



*Children Left Behind by Labor Migration: supporting  
Moldovan and Ukrainian Transnational Families in the EU  
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## CASTLE

### Opening Report

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## *Introduction<sup>1</sup>*

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*.

### *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

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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 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

		Interviewees /FG participants' country of origin		
		Republic of Moldova	Romania	Ukraine
<b>INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS</b>				
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		<b>73</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>FOCUS-GROUPS (10 sessions)</b>				
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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## Findings

### 1. Literature review

(Mihaela Hărăguș, PhD, Babeș-Bolyai University, Romania)

#### 1.1 Methodology of the studies

There are 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 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.

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 emotional unmet 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 does 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: pp.15 - 17).

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 Pfiffer 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 to the negative educational 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 is 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 of economic 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 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, 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. 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 childcare, 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 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 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.

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 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 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

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### 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:

##### 2.3.1 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

##### **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 complex<sup>2</sup>

### 2.6 Limited awareness of the existing legislation

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<sup>2</sup> European Parliamentary Research Service. Legal migration policy and law. European added value assessment, 2021.

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.<sup>3</sup>

## 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.<sup>4</sup> The approval of the said Directive<sup>5</sup>, on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022, was soon followed by a set of guidelines<sup>6</sup>, 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.

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

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<sup>3</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. Protecting migrant workers from exploitation in the EU: workers' perspectives, 2019. `

<sup>4</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/temporary-protection\\_en](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>

<sup>5</sup> 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](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)

<sup>6</sup> 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>

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.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

### 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 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 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 UKraine);

- 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 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).

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).

### 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”* (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 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 Moldova)

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 Moldova)

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 Moldova)

#### 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 Moldova)

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 Moldova)

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 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 Moldova), indeed to forbid such communication: *“Grandma didn't let us talk to our mom on the phone”* (child, Moldova). 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, Moldova).

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 Moldova).

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) Moldova 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 Ukraine)

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, Moldova),

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 Moldova)

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, Moldova).

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 Moldova)

### 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 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, Moldova)

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, Moldova)

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. 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, Ukraine)

### 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, Ukraine)

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 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, Moldova)

### 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 Moldova)

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 Moldova)

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, Moldova)

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

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, Moldova)

## **Discussion**

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 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.

Among the consequences of these:

- 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.

#### *Take-away points*

In conclusion, we can witness families in acute need of external support - economically, medically, psychologically, with childcare, temporary delegation of guardianship, especially in emergencies. These are situations not created by migration, but tentatively solved by it, to various levels of success, sometimes worsening them.

As a direct recommendation, an economic and social emergency intervention package should be designed for these transnational families for crisis situations, economic, medical or legal, with special emphasis on mono-parental families and those with sick children.

A more contextual recommendation is the creation of mutual support groups for stayer family members, caregivers and children, in order to de-stigmatize, build belonging and self-image, and prevent isolation.

While 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 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. Some of the issues involved are:

- 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

### 3.3.4 Intersection of family issues and migration

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.

### 3.4.5 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.

## 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](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;
- 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.

## 4. 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 34107 children, of which 24763 children in rural areas. Of these 29186, including 21684 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 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 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).

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).

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.*”

#### 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 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 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 (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 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 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.

#### 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 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, 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\_Î\_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).

#### 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 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).

## 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”

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.

### 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.

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 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 1500-2000 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 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 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 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 emphasizes 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 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).

## 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.

## 6. Country report – Ukraine

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### 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 Strategy<sup>8</sup> 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 Child<sup>9</sup> 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 Report<sup>10</sup>, 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 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

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<sup>8</sup> 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>

<sup>9</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child. URL: [https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995\\_021#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_021#Text)

<sup>10</sup> World Migration Report 2022. URL: <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022>

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;
- 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 Ukraine<sup>11</sup> and is designed to comply with the requirements of the ESOMAR Committee for Professional Standards<sup>12</sup>, 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;

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<sup>11</sup> Code of professional ethics of a sociologist. URL: <https://sau.in.ua/pro-sau/>

<sup>12</sup> ESOMAR Guidelines for conducting surveys among children and young people. URL: <http://www.uam.in.ua/ukr/standarts/>

- confidentiality and anonymity: all participants were informed that participation in the study is confidential and anonymous. The information provided by the 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.

## 6.2 Overview of the legislation of Ukraine

The legal basis of Ukraine's state migration policy is the *Constitution of Ukraine*<sup>13</sup>. 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*<sup>14</sup>. 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 Child<sup>15</sup>. 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*"<sup>16</sup> 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

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<sup>13</sup> 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>

<sup>14</sup> European Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers. URL: [https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/994\\_307#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/994_307#Text)

<sup>15</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child. URL: [https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995\\_021#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_021#Text)

<sup>16</sup> 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>

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 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*<sup>17</sup>. 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

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<sup>17</sup> 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>

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.

**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*<sup>18</sup>. 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 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*<sup>19</sup>. The document is intended to promote the employment of migrant workers and their families

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<sup>18</sup> 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>

<sup>19</sup> 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>

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*<sup>20</sup>. 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 Rights<sup>21</sup>. 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.

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

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<sup>20</sup> 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>

<sup>21</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights. URL: [https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995\\_015#Text](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_015#Text)

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"<sup>22</sup>. 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"<sup>23</sup>. 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 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*

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<sup>22</sup> 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>

<sup>23</sup> 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>

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).

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.

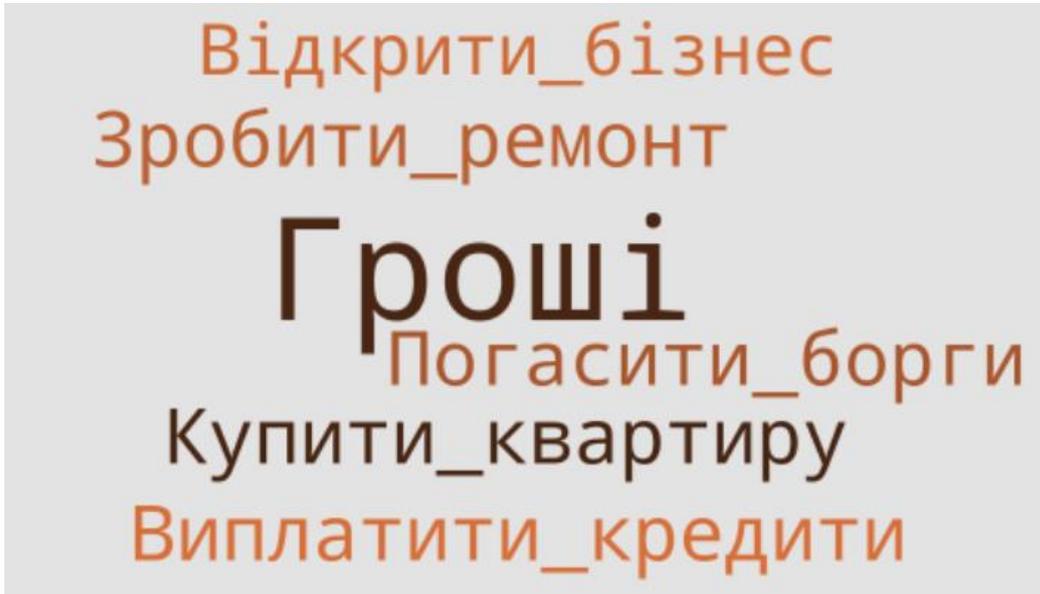
*"There were discussions that we want to go to Poland, I always agree with such changes. In general, I agree with some changes in my life, I like to travel, so I would like to move"* (Anastasia, 13, daughter of a migrant worker).

*"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)



#### 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 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).

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)

Конфлікти  
Споживацьке\_ставлення  
Непорозуміння  
Руйнування\_сімей  
Діти\_без\_нагляду  
Судові\_позови  
Відчуження

## 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.

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 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).

Діти\_самотні Родичі  
Старші\_сестри  
Бабусі Сусіди  
Дідусі  
Один\_з\_батьків  
Старші\_брати  
Менше\_уваги

## 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 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).

## 6.6 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).

*"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).

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

# Відчуження Проблеми\_у\_взаєминах Руйнування\_сімей. Месенджери Смартфони Ревнощі

## 6.7 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.

*"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).

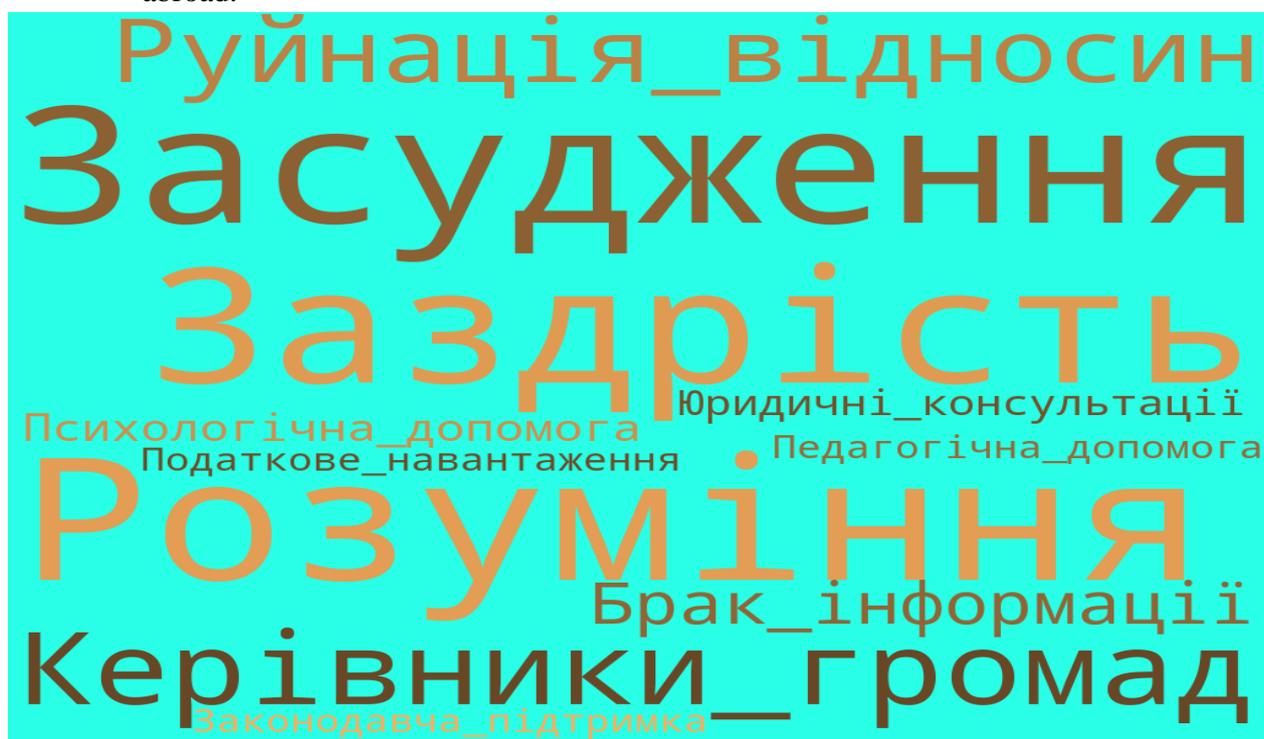
Sometimes there are difficulties in adapting to the unusual living conditions in another country, problems with communication due to not knowing a foreign language. At the same time, after returning to Ukraine, some labour migrants need "reverse adaptation" - adaptation to living conditions in Ukraine.

*"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.



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)

## 6.7. 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).

*"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.

*"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").*



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.

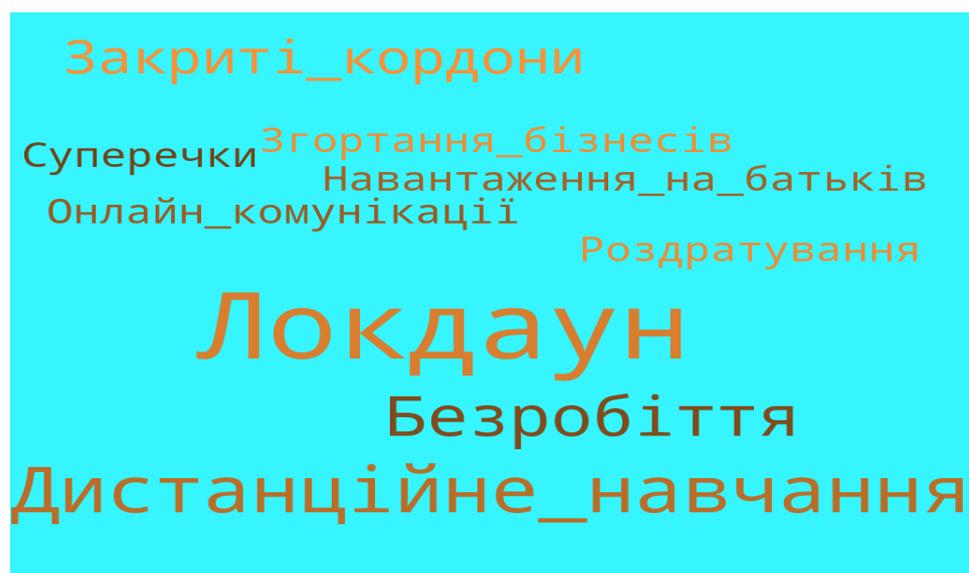
*"We are having such a difficult time, we have not seen our 2-year-old son because of the epidemic, he cannot return"* (Natalia, 44, the wife and mother of migrant workers).

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).



## 6.9 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 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).

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).



## 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.
- 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 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.

## Recommendations

- 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 (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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## ANNEXES

1. Research protocol
2. Guide for conducting interviews with adult family members of migrant workers
3. Guide for conducting interviews with migrant workers' children
4. Guide for conducting focus groups with adult family members of migrant workers
5. Guide for conducting focus groups with the children of migrant workers
6. Guide for conducting interviews with experts
7. Transcripts of interviews with the children of migrant workers
8. Transcripts of interviews with adult family members of migrant workers
9. Transcripts of focus groups with the wives of migrant workers
10. Transcripts of focus groups with children of migrant workers
11. Transcripts of interviews with experts