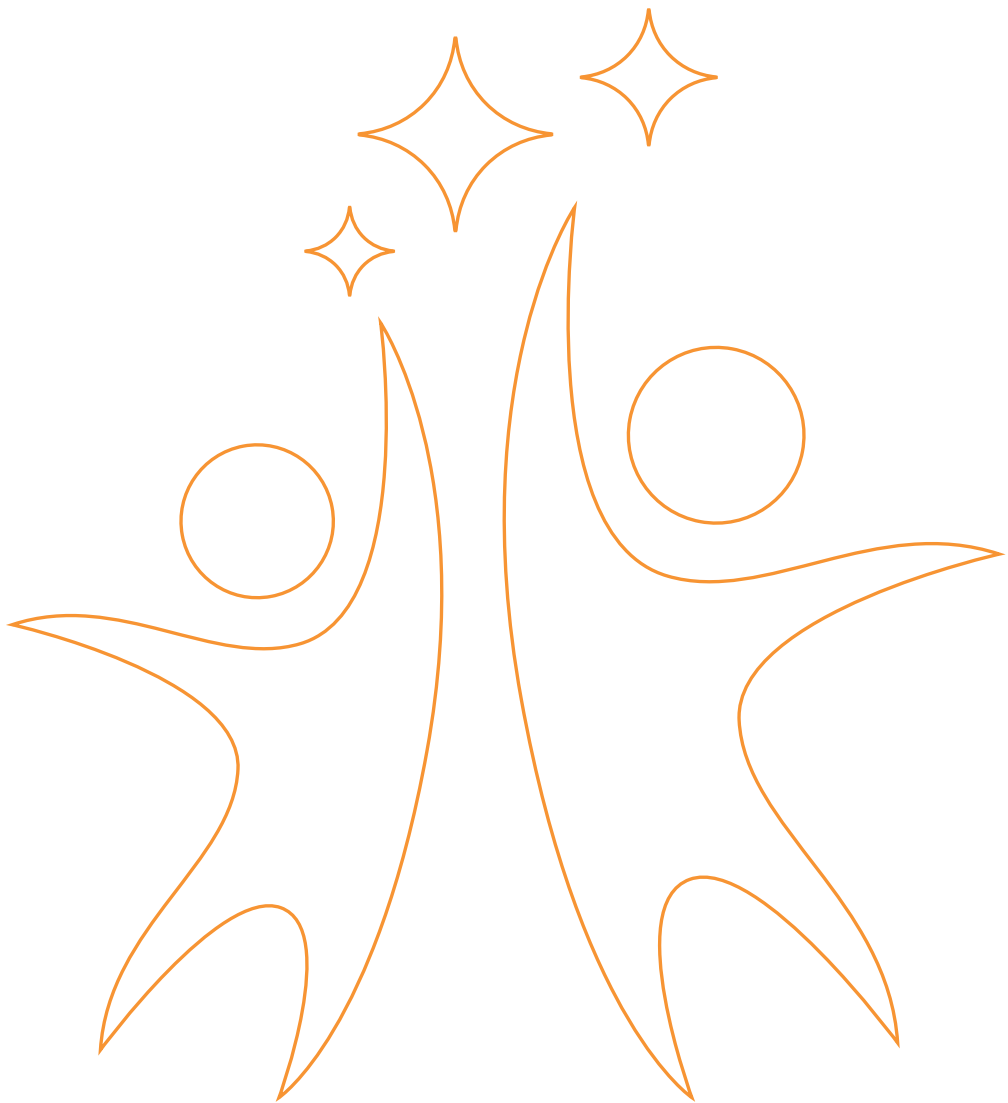
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1. Introduction

“CASTLE – Children left behind by labour migration: supporting Moldovan and Ukrainian transnational families in the EU” is an action-project that aims to support the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in improving their child protection frameworks and their migration and mobility policies, with a focus on the social and legal impact of labour migration on transnational families.

Among the previous outputs of the action (available on its website), Policy Brief 1 was based on the primary analysis on data and formulated general recommendations, while Policy Brief 2, on secondary analysis with specific recommendations within the Hybrid Transnational Social Protection framework.

In turn, Policy Brief 3 presents the following:

- recommendations for EU countries hosting labour migrants having children left behind, based on a collective effort and formulated by the Romanian NGO partner (TdH Romania);
- country-specific recommendations for Ukraine (UISR);
- country-specific recommendations for the Republic of Moldova (ASEM).

2. Recommendations for host countries

Based on the positive experiences and initiatives in the field of protecting children who remain at home due to their parents’ labor migration, one major insight is that, beside public administrative bodies, community organizations and private non-profit entities, employing companies can also play a significant role in supporting employees who have children left behind due to migration for work.

In this context, the following recommendations can be made:

Flexible Work Arrangements: Offer flexible working hours and remote work options to employees with children left behind. This flexibility can help them manage their family responsibilities more effectively.

Financial Support: Provide financial assistance or benefits to employees with children left behind. This can include subsidies for childcare expenses, school fees, or medical bills.

Counseling and Employee Assistance Programs (EAP): Offer counseling services through EAPs to help employees cope with the emotional and psychological challenges of separation from their children. These programs can provide support for mental health and well-being.

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Paid Leave and Family Reunification Programs: Implement policies that allow employees to take paid leave to visit their children or arrange family reunifications. This can include additional days off or financial assistance for travel expenses.

Childcare Assistance: Establish or partner with childcare facilities or services to provide affordable and convenient childcare options for employees with children left behind.

Educational Support: Offer educational support programs for employees' children, such as scholarships, tutoring services, or access to online learning resources.

Legal Assistance: Provide legal support and guidance to employees who need assistance with immigration or family-related legal matters, such as custody arrangements.

Healthcare Benefits: Ensure that employees have access to comprehensive healthcare coverage for both themselves and their children, including mental health services.

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs): Create or support ERGs focused on the needs of employees with children left behind. These groups can provide a supportive community and share resources and advice.

Communication and Information: Keep employees informed about available resources and support programs through regular communication channels, such as company newsletters or intranets.

Training and Sensitivity Programs: Conduct training programs to raise awareness among employees and supervisors about the challenges faced by those with children left behind. Promote a culture of understanding and empathy.

Flexible Financial Benefits: Offer financial planning and advisory services to help employees manage their finances, especially when supporting family members abroad.

Partnerships with NGOs and Community Organizations: Collaborate with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community groups that specialize in supporting families affected by migration. This can help extend the reach of support services.

Family-Friendly Policies: Create and enforce policies that support a family-friendly workplace culture, including understanding and accommodating the needs of employees with children left behind.

Regular Check-Ins: Encourage supervisors and HR teams to conduct regular check-ins with employees in this situation to assess their well-being and offer support as needed.

Advocacy: Advocate for policies at the national and international levels that protect the rights and well-being of families affected by migration, including children left behind.

Further examples of positive experiences and initiatives in the field of protecting children who remain at home due to their parents' labor migration:

- ✓ Psychosocial Support Programs
- ✓ School Attendance Incentives
- ✓ Cross-Border Family Reunification

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- ✓ Community Engagement
- ✓ Parenting Training
- ✓ Scholarship Programs
- ✓ Collaboration with Diaspora Communities
- ✓ Child Advocacy and Participation
- ✓ Legal Protections for Migrant Workers
- ✓ Integration Programs for Returning Parents
- ✓ Public Awareness Campaigns
- ✓ Local Economic Development Initiatives
- ✓ Access to Healthcare
- ✓ Multi-Agency Coordination

3. Recommendations for Ukraine

3.1 Research methodology

I. Quantitative method: online interviews using Zoom and Teams platforms and messengers convenient for respondents (Viber, WhatsApp, Fb, Telegram). The survey was conducted using tablets with special software “DigSee Sure”.

Geography of the quantitative method: Country of residence of respondents at the time of the survey: Latvia, Lithuania, Germany, Poland, Romania, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, the Netherlands, Spain, Ireland, Hungary, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Sweden, Italy, France, Portugal, Denmark.

The sample population implemented—totally, 207 respondents were interviewed.

- 115 respondents—persons with a child/ children who moved abroad due to the full-scale war and found a job abroad;
- 92 respondents—persons with a child/ children who left for employment (already have previous experience of labour migration).

After quality control, the data obtained were used to create a data set and perform calculations, which were further used in the preparation of the analytical report.

II. Qualitative method: group focused interviews (focus groups) were conducted online using the ZOOM platform. 4 focus groups were conducted, for a total of 32 participants.

Target groups:

Persons with a child/ children who moved abroad due to the full-scale war and found work abroad or who left for employment (already have previous experience of labour migration);

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Children of persons who moved abroad due to full-scale war and found a job abroad, under the age of 17 or who have left for employment (already have previous experience of labor migration), under the age of 17.

Geography of respondents' residence: Germany (8 participants), Poland (8 participants), Romania (8 participants), Czech Republic (4 participants), other EU countries (4 participants).

3.2 Some conclusions

- The most common reason for many forced migrants to decide to move abroad is a sense of danger to themselves and their children. At the same time, every fifth forced migrant said that the reason for leaving was better conditions and prospects than in Ukraine.
- When deciding which country to move to, an important factor for more than half of the respondents is the presence of relatives/acquaintances in that country or previous experience of staying in that country.
- More than three-quarters of respondents said that the end of hostilities in Ukraine would encourage them to return to their homeland. The number of migrants who do not plan to return to Ukraine is much smaller than the widespread public and expert opinion suggests.
- The main source of information for Ukrainians abroad is Internet resources, as well as communication with representatives of the social environment - relatives, friends and acquaintances.
- The hypothesis about the possible negative impact of forced migration on the strength of marriages was not confirmed: only 4% of the surveyed forced migrants said they had divorced after the start of Russia's large-scale aggression (after February 24, 2022).
- The decision to move was often made by parents without taking into account the opinion of the children or against their reluctance to leave Ukraine. Some teenagers, talking about the circumstances of migration, mentioned the feeling of disdain from adults and disregard for their opinion, which led to the deterioration of relations in the family.
- Migrants moving abroad was accompanied by a significant decline in their real income (purchasing power). According to the current level of income, two-thirds of the surveyed migrants should be classified as 'poor' or 'low-income'. Compared to the pre-war period, the share of 'middle-income' and 'wealthy' respondents has significantly decreased (in each case by about one and a half times). At the same time, the proportion of 'low-income' people has increased by one and a half times. About half of the migrants surveyed today do not have a 'emergency fund'—material assets that they can rely on in case of emergency.
- Ukrainian migrants abroad cannot fully implement their educational and professional potential.

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- Many Ukrainian migrants belong to the social group of the ‘working poor’. Unskilled work and part-time employment cause low incomes, limited purchasing power of Ukrainian migrants and, as a result, deprivation.
- At the same time, there was no massive impoverishment or lumpenization among the displaced persons from Ukraine. This indirectly indicates the effectiveness of the system of social protection and assistance to Ukrainian migrants in the countries of destination.
- For minor children of migrants, the problem of adaptation to new living conditions after moving is very relevant, given their age and lack of life and social experience.
- Adaptation of children and adolescents in a new country is facilitated by a large number of migrants like them, who live next to them and study together. At the same time, this situation in some cases leads to a kind of “encapsulation” of children of migrants: their communication is mainly concentrated in the circle of migrants like them, which makes it difficult for them to socialize in a new environment.
- Ukrainians abroad are more likely to trust narrow social circles and people they know than public institutions and organizations.

3.3 Recommendations

Strengthen cooperation between local authorities, law enforcement agencies and communities where migrants live. Use the role of reputable organizations, such as the Embassy of Ukraine, to build trust and prevent situations that could lead to unfair treatment or prejudice against Ukrainian migrants in important areas (employment, access to health-care, housing).

Use digital platforms, targeted media and local authorities to disseminate clear, accessible information about legal aid and support services. Customize the provision of information to the specific needs of different groups of migrants, helping them to understand where to turn if they encounter problems.

Create structured information flowcharts or guidelines to help migrants navigate different situations, for example, when they face obstacles in obtaining financial support or medical services. Such guidelines will serve as a navigational tool, helping migrants understand what steps to take and where to go for help, improving their overall experience and well-being in their new environment.

To ensure the successful integration of Ukrainian citizens abroad and improve their standard of living, the Ukrainian government should *strive to simplify the procedure for nostrification of educational documents*, in particular to ensure that migrants with higher education have the opportunity to obtain well-paid jobs in their specialty. The best practice would be for a Ukrainian specialist to work for a certain period of time (up to six months) under the supervision of employer’s representative, receive a salary, and at the same time

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confirm his or her diploma. It is important to ensure that Ukrainian diplomas, at least for vocational education and professional higher education, are recognized without additional confirmation (special exams, etc.).

To ensure the successful economic integration of migrant women with children, it is important that *mothers have the opportunity to leave their children under supervision while they work*. Since public (free) kindergartens often do not have free places for children, an alternative is the cooperation of Ukrainian women in childcare and the creation of home-based kindergartens. Women who know each other would take turns caring for children at home, allowing others to work during this time. It is also advisable to use the experience of women's coworking spaces, which are considered an important trend in modern life. Women who are able to work remotely could *take their children to such a coworking space* and take turns looking after the children for one or two hours. Such coworking spaces could be created by migrant women who have experience in entrepreneurship. NGOs and volunteers could initiate or motivate the creation of coworking spaces for migrant women and provide practical assistance in the first period of their work. Women's cooperation in childcare and upbringing should be popularized, information on the creation of home-based kindergartens and women's coworking spaces, the conditions and procedure for their creation should be disseminated on social media, and examples of such practices should be provided.

Ukrainian society should be interested in ensuring that as many Ukrainian school-age children who find themselves abroad continue their online education in Ukraine as possible. It would be advisable to *create a special educational center in Ukraine that would provide a new level of online learning*, which would not depend on air alerts, emergency power outages, and would also take into account the fact that many Ukrainian migrant children are currently living in countries with different time zones (Canada, the United States, and others). The new online learning center should use the latest media technologies for teaching and learning, and thus improve the quality of school education. The educational process itself, the child's communication with Ukrainian teachers, and staying in a Ukrainian-speaking environment will strengthen the child's symbolic connection with the homeland, form the child's national identity, and prevent him or her from losing his or her "roots."

A significant part of the surveyed migrants recognize that their adaptation and integration into a new social environment is problematic and involves significant psychological costs. Many of them experience feelings of isolation and alienation against the background of various manifestations of tension and depression. At the same time, the need for psychological assistance is not always recognized. Lack of a culture of caring for psychological health, lack of experience with a psychologist, and stigmatization of psychologist and psychiatrist services are obstacles to getting the help you need. *Educational work among migrants is needed to overcome prejudice against relevant services*. There is also a need to widely inform migrants about where and how they can get psychological help.

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The Ukrainian government should *create conditions for the return of Ukrainian citizens who are abroad and want to return home now*, without waiting for the war to end. The strategy of returning migrants should take into account that among them there are...

- many women with children;
- many residents of settlements that are currently occupied;
- people whose homes were destroyed or damaged;
- many poor people who are unemployed and have no savings, whose income is mainly from social benefits in the host country.

Therefore, the government's program for returning Ukrainian migrants home should include the following:

- providing migrants with funds for relocation and accommodation in a new place;
- resettlement of migrants to the safe regions, to settlements that are not subject to shelling;
- providing migrants with housing—government-purchased housing on the primary or secondary housing market, or in towns with modular houses with utilities;
- providing migrants with jobs;
- enabling migrants to enroll their preschool children in kindergartens and school-age children in schools.

With regard to providing migrants with funds for relocation and initial accommodation, purchase or construction of housing for them, the governments of the *countries where migrants currently reside and the European Commission can become donors in these matters*.

4. Recommendations for the Republic of Moldova

4.1. Background

The phenomenon of labor migration from the Republic of Moldova is becoming more and more widespread in connection with the precarious economic situation, as well as with the intensification of globalization processes. According to statistical data, the cumulative number of labor migrants in the last 25 years from the Republic of Moldova exceeded 1 million people.

International labor migration can be considered beneficial for the Republic of Moldova. It reduced unemployment and the pressure on the labor market, contributed to the increase of incomes and well-being of the population, to the reduction of the poverty level, in general, it ensured a perspective of sustainable development. The financial resources that entered the country ensured a stability of the national currency, an economic growth, as well as a change in the consumption pattern of the population.

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At the same time, labor migration has also generated a series of social risks, such as the decline of employment on the labor market, the aging of the population, the expansion of transnational families, the problem of children left behind by migration.

It should be noted, that the expansion of transnational families is characteristic of all countries, in the context of globalization processes and the intensification of international migration in the world. Each country facing this phenomenon develops its own policies to mitigate its negative effects.

The expansion of transnational families affects the integrity of the family and can generate certain risks related to the situation of children left behind after migration, including their psycho-emotional development, their health, their education, their socialization. The psychological impact of the parents' migration on the children left after the migration is characterized by the feeling of loneliness, lack of affectivity, emotional deprivation, which negatively influences the children's personality development.

The central and local public authorities in the Republic of Moldova are aware of the risks of international labor migration related to the situation of children left behind after migration and try to overcome them quite effectively, either by adapting the regulatory framework, or by promoting coherent and effective public policies, or by developing new social services for social groups affected by migration. Several strategic documents were developed (Strategy for Child Protection for the years 2014–2020), normative acts were approved (Law no. 140 of 14.06.2013 “Regarding the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents”) which provided for a series of multidisciplinary actions aimed at ensuring the protection and well-being of children left behind after migration.

It should be noted that the phenomenon of transnational families and children left behind by migration manifested itself in different ways in various periods of the history of labor migration from the Republic of Moldova, which determined the need to organize systematic research in the field, which led to the continuous improvement of the framework legislation and methods of intervention by public authorities to manage this phenomenon.

In 2021, a research (CASTLE) was initiated that aimed to improve the legislative institutional framework for the protection of transnational families in correlation with similar legal practices and norms in the European Union, including based on solid empirical research evidence. The research highlighted certain challenges related to the phenomenon of transnational families and children left behind after migration, including: the problem of monitoring children whose parents are away working abroad in the urban environment due to the large number of inhabitants; the lack of effective intervention tools, especially in the urban environment; the lack of qualified specialists who could work with this category of people; the small number of trainings for specialists (social workers, psychologists, etc.) for perfecting intervention methods in managing the situation of children left behind after migration.

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4.2 Recommendations

However, there are also certain gaps, the overcoming of which would lead to the avoidance of several problems and challenges related to the phenomenon of transnational families and children left behind by labor migration, including:

- *Complementing town halls in all rural localities with qualified personnel, psychologists, specialists* in the field;
- *Streamlining the process of delegating guardianship or custody* for children without care whose parents are away working abroad;
- *More active involvement in the management of the problem* related to children following migration, the involvement of other partners: civil society, individuals, companies, etc.;
- *Organizing systematic research in the field* to improve both the legislative framework and the methods of intervention by public authorities.

