

National analysis of the phenomenon of
children left home by their parents who
migrate abroad for employment

2008

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

UNICEF Romania supported this research report based on an inter-institutional partnership between authorities and governmental and non-governmental organizations, in particular: the Ministry of Labour, Family and Equal Opportunities – the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, the Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reform – the Institute for Crime Research and Prevention, the Alternative Sociale Association and the Gallup Organization Romania.

The National Institute of Statistics contributed with data and information.

Participating in the qualitative research were: General Directorates for Social Assistance and Child Protection, County School Inspectorates, County Police Inspectorates, City/Town Halls, Schools, Churches, family doctors, non-governmental organizations and children.

The Gallup Organization Romania carried out the field research and prepared the research report.

Authors of the research report:

Alexandru TOTH – Research Director, coordinator.

Daniela MUNTEANU – Consultant Specialist, data analyst.

Ana BLEAHU – Consultant, data analyst.

The final report was written-up with the support of the following experts:

Elena TUDOR – Director, Monitoring Directorate, NAPRC

Mihăiță MAGHERU – Child Protection Consultant, UNICEF Romania

Cătălin LUCA – Executive Director, Alternative Sociale Association.

This report is part of a more extensive project, implemented by Alternative Sociale Association in Iasi County with technical and financial assistance from UNICEF Romania, to which PROVIDENT FINANCIAL ROMANIA has also contributed.

The present report is meant to be one of UNICEF's advocacy tools for inter-institutional dialogue in the field of child protection. All the data presented in this research report constitute, together with data from other sources, complementary useful information that helps the Romanian State and governmental partners to develop appropriate social policies in the field of child protection.

The identification of the most vulnerable, excluded or marginalized children should be at the core of any research approach, thus providing the design of an adequate lever to sustain the Romanian authorities' efforts to ensure the rights of all children in Romania.

Edmond McLOUGHNEY
Representative, UNICEF Romania

The Law 272/200, on the protection and promotion of the rights of the child, is based on the fact that the primary responsibility for the upbringing, care and development of the child rests with the parents. In fulfilling their responsibilities, the parents are entitled to receive the necessary support from the community and the local authorities whose efforts to meet their obligations often fail.

The National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of the Child will support, through all the actions it will undertake, the mobilisation of public services of social assistance and will help them develop services designed to reduce the vulnerability of children with migrant parents.

NAPRC will continue to assume its binding role among central institutions, which have to get involved in the creation of local social networks for the benefit of all children, including those whose parents are abroad for work.

Gabriella TONK
Under-Secretary of State, the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of the Child

Labour migration of parents abroad represents a social phenomenon with a complex impact on the dynamics and functionality of the families; children left home alone are victims of neglect (emotional, educational, medical, etc.)

Children without parental supervision become vulnerable to abuse, child labour and other risks, with short and long term negative consequences, which require specialized multi-disciplinary interventions.

Cătălin Luca,
Executive Director, Alternative Sociale Association

This study represents the result of the first research carried out on a representative sample at national level on the effects of migration on children. The methodology used provides a picture at national level of the scale of the phenomenon, of the impact at family and children level, as well as a better understanding of the current system of monitoring and intervention in favour of these children.

The Gallup study, in its sociological approach, does not focus on isolated cases, which usually draw the attention of the mass media, but on vulnerable groups, which should be the concern of both the authorities and non-governmental organizations in the field of child rights protection.

Alexandru TOTH
Research Director, The Gallup Organization Romania

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In the context of globalization and of wide reaching phenomena, and also of its E.U. membership, Romania has experienced a number of changes both at economic and social levels. One of the phenomena with a strong impact on the country's society and economy is that of migration for work abroad. Concretely, in recent years, more and more people, especially from modest* but also from poor strata of the population, choose to emigrate due to a lack of employment opportunities in their area of residence or in order to get better salaries. In many of these situations children are affected too, and initially it was the mass media that took notice of the phenomenon of children left home by their parents who migrate abroad for work, particularly the isolated cases with strong media impact on public opinion. At a later stage, Romanian authorities responded by some legislative provisions directly addressing this issue but which were not able to cover the inherent complexity of such a phenomenon.

It has soon become known as the 'home alone children' phenomenon, even if its true sense does not apply but to a small percentage of children with migrant parents. However, the complexity of the phenomenon, its causes and consequences, its dynamics and the way legislative provisions are actually implemented in the field, as well as the professionals' practices have constituted as many challenges not only for the authorities but for civil society too. In this context, civil society is represented either by the set of NGO's involved in one way or another in the analysis of the phenomenon or in direct interventions to support affected children, or by the mass media and the public at large.

It is an undeniable fact that the dynamics and the complexity of these phenomena (migration and home alone children) impacting the family and society at large are factors that hinder and diminish the capacity to research and analyze the issue. Moreover, the difficulty is redoubled by the absence of viable and recent data from other sources, due to poorly developed monitoring capacities and mechanisms especially at local level.

At the time when UNICEF contracted a research company to carry out the national study, other studies on such scale were not available. In the meantime, the Soros Foundation carried out a national research on a sample of adolescents, more precisely schoolchildren 10 to 14 years of age. Save the Children Romania also carried out a qualitative study in three communities in the region of Moldova. The present executive summary includes the main findings of the National Study carried out on a representative sample for the population of Romania, containing data on the entire juvenile population (0 to 18 years old) as well as a few comments on the value added in comparison with the above-mentioned studies.

Purpose and objectives

The Study provides data and information on the **scale of the phenomenon** (highlighting the most affected regions), the **'profile' of the family/community where children are more exposed to vulnerability, marginalization, and/or exclusion** due to their parents migration,

* The average income in July 2007, according to the field survey, is 482 lei per household member, but the median is 283 lei. Moreover, 23% of households with at least one parent abroad report an income of less than 150 lei per household member.

and the **implemented practices** to identify, monitor and evaluate children in this situation, in view of making recommendations for their development and improvement, all combined with a review of the legislative provisions on the issue, of the mass media opinions and coverage, and of the general public opinion in Romania.

This research was conducted in view of gathering data to contribute to the development of social policies targeting this segment of the population, to help improve the legislation and develop practices for the professionals in the field, all these constituting the domain of the technical assistance provided by UNICEF to the National Authority for Children's Rights.

The following objectives have guided the intervention within the research:

- To understand the complexity of the phenomenon and its dimensions through measurements and estimations of its scale at national and regional levels which identify the most affected areas and provide a 'map of the phenomenon' from the standpoint of its prevalence at the time of the research.
- To identify the causes and the consequences of the phenomenon, by an in-depth analysis of the immediate and underlying causes, as well as the consequences on the children of their parents migration abroad for work, from the standpoint of the rights of the child and of the impact on these rights.
- To identify the major gaps in the legislation through a comprehensive analysis of the legal framework, of legal provisions and of actual practices in the territory, combined with a series of case studies in several communities in different regions of the country.
- To understand the broader context of migration and its effects by measuring the impact on the public and authorities, the mass media interpretations and the messages spread. The broader context refers to the values and principles of contemporary Romanian society, to the 'collective mind', and to the grounds that determine certain behaviors.
- To build UNICEF's capacity to provide information and relevant recommendations for future strategies and policies in the area as well as for the lines to be followed.

Methodology

In order to carry out this study in a comprehensive manner, The Gallup Organization Romania developed a combined methodological approach, including i) a **quantitative research**, through questionnaires applied to a representative national sample and to sub-samples, ii) a **qualitative research** through case studies and in-depth phone interviews with a series of central and local stakeholders, and iii) **desk-review** of the legislation and other relevant documentation like studies on migration, on children left home by migrant parents or available statistics. Taking into account the media approach of the subject and the coverage in the print media, the research was completed with a **press articles assessment** in order to understand how the subject is tackled and what kind of influence it has on general public opinion.

Some limitations of the research should be considered and they refer to the **complexity of the phenomenon of migration**, (dynamics and seasonal character) and to the constraints directly linked to the **cross-section and selective type of the research** (sample size, period of data collection, instruments used). The whole methodological chapter explains in detail these limitations which are related specifically to the impossibility of statistically representative extrapolations within very specific samples of the population like a certain age group, a certain county or area of residence.

The scale of the phenomenon and its complexity

The national research presents valid estimates at national level concerning the scale of the phenomenon and the size of sub-groups of the population affected by the phenomenon in terms of breakdown by age groups, area of residence, which one of the parents left home and for how long.

At national level, it is estimated that the phenomenon involves around **350,000 children**, respectively, children affected by the phenomenon at the time when the research was carried-out. More than a third of these children, i.e. **approximately 126,000 are affected by the migration of both parents.**

Addressing in a comprehensive manner the situation of children affected by the migration of both parents must take into account some limitations, as it is explained in the methodological chapter, but some trends are evident. The first would be that **half of the children with both parents abroad are below the age of 10 years.** More than half of these children are between 2 and 6 years of age and the other half are over 7 years old. Even if in terms of percentages the figures are not high, estimates show that 4% of these children are under 1 year old. Moreover, **16% of the children with both parents abroad spent more than a year in the absence of their parents** and 3% of them spent even more than four years without their parents.

In terms of area of residence and regional distribution of children affected by the migration of one or both parents several trends were identified: almost a third of the total number, i.e. **100,000 children live in the Moldova region.** Similar figures are found in Transylvania and Oltenia, with 50,000 children, and Muntenia with 55,000 children affected by the phenomenon. Estimates by region and area of residence are not available but it is to be mentioned that **more than a half of all children affected by the phenomenon live in rural areas** where the incidence of migration of both parents is higher than in the urban area which is characterized mainly by the migration of the father. Moreover, estimated figures indicate that the region of Transylvania is not affected by the migration of both parents. This might be linked to the fact that the level of urbanization is higher in this region of the country.

Main causes

Several causes operate at the origins of the phenomenon on a multi-level basis. These levels of causality are inter-linked and sometimes mutually enforcing¹. This study seeks to identify the main factors at the roots of the phenomenon at the following levels:

- i) The level of immediate causes – which refers to the desire/decision of people/parents to obtain better wages and thus to improve the economic and material status of their families,
- ii) The level of underlying causes – which refers on the one hand to the basic social services and on the other hand to the knowledge, attitudes and practices of both families and communities related to this phenomenon and to children's rights,
- iii) Finally, the level of basic causes refers to the values and opinions of the Romanian population with regard to migration issues but also to roles and behaviors in the family.

¹ For more details on “causal analysis” please refer to: “Children on the Brink” – UNICEF 2006, p. 18.

While immediate causes impact migration directly, particularly migration for employment, the phenomenon of ‘home alone children’ is rather more influenced by underlying causes. In addition, the root causes determine a kind of pattern of cultural values and customs among Romanians with respect to migration.

Children left home by their both migrant parents (or by the single parent) are usually **in the care of the extended family**, especially their grandparents. When they make the decision to migrate, the major *pro* factor relates to economic reasons and the major *con* factor is separation from family and children. But the latter aspect is representative for only one fifth of parents. Moreover, 45% of parents declare that there was no argument against their decision to migrate.

Most migrant parents are **under 40 years of age**, both mothers and fathers (78%, 63% respectively). Differences appear in terms of age brackets, the percentages being similar in the age group 30-40 years (55% and 52% respectively), but diminishing to a half for fathers in the age group 20-29 years (23% for mothers and 11% for fathers).

In terms of the **migrants’ level of education**, mothers have generally a lower level of education than fathers: 36% of mothers have primary and secondary education compared to 23% of fathers. The great majority of the population has high-school education, 58% of mothers and 64% of fathers. As to parents with higher education, the percentages are 13% of fathers and 7% of mothers.

In the process of identifying the “home alone children” both the parents and the authorities have certain responsibilities. But, usually, they lack the necessary knowledge and, in the case of authorities, the mechanisms to ensure appropriate information and data.

Parents very rarely (only 7%) inform the authorities about their intention to go abroad, and, moreover, they usually do not prepare their children in any way before leaving the country. Also, the number of children involved in their parents’ making the decision to migrate is very small: by age groups, the findings show that approximately 16% of children under 6, 19% of children over 10 and under 14, and 34% of children over 15 and under 17 are consulted by their parents before going abroad.

Local authorities lack the human and material resources necessary to manage the phenomenon. Consequently, services at community level are not developed either, and where services have been established to some extent, the basic knowledge and training of the staff are deficient, which does not allow for the development of necessary skills to address some complex community issues.

As to the root causes of the phenomenon, Romanian society is still influenced by ‘traditional patterns’ as regards the way a family functions and the roles of its members, that is, the ‘classical’ role of the woman to do the housework and to raise the children while the man is the breadwinner. However, the survey findings also show a shift in this pattern (approximately one third of respondents) especially among young people - the group that interests us most. In addition, only 14% consider that it is the mother’s role to take care of the children while the other 86% consider that both parents should be equally involved. Differences appear though when comes to the skills required for child caring.

Thus, most migrants are men. Furthermore, the public opinion in Romania generally agrees that contemporary society and its specific demands drive parents to migrate and seek better paying employment, in spite of the separation from their children who are usually left in the care of the extended family.

Major consequences from the child rights perspective

The family is fully entitled to choose a migratory behavior and to separate from the children (one or both parents), and the state cannot interfere with this decision. However, as regards the **separation of the child from his/her family**, the prevention of undesirable situations and effects on the child should be the central goal of social policies, especially in the field of child protection. The national research has found that almost one fifth (18%) of the cases when the mother migrates are affected by a deterioration of the relationship between parents, and among them 43% end up in divorce even.

The main consequences on the child are visible in terms of emotional/psychological trauma (as reported both by parents and children). This leads to the hypothesis that it is likely that the situation of children with migrant parents is similar to the situation of children with separated (divorced) and/or very busy parents.

Parents who leave the country are mainly motivated by their desire to improve the material and economic state of the family, that is, to improve the **family's standard of living**. Unfortunately, they do not always succeed, and percentages show that around one third of migrants (31% of former migrants and an almost equal number of current migrants) state that neither their economic situation nor the standard of living have improved. In some cases, only few to be accurate (3%), it even declined. The public opinion confirms these trends, since 66% of the total number of respondents think that the standard of living among migrants has improved as a result of their migration, while 30% consider that this happens rarely or almost never.

A series of positive effects reside in an improvement of children's standard of living (clothing, shoes, toys and mobile phones) and also of living conditions in general. It is to be mentioned that the first departure of the parents is often accompanied by a decline in living conditions (due mainly to debts accumulated to pay travel expenses/insurance, etc.). In some cases the departure may be also accompanied by the suspension of some social benefits for those who stay behind.

Regarding the child's **right to health care and services**, the data collected do not reveal differences between children from migrant and non-migrant families. Furthermore, in the case of both parents' absence, the incidence of accidents, illness or apathy is lower than in the case of other groups. This might be linked to a sort of "protective" behaviour of carers who want to prove that "the child is in good hands".

The influences on the **right of the child to education** are quite bivalent in terms of the participation in school and school performance. The public opinion considers in the majority (67%) that parents' absence negatively impacts on children's school performance but the survey findings indicate a low negative impact (in less than 10% of cases). When parents are aware of the importance of education and they invest more in it (private tutoring and educational support) – this represents a positive impact of the phenomenon. On the other hand, a relatively recent phenomenon has occurred: some children with migrant parents drop out of school in Romania in order to enroll in a school abroad, in the country where his/her parents work. In addition, some interviews show that certain children, especially adolescents, drop out of school mostly because they found employment or remunerated work. The survey data show that 2% of the total number of children with at least one migrant parent have dropped out of school.

Without parental control (by one or both parents), children of migrants are affected both in terms of **leisure time activities and prevalence of certain kinds of work**. In terms of leisure it is “children’s wishes” rather than adults’ that impact mostly their activities. In addition, the public opinion considers that these children, given their material status, are more “independent spirits”. In terms of the work children engage in, the general trend is that the child usually assumes some responsibilities in the household. Depending on which of the parents is abroad, these vary from “typical activities for women” (cooking, cleaning), usually taken over by girls under 14 years old, to general “typical household activities” like shopping. Nevertheless, it is worrying that young children (from 7 to 13 years old) have to do farm work and animal husbandry.

The fact that, usually, the parents do not inform local social authorities or other institutions (like the school) of their intention to emigrate does not facilitate the state’s capacity to respond through appropriate **social services (or even protective services**, where applicable). The most obvious effect is that the state has neither the data nor the viable local mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the phenomenon.

Conclusions and recommendations

It is undeniable that both migration and the effects on children of parents going abroad for work are two very complex phenomena, with impact on the family and on society at large. The limited possibilities for research and analysis are redoubled by the lack of functional mechanisms to allow the collection of data at local level.

The present research highlights several general trends in the phenomenon of children left home by their parents who go abroad for work. Beyond the figures representing national estimates of the number of children affected by this phenomenon, the concrete reality of these families, in search of more and better resources to ensure their development, demands the formulation of relevant recommendations that lead to an effective implementation of some measures in favor of all Romanian children, particularly those who are more vulnerable, marginalized or excluded.

The recommendations made by this study are designed to guide and support the efforts that the authorities have already undertaken. In addition, these efforts should be accompanied by the support which non-governmental organizations are able to provide concerning some aspects – a review of the legislative framework and of practices in the field, the development of community-based services addressing also the needs of children of migrant parents, knowledge acquired in the field. UNICEF Romania considers that it is able to provide both the assistance and the expertise necessary for an appropriate implementation, taking into account the fact that the responsibility for the implementation of legislative measures is entirely incumbent to State authorities, but also that the practical experience shows that it must be a joint effort.

It has been agreed that the joint effort shall be guided by the following recommendations:

- ⇒ **Revise the Order 219/2006 issued by the Secretary of State of the National Authority for the Protection of Children’s Rights, through consultations with all the public and private stakeholders with relevant expertise in the field;**
- ⇒ **Improve and strengthen monitoring and reporting mechanisms at local level, with emphasis on SPAS;**
- ⇒ **Build the capacity of public social assistance services [SPAS] at national level;**
- ⇒ **Raise awareness and improve information of the negative effects of migration on children, among all those concerned (parents and public at large).**

II. RESEARCH REPORT

1. Research goal and methodology

The goal of this research is to provide an assessment at national level of the phenomenon of children whose parents have gone abroad for work. A first objective of this research was to identify the scale of this phenomenon and its breakdown across the country. Thus, we have tried to answer two questions: how many children experience the situation of being left “home alone” because of their parents’ migration abroad for work, and which areas are most affected by this phenomenon. Secondly, the research aimed at analyzing the causes and consequences of parents’ going to work outside the borders of the country, from the standpoint of the impact this phenomenon has on children’s rights. In the third place, we aimed to analyze the legal framework and the concrete practices at the level of the institutions directly involved in the management of these children’s situations. Not least, we were interested to see what the public perception is of this phenomenon and how it is covered by the mass media.

The study presented in this report is based, on the one hand, on quantitative data collected in a representative survey at national level, and on the other hand, on information gathered through qualitative methods. The initial design of this research was to compile the data collected by ourselves with data coming from other sources of information, in order to provide a more comprehensive picture, solidly tied to data on the phenomenon of migration and the way it affects children. Unfortunately, in spite of the fact that the international movement of population is probably the most important demographic phenomenon Romania has been experiencing in recent years, there are very few sources of information and often outdated or simply incapable of reflecting both the scale and the structure of the phenomenon of children whose parents went to work abroad. Therefore, even if reference will be made throughout this report to a few other sources of information, the vast majority of findings and conclusions presented are based on the Gallup Romania research, developed at UNICEF’s request, in April through October 2007. Inevitably, given the fact that this is the only measurement conducted to date at national level in Romania, this research has a number of limitations, and the validity of these data can only be tested with respect to their internal coherence.

Even if this research has a number of limitations, it is at this time the only one at national level that provides solid information based on which measures, social policies could be developed in order to reduce the negative impact of parents’ migration on ‘home alone’ children. The research limitations derive mainly from two aspects. In the first place, the nature of the studied phenomenon: migration is a complex phenomenon, with a multitude of facets, dimensions, a dynamic process in space and time, and a single cross-section type measurement cannot provide more than a still picture, valid at a certain point in time. Given the strong circulatory character of international migration in Romania, the measurement may be significantly affected by errors going beyond those related to sampling, and that relate mainly to the respondents’ underreporting of parents being away from their children due to work abroad.

In the second place, there are constraints inherent to this type of cross-section, selective research, respectively, the size of the sample, the collection period, the research tools that are used. The sample size allows for volume estimates at national level and valid structure

analyses, but analyses by sub-samples have much less validity and should be interpreted very cautiously. It is also possible that the period when the survey was carried out – August 2007 – may have an influence on the estimation of the scale of the phenomenon of children whose parents are abroad, for at least two reasons: on the one hand, in the summertime, especially in the month of August, many migrants come back to spend their vacations with their families at home, so that it might happen that migrant parents, due to social pressure exerted on them, report socially desirable information; on the other hand, summertime is the period when certain categories of migrants leave the country, particularly those who get employment for 3-4 months as seasonal workers in such fields as tourism. Since this is the time of summer holidays for children, it is very likely that they are sent to their grandparents for instance, while one or both parents go abroad to work for only a few months.

The quantitative research was based on a survey of a probabilistic representative sample at national level of 2000 households. For sampling, we used stratification in terms of the 18 cultural areas² and 8 types of localities classified by the degree of urbanization. The sampling scheme was that of allocation in proportion with the size of every stratum, using a set number of questionnaires by each primary selection unit. In total, the sample included 200 primary selection units (villages in the rural area, clusters of addresses in the urban area), in 159 localities. For the selection of the households the random route method was used, and for the selection of the respondent, the “day of birth” rule was used. In addition, from every primary selection unit, by the snowball method, 2 households were selected on the criterion that they included children whose parents were or are currently abroad for work. The additional sample of households with “home alone” children is a non-probabilistic one. In each household, only one questionnaire was applied to an adult person. In households with children, if a child over 10 years old was available and an adult person in that household gave his/her consent, a questionnaire was applied to the child too. Statistic analyses were made on several sub-samples, of different sizes, and the information concerning them is presented in the table below.

² *Sociology of Transition. Social Values and Types in Romania*, Sandu D., Staff, 1996

Table 1 Sample sizes used in the analysis

National representative household sample	2020
Additional sample of households with formerly/currently migrant parents	395
Sub-samples of households with children 0-18 years old	978
Out of which:	
households with non-migrant parents	491
households with both parents currently migrant	85
households with currently migrant father	179
households with currently migrant mother	116
households with formerly migrant parents	107
Sub-sample – children 0-18 years old	1562
out of which:	
Children with both parents migrants	138
Children with migrant father only	291
Children with migrant mother only	186
Children with formerly migrant parents	180
Sub-sample of interviewed children	540
Out of which	
Children with migrant parents	233

The qualitative stage of the research was designed to collect detailed information on the problems facing the children whose parents are abroad for work, the dimensions of the phenomenon, and the available and necessary intervention methods to secure all the conditions and services these children are entitled to. In this respect, we conducted interviews with responsible actors at central, county or community level, and representatives of non-governmental organizations in the 8 regions and 5 case studies, presented in the annex. The interviews with specialists (29) were conducted over the phone, in the period 20 September – 5 October, based on a semi-structured interview guide. The counties selected for this stage were: Northeast: Botoşani and Neamţ, Southeast: Galaţi, South: Prahova, Southwest: Dolj, West: Timiş, Northwest: Maramureş, Central: Mureş, and Bucharest.

The case studies were conducted in the period 10 – 25 August 2007 in the counties of Galaţi, Mureş, Maramureş, Prahova, Timişoara. To carry out qualitative surveys, the communities were selected based on the following criteria: high prevalence of migration rate, regional coverage (communities in 5 different regions), size of the community, cultural diversity. In each community, interviews were conducted with: the mayor or deputy mayor, the social worker or social referent, teachers, priests, nurses, police workers. In each community, a minimum number of 5 families were visited, which included children whose parents (one of them or both) had been away to work abroad for a shorter or longer period of time. In these families, the concerned adults and children were interviewed. The tools we used were: the structured and semi-structured interview.

The monitoring of the media focused on the print media, specifically the articles selected for the UNICEF database, accessible on-line. The monitoring period was 1 January 2007– 15 October 2007. For the analysis of the article content, only those articles were selected which made reference to children with one or both parents working abroad. The content analysis

focused on the subject of the articles, the attitudes manifested in the articles and the way they presented the information.

In the analyzed period (1 January – 15 October 2007), 102 articles were identified that had as a central subject, or made mention of, the issue of parents' migration abroad for work. Many of the central newspapers covered this subject, but there are 4 newspapers that gave more attention to this matter (publishing more than 10 articles in the analyzed period): Gândul (17 articles), Adevărul (13 articles), Gardianul (11 articles) and Evenimentul Zilei (10 articles). In addition, these newspapers also allocated the larger space to the articles on the analyzed theme.

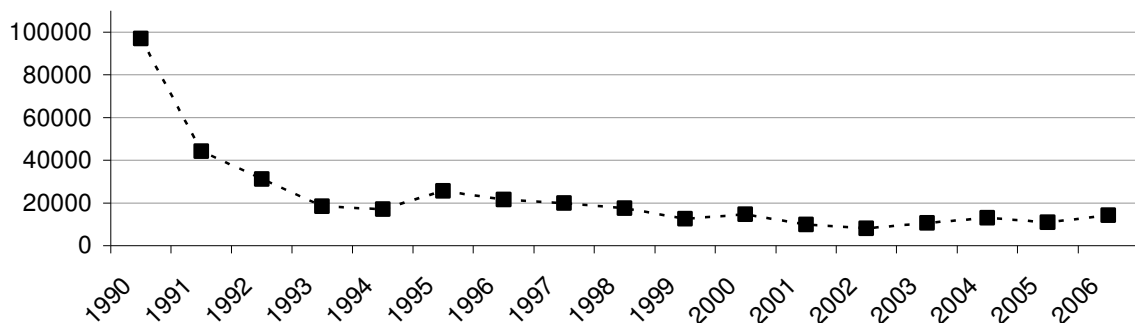
Daily	Average size - cm ² -	Number of articles	Total allocated space - cm ² -	Minimum space - cm ² -	Maximum space - cm ² -
Adevarul	536	13	6967	28	1283
Gandul	246	17	4180	49	1241
Gardianul	246	11	2709	121	682
Click	480	4	1921	50	1428
Romania libera	269	7	1880	41	1214
Evenimentul Zilei	161	10	1610	40	553
Atac	239	6	1433	68	515
Ziua	317	4	1268	95	741
Cotidianul	208	5	1039	41	479
Curentul	172	4	687	66	323
Azi	157	3	472	36	351
Jurnalul national	118	3	355	34	170
Libertatea	46	4	185	21	115
Alte ziare	233	11	2565	21	1009
Total	267	102	27273	21	1428

Half of the analyzed articles were brief, while only 13% were ample and detailed, and 35% were average. This classification was based not only on the size and the number of words of the article but also on the diversity of the information given by the articles. Most articles measured about 21 cm², and half of them measured less than 157cm². The largest size of an article dealing with this matter was 1428 cm², being an article published in Click daily.

2. Data and opinions on migration

Migration is a phenomenon implying the movement of people from one area to another. It may be accompanied by a change of address, by the participation in certain activities in the area of destination or by the return to the area of origin. Knowledge of the phenomenon through official statistics is limited by the legal provisions regulating the movement of citizens in the territory of the state of origin or of other states. Thus, in Romania, official statistics published by the National Institute of Statistics include the changes of address reported by the police, which represent just a small part of the phenomenon. Thus, in 2006, 14217 Romanian nationals took up residence in another country, this phenomenon having a very small variation in the last 10 years.

Evolution of international migration – permanent residence abroad



Source: National Institute of Statistics

The Ministry of Labor, Family and Equal Opportunities, through its decentralized structures, provides mediation services for employment abroad. Official data reported by the Ministry of Labor are in regard to an important component of migration: international migration for employment. This, in contrast with the one captured by the National Institute of Statistics, represents temporary migration, and in some cases circulatory (the employment contracts obtained through these public institutions are for a duration of 3 to 36 months). In 2005, 42,758 persons over 18 years of age benefited from employment contracts abroad, and in 2006, their number increased to 53,029. In 2007, in the first 2 quarters, 24,063 persons obtained contracts. The highest percentage (43%) among them is found in the age group 36-45 years, and more than half (58%) are women.

Employment abroad may be intermediated by private agents too, and the data regarding their annual activity are not included in official statistics.

The most frequent type of temporary migration abroad is the one without legal forms. Although recognized at official level, it cannot be captured from a statistic point of view by any of the state institutions, given the fact that the people who go abroad without contracts leave Romania as tourists. It is difficult to make estimations of this phenomenon, especially as this is a very dynamic phenomenon.

A survey carried out by the Open Society Foundation in 2006 shows that one third of the households count among their members at least one person who has gone abroad after 1989. Extrapolating this ratio to the data collected by the Population and Housing Census of 2002, it results that approximately 2.5 million households have at least one member who is or was

abroad either for work or tourism. At the same time, the survey shows that at least 10% of the adult population has had the experience of working abroad.

An evaluation carried out in Italy³ shows that at the end of the year 2006, 556,000 Romanian nationals lived in the country, as residents or on a residence permit, representing 15% of the total number of immigrants.

Professionals' view

Most of the interviewed professionals mention primarily the positive consequences of migration on the standard of living of families, but also on the community at large: *"Positive! We have no negative effects!"* (Social worker, Town hall, Maramureş). Another aspect with impact on the community is the fact that adults have raised their level of instruction by adopting/ promoting some civic behaviors, and also the fact that they have learned a foreign language and are able to adjust more easily to the demands of the labor market.

From the standpoint of the need for social intervention, the cases of families with temporary migrants do not constitute a priority: *"...people here leave all the time, but they don't make trouble... on the contrary, we have families where the parents are here with them who are lazy, they don't want to work."* (Mayor, Timiș County). For most professionals, the situation of these children represents one of the different situations when children may be at risk. In the absence of frequent cases proving the negative consequences on the development of children, this category is not regarded as a priority: *"For us, the problem is not the children left home in the care of grandparents and parents gone abroad, but the families who live on the minimum guaranteed income, who stayed in the country and live at the limit of subsistence."* (Social worker, Town hall, Neamț County).

Opinions of the public at large

The perceptions of the public at large on external migration for employment are diverse. 38% of those interviewed believe that it is fine that people go to work abroad, 29% think that it is bad, and 27% think that this phenomenon has its good and its bad sides. The reasons why they characterize this phenomenon as a benefic one are related to the financial aspects: financial gain is mentioned by 60% of those who believe that it is a good thing and it is both good and bad, while 17% mention these gains in relation with the migrants' families: "they send money home", "they build a future for the family", "they earn a buck there and send it to the country". A small percentage considers that it is an opportunity to gain professional experience or appreciates that it is the only chance for those who cannot find employment in the country (4 and 6% respectively).

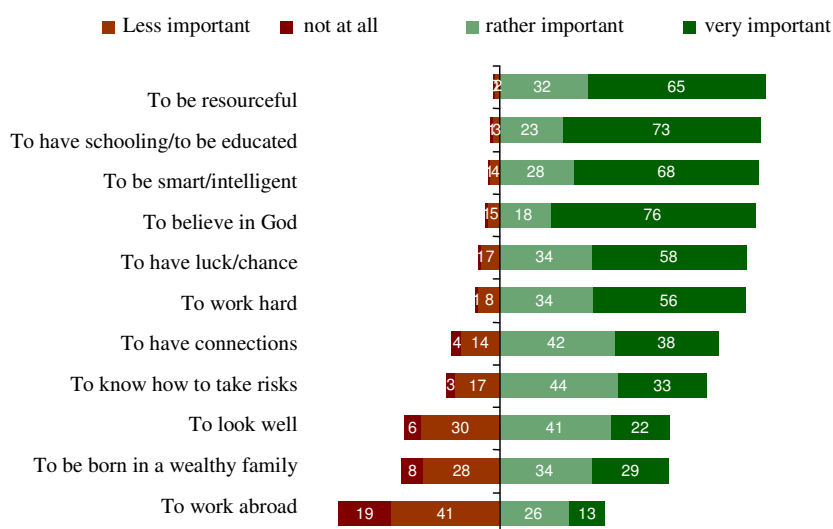
The experience at local level with regard to migration has the role to form an opinion on this phenomenon, which is not automatically a positive or a negative one. The table below shows that only 37% of the respondents who state that very few people in the community have gone to work abroad express an opinion on the consequences of migration at community level. At the same time, where there are few cases, the positive effects are mentioned more frequently than the negative ones. In general, respondents are likely to associate rather positive effects with this phenomenon, and the immediate experience of the community constitutes a very important factor in forming an opinion on this phenomenon.

³ Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 2007 Caritas/Migrantes

%		Q10. What are the effects on your community of the fact that (read answer to Q9) have left to work abroad?			
		Rather positive	Rather negative	DK/NR	Total
Q9. Would say that in your community very many, quite a few, not too many, or very few people have left to work abroad?	Very many	48.4	35.3	16.3	100
	Quite a few	42.2	30.0	27.8	100
	Not too many	41.7	20.2	38.0	100
	Very few	22.1	14.8	63.1	100
	DK/NR	9.3	6.5	84.1	100
	Total	35.9	23.6	40.4	100

The attitudes regarding migration should be understood also in terms of the values that form the criteria for choosing life strategies: family, work, money, religion. The least valued are those referring to the relationship with the community and the participation in civic life. Although religion is mentioned among the most important things in life, good luck and opportunity are also considered as being very important to be successful in life. Although 90% consider that in Romania people are not rewarded proportionally with the work performed, only 39% think that it is important to work abroad in order to succeed.

How important are each of the following aspects for someone in Romania today to be successful in life



In spite of the fact that certain personal skills (level of education, intelligence, ability to deal with various situations) are considered to be very important to succeed in life, the confidence in present Romanian society as an environment that promotes competence and performance is very reduced: only 8% believe that people in Romania are rewarded in proportion with the work done, and only 15% believe that they are rewarded in proportion with their intelligence and training.

3. Profile of families where parents have gone abroad

In most cases, whether one or both parents have gone to work abroad, the children who are left behind in the country come from and are in the care of a structured family. At the level of the entire population, approximately 83% of children live in families where the parental couple is legally formed. Similar percentages are found both in the case of children with non-migrant parents, and of children whose parents are both migrants. A special situation is found in the case of children whose mother alone has gone abroad, in the sense that among them we find the most children who live in a broken home. 18% of these children (approximately 12,000 children) have a divorced mother, in the majority of cases the divorce being subsequent to the act of migration.

Who do children live with when one or both parents go to work abroad? The data from the survey clearly show that in most cases the child stays home either with one of the two parents or with the extended family. 78% of the children whose father alone has gone abroad lived with the mother most of the time in the last six months before the survey. Also, 50% of the children whose mother is abroad lived with their father, while around one quarter remain in the care of their grandparents. In the case when both parents have gone abroad, 79% of these children remained within the extended family: 74% in the care of grandparents, and 5% in the care of uncles and aunts. 3% of the children with both parents abroad (~ 3500 children) remained in the care of an older sibling.

What are the socio-demographic characteristics of migrant parents?

Both in the case of mothers and of fathers, migration for employment is more frequent among parents aged between 30 and 39 years. More than a half of the migrant fathers and migrant mothers belong to this age category. Among migrant fathers, the percentage of those over 40 years of age is significantly higher than the one among mothers (35% compared to 16%). As to the level of education, approximately 64% of migrant fathers have secondary education (high school, vocational school), while among migrant mothers the percentage is 58%. The ratio of those with a lower level of education is higher among migrant mothers compared to that of migrant fathers. Regarding the marital status migrants, we notice a significantly higher ratio of divorced women (13%) than in the case of men.

How long have they been living in the absence of one or both parents?

The survey clearly suggests two important characteristics of international migration for employment in Romania: the fact that it is circulatory and the fact that it is temporary. Migrant parents, similar to migrants for work in general, are caught in a continuous movement between the country and abroad, living for varying amounts of time within and outside the borders of the country of origin. The ratio of children with respect to the amount of time spent in the country in the absence of one of the parents does not vary significantly in terms of a migrant father or a migrant mother. 46% of the children whose mothers are abroad (approximately 30,000 children) have lived in their absence for at least one year. Also relevant, from the point of view of the fluidity of the international movement for employment, is the time elapsed since the last departure. Thus, 55% of children with migrant fathers have been living in their absence for less than 6 months now, while in the case of children with migrant mothers the percentage is of 48%. Regarding children with both parents abroad, 16% of them (approx. 20,000 children) have lived for at least one year in the absence of both parents. Out of the total number of children with both parents abroad, 12% are children under 6 years of age who have lived in the absence of their parents for more than 6 months. The

highest ratio is represented by children between 7 and 14 years of age who have lived in the country in the absence of their parents for more than 6 months, respectively, 30% of the total number of children with both parents abroad.

As for parent migration in terms of the age of the child, data indicate that mothers are more likely to migrate when their children are older than 11 years, and less when they have children under 6 years old. Nevertheless, it is a concerning fact that there are approximately 5,000 children under one year of age whose mother has gone abroad.

Parents' migration experience

Most of the migrant parents have left for abroad without a contract signed in the country. Only about 21% of migrant mothers had before leaving the country a contract of employment abroad, in the case of fathers the percentage being 30%. 56% of migrant mothers, and, respectively, 41% of migrant fathers have worked illegally in the country of destination. The findings suggest a better integration of men into labor markets abroad, which justifies in part the fact that men go in larger numbers to work abroad. On the other hand, the fact that many of these parents work abroad illegally puts their families at risk, since they are not entitled to a range of social benefits.

In the case of former migrant parents (who used to work abroad and have returned to the country), 44% plan to go back to work abroad, and among them 65% plan to leave the child in the care of the other parent, 16% will leave the child in the care of grandparents, and 10% plan to take him/her with them.

Contact between parents and children

How often do parents come to visit in the country? Speaking strictly of parents who have been abroad for more than six months, we find that the majority of parents have come back home to visit once at most in the past year. In 32% of cases with both parents abroad, they have not come to visit at all in the past year, while 34% have made one visit.

In the absence of more frequent visits, parents who are abroad and their children left at home keep in contact, in most cases, by two ways: by phone and by sending money or goods home. Almost 80% of parents talk on the phone at least once a week with the children left at home and send them money or various goods monthly.

4. Scale of the phenomenon of children left home alone

4.1. AVAILABLE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The object of the present research is the analysis of children whose parents have gone to work abroad, legally or not. The difficulties to estimate the number of temporary migrants abroad also reflect on the estimation of the number of children with one or both parents abroad.

In recent years, there have been a few initiatives to estimate the scale of the phenomenon and to analyze its impact on children. Every such research has its limitations relating to the methodology used and the barriers in the identification of households with migrants.

The survey carried out by the Social Alternatives Association, in 2006, at the level of Iași city and the town of Răducăneni, identifies 4,156 schoolchildren aged between 10-19 years with at least one member of the family who went abroad. In Iași, 20% of these children have both parents abroad for work, while in Răducăneni only 7% of children report such situations. In Iași, in 47% of cases, it is the mother who has gone abroad, while in Răducăneni the same applies to 70% of schoolchildren.

In 2007, the study “Impact of migration: children left at home”, conducted by the Open Society Foundation among the school age population, shows that 170,000 schoolchildren in grades 5-8 have at least one parent who went to work abroad. Out of which, 55,000 have their mother abroad, 80,000 have their father abroad, and 35,000 have both parents abroad.

The only governmental source of information is the National Authority for the Protection of Children’s Rights (NAPCR), who has been collecting these data since 2006. NAPCR, in response to the calls from non-governmental organizations, the mass media and local authorities, launched a process of identification and constant monitoring of children whose parents have gone to work abroad. Therefore, by Order 219 of 2006, local authorities (Public Services of Social Assistance – SPAS – within municipalities, or workers with social assistance duties, and the General Departments of Social Assistance and Child Protection – DGASPC – at county level) have become responsible with identifying the cases. At the same time, parents who go abroad on employment contracts have the obligation to notify local authorities of their intention to leave and of the person who will be in charge with the care of the children. The data collected by NAPCR include the circumstance when only one of the parents has gone abroad for work.

The most recent monitoring (June 30th, 2007) shows that there are at least 82,464 children with at least one parent working abroad. Out of which, 26,406 children have both parents working abroad, and 8,904 have the single caretaker parent working abroad. More than 1,500 out of the children with both parents away and those with the single caretaker parent away are in the special protection system. 873 children have both parents, or the single caretaker parent, working abroad, while they are in the care of neighbors or of other families who are not their relatives; they do not benefit from any protective measure.

The overall situation of children in Romania is indicative of the chronic problems still affecting their development and requiring sustained efforts from the state: poverty, the incapacity of the educational system to school all children at least at the level of compulsory

education, the incapacity of the system to prevent vulnerable situations or violations of children's rights.

An indicator of the health status, and also of the extent to which children are affected by poverty, is the infant mortality rate. It has been constantly dropping in the past 10 years, from 22.3‰ in 1996, to 13.9‰ in 2006. Even if infant death rate has decreased by half, compared to the other European countries⁴, Romania is sadly placed first in 2006, with the highest rate in Europe. Although an average rate has not been calculated at European level, most countries have at most half the infant mortality rate reported in Romania.

In 2006, approximately 10% of the total number of children were living in households where none of the adults had a job⁵. This value is quite close to the European average, but in absolute figures it means approximately 420,000 children.

Although the school enrollment rate has been constantly rising starting from 64% in 1996 to 77% in 2006, the dropout rate has been rising too from 0.6% in the school year 200-2001 to 1.7% in the school year 2004-2005.

In the past 15 years, the system of special protection has aimed to reduce the number of children in the special protection system living in residential care institutions and to focus more on prevention and providing complementary services to the family. Thus, in Romania, on 30 June 2007, 25,802 children were receiving special protection in residential care services (public or private). Other 46,604 children were receiving social protection in family-type services. At the same time, 30,757 children were benefiting from services for the prevention of child separation from their parents, consisting mainly of day-care centers, counseling centers, etc.

4.2. IDENTIFICATION MECHANISMS AND LIMITATIONS OF OFFICIAL DATA

Legal framework and responsibilities of public institutions

The major legislative acts governing the intervention activities in the case of children whose parents are abroad for work are Law 272/2004 on the protection and promotion of the rights of the child, and Order 219/2006. Law 272 provides the framework of intervention for children at any risk, even if this category of children is not explicitly mentioned.

The two legislative acts stipulate:

- Public social assistance services shall take every measure for early identification of risk situations.
- Public or private institution workers, who, by the nature of their profession, have contact with the child and have suspicions about a potential case of abuse, neglect or maltreatment, have the obligation to report it immediately to the general department of social assistance and child protection.
- For the purpose of verification of cases of child abuse and neglect, the representatives of the general departments of social assistance and child protection shall have the right to access the offices of corporate bodies as well as the homes of private individuals.

⁴ Source of data: EUROSTAT

⁵ Source of data: EUROSTAT, according to the AMIGO survey prepared by NIS

In summary, the current child protection system includes central and local institutions that have responsibilities regarding the identification of children whose parents live abroad:

The National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights has the role to monitor children's rights and to coordinate and supervise the activity in child rights protection and promotion.

The General Departments of Social Assistance and Child Protection collect data at the level of municipalities and forward them to the NAPCR.

Public Social Assistance Services belonging to **municipalities** are the institutions that should play the most active role in identifying and supporting these cases. Unfortunately, in most cases, the human resources available to them are totally insufficient.

“Reality shows that the number of social workers is insufficient. For instance, the City hall has 8 social workers, and our survey in 2005 shows that in the city of Iași approximately 4300 – 4400 children are home alone, so imagine what number of home alone children should be the responsibility of one social worker in the city of Iași! If then we take into account the working standards in this field and we see that a social worker should have maximum 35 active cases, we realize that often it is impossible for social workers to do their job in a professional manner and according to quality standards.” (Project coordinator, Alternative Sociale Association)

“According to the law on social workers, the social worker must have higher education with a degree in social work, and I want to tell you that they don't come to work for local authorities because the salary is very low, that is why we advertise vacancies, they don't come to occupy them... for a population of 300,000, each with their problems, I think that 7 social workers are insufficient.” (Social worker, Town hall, Dolj County)

“Unfortunately, many times the work of social workers in the rural area is reduced to completing the paperwork for the minimum guaranteed income and that's about all. ... for these families, for these children, it would be important to have someone monitoring children's situation, a competent authority, especially where there are only children in the house, someone to go visit them regularly and check on them, see if they need anything; someone to do this monitoring and field work.” (Project coordinator, Romanian Foundation for Child, Community and Family - FRCCF).

The cooperation between social assistance services operating within the Town hall and the community is still deficient, its role being perceived, for now, by the community as a passive one, a place where applications are submitted to receive certain benefits.

“For the time being, the municipality is perceived only as a source of funds. ... that's where aid comes from, but they don't come to us with special problems. They come only in situations, how shall I say, when a grandmother comes because the parents have gone away and they left the child behind and to obtain other facilities. So, the idea of social assistance and of what social work means has not been formed yet.” (Social worker, Town hall, Mureș County).

The School is the institution that could be of utmost support in the process of identification of children in vulnerable situations. Although Law 272/2004 stipulates the obligations of all the professionals working directly with children, and there were also information campaigns, the

obligations are not known at the level of teaching staff. There is still reluctance to call on social workers. School Inspectorates should change the teachers' attitude towards social workers and determine them to cooperate with social workers. *"For a teacher it should become a reflex to notify social services when a child is in difficulty. Teachers are used to solve the problems with children in their own institution, within their own hierarchic system."* (Project coordinator, Alternative Sociale Association)

"In this kind of cases, it [the school] is either insensitive, or it doesn't want to know. Definitely, a factor which could detect such cases is the school. It hasn't happened. ... there are certain financial benefits, like complementary allowances, requiring some school certificates. What I mean is that the school is not even doing its duty, once a semester, to issue these papers upon request to continue the financial aid." (Social worker, Town hall, Dolj County)

In the rural area, schools represent the most important partner in the identification of cases, especially after Order 219/2006 was passed and this issue became a priority. Nevertheless, some schools show reluctance to report some cases with negative consequences: *"There are also some [school] principals who try to somehow conceal certain aspects in the school so as for the school to have a good reputation."* (Project coordinator, The Red Cross, Vrancea).

In many circumstances, the teachers are not aware of their obligations, under Law 272/2004, to report situations implying child neglect (especially the situations when the child is left alone in the household), to the local authority. The teachers' responsibilities, in their view, are the ones resulting from the Law on Education, the statute of teaching staff, the terms of reference and internal regulations.

"The teachers ought to have had the ability or even the habit to notify social services at the city hall, or in more serious cases to go to the department for child protection and ask for support because, we found out later, those problems were due also to the fact that the children had no supervision, and in some situations due to the fact that the respective children were being left at home without resources, the parents were going away but could not find employment and send money home. These economic problems were in addition to the emotional ones". (Project coordinator, Alternative Sociale Association)

The most frequently employed mechanisms to solve cases, when a teacher detects a situation of a child facing some problems, are those proper to the school system, respectively, discussions with the child's caregivers or referral of the child to the school counselor.

"Of course, the class guiding teacher has responsibilities because he/she should follow the [child's] behavior, because in the absence of a parent... he/she should keep in contact with the family who stayed in the country for more careful supervision." (County School Inspectorate – CSI Dolj)

"What should the guiding teacher do when he/she notices that the student's school performance is declining and he/she finds out that the student's parents have left the country?"

"In the first place, he would go into the counseling activity at school level, conducted by the counseling teacher, in his/her office, to, let's say, remedy the student's misbehavior." (CSI, Dolj)

The community is perceived as an important social actor in identifying cases, but also in intervention. Nevertheless, in most cases there are reservations toward cooperating with the institutions, particularly when it comes to family matters.

“The community is still reluctant to go and report a problem relating to the situation of a neighbor... There is still a negative connotation attached to reporting a situation, for instance of a child in difficulty. There is still, I believe, reticence to report on the situation of a child, other than your own, in difficulty.” (Project Coordinator, Alternative Sociale Association)

Sometimes, neighbors or relatives call on the phone or write to the GDSACP and report the unusual situations of some children.

“We cannot report exact figures. It would mean for us to go door-to-door...to look them up ourselves, to identify them ourselves. It is very hard to do so much fieldwork day after day. It would require time and human resources to identify the children and talk to them. We sometimes find out about them when people come to make complaints: ‘you know, our neighbor is out of the country but they still get the complementary allowance’. And then we have to check. I mean, they tell on each other and this is how we find out who has gone abroad.” (Social referent, commune hall, Galați County)

In general, there has been mention of cooperation between the Town hall – police – the school – the county department of child protection. Town hall referents have indicated that the police are more likely to give support in cases where they have trouble conducting social enquiries. Also, the police ought to notify the Town hall or the DGSACP in case a child is in conflict with the law and does not have a legal representative, but no such situation was identified during the interviews.

The cooperation between institutions does not take place based on formal partnerships. In most cases, it depends on the way they cooperated in the past, in other important issues. The school – town hall partnership works less well, as mentioned above. Nevertheless, formalizing the partnership is not perceived as being necessary, especially since between the two institutions there is a relationship of subordination.

“I think that there should not even be partnerships, as long as we are an institution with competency including in activities regarding children, as long as the schools, from a financial point of view, are subordinated to the local authority, it is normal for them to notify us.” (Social worker, Town hall, Dolj County)

Barriers in case identification and monitoring

The qualitative research among professionals in the field of child protection has revealed a number of limitations of the data collection system and a range of barriers, which, for the time being, impede on the development of a comprehensive monitoring system.

Even if there are deficiencies or inconsistencies with other legislative acts, the major observations made by all the interviewed professionals are in relation to the failure to implement these legislative acts, which is also the result of the absence of sanctions for failure to implement the provisions.

“As long as it does not stipulate a sanctioning character if an action we want to take on our own initiative does not happen, I appreciate it as ineffective. So, the legislation is good, but it’s deficient in the sanctions chapter.” (Social worker, Town hall, Dolj County)

Order 219/2006, which has brought the issue of children whose parents have left to work abroad on the list of priorities of directorates / departments of social assistance, is appreciated

by a number of professionals as a positive change, because it shows that this is a national phenomenon and that there is willingness to change something in this matter.

“It’s a step forward because we can be notified!” (Social worker, GDSACP, Botoșani County)

“It makes us believe that these cases have priority before other cases for which social enquiries are required. For example, like those social enquiries every 6 months or every quarter required by law in order to grant some social services. ... Actually, we have given priority to this category. When the parent came and requested a certificate, we never issued it the next day, as a formality.” (Social worker, Town hall, Dolj County).

Furthermore, even if the Order sets forth certain obligations only for the parents who leave the country on employment contracts, it appears that it has contributed to making those who leave the country without legal forms more responsible: *“It is a good thing, because it implies also a responsibility of local authorities but also of the family in general.”* (Social worker, Town hall, Galați County)

For all the departments of social assistance within municipalities, this Order has added to their workload, which is considered in some areas justified, while in others, needless. *“Additional work and a warning sign. ... It has made my work more difficult because I am rather hard to find.”* (Social worker, Town hall, Mureș County).

“We write down reports all day long and nothing concrete is being done.” (Social referent, Town hall, Timiș County).

The fact that this Order concerns only the parents who leave on employment contracts has been considered as an omission of this legislative act, although the interviewees could not find a feasible solution of how to propose an amendment without prejudice to the rights of the parents.

“The Order is incomplete. It regards only a small part of the phenomenon. Moreover, it is insufficiently correlated with the existing legislation in the field of child protection.” (Project coordinator, Alternative Sociale Association).

“If someone’s intention is to hide the fact that they are out of the country for a period of time, we cannot prove it. At the present time, there are no border records any more, and the neighbors, the family members or the child even may think that he/she has gone to another town in Romania for a short period. Only long-term monitoring may prove this fact ...” (Social worker, GDSACP, Dolj County).

The sources of identification and referral of cases differ from town to town according to their size, the human resources assigned to the department of social assistance, and the existing partnerships between institutions. Although Law 272/2004 stipulates the establishment of Community Task Forces (CTF) at the level of each community, through which the community gets involved in the identification of and intervention in cases of children at risk, for the time being, they are rarely functioning. They imply the reunion of representatives of important institutions, respectively, the municipality, the church, the school, the medical office, the business sector. The CTF is very important because it includes people from various fields, who, by the nature of their professions, come into contact with families in special situations and are able to get involved. But, in practice, since the social worker has too many duties, or because of the fact that *“sometimes, the area concerning children seems much less important, the members of the CTF, although they have been selected, do not do their job.”*

(Social worker, GDSACP, Maramureş County). Moreover, existing community task forces work in very rare cases as they should: it has been estimated that, in Neamţ County, CTF's come close to performing their duties under the law in 10% of the total number of communities. In some cases, the local community would rather identify funds in order to have the DGSACP intervene with residential services than attempt to take action at local level.

In spite of the fact that local authorities (municipalities) have the obligation to provide these data, there are quite a few cases when they did not participate in this effort, given that there is no way to compel authorities to comply with the provisions of the Order. The NAPCR has tried to compensate for this omission in the Order (to stipulate sanctions for the authorities who do not provide statistic data on this phenomenon) by forming a partnership with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administrative Reform, but this partnership was not finalized.

Neamţ County is an example: "At the level of Neamţ County, we have received data from approximately 60% of the town halls. Because there is a law on administration and the mayor decides whether they comply or not. So, we cannot force them to do it." (Social worker, GDSACP, Neamţ County). Another example is the town of Botoşani where there is no monitoring of this situation, and the town hall referred the GDSACP to the School Inspectorate to get this type of statistics.

An ambiguity of the Order that generates difficulties is the object of monitoring itself: cases of children whose parents are abroad for work; the Order makes no specific reference to parents who go abroad without legal forms. Given that Art. 10 of Order 219 stipulates: "Romanian nationals who have minor children in their care and wish to sign a contract of employment abroad have the obligation to notify the SPAS/Town hall of their intention to go abroad for work, and also of the person designated to provide for and take care of the children", some authorities interpret the request to collect data as applying strictly to the cases where the law stipulates the obligation of the parents to notify. Practically, the data collection methodology is adapted at local level according to the available resources and to the particular way of interpretation of the law. Therefore, there are very different situations:

- the Town hall collects data on those who go abroad on contracts signed in Romania. This happens mostly in urban areas, but it does not mean that the phenomenon is less widespread.

"On the contrary. It might be even more widespread [the phenomenon of parents' migration for work] in urban areas, it's just that it is stronger on this side of those who leave without an employment contract." (Social worker, DGASPC, Dolj County).

"At this time we have 22 children. ... With legal contracts because, in general, they are the ones who have the obligation to notify us, the others, I don't know exactly, unless we receive information somehow. Ploieşti has a population of 234 thousand." (Social worker, Town hall, Prahova County)

In some instances, the statistic data include also cases that come to the knowledge of the municipality or GDSACP by other means, for example when applications are filed for certain social benefits, and in order to be granted a social enquiry is a prerequisite, but they represent a small portion of the total reported.

"We started from the applications submitted by parents requesting a certificate, according to the legislation in effect, that they may go to work abroad while having one, two or more

minors, and that they remain under the care of the other parent or of maternal, paternal grandparents respectively. Only with legal contracts. There have been other situations too, fewer, I could say an exception to the rule, when the parents left and we found out that they were welfare recipients. That is, when we conducted the social enquiry and noticed that both or one parent are away, they could not justify where, and the children were in the care of the grandparents, relatives, and so on. And then, we reported it to the department of child protection.” (Social worker, Town hall, Dolj County).

“If they are not welfare recipients, the parents are not in our records, they do not request this certificate, we can only find out when the children are abandoned.” (Social worker, Town hall, Dolj County)

- the town hall collects data on those who leave without legal forms or contracts, and who come to the knowledge of social workers through various social networks: the school, relatives, neighbors, or in case they conduct social enquiries.

“Usually the grandparents come: they left the child with me and if I could get the placement allowance or ... so they try to obtain benefits afterwards. This is how we find them.” (Social referent, Town hall, Neamț County).

“The children who are left home come to our attention either following the notification made by parents that they are about to go abroad, or by grandparents, other friends who are designated by the parents to take care of them. ... We appoint a legal guardian to uphold the child’s interests and to represent him/her wherever needed: so, at school, at the doctor’s, and before competent state bodies, so wherever they need to. Actually, it’s not only after the Order was issued. Even before, they would come and say ‘We want to take the child to Italy or if I leave him home what can he do’.” (Social referent, Town hall, Neamț County)

“We conduct periodic enquiries. Every time there are modifications to the law 416 we must conduct social enquiries, and periodically every six months. The same for Ordinance 205/2003 on supplementary support and complementary allowances. Every time we go for visits we take into account this aspect. We always ask what persons are missing from home, what children, about the children left behind...” (Social referent, town hall, Dolj County)

- another method to collect data is strictly following the letter of the law, including only the children whose parents are both abroad for work, even if later NAPCR’s recommendations were to identify also the cases where only one parent is abroad.

“Legally, we are monitoring the children whose parents are both living abroad, and we monitor them and we prepare a report too. We don’t have a report on the children who have one parent abroad, because, legally, we cannot approach them.” The identification was done in the field: *“from door to door, by asking: ‘Do you know, have you heard of people who left...?’”* (Social referent, Town hall, Prahova County)

“I have no legal grounds to go into people’s yard, where only one parent is away.” (Social referent, Town hall, Prahova County)

- in some places, there is monitoring of those who come to the Town hall and inform of their intention to go work abroad, even if they leave without legal forms.

“We know that there is more of them, but we cannot monitor them all. Those who come like this and inform us are very few. This month, for instance, someone informed us that he planned to go abroad and was leaving the child in the care of a relative.

‘Are we talking about people who go abroad without legal forms?’

Well, the person who informed us did not have legal forms, so, without a contract; he was going away on his own initiative, his own account. With or without legal forms. No one notified that they were going away, so to come and fill out that form, to come and ask us to issue a certificate that they notified of their departure ...” (Social referent, Town hall, Galați County)

An exceptional situation of interpretation of the Order was identified Maramureș, where, in a commune, only the children who left with their parents are reported. The data were collected through schools: *“So, the children who are in the commune? ... This report, I didn’t do it. So, only these ones who’re away.”*(Social referent, Town hall, Maramureș County)

NAPCR collects these data quarterly and is aware of the fact that the method of data collection is different at the level of Town halls. Even if it has attempted to unify the data collection methodology by issuing recommendations that the children whose parents go abroad without legal forms should be included too, at this time it is not technically possible to separate the existing data based on this criterion in such a way as to make possible certain estimations. Nevertheless, in spite of challenges, there are expectations that, within one year maximum, this methodology will be applied in a unified manner and that the data will be as accurate as possible.

In addition to methodological differences, social workers, or other staff with social assistance duties, have encountered various practical difficulties, such as:

- the reticence of extended families to acknowledge the departure abroad for work, either for fear that the authorities would take the children away from them, or for fear of losing the social benefits they were receiving.

“As a precise figure, we cannot say, because the are... some come, others go, ... and many avoid notifying the local authorities of the fact that they are going abroad because they lose the right to some social benefits and they hide it.” (Social referent, Town hall, Galați County)

- the absence of legal means to determine parents to notify the authorities when they leave the country for longer periods.

“On the other hand, free movement of people in the European space is guaranteed by law, by the European legislation. It is a very entangled situation because you cannot stop people from traveling wherever they wish and from working wherever they wish in Europe, but, on the other hand, there are some – and they represent a big problem for us, who leave behind children under 2 years of age, that is at the time when the safety attachment is forming.” (Social worker, DGASPC, Neamț County)

- the lack of technical and legal means to identify the parents who have been out of the country for a long time.

“Rather difficult. You can’t really monitor them because now they go abroad with the ID card and it is difficult to follow. Only if you receive information.” (Social referent, Town hall, Mureș County)

- the impossibility to collect data based on legal provisions, most of the times classifying a situation as “migration abroad for employment” is based on collateral information;

- the existence, at the level of institutions working directly with children, of disparate data. For instance, some school inspectorates may supply data on children who transfer to schools abroad. Other school inspectorates have in addition records of the number of children who

have returned and reintegrated into schools in Romania, either because their parents have returned to the country or because they could not adjust to the new school system. In other regions, as a result of local initiatives, they have initiated surveys to collect data on the children in the school system who have parents abroad for work.

“The only ones who show up at the School Inspectorate are the parents and students, in case they are over 17 years old, who request a certification of their studies to be able to continue their education abroad.” (School inspector, CSI, Dolj County).

In Botoşani, it has been reported that, for approximately one and a half years, parents have started to take their children with them, especially as a result of the fact that in the countries of destination a range of measures have been taken to facilitate enrollment in school. *“The problem is more serious when the child remains here with someone else than the adjustment over there when he/she is together with their parents.”* (Social worker, GDSACP, Botoşani County).

4.3. HOW MANY CHILDREN HAVE PARENTS ABROAD?

Survey estimates at national level

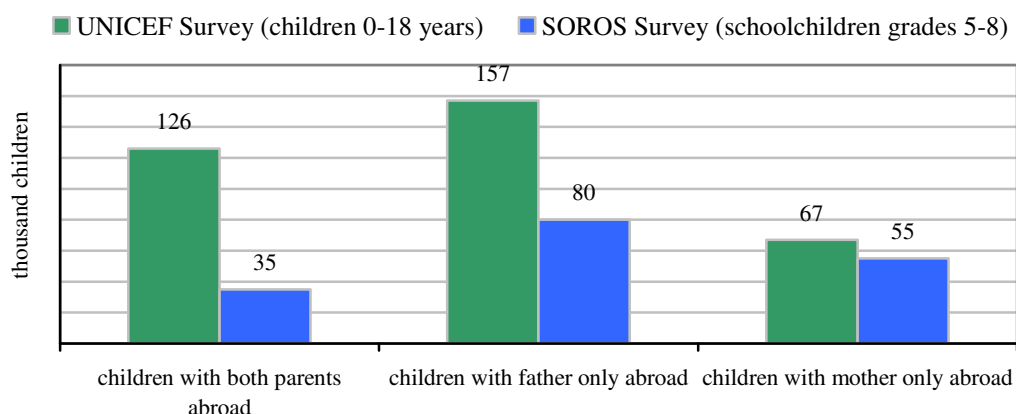
Statistic estimates⁶ indicate the fact that at the level of the month of August 2007, approximately 350,000 children, representing about 7% of the total population aged 0-18 years, have at least one parent who went abroad. Out of which, most of them had only the father abroad, respectively, 157,000 children, and 67,000 had only the mother abroad. At the same time, 126,000 children had both parents living abroad. For the entire population aged 0-18 years, another approximately 400,000 children had experienced at some point the absence of one of the parents as a result of his/her going abroad for work.

In absolute figures, the phenomenon appears to have significant, mass proportions. If we add the approximately 350,000 children whose parents are abroad at the present time with the 400,000 who had at some point one or both parents abroad, we can practically talk about almost 750,000 children, out of the approximately 5 million children of Romania today, who have been affected, to a certain extent, by their parents' migration. As size, the figures in this survey are to some extent consistent with the ones estimated by the Soros Foundation survey among children in middle school [grades 5-8].

There appears though a significant difference between the two surveys with respect to the number of children with both parents abroad. At the level of the 0-18 year old national population, the number of those with both parents abroad is much higher than that of those with only the mother abroad, while at the level of middle school population the relation between the two sizes is inverted (see fig. 1).

⁶ The extrapolations at population level were developed based on the data on the structure of households by number of members, number of children 0-18 years old at the 2002 Census, and based on the distribution of the 0-18 years old population by regions and residential areas of June 2006, data supplied by NIS.

Figure 1. Estimates of the number of children with parents abroad based on the two surveys by UNICEF and SOROS



The difference may arise from several sources. On the one hand, it might arise from the non-probabilistic method of selection of households with children with migrant parents, respectively, of schoolchildren with migrant parents used in the two surveys, and which might have introduced systematic errors of selection of one of the two categories of children – with both parents abroad or with only the mother abroad. On the other hand, the Gallup-UNICEF national survey indicates that the number of children in grades 5-8 is higher among children with only the mothers abroad compared to the other categories of children with migrant parents. Not least, it is possible that the difference may be explained in part by a certain seasonality of migration, which could not be captured by the Gallup-Soros survey conducted at the end of the 2006-2007 school year, practically during the summertime, when part of the parents, particularly the mothers, would go abroad temporarily to join their husbands who were already working abroad.

What is the breakdown at regional level of this population of children with one or both parents abroad for work? The survey indicates that the region with the highest concentration of children whose parents are abroad is Moldova, (approximately 100,000 children). Other four regions, Muntenia, Transylvania, Crişana-Maramureş-Banat and Oltenia have each an approximate number of 50-55 thousand children with parents abroad. In Bucharest, estimates indicate approximately 30,000 children with migrant parents, and in Dobrogea, about 10,000. As ratio among the 0-18 year old population within each region, the data do not reveal significant inter-regional differences, but it suggests a higher prevalence of the phenomenon of children with migrant parents in Moldova and in Oltenia.

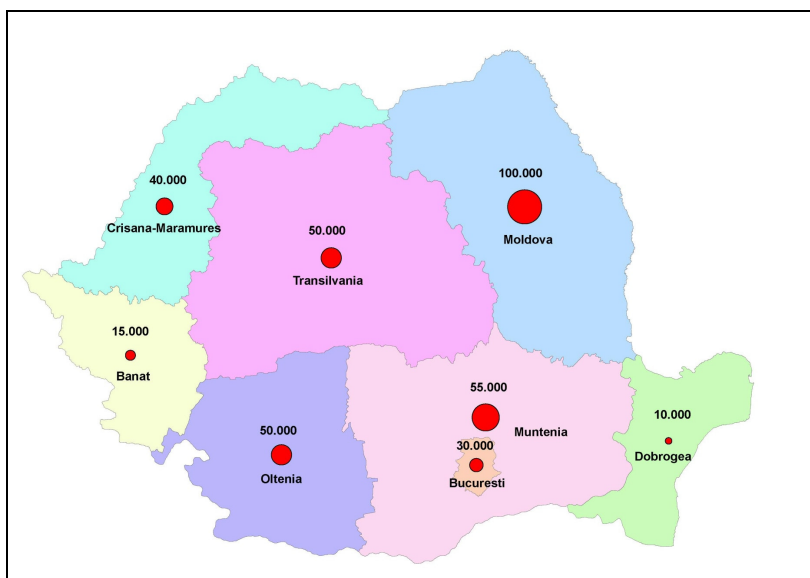


Figure 2. Dimensions of the phenomenon of children with migrant parents by regions (estimates based on the extrapolation of the survey findings to the population size of the regions)

Approximately 52% of the children with parents abroad for work are in the rural area, which represents about 180,000 children. In the rural area, it is more likely that both parents go abroad, while in big cities only fathers are likely to go abroad. This gap between residential areas could be explained by the fact that extended families have more importance in the rural area compared to the urban area, but this hypothesis cannot be verified based on the available data.

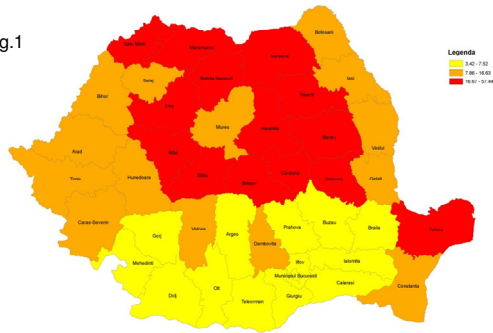
The survey data cannot provide information regarding the county distribution of the population of children affected by parents' migration. However, at least at theoretical level, this distribution is likely to reflect the prevalence of the migration phenomenon in general.

Unfortunately, there are no recent official data on the prevalence of international migration that would not significantly underestimate the scale of the phenomenon. However, based on three sources of data ⁷, we have attempted to draft a map at county level of the prevalence of the migration phenomenon and, implicitly, of the 'home alone children' phenomenon. The three maps shown in chart 4 suggest the existence of a few counties where the prevalence of the incidence of the 'home alone' phenomenon is significantly higher. The maps give an indication of the proportion of children in each county who could be in a 'home alone' situation and not of the number of affected children. Firstly, all three maps show that migration is more prevalent in the four counties in the west of Moldova: Vrancea, Bacău, Neamț and Suceava. Another group of counties with a probably large proportion of children with parents abroad are those in the North and Northwest of the country: Bistrița, Maramureș, Satu Mare and Sălaj. A third group includes the counties of Banat: Caraș, Timiș and Arad. The counties of Sibiu and Alba, as well as Tulcea, are also very likely to be affected by this phenomenon to a larger extent than the other counties. More study is required of the situation of counties with a preponderantly Hungarian population – Harghita and Covasna – which, at least according to 5 year old data, appear as counties having a high prevalence of the phenomenon of migration.

⁷ Population Census 2002, Community Migration Census 2001 (OIM) and data on the number of children whose parents are abroad for work, NAPCR – 30.06.2007

Prevalence of international migration according to data from the 2002 Population Census

Fig.1



Prevalence of international migration according to data from the 2001 Community Census

Fig.2



Prevalence of the phenomenon of children with parents abroad according to NAPCR data – July 2007

Fig.3

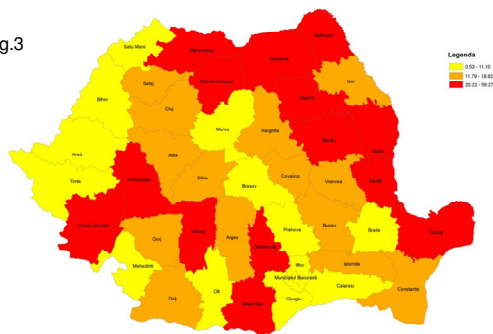


Fig. 1: Temporary emigration rates by counties, calculated as ratio of the number of travels abroad for at least one month to the total population

Fig. 2: International migration prevalence rates for the rural area and towns with a population size below 30,000, calculated as the sum of the total number of people who went abroad and those who returned to the country, in proportion to the total population

Fig. 3: Ratio of children with at least one parent abroad in the total population of children at the level of each county

5. Causes of the phenomenon of home alone children

5.1. CONTEXT OF THE PHENOMENON FROM THE ANGLE OF MENTALITIES ABOUT FAMILY AND CHILDREN

The perceptions of the roles in the family in Romanian society revolve around two patterns: a traditional one, where the woman does the housework, and the man is to a greater extent responsible for providing financial resources (54% of respondents expressing opinions corresponding to this pattern), and a more modern pattern, where the responsibilities within the family are not divided on the criterion of gender (27% of respondents stating such opinions). The inclination towards a pattern or the other is not influenced by the gender of the respondents but rather by their age and family experience. Thus, among young adults (under 35) and among persons without children the proportion of those who state egalitarian values between men and women is larger.

% of the total		In general, are you of the opinion that it is more the man's rather than the woman's duty to be the breadwinner in the family?			
		Yes	No	DK/NR	Total
In general, are you of the opinion that it is more the woman's rather than the man's duty to do the housework?	Yes	54.9	6.2	0.4	61.5
	No	9.2	27.4	0.2	36.9
	DK/NR	0.5	0.0	1.0	1.6
	Total	64.6	33.7	1.7	100.0

Although 61% of respondents consider that it is more the women's duty to do the housework, only 14 % think that the mother should take care of raising the children. The opinions concerning the responsibility for raising children are in favor of the involvement of both parents in the case of the majority of respondents – 86%. However, when they refer to abilities, the respondents give less credit to fathers as to their being as capable as mothers to take care of their young children (30%).

The relation between family life and professional life is one that requires constant compromises in order to fulfill the two roles. The opinion of the majority (88%) is that, if a family can afford it, it is better that one of the parents should stay home with the children. However, as 74% of respondents indicate, there are few families who decide that one of the parents should stay home with their children in their first years of life. When it is a matter of choice between caring for the children versus having a career and financial earnings, the opinions are not unanimous any more. Thus, 67% of respondents think that parents are wrong when they choose the career and the financial earnings, while 26% hold the opinion that such a choice is not a mistake.

With regard to mothers' participation in the labor market, it is considered that there is no incompatibility between the two roles, and that the emotional side of the relationship with the children would not be affected: the majority considers that working mothers are as loving and attached to their children as the staying home mothers. Most respondents (63%) think that employers put some pressure on mothers to reintegrate into the labor market.

Concerning the parents' ability to meet their children's needs, 82% consider that not all parents are prepared to meet these responsibilities, because they do not think in advance about

what raising children means. Furthermore, 48% of respondents say that it is more difficult to raise a child today than in the time of their parents, because the scarcity of money is more acute (59% of the respondents who say that it is more difficult), associated with the lack of employment opportunities (7%), but also because children are more demanding (31%) as they have more alternatives, and parents are pressed for time (7%). Those who state that it is easier, emphasize the much more diversified opportunities for children's care and education (81%) and the fact that the state grants certain benefits like maternity leave and new-born allowances.

The respondents believe that certain children's rights are of great importance for their development. Thus, the respondents were asked to give grades from 1 to 10 on a scale where 1 means 'not at all important', and 10 'extremely important', to some rights stipulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and in Law 272/2004 on the protection and promotion of children's rights. All the items were given the maximum grade (10) in at least 70% of the cases, the average grade received by each right being higher than 9. The least important rights were considered to be those relating to traditional family patterns, where the child is socialized through involvement in various types of work, and is disciplined by punishment. Thus, the statement 'the child shall not be forced to work by adults' had an average grade of 9.33, 73% giving it grade 10, maximum importance. Compared to other rights, when 90% of respondents gave the maximum grade, on this right there are different opinions. 4% of respondents gave grades under 7 to this right.

Another right the respondents rated as less important is the right to receive protection from the State when the child is deprived of parental support: average grade 9.56, 81% gave it 10. Besides, the majority of respondents (82%) consider that it is better for the child to be cared for by grandparents or close relatives when the child is abandoned or neglected by his/her parents. Only 14% think that that state should intervene either through placement centers (7%), or through the foster care network (7%).

The right regarding the involvement and participation of children is also less valued by the respondents: the average grade was 9.64, and the percentage of those who rated it as extremely important was 82%. The right to play or engage in recreational activities, together with the statement 'the child shall not be subjected to physical or humiliating punishment' received 9.68 on average, being rated as extremely important by only 83%, 86% respectively.

The most important aspects (rated at 10 by more than 95% of respondents) are those relating to the emotional relationships between parents and children and to the child's living together with his/her parents.

5.2. REASONS FOR PARENT MIGRATION ABROAD FOR EMPLOYMENT

The theoretical perspective of the new economy of labor migration indicates that the decisions to migrate are not made by isolated individual actors but by larger units like the family, the household, and sometimes the community even, within which people take collective action not only to maximize the expected gain, but also to minimize risks and reduce the constraints associated with different types of dysfunctions of markets, other than those on the labor market. The absence of functional capital markets and crediting markets generate a strong pressure towards international migration as a strategy to accumulate capital. In addition to dysfunctional markets, an important factor for the theory of the new economy of migration is

that of relative deprivation. Households send their workers abroad not only in order to increase their income in absolute terms, but also in order to increase it compared to the other households in the community, and thus to reduce their relative deprivation in comparison with another group of reference.

Regarding the migration of parents associated with leaving one or more children in the country, the question “why do they migrate?” triggers the question “how can they leave their children ‘alone’ and go?” This question is not a justified one except for few cases, since, as we have shown before, the child is left either in the care of one parent or of the extended family. Before making the decision to migrate, the potential migrant parent does a cost/benefit-type analysis. In the survey, when asked what the major arguments were against the decision to migrate, approximately 20% of respondents mentioned the separation from the family and children, and almost 40% said that there were no arguments against. The support of the extended family is obviously a resource that is needed in case of both parents’ migration and, it is very plausible that in the absence of this support, the likelihood of both parents’ migrating should be much reduced.

The primary causes of the phenomenon, as identified by the professionals who work directly with children, are those relating to the economic development and the phenomenon of migration, in general. Although, in recent years, the unemployment rate has dropped, it is still the dynamics of the labor market that determines active people to seek better paying employment in other countries. More to the point, the reason is not the total lack of employment opportunities, but the higher expectations in terms of working conditions, and particularly, the pay that goes with the job.

“The lack of employment opportunities in our country. Practically, the lack of well paying jobs, because you could find jobs here too, but they are not well paid so that they consider that they would not be able to provide the bare necessities for the child or/and the expectations have become higher after they have been out of the country.” (Social referent, Town hall, Neamț County).

For some of the migrants, going abroad solves some stringent problems, for others it is a guarantee that they will be able to provide their families with everything they want.

“Some believe that if the economic problem is solved the social one will be solved too, like a house or better health care, or things of this nature.” (Social worker, GDSACP, Dolj County)

Sometimes, the mirage of high earnings makes some of the migrants disregard living expenses or the risks of working illegally and to fail, causing even more suffering to the family. One such example, identified during the qualitative research, is in Cerat commune, Dolj County, where there were many cases of failure, people who went abroad for work but could not find employment in the country of destination:

“Most of the times, I might say, they have a hard time coming back home. They can barely solve the problem of money to come home. So, it’s more of an attempt...” (Social referent, Town hall, Dolj County).

In most of the cases, at the beginning, the idea is to leave for a limited period of time and to return home. The difference between those with economic problems who choose to try their

luck in another country and those who do not go abroad lies, according to professionals, in their daring and attitude towards taking risks:

“Those who go away have the guts to start fresh, all over again. ... Their ideal is to go abroad, earn enough money to be able to come back to town, build a house or some small business, but they all want to come back to town.” (Social referent, Town hall, Neamț County).

Not least, the professionals mentioned the lack of information about the risks posed by the absence of one parent from the household, or of both parents, to the development of the child.

At the same time, the public at large has formed an opinion on the reasons why parents go to work abroad. These reasons refer to the scarce family income, lack of employment opportunities, but also to situations when families want more than local opportunities have to offer. These reasons range among the general causes of going abroad for work of the people in the community, where in the first three places we find too low salaries, lack of employment and poor prospects of becoming successful in Romania.

What are the reasons given by migrants, as the survey reveals? Two thirds of families of current and former migrants mention that they went to work abroad to earn more money for their livelihood, and only 23% make reference to the accumulation of capital in view of making some acquisitions or investments. Among the latter, most had a plan before going abroad to save money to buy durable household goods, to modernize the house, to buy a car, as well as to buy or to build a house. Only 13% indicate that they planned to save money to start a business.

More interesting is the way they actually spent part of this money and also the fact that there are no differences between migrant families with children and non-migrant families with children. Practically, similar percentages of the two categories of families made the same types of expenses/acquisitions in the last two years. The most frequent expenses made in the last two years are those related to the purchase of household appliances and to the improvement of living conditions.

Regarding the temporary character of parents' migration for work, the survey shows that in almost 80% of cases there is no plan to establish permanent residence in the country of destination. At the same time, in approximately 20% of cases of currently migrant parents they expressed their intention to take the child to the country where they are working at present, the percentage being higher in case both parents are employed abroad at present (30%). The intention to take the child to the country of destination is not significantly associated with the child's age.

6. Consequences of the phenomenon

6.1. IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The child's right to not be separated from his/her parents

“States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his/her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child.” (Article 9)

“The child, for the full and harmonious development of his/her personality, needs love and understanding. He or she should, whenever it is possible, grow up under the care and responsibility of his/her parents...” (Article 6)

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Although the natural tendency of adults in households of migrants is to underestimate the negative effects of the departure of one of the parents abroad for work on the relationship between them, the quantitative research found that in 9% of the cases of households with a migrant father or both parents there are statements that the relationship has grown worse. At the same time, in 18% of the cases when only the mother is currently abroad for work it is recognized that the effects on the relationship between the parents were negative.

Out of the total households where the relationships between parents have deteriorated, the most frequent manifestations are: frequent fights (61%), separation or divorce of the parents (43%). In households where the relationship between parents has broken either by separation only or totally, by divorce, the average number of children per household was 1.6 children. In 12% of cases, these households affected by the break up of the parents had three minor children, and in 40% of cases, 2 minor children.

In the majority of cases (over 50%), it is estimated that the departure of one or of both parents did not affect in any way the relationships between the family members who stayed home, and in over 25% of cases when at least one of the parents is living abroad for work, the perception of the impact at the level of relationships between family members who stayed home or at the level of relationships between parents and children is a positive one. Most negative mentions appear in cases when only one of the parents has gone to work abroad.

At family level, the most serious consequence is its breaking up. A divorce usually occurs on the grounds of preexisting problems or because of separation for very long periods of time. The children are hurt not only by the formalization of the separation, but also by the ensuing conflicts in the dispute for their custody.

“The worst consequence, let’s say, is that the number of divorces has increased, the breaking up of families by divorce. ... Like, when one of the parents goes away. It’s not only that they stay there, but you know when the mother goes and leaves at home a husband who was not quite good for the family, if they had fights or disagreements in the family, she won’t come back. That is, she says “Lady, I’d rather live alone than with him, I’ll raise my children and not ...” (Social referent, Town hall, Neamț County)

“The number of divorces is rising because distance makes family relationships grow colder.”
(Social referent, Town hall, Timiș County)

“There are cases of divorce, they are the order of the day. There are many who break up.”

“Does it have to do with going abroad for work?”

“Some do; yes, and this leads to... going abroad leads to separation of the spouses. There were also cases when the husband left and then gave no sign anymore. The wife was waiting, maybe she went after him and over there she found out that the husband was having another relationship and they got divorced in the end.” (Social referent, Town hall, Galați County)

“In this tug of war, between the two parents who break up and start fighting with each other; they come back, one worked someplace, the other in another, they have cars and money and everything they need, and the one and the other both start tugging at the child. ... And they tug at the child to one side or the other and the child is really hurting.” (Social worker, GDSACP, Neamț County)

In cases when the child is temporarily separated from the mother, the child is under much less strict supervision, and therefore, in 5% of cases the child’s adult caretakers indicate that it frequently happens not to know exactly how the child is spending his/her time outside the home.

Although in households of migrants the adults’ perception of the global effects of the parents’ going away on the behavior of children gives more credit to the hypothesis of positive effects through their becoming more responsible, the identification of some concrete situations substantiates the hypothesis of negative effects experienced in the case of more vulnerable children: children are in much pain because they parents left (39% of parents’ mentions); effects at emotional level, the child becomes more reserved (10%); children begin to spend more time in front of the computer or television (10%), to be naughtier, more disobedient (7%), or they start to be neglectful of school (7%).

It is a concerning fact that 2% of households with current migrants mention that at least one of the children has dropped out of school, this situation being more frequent in the case of families where the mothers are abroad (5%). In 0.4% of cases, the adults declare that one of the children in the family was in trouble with the police because he committed an offense. In most of the situations, the mother’s departure exacerbates these effects on the child’s behavior: in 50% of cases the child’s suffering is mentioned, in 16% of cases the child has become more reserved, school performance has been poorer in 14% of cases, and in 2% of cases one of the children has committed an offense.

Law 272/2004 stipulates the parents’ responsibility to supervise the child and to ensure the realization of their child’s rights. The State, through the local administration, plays a complementary role to assist the parent in fulfilling these responsibilities and to take action when these responsibilities are not met. The public social assistance services within Town halls represent the primary institution with the responsibility of early identification of risk situations and of prevention of child abuse or neglect.

The barriers social workers experience in their field work are correlated with the poor involvement of responsible actors and the failure to observe existing legal provisions.

“I have the law but it’s useless as long as I go to conduct a social enquiry and I am bullied or I cannot communicate, there are language barriers.... We take it easy, we take it from the beginning, we ask the support of the community police, of the neighbors...” (Social worker, Town hall, Galați County)

Moreover, the staff of the GDSACP and SPAS consider that they do not have the capacity and methods of effective monitoring and intervention.

“SPAS’s are not developed enough to provide prompt services and for the full range of children’s needs.” (Social worker, GDSACP, Dolj County)

“Still, we have to respect the families’ privacy too, we cannot barge in and it’s not ethical. So it is rather difficult to follow-up on families where the children are abandoned.” (Social referent, Town hall, Dolj County)

“You cannot meddle in anyone’s family. The police, the same, they don’t get involved much...” (Social referent, Town hall, Timiș County)

With regard to the specific needs of children with parents abroad, there is the general opinion that the major need is that of attachment, the need for emotional attachment to an adult, which makes them vulnerable in some situations, while in other cases, more open and more cooperating with the staff of day-care centers or of other care services: *“they develop much more easily an attachment to an adult who shows interest and love for them.”* (Project coordinator, FRCCF).

“The longing. It’s hard. Children miss their parents, no matter how well they are treated or not.” (Social worker, Town hall, Prahova County)

The professionals’ opinion is that the absence of parents does not automatically induce negative effects. The effects do not occur in all the children whose parents are abroad for work. *“We should not be thinking of some specific effects of the fact that they are home alone, but to talk about a specific type of vulnerability”* (Project coordinator, Alternative Sociale Association)

“There are two categories of children who require special attention: the children who become victims and the children who become victimizers, become delinquents. Sometimes, the availability of financial resources sent home monthly by the parents makes them victims of some circles of associates who take advantage of them. The availability of resources and the lack of adult supervision determine some children/adolescents to resort to different ‘extravagancies’, sometimes breaking the law (alcohol or even substance abuse)”. (Project coordinator, Alternative Sociale Association)

The necessary services to reduce the vulnerability of children whose parents are abroad for work are counseling services or day-care centers.

Psychological counseling is provided by the school, GDSACP through its specialized services, or by NGO’s. These services are mostly available in urban areas. At the time of the research there were no data available on the children who had been referred to GDSACP services.

With regard to counseling provided in the school system, although useful, it has limitations relating to the resources allocated to this service.

“Teachers report the problem to the parents or legal guardians and bring the children here. Usually, they come a few times and then give up. ... The outcome of counseling? I’m telling

you, there was no result. They were, they really couldn't see the point or couldn't find comfort here and peace here. It is also more difficult at our offices because we have two counseling rooms where it's a come and go, it's quite a lot of people moving about and it is more difficult to do counseling." (School Inspector, CSI, Maramureş County)

The school, through the network of school counselors, where it is adequately developed, is able to intervene by providing primary counseling services to the children who need such support.

Day centers, where children may stay after classes under the supervision of a teacher, are generally designed for children from disadvantaged families or children who cannot benefit from the constant supervision of an adult. These centers were set up by GDSACP or by schools and offer after-school activities. The structure and types of activities that can take place in such centers are regulated by NAPCR by the issuance of minimum obligatory standards of operation for such services. This type of services exists in schools or high schools (for example, counseling and day centers are being established in the schools of Botosani County), but they are also provided by non-governmental organizations, either in a broader context – vulnerable children – or as specific services.

A model of such service is the one established by Alternative Sociale in Iaşi, where the intervention is complex including: the evaluation of problems of a psychological nature resulting from the physical and emotional neglect of the child, counseling (for the child, parent, caretaker) to maintain and improve the child's relationships with the parents and other persons; socialization activities in view of preventing the child's (self)marginalization within the group of friends or schoolmates; facilitation of a protective measure to be established in cases of children deprived of adult care; facilitation to receive the benefits provided by law. At the same time, it aims to develop independent life skills; it provides school orientation, vocational guidance, especially for children in their last year of school, to continue their education. For those who have dropped out of school, it facilitates school reintegration.

The center offers various alternatives for children's leisure time – engagement in "after-school" activities to develop pro-social behavior; information and awareness activities to prevent juvenile delinquency – for 'home alone' children who are at risk, and information and awareness activities aimed to prevent child labor, sexual exploitation and trafficking of children, thus reducing their vulnerability to different forms of exploitation.

Also, a community center was opened in Țara Oaşului by the Romanian Foundation for Child, Community and Family. The center is mainly designed for children whose parents are abroad for work. The capacity of the center is of 45 children, but in the course of one year, the number of beneficiaries is larger. The applications to benefit from the services of this center exceed its capacity, therefore a selection is made on the following criteria: if the child has one or both parents abroad for work, if he/she enjoys support and supervision at home, if they have problems at school (poor performance, many absences, behavioral or emotional problems). The Organization started to work in the field of migration since 2004, dealing with the issue of the risks of child migration, in particular non-accompanied children.

"In the course of this project, during our discussions with schools, with authorities, they called our attention to the fact that, indeed, this [migrant children] is a problem, but for the local community there is a much bigger problem, the problem of the children who were left home, the parents being abroad, because they manifest different behavior problems, indiscipline, in school they don't get marks as good as before, they are not so much interested

in school anymore; the children were left in the care of grandparents who cannot control them anymore after a certain age. And we were asked if we would be able to do something in this respect.” (Project coordinator, FRCCF). Other children were accepted too in this center, children deprived of the care of one of the parents (either following the death of one of the parents, or following a divorce), or from families with very many children, or with parents who are not able to help the child prepare the assignments for school.

The center offers daily activities, for 4 hours, after school, assistance activities in doing homework and study; assistance to those who are behind in school to catch up; leisure time activities. Periodically, the children may receive psychological counseling, there are group meetings organized within personal enhancement groups for young people. Children may benefit from this project up to the time when they complete the 8th grade, after that they need to go to another town to attend other forms of education. The staff of the center consists of teachers from the school hosting the center, 3 kindergarten teachers, a psychologist and a social worker from Satu Mare, who come periodically to the community center. The staff represents a big challenge both for public and private social service providers, in particular when these centers are established in rural areas. The results observed in the first year of implementation are in connection with the improvement of school performance, behavioral changes *“especially in children who used to have socialization problems, to be reserved, isolated, now one can notice an improvement in the communication with others, they form friendships more easily, they integrate better into the group”* (Project coordinator, FRCCF), and more self-confidence.

Another experience in Maramureş County shows that recreational activities organized in a day center are not sufficient if they are not complemented by counseling or support groups. *“Here they have the opportunity to spend their time in an organized manner, but I don’t think this is the answer.*

Why not?

Because they had emotional problems. They were missing their parents and they didn’t feel like being distracted with sports and singing, dancing and what not...” (CSI, Maramureş)

The right to an adequate standard of living

1. States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.
2. The parent(s) or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities, the conditions of living necessary for the child’s development. (Article 27)

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The parents’ motivation to go abroad and to assume all the negative consequences associated with this decision is related, in most cases, to the desire to ensure an adequate standard of living for their family members. This endeavor is far from being a total success. Thus, in 31% of families of former migrants, they indicate that going abroad did not bring about any change in the standard of living of those at home. With regard to those who are abroad at the present time, in 28% of families with the father abroad, respectively 35% of families with the mother abroad, and 22% of families with both parents abroad, the effects of their going abroad on the standard of living of those who stayed home are not felt. Furthermore, in 2% of cases with both parents abroad, 3% of cases with the father abroad, and 4% of cases with the mother abroad the effects on the standard of living are negative.

Comparing the situation of children with at least one parent abroad with the situation of children who live together with both parents, we find that the departure of one of the parents leads to more access to certain products that children need or want: clothing and footwear, toys, cell phones, etc. The biggest differences in the accessibility to products are identified in the cases of children whose mother is abroad. It may be that this fact is a consequence of the deeper emotional pain associated with the departure of the mother, and that purchasing these products wanted by children is a way of compensating for the absence of the mother from the household.

Professionals mention the fact that housing conditions have improved, these being the first investments made by those who come back to the community. The financial resources available to these children are larger than in the case of children whose parents are in the household, this fact having both a positive side (higher standard of living for the child), and a negative side (the child is vulnerable to being taken advantage of by older children, or has access to activities or substances not recommended to minors).

However, when it is the first time that the parents go out of the country, a consequence that appears shortly after their departure is a decrease in the standard of living as a result of reduced income. In the case of disadvantaged families, who receive different social benefits, the departure of the parents triggers the suspension of these benefits, and even the closing of their files after a period of three months of absence. This fact has immediate consequences on the child, determining a decrease in the standard of living of the child up to the time when the parent/parents manage to send money home. *"Instead of favoring them, we disadvantaged them"* (Social referent, commune hall, Galați County).

There have been situations when, expecting more difficult times to come before the moment they find a secure job and in the absence of a support network within the extended family, parents call on child protection departments before going abroad:

"There were parents who went abroad and who asked us, through their legal representative, for emergency aid, financial support until they get there and rehabilitate." (Social worker, Town hall, Dolj County)

In some situations, the children whose parents are abroad for work need financial assistance for a limited period, until the parent/parents are able to send money home. The Red Cross is providing such a service as emergency aid.

"Well now, it depends also on the parents, what they do with the money. There are some who spend it, some who save it and send some to their children too. That's why, we always conduct social enquiries beforehand." *"There are also children in financial difficulties because they have not yet received money, there are people who left and found somebody else over there, but the problems were solved at the level of the department of child protection."* (Project Coordinator, The Red Cross, Vrancea).

The right to health

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health and to receive health care and rehabilitation services. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his/her right of access to such health care services. (Article 24)

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The survey data do not reveal significant differences with respect to the risk of morbidity between the children who have one parent abroad for work and the children who live together with their parents. There are much less frequent mentions of cases of illness, accidents, or states of apathy, fatigue in circumstances when both parents are abroad for work.

Health care services were accessed more frequently in the case of families without parents abroad (63% of cases went at least once from the beginning of the year for consultation or treatment), although the frequency of reported illness was the same as in the cases when the mother is abroad (access to health care services is mentioned by only 57%).

It is possible that these differences are determined by the fact that the mother has a more important role in accessing medical services, and her absence leads to reduced access of children to services they are entitled to. Thus, in 22% of cases when the mother is abroad, the children have taken medication that was not prescribed by a doctor, compared to 15% of those who live with their parents.

It is important to note the higher prevalence of cases of children who have a chronic disease or a handicap, (11%) in the case of families with both parents abroad or (9%) migrant mother, compared to those who live with their parents (5%). This situation could be one of the reasons why the parents went to work abroad. However, on the short term, the departure of one or of both parents brings about reduced access to health care services: 55% of families with migrants who have a child with a chronic disease or a handicap have not been seen by a doctor from the beginning of the year, compared to 32% of families without parents abroad.

The right to education

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

- (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free for all;
 - (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child;
 - (c) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible;
 - (d) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.
- (Article 28)

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

As mentioned above, the absence of the parents from the household has an impact on the child's school performance or even school participation. Thus, although in some cases the parents make efforts to assist the child by tutoring and to support him/her for better school performance, there are also cases when the parents resign themselves to the idea that the child simply "doesn't care much for school". And so it comes to situations when, in the absence of the mother, the child has failed in one or more subjects (8%), has absences without excuse

(8% among those with the mother or father abroad), or has problems at school with other bullying children (8% of those with the mother abroad).

At the opposite pole, there are situations when one of the parents stayed in the country and is taking care of the children's education; in this case the concern for the children's school performance is greater than in the case of children whose both parents are abroad: 17% attend tutoring classes, and 25% of those with only the father abroad have participated in a school contest in the last year.

The interviews with professionals show that the lack of supervision by parents, or even by relatives left in charge with caring for the children, results in truancy and, in the worst cases, in school dropout.

“There have been a few cases when the mother was the one who left for a period of 3 months, and the guidance teacher called us because the child was at risk of failing. Without his mother's protection and supervision, or even the grandmother who cared for him, he left him to his own devices, did not take care of school and the needs of the child.” (Social referent, Town hall, Timiș County)

“I have only one case, a 17 year old boy, almost 18, so the mother abandoned him when he was 6 months old and the father works abroad. He is living with his grandparents and he is employed illegally. ... He completed only 7 grades.” (Social referent, Town hall, Mureș County)

The parents' attitude towards education and its role in the child's future is essential for school performance: *“even if the parents are abroad, most of them communicate with their children over the phone, they call them quite frequently. If the parent cautions the child, emphasizes the study, especially if he/she is keeping in touch with the child's teacher or guidance teacher, then the child too will attach importance to this, will be more motivated. ... When the parent is not in constant contact with the school, then the motivation is poorer and of course the performance is poorer.”* (Project Coordinator, FRCCF)

In recent years, it has been an increase in the turnover of children between the Romanian school system and those in the country of destination. The parents, reaching a level of welfare adequate to maintain their children in the country of destination, transferred them to schools in the communities they work in. The advantage of this turnover is that the distance between children and parents disappears, but some children do not manage to adjust to the new requirements and return to the country. In addition, there are cases when parents take their older children along to work together with them, even if they did not complete the compulsory level of education.

“There are also children who left and did not adjust. They came back to school here, so they did not adjust to the requirements over there at school or couldn't stand the fact ... here, being in the countryside, they are free to romp. I'm thinking that maybe over there they didn't even have a group of friends and they came back to the community.” (Social referent, Town hall, Neamț County)

The right of child to leisure and to be protected from economic exploitation

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, the right to play and engage in recreational activities appropriate to his/her age and the right to participate freely in cultural and artistic life. (Article 31)

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected against economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health and physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. (Article 32)

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Regarding the ways of spending leisure time, in the absence of permanent control exercised by the parents, the time devoted to recreation and the ways of spending spare time depend to a greater extent on the child's wishes and on available opportunities. Thus, families who have at least one migrant parent report much more frequently situations where the children play either in the household or outside the household, or where the child spends his/her time in front of the television.

The engagement of children in different kinds of work inside or outside the household should take into account, on the one hand, the child's capacity to perform those activities without repercussions on his/her physical development, and on the other hand, that it does not interfere with the child's process of education, and, also, his/her leisure time.

In the case of children who have at least one parent abroad for work, we find that some of them assume the roles of adults within the household. The incidence of these situations is higher in the case when only the mothers go to work abroad, even if compared with the cases when both parents are abroad. This situation could be explained on the one hand by the more important role played by the mother in the household activities, and on the other hand by the solutions found in each family to the problem of care and supervision of the children. Thus, in the cases when both parents are abroad, 74% spent most of the time with their grandparents who take over to a large extent the tasks of the parents. In 52% of the cases when the mother is the one who went abroad, the children are left in the care of their father and they largely assume the household roles performed by the mother.

The most frequent activities performed by children are cleaning in the household, usual shopping, preparing food and looking after the animals. Even if assuming some tasks in the household may have the role to socialize and make children more responsible, there are certain activities in which the consequences of children's involvement should be taken into consideration. Thus, in 4% of cases when the mother or both parents are abroad for work and in 7% of cases when the father is abroad, the older children have taken on largely the task to look after the younger children in the household. This should be concerning since such an activity takes a lot of the child's time, time that should be devoted to other activities too, like studying, and on the other hand, it constitutes a very big responsibility on a child's shoulders.

At the same time, in approximately 5% of families with at least one parent abroad for work, the children have taken over their parents' tasks in doing farm work. Although the percentage may seem small, the strain on physical capacities implied by performing farm work makes an argument in favor of considering this situation as problematic.

Usually, the mother's tasks are taken over mostly by children over 14, especially girls. There are some activities that are performed in equal measure by boys and girls aged between 14 and 17 years: cleaning the household (33% boys and 34% girls), usual shopping (38% boys and 39% girls), and farm work (10% boys and girls). In addition, girls do the cooking (27%) and look after the animals (17%). Children aged between 7 and 13 years take on easier tasks like cleaning the household and usual shopping. Nevertheless, from the statements of adults in the household, we find that there are cases when children at a young age (7-13 years) look after the animals (3% boys and 8% girls) or do farm work (3% of girls).

The professionals have observed the emergence of a distance between children and their parents, some barriers of direct communication. In many cases the children assume the economic reasons for their parents' departure and take on a large part of the adults' tasks in the household with enthusiasm, which leads to an overload of roles for the child in the family.

A qualitative research carried out by the County Centre for Pedagogical Assistance - CCPA Maramureş psychologists reveals that the schoolchildren whose parents are working abroad have adjusted very quickly to the circumstances and assumed many of their parents' roles: *"The majority lived alone, that is alone in the parental apartment and somebody came regularly and cooked for them or made sure that everything was all right in the house. The management of the house, which implies payments, money management, cleaning the apartment, all this was their responsibility and their brothers'. And they were very independent, very self-sufficient, but at the same time they were very lonely too and very unstable emotionally. Their parents had been gone for at least 2 years, and in some cases even 5 years. They keep in contact daily by phone or the internet. The children who didn't know when to expect their parents (they were not coming home regularly) had bigger emotional problems."* (Psychologist, CCPA Maramureş)

One example, in Vrancea it is estimated that, at the start of the school year 2007-2008, approximately 500 children were withdrawn from school in order to accompany their parents abroad. Also, the same estimates show that approximately 900 children traveled abroad to join their parents, without applying for the papers necessary to enroll in a form of education, the likely explanation being that they went abroad for work. (Source: the Red Cross, Vrancea).

At community level, models of success are promoted which imply earning an amount of money quickly, possessing expensive goods. School does not matter anymore in success strategies. That is why, some parents and children choose school dropout and early integration of the children into the illegal labor market, in other countries. As mentioned before, there are children who do not complete compulsory education, and they enter the illegal labor market, abroad, together with their parents. The lack of a legal form of performing lucrative activities makes them vulnerable both to exploitation by adults and to work injuries or occupational diseases.

"The disadvantage is that in spring they [the children] are taken along to work too, so they are taken by the parents and don't complete the 8th grade, they don't continue their education." (Social referent, commune hall, Neamţ County)

The right to special protection and assistance provided by the State

2. States Parties undertake to ensure the protection and care necessary for the well-being of the child, taking into account the rights and duties of his/her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for the child and, to this end, shall take all the appropriate legislative and administrative measures. (Article 3)

1. A child who is temporarily or permanently deprived of his/her family environment, or who in his/her best interests, cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the State. (Article 20)

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Parents have the primary responsibility under the law for the care and upbringing of the child. In circumstances when the parents are not able to perform this role, the State shall ensure protection for the child deprived of parental care. The condition for the State to fulfill this role is that one of the State's institutions should identify children deprived of parental care and develop the necessary services.

Among families with parents working abroad, only 7% state that they notified the social assistance and child protection services of the fact that one or both parents were going abroad. Taking into account that more than half of the parents claim that the purpose of their travel is tourism, the State is not likely, within the present legislative framework, to be able to identify the cases of children who were left in the care of individuals other than their parents. Among those who did not notify the authorities of the fact that they were going to work abroad, regardless of the reason why they did not, 20% are cases of both parents abroad.

Parents do not consider it necessary to inform the school either about these situations, only 7% stating that they notified the primary school teacher or the teachers of the fact that they were going abroad for work.

Regarding the intervention in cases at risk, the three institutions at central, county and local level with responsibilities in the identification of cases have also a role in intervention:

The National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights, by Order 219, has put this issue on the priority list of social workers in the child protection system. In 2007, NAPCR recommended that the Programs of National Interest should address the development of services for children whose parents are working abroad. Subsequently, this recommendation was reviewed, so that the 2007 Programs of National Interest aim to develop day services for all children at risk. Besides, the overall approach to this category of children is based on the broader perspective of vulnerable children who are at risk.

General Departments of Social Assistance and Child Protection at county level may develop, in partnership with municipalities, social services; they identify and recommend the priority lines of intervention at county level; they take special protection measures for children in difficulty, when they identify specific cases or when the cases are referred to them by municipalities.

The evaluation of the extent of the risk for these children focuses on several key criteria:

- Housing conditions, financial resources;
- School attendance;
- School performance.

Although the majority of professionals mention the emotional problems associated with the parents' departure, the evaluations, conducted with a view to establishing a potential measure of intervention, take more into account the material rather than the psychological aspects.

"The fact that parents send money and they are in a better economic situation definitely does not, in any way, compensate for the emotional frustration and the absence of their parents." (Social worker, GDSACP, Botoșani County).

"A socio-economic evaluation has been conducted to see if there are living conditions [for the child] to remain in the family or possibly to notify the child protection department to take a measure for placement, in case he/she does not stay with the other parent." (Town hall, Tecuci)

"We are monitoring to see if there are exceptional circumstances, like if they are left without their grandparents or left alone. And we make sure that they receive the social benefits they are entitled to." (Social referent, Town hall, Mureș County)

Protection services in its different forms (in the extended family, with individuals other than relatives, in foster care, or in residential centers) constitute measures taken in the most serious cases, when the extended family is not able to provide the minimum living conditions necessary for the child's development or as a measure to make the extended family responsible and to ensure legal representation of the child.

"I have two cases. So, both parents went abroad initially, they had five children, they left them at the grandparents' home without sending a word and we had to take the measure of placement because the grandparents couldn't cope, as they didn't have any income either." (Social referent, Town hall, Neamț County)

"Have you had cases when the measure of placement in a residential center was taken?"

"Such measures have been taken, but as emergency placement, afterwards other solutions were found." (Social worker, GDSACP, Dolj County)

The measure of placement with the extended family is perceived by some professionals as having benefic results, on the one hand because there is a legal responsibility assumed for the respective child, and on the other hand because it generates additional income for the extended family: *"Some view it [the measure of placement with the extended family] favorably, because it brings them more income, it's a benefit for them and they respond positively, in general."* (Social worker, Town hall, Tecuci County)

Public Social Assistance Services operating within **Town halls** are the institutions that should play the most active role in the support of these cases.

When a risk situation is identified, the existing means of intervention do not always take into consideration the best interests of the child. Thus, in some cases it is in the best interest of the child to receive support within the extended family, but most of the times when they come to the attention of the SPAS they are already at risk. The scarce resources and methods of granting some resources, in emergencies, result in a rather delayed response from the authorities. For example, there is no relief fund for exceptional situations.

"When a disadvantaged family goes to the institution, it may receive support under law 416 or 205, but they will be operational in approximately 1 month. It would be excellent if it had an emergency fund to resort to in case the family has nothing to rely on." (Social referent, Town hall, Dolj County)

The cooperation between social assistance services within the municipality and the community is still deficient, for the time being its role being perceived by the community as a passive one, as a place where one goes and submits applications to receive certain benefits.

“For the time being, the Town hall is perceived only as a source of funds. ...That’s where the aid comes from, but for special problems they don’t come to us. Only in situations, how shall I put it, when a grandmother comes because the parents went abroad and left the child and to benefit from other facilities, they show up. So, the idea of social assistance and of what social work means is not formed yet.” (Social worker, Town hall, Mureş County)

Non-governmental organizations, in areas where they address this category, take action either by informing all the actors involved of the risks associated with parents’ going abroad, or by offering services to these children. One example, in Moldova there is a coalition of NGO’s, from 8 counties, coordinated by Alternative Sociale, which worked initially in the field of child trafficking, and which in 2006 defined as its priority for taking action the reduction of the vulnerability of children with migrant parents. Their goal is not to reduce migration, but to maintain functional relationships with the children. The necessary funds were raised at local level, at the level of companies in the counties included in the coalition. Their message to children is to have confidence in existing services, but primarily in their parents, because the parents went abroad for their well-being. At the same time, NGO’s may refer families or children to other public services.

Another example of involvement of non-governmental organizations is represented by a specific methodology of intervention in cases of children whose parents are abroad for work, developed by Alternative Sociale: *“children suffer because they don’t have a role model necessary for their personal development, at the same time, we could speak about children who become victims because they are looking for such role models and are vulnerable to abuse by individuals who take advantage of this need of the child’s to complete his/her personality with a role model, which, in normal circumstances, would have been the family...”*. This methodology is addressed to social workers with specific responsibilities, either at the level of municipalities or county departments of social assistance and child protection.

6.2. VIEWS OF THE PUBLIC AT LARGE ON THE CONSEQUENCES OF MIGRATION

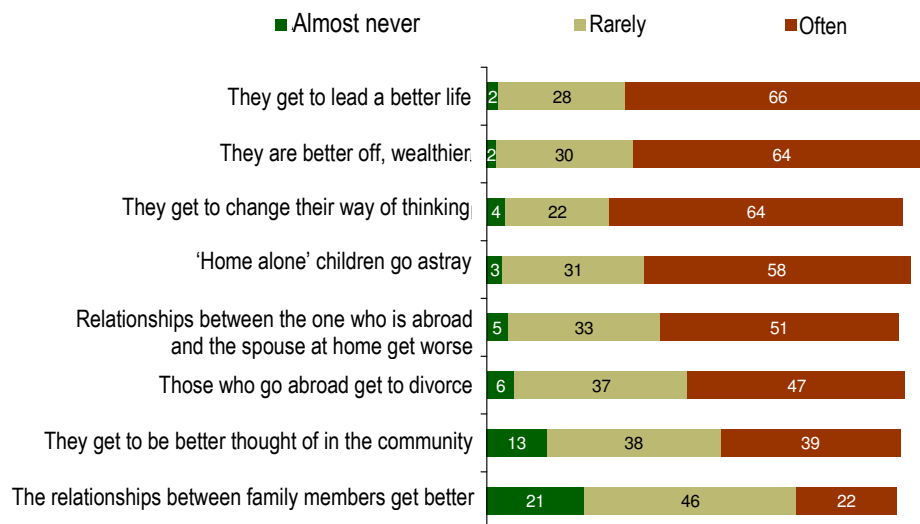
The problems affecting the community when its members go to work abroad, as perceived by the public at large, are those relating to the unbalance on the labor market: “the young are going away, young manpower is going away” state 47% of those who believe that the effects are negative, and this hurts the economy of the community – 7%. At the same time, the effects on the family and children count among the examples given by respondents: family breakup – 9%, child abandonment – 8%. Not least, the respondents estimate that there will be a decrease in the population of the community (11%), which is perceived as a negative consequence of migration for employment.

The positive consequences of migration on the respondents’ community are in relation to the financial aspects too, but they are considered also from the standpoint of incoming resources for the local economy: they invest at home the money they have earned – 30.8%, they have a higher standard of living – 20.8%, they support the family financially – 18.5%, they contribute to the development of the community – 11.3%. The effects on the families who have some of their members abroad for work are not only of a financial nature, but it is

considered that this fact has an influence on the social status of the family in the community, the family having a better image – 4.6%.

The respondents’ perception on the consequences of migration at family level and their extent includes both positive and negative aspects. Thus, among the consequences respondents estimate as being the most frequent are increased financial resources and a higher standard of living. At the same time, among the frequent effects respondents also identify changes in the way of thinking. At the same time, they mention negative effects on the children who go astray and on the relationship with the partner who stayed in the country, the deterioration of the relationship resulting possibly in divorce even.

In your opinion, how frequently do the following happen in the case of the families of those who are abroad for work?



In an overall analysis of the effects on children, the opinion of the majority of respondents (66%) is that the parents’ migration has mainly negative effects on their children, which is explained by the fact that children ‘miss their parents’ and are affected, and also by the absence of the parent as a factor of education and discipline. The positive effects are those relating to the standard of living and more opportunities brought about by the money earned by parents. The absence of both parents is considered by 84% of respondents as being the situation when the child is most affected, followed by the situation when the mother is the absent parent – 10%. The absence of the mother is perceived as being much more serious for the development of the child than the absence of the father, so that less than 1% of respondents mention that this is the situation that affects more the life of a child.

The public opinion perception of what aspects of children’s life are the most frequently affected by parents going abroad for work focuses primarily on the emotional component: 84% consider that it often happens that children suffer from lack of affectivity, and 78% believe that they feel lonely. The following aspects, in order of frequency of mentions, are those relating to school performance (67% consider that it often happens that children’s performance is poorer) and behavioral deviations: to be naughty, disobedient (67%), to enter

an inappropriate circle of friends (63%), and to miss a lot of classes (62%). Deviant behavior is mentioned by less than a half of respondents: 46% believe that they start to be in conflict with the law and to be in trouble with the police. Counting among the positive effects, perceived as being frequent, are those relating to financial aspects and access to different products or services, or the development of a more independent spirit.

The extent of the phenomenon of children whose parents are abroad for work, in the respondent's community, is perceived to be large or quite large by more than 25% of respondents. Thus, the situations estimated to be the most frequent in the community are those when only one of the parents is abroad or situations when the children are left in the care of grandparents. Less frequent are the situations when the children are left in the care of their older siblings (mentioned by 13% of respondents), or situations when the children are left in nobody's care (8% of respondents).

The public opinion recognizes the negative effects of parent migration and identifies them as well, to a large extent, in the case of children in the community they belong to. At the same time, the opinions of the public at large are formed based on the information and attitudes disseminated by the mass media.

The mass media have shown particular interest in this issue, focusing on the sensational side of the phenomenon. The distribution of coverage is not level, depending instead on the tragic events whose victims were home alone children (like suicides) or the publication of statistic data on the dimensions of the phenomenon.

In 90% of cases, children whose parents are working abroad represent the central topic of the article. Most articles (64%) present the analyzed subject as a mass phenomenon, while 23% limit themselves to cover a case. In 12% of cases, the author of the article goes into a complex analysis starting from actual cases and generalizing the consequences at national level, at system level.

The writer's attitude towards the subject, which becomes transparent from the content of the article, is in most cases neutral, the writer presenting the information without his/her own interpretation or comments. In 37% of cases, the writer has a negative attitude, particularly towards responsible actors, and in only 9% of articles the attitude is a positive one. In this respect, we should also mention the use of words charged with disparaging connotations. Thus, in 27% of articles the word 'strawberry picker' appears in the headline of the article.

In connection with the subject of children whose parents are abroad for work, the most attractive themes for journalists were the consequences of the phenomenon, followed by information on measures taken by authorities (activity of institutions), and statistic data on the dimensions of the phenomenon. The negative consequences are presented in 39% of cases, while for 8% the consequences are both positive and negative. Only 3% of articles present the positive consequences of parent migration.

In 32% of articles, the authors do not identify the actors responsible for the problems children experience. When the content does make reference to responsible actors, the most frequently mentioned are the parents (64%), then central authorities (12%) and local authorities (8%), and in rare occasions, the local community (3%).

Most articles also mention the social actors who get involved, in one way or another, in addressing the problem: central authorities (44%), local authorities (36%), NGO's (11%), and the community (5%).

79% of articles cover a range of problems these children are confronted with. The first is the lack of parental care and the consequences resulting from this situation (32%). Secondly, emotional problems associated with the absence of parents (16%), then increased vulnerability of these children to violence (13%), and, in some cases, extreme gestures by these children, such as suicide or attempted suicides (13%).

Ranking of problems covered by the mass media

Problem mentioned	% of total articles
Children deprived of parental care/ left in State's care	39.0
Emotional problems	18.3
School dropout / poor school performance	12.2
Suicide / attempted suicide	12.2
Juvenile deviance	8.5
Child neglect	8.5
Victims of violence	7.3
Low standard of living	4.9
Lack of representation for the child to receive some rights	4.9
Work outside the household	3.7
Do not cover problems children are confronted with	15.9

7. Children's perspective

The Study, developed from the standpoint of the rights of the child, also included a section where the children in the household expressed their opinions on the relationship with their parents and the major challenges they are confronted with. The limitations of this component of the Study are imposed by the method used to interview children, in the study, and particularly the site of the interview: in the household, and in the presence of the parent / adult caregiver. Taking into account that this factor might influence the answers, we tried to minimize this influence by formulating the questions in a neutral manner that should not put the child in a difficult position before the adults in the household.

Communication between parents and children, the major means of education and support of the child in his/her psychological-social development, is mainly affected by the mother's absence from the household.

"What seems the hardest thing since your parents left?"

"The hardest is the word mother... the hardest for me was to call my parents mother and father again, now that they are home... I am no longer used to it. At my grandmother's I used to call her mother when I was there..." (girl, 16 years old, Prahova)

The survey findings reveal the fact that, although migrant parents try to make up for their absence from the household by frequent communication via modern technology (cell phone, the internet), the quality of communication with the child is much poorer. Thus, issues like the child's day to day problems, school performance, how the child is spending his/her time or the child's wishes are discussed with the parents much more rarely when both parents are abroad or only the mother is abroad. This could be explained by the important role played by the mother in the emotional support of the child and in monitoring the child's daily activities.

"A: Marian, you were 13 when your father left. Have you cried sometimes?"

"M: Yes, I missed him..."

"A: Why did he leave?"

"M: He left for me ... for a better future. I've had everything I wanted: a computer, more money to go out more often... a more expensive cell phone... I buy myself whatever I want... I have many schoolmates in high school with parents abroad.... in my class we have 4, in other classes there are 15 even..."

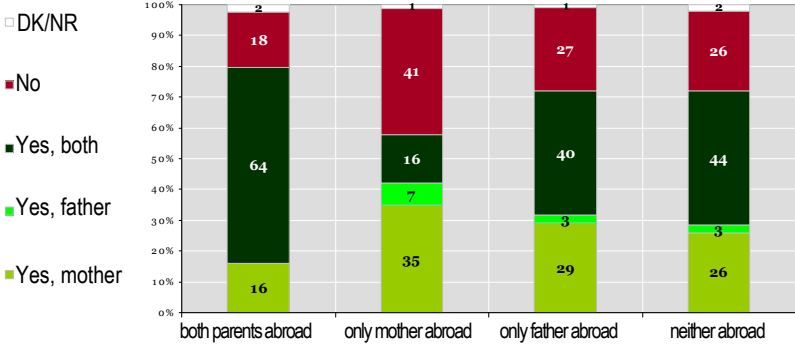
"At what moments would you have wanted your father to be with you and he wasn't?"

"... my birthday... when I was going some place just with my mother or alone... we talk on the phone every day... twice a day... or three times... He cannot live without us, if he doesn't see us, at least to hear us... The hardest is loneliness... with the rest we get by... Me and father will have a constructions firm when we get back to Romania... I'll go to Italy and stay as long as possible ...as long as necessary... to save some money to buy an apartment... For my birthday I got a new phone and a thick gold chain... but I lost it... I lost one before too..." (boy, 18 years old, Galați)

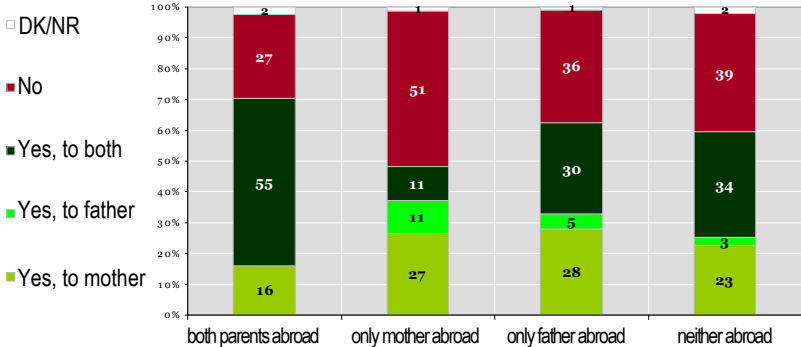
Interviewed children mention much more frequently the expression of feelings for their parents abroad (55% of children with both parents abroad say that they told them they loved them) compared to children living with their parents (only 34% say that they told both their parents that they loved them in the last 7 days), this being a way of compensating for the physical absence of their parents. In cases when the mother is abroad, sharing feelings is more

deficient too. Thus, more than half of them did not express feelings of love for neither parent, and in 38% of cases this situation was reciprocal.

In the past 7 days, did either of your parents tell you that they love you?
National sample: 541 children



In the past 7 days, did you tell either of your parents that you love them?
National sample: 541 children



As indicated above, the most visible negative effects manifest themselves in cases when only the child’s mother is abroad for work. Thus, children become more frequently victims of verbal abuse: 25% of those with the mother abroad state that lately it has happened to them sometimes or quite often to be talked to rudely or to be cursed, and 13% say that someone made fun of them or humiliated them. The absence of the mother brings about a general state of unhappiness: 20% of children with mothers working abroad have felt unhappy quite often or sometimes. In cases when both parents are abroad, children mention more frequently situations when someone threatened them (11%).

It is important to note the fact that in the case of children with both parents abroad for work the use of punishments is mentioned much more frequently than in the case of children with

parents in the household (23% compared to 10%). This could be explained either by the weak authority of adult caregivers who resort to negative sanctions to discipline the children or by the stronger impression left by these events in the context of a state of sadness caused by the absence of parents.

When asked about the three most important problems they have at present, we find that a significant number of children with migrant parents mention, in addition to problems specific to their age (homework, grades at school, or what children call sentimental problems), too little time spent with their parents (26% of all children with at least one parent abroad, compared to 10% of children with both parents in the household). In the absence of parents, homework for school becomes less important, while spare time becomes longer and less supervised: 41% of children with parents in the household mention among their major problems the fact that they have too much homework to do, compared to 35% of children with at least one parent abroad; 34% of children whose parents are not abroad consider that they have too little spare time, while only 25% of those with at least one parent abroad complain about this situation.

The most important people children go to when they have problems are their parents and grandparents. Children who are living with their parents go their mother first when they have problems at school (43%) or with their schoolmates (27%), then to both parents in equal measure (23% when they have problems at school and 16% when they have problems with their schoolmates). Only 6% go to their father for help when they have school-related problems. The absence of one parent from the household leads to more involvement of the remaining parent in solving school-related problems. When both parents are absent from the household, grandparents assume the role of parents in 39% of cases. 18% of children mention that they either go to both parents or to their mother, although they are out of the country. 9% of those with both parents abroad find support in siblings, and 7% in friends.

When the problems are related to schoolmates, children whose mother or both parents are abroad are more willing to go to teachers for help (16% of those with both parents abroad and 19% of those with mother abroad). It should be noted the rather high percentage (20% of those with both parents abroad and 19% of those with the mother abroad) of children who do not go to anyone for help, and find themselves a solution to their problem.

Disagreements between parents and children represent another situation when a child needs advice, support from a third person. In the case of children with both parents abroad, the most frequently mentioned solution is to go to their grandparents (41%). Moreover, a high percentage of interviewed children (25%), regardless of the migration experience of the family they come from, would not go to anyone for help.

III. CONCLUSIONS

It is undeniable that both migration and the effects on children of parents going abroad for work are two very complex phenomena, with impact on the family and on society at large. The limited possibilities for research and analysis are redoubled by the lack of functional mechanisms to allow the collection of data at local level.

The present research highlights several general trends in the phenomenon of children left home by their parents who go abroad for work. Beyond the figures representing national estimates of the number of children affected by this phenomenon, there is the concrete reality of these families, in search of more and better resources to ensure their development – in some cases, or to allow them to escape poverty – in other cases.

The complexity of the phenomenon derives from a series of aspects relating to the economic and social situation of Romanians, to the difficulties and challenges posed by a booming economy which still allows for very large gaps between the different strata of society. Aiming to prevent unwanted vulnerability and risk situations, the Romanian social assistance system, and in particular the child protection system, has significantly improved in recent years, the process being accompanied by the issuance of a series of high standards and legal provisions designed to address the wide range of issues in the field of child rights protection.

However, practically the implementation of legal provisions in the field is sometimes more limited, either because of the multitude of legislative provisions issued in a short period of time, or because of the diversified and complex way local and central public administration institutions interrelate. In addition to these considerations, sometimes, legislative provisions cover only partially the concrete aspects in the field, which results in a segmental approach or in partial implementation.

Concerning the activity at community level, it should be mentioned that Public Social Assistance Services, especially in rural areas, are often confronted with a lack of human and material resources. Moreover, the implementation stage of the reform in the field of child protection is more advanced compared to other fields, such as health and education, demanding the development of a specific and explicit mechanism for institutional cooperation and interrelation in order to ensure the coherence of interventions.

In the case of children with migrant parents, as also in the case of other social phenomena, a series of causes corroborate so the approach should be detailed, complex and comprehensive in order to be able to reduce potential negative effects on children. This will ensure an enhancement of the state's capacity to anticipate some trends in Romanian society, which will have a positive impact on the process of developing social policies.

Finally, children affected by their parents' migration live in a system of conditionings specific to the family, community and society. The situations in which the social and economic risks are made worse by the absence of parents, who cannot meet their children's need for care, protection and education, may be conducive to increased vulnerability. It should be mentioned however that these risks are found in other situations too (familial, communal, and societal) and the state must intervene in order to prevent certain effects that might be harmful to the harmonious development of new generations. This is also the spirit in which the recommendations of this research were drafted.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations made by this study are designed to guide and support the efforts that the authorities have already undertaken. In addition, these efforts should be accompanied by the support which non-governmental organizations are able to provide concerning some aspects – a review of the legislative framework and of practices in the field, the development of community-based services addressing also the needs of children of migrant parents, knowledge acquired in the field. UNICEF Romania considers that it is able to provide both the assistance and the expertise necessary for an appropriate implementation, taking into account the fact that the responsibility for the implementation of legislative measures is entirely incumbent to State authorities, but also that the practical experience shows that it must be a joint effort.

Recommendation 1 – Revise the Order 219/2006 issued by the Secretary of State of the National Authority for the Protection of Children’s Rights, through consultations with all the public and private stakeholders with relevant expertise in the field, so as to include provisions concerning:

1. children with only one parent abroad, in view of preventing situations when the parent who stayed in the country is not able to provide care and protection for the child/children.
2. the involvement of all local level institutions with responsibilities in the field of child rights protection in the process of identifying the children with migrant parents, respectively SPAS, the school, and the police, and the establishment of a coordinating mechanism of the identification process by SPAS.
3. the evaluation by SPAS of the risk of all children with migrant parents upon their identification, including the capacity of the person(s) in charge with their care, given that they represent a vulnerable category of children at risk.
4. the definition of the syntagm ‘at risk’ in reference to children with migrant parents, in order to avoid placement as a special protective measure for every child.

Recommendation 2 – improve and strengthen monitoring and reporting mechanisms at local level, with emphasis on SPAS, which should ensure:

5. a unified methodological approach to facilitate the transfer of data and information both horizontally (from local institutions to SPAS) and vertically (from SPAS to GDSACP and further on to NAPCR). This should be taken into consideration when the national monitoring system is implemented.
6. the implementation of a unified methodology for referral of cases between institutions with responsibilities in the field of child rights protection in view of a prompt and efficient intervention response.
7. the involvement of institutions with supervisory duties, such as the Controlling Body or the Social Inspection, in the assessment of the implementation of the legislation and social policies.

Recommendation 3 – build the capacity of public social services at national level to ensure:

8. the collection of data and information concerning SPAS staff, in view of identifying their training needs and the training programs.
9. the transfer of know-how and the dissemination of best practices in the field of basic social services and their correlation with the needs of the community.
10. the development of day-care services. In this respect, the new (February 2008) legislative bill which plans to develop such services is more than welcome.

Recommendation 4 – raise awareness and improve information of the negative effects of migration on children among all those concerned (parents and the public at large) through:

11. the implementation of an information and awareness raising campaign in view of making the public at large aware of the issue and the associated risks of migration for employment abroad as well as of the legal provisions and the obligation to observe them. It should extend to the parents already living abroad and also to those who plan to leave the country – that is, preparing/making arrangements for the child before the parents actually leave the country.
12. the development of local support networks for various local stakeholders, such as Community Task Forces, who can fully respond to the local complex issues, in parallel with the support necessary to the training of the members of these structures.