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Children left behind by labour migration: Supporting Moldovan and Ukrainian transnational families in the EU ("CASTLE")

Policy Brief 3



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Policy Brief 3 - CASTLE

Introduction

"CASTLE - Children left behind by labour migration: supporting Moldovan and Ukrainian transnational families in the EU" is an action-project that aims to support the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in improving their child protection frameworks and their migration and mobility policies, with a focus on the social and legal impact of labour migration on transnational families.

Among the previous outputs of the action (available on its website), Policy Brief 1 was based on the primary analysis on data and formulated general recommendations, while Policy Brief 2, on secondary analysis with specific recommendations within the Hybrid Transnational Social Protection framework.

In turn, Policy Brief 3 presents the following:

- recommendations for EU countries hosting labour migrants having children left behind, based on a collective effort and formulated by the Romanian NGO partner (TdH Romania);
- country-specific recommendations for Ukraine (UISR);
- country-specific recommendations for the Republic of Moldova (ASEM).



Recommendations for host countries (TdH Romania)

Based on the positive experiences and initiatives in the field of protecting children who remain at home due to their parents' labor migration, one major insight is that, beside public administrative bodies, community organizations and private non-profit entities, employing companies can also play a significant role in supporting employees who have children left behind due to migration for work.

In this context, the following recommendations can be made:

Flexible Work Arrangements: Offer flexible working hours and remote work options to employees with children left behind. This flexibility can help them manage their family responsibilities more effectively.

Financial Support: Provide financial assistance or benefits to employees with children left behind. This can include subsidies for childcare expenses, school fees, or medical bills.

Counseling and Employee Assistance Programs (EAP): Offer counseling services through EAPs to help employees cope with the emotional and psychological challenges of separation from their children. These programs can provide support for mental health and well-being.

Paid Leave and Family Reunification Programs: Implement policies that allow employees to take paid leave to visit their children or arrange family reunifications. This can include additional days off or financial assistance for travel expenses.

Childcare Assistance: Establish or partner with childcare facilities or services to provide affordable and convenient childcare options for employees with children left behind.

Educational Support: Offer educational support programs for employees' children, such as scholarships, tutoring services, or access to online learning resources.

Legal Assistance: Provide legal support and guidance to employees who need assistance with immigration or family-related legal matters, such as custody arrangements.

Healthcare Benefits: Ensure that employees have access to comprehensive healthcare coverage for both themselves and their children, including mental health services.

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs): Create or support ERGs focused on the needs of employees with children left behind. These groups can provide a supportive community and share resources and advice.



Communication and Information: Keep employees informed about available resources and support programs through regular communication channels, such as company newsletters or intranets.

Training and Sensitivity Programs: Conduct training programs to raise awareness among employees and supervisors about the challenges faced by those with children left behind. Promote a culture of understanding and empathy.

Flexible Financial Benefits: Offer financial planning and advisory services to help employees manage their finances, especially when supporting family members abroad.

Partnerships with NGOs and Community Organizations: Collaborate with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community groups that specialize in supporting families affected by migration. This can help extend the reach of support services.

Family-Friendly Policies: Create and enforce policies that support a family-friendly workplace culture, including understanding and accommodating the needs of employees with children left behind.

Regular Check-Ins: Encourage supervisors and HR teams to conduct regular check-ins with employees in this situation to assess their well-being and offer support as needed.

Advocacy: Advocate for policies at the national and international levels that protect the rights and well-being of families affected by migration, including children left behind.

Further examples of positive experiences and initiatives in the field of protecting children who remain at home due to their parents' labor migration:

- ✓ Psychosocial Support Programs
- ✓ School Attendance Incentives
- ✓ Cross-Border Family Reunification
- ✓ Community Engagement
- ✓ Parenting Training
- ✓ Scholarship Programs
- ✓ Collaboration with Diaspora Communities
- ✓ Child Advocacy and Participation
- ✓ Legal Protections for Migrant Workers
- ✓ Integration Programs for Returning Parents



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- ✓ Public Awareness Campaigns
- ✓ Local Economic Development Initiatives
- ✓ Access to Healthcare
- ✓ Multi-Agency Coordination



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Recommendations for Ukraine (UISR)

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Research methodology:

1. Quantitative method: online interviews using Zoom and Teams platforms and messengers convenient for respondents (Viber, WhatsApp, Fb, Telegram). The survey was conducted using tablets with special software "DigSee Sure".

Geography of the quantitative method: Country of residence of respondents at the time of the survey: Latvia, Lithuania, Germany, Poland, Romania, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, the Netherlands, Spain, Ireland, Hungary, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Sweden, Italy, France, Portugal, Denmark.

The sample population implemented - totally, 207 respondents were interviewed.

115 respondents - persons with a child/ children who moved abroad due to the full-scale war and found a job abroad;

92 respondents - persons with a child/ children who left for employment (already have previous experience of labour migration).

After quality control, the data obtained were used to create a data set and perform calculations, which were further used in the preparation of the analytical report.





2. Qualitative method: group focused interviews (focus groups) were conducted online using the ZOOM platform. 4 focus groups were conducted, for a total of 32 participants.

Target groups:

Persons with a child/ children who moved abroad due to the full-scale war and found work abroad or who left for employment (already have previous experience of labour migration);

Children of persons who moved abroad due to full-scale war and found a job abroad, under the age of 17 or who have left for employment (already have previous experience of labor migration), under the age of 17.

Geography of respondents' residence: Germany (8 participants), Poland (8 participants), Romania (8 participants), Czech Republic (4 participants), other EU countries (4 participants).

Some conclusions

- The most common reason for many forced migrants to decide to move abroad is a sense of danger to themselves and their children. At the same time, every fifth forced migrant said that the reason for leaving was better conditions and prospects than in Ukraine.

- When deciding which country to move to, an important factor for more than half of the respondents is the presence of relatives/acquaintances in that country or previous experience of staying in that country.

- More than three-quarters of respondents said that the end of hostilities in Ukraine would encourage them to return to their homeland. The number of migrants who do not plan to return to Ukraine is much smaller than the widespread public and expert opinion suggests.

- The main source of information for Ukrainians abroad is Internet resources, as well as communication with representatives of the social environment - relatives, friends and acquaintances.

- The hypothesis about the possible negative impact of forced migration on the strength of marriages was not confirmed: only 4% of the surveyed forced migrants said they had divorced after the start of Russia's large-scale aggression (after February 24, 2022).

- The decision to move was often made by parents without taking into account the opinion of the children or against their reluctance to leave Ukraine. Some teenagers, talking about the circumstances of migration, mentioned the feeling of disdain from adults and disregard for their opinion, which led to the deterioration of relations in the family.

- Migrants moving abroad was accompanied by a significant decline in their real income (purchasing power). According to the current level of income, two-thirds of the surveyed



migrants should be classified as ‘poor’ or ‘low-income’. Compared to the pre-war period, the share of ‘middle-income’ and ‘wealthy’ respondents has significantly decreased (in each case by about one and a half times). At the same time, the proportion of ‘low-income’ people has increased by one and a half times. About half of the migrants surveyed today do not have a ‘emergency fund’ - material assets that they can rely on in case of emergency.

- Ukrainian migrants abroad cannot fully implement their educational and professional potential

- Many Ukrainian migrants belong to the social group of the ‘working poor’. Unskilled work and part-time employment cause low incomes, limited purchasing power of Ukrainian migrants and, as a result, deprivation.

- At the same time, there was no massive impoverishment or lumpenization among the displaced persons from Ukraine. This indirectly indicates the effectiveness of the system of social protection and assistance to Ukrainian migrants in the countries of destination.

- For minor children of migrants, the problem of adaptation to new living conditions after moving is very relevant, given their age and lack of life and social experience.

- Adaptation of children and adolescents in a new country is facilitated by a large number of migrants like them, who live next to them and study together. At the same time, this situation in some cases leads to a kind of "encapsulation" of children of migrants: their communication is mainly concentrated in the circle of migrants like them, which makes it difficult for them to socialize in a new environment.

- Ukrainians abroad are more likely to trust narrow social circles and people they know than public institutions and organizations.

Recommendations

Strengthen cooperation between local authorities, law enforcement agencies and communities where migrants live. Use the role of reputable organizations, such as the Embassy of Ukraine, to build trust and prevent situations that could lead to unfair treatment or prejudice against Ukrainian migrants in important areas (employment, access to healthcare, housing)

Use digital platforms, targeted media and local authorities to disseminate clear, accessible information about legal aid and support services. Customize the provision of information to the specific needs of different groups of migrants, helping them to understand where to turn if they encounter problems.

Create structured information flowcharts or guidelines to help migrants navigate different situations, for example, when they face obstacles in obtaining financial support or medical services. Such guidelines will serve as a navigational tool, helping migrants understand what



steps to take and where to go for help, improving their overall experience and well-being in their new environment.

To ensure the successful integration of Ukrainian citizens abroad and improve their standard of living, the Ukrainian government should strive to simplify the procedure for nostrification of educational documents, in particular to ensure that migrants with higher education have the opportunity to obtain well-paid jobs in their specialty. The best practice would be for a Ukrainian specialist to work for a certain period of time (up to six months) under the supervision of employer's representative, receive a salary, and at the same time confirm his or her diploma. It is important to ensure that Ukrainian diplomas, at least for vocational education and professional higher education, are recognized without additional confirmation (special exams, etc.).

To ensure the successful economic integration of migrant women with children, it is important that mothers have the opportunity to leave their children under supervision while they work. Since public (free) kindergartens often do not have free places for children, an alternative is the cooperation of Ukrainian women in childcare and the creation of home-based kindergartens. Women who know each other would take turns caring for children at home, allowing others to work during this time. It is also advisable to use the experience of women's coworking spaces, which are considered an important trend in modern life. Women who are able to work remotely could take their children to such a coworking space and take turns looking after the children for one or two hours. Such coworking spaces could be created by migrant women who have experience in entrepreneurship. NGOs and volunteers could initiate or motivate the creation of coworking spaces for migrant women and provide practical assistance in the first period of their work. Women's cooperation in childcare and upbringing should be popularized, information on the creation of home-based kindergartens and women's coworking spaces, the conditions and procedure for their creation should be disseminated on social media, and examples of such practices should be provided.

Ukrainian society should be interested in ensuring that as many Ukrainian school-age children who find themselves abroad continue their online education in Ukraine as possible. It would be advisable to create a special educational center in Ukraine that would provide a new level of online learning, which would not depend on air alerts, emergency power outages, and would also take into account the fact that many Ukrainian migrant children are currently living in countries with different time zones (Canada, the United States, and others). The new online learning center should use the latest media technologies for teaching and learning, and thus improve the quality of school education. The educational process itself, the child's communication with Ukrainian teachers, and staying in a Ukrainian-speaking environment will strengthen the child's symbolic connection with the homeland, form the child's national identity, and prevent him or her from losing his or her "roots."

A significant part of the surveyed migrants recognize that their adaptation and integration into a new social environment is problematic and involves significant psychological costs. Many



of them experience feelings of isolation and alienation against the background of various manifestations of tension and depression. At the same time, the need for psychological assistance is not always recognized. Lack of a culture of caring for psychological health, lack of experience with a psychologist, and stigmatization of psychologist and psychiatrist services are obstacles to getting the help you need. Educational work among migrants is needed to overcome prejudice against relevant services. There is also a need to widely inform migrants about where and how they can get psychological help.

The Ukrainian government should create conditions for the return of Ukrainian citizens who are abroad and want to return home now, without waiting for the war to end. The strategy of returning migrants should take into account that among them there are...

- many women with children,
- many residents of settlements that are currently occupied;
- people whose homes were destroyed or damaged,
- many poor people who are unemployed and have no savings, whose income is mainly from social benefits in the host country.
- Therefore, the government's program for returning Ukrainian migrants home should include the following:
 - providing migrants with funds for relocation and accommodation in a new place;
 - resettlement of migrants to the safe regions, to settlements that are not subject to shelling;
 - providing migrants with housing - government-purchased housing on the primary or secondary housing market, or in towns with modular houses with utilities;
 - providing migrants with jobs;
 - enabling migrants to enroll their preschool children in kindergartens and school-age children in schools.

With regard to providing migrants with funds for relocation and initial accommodation, purchase or construction of housing for them, the governments of the countries where migrants currently reside and the European Commission can become donors in these matters.



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Recommendations for the Republic of Moldova (ASEM)

The phenomenon of labor migration from the Republic of Moldova is becoming more and more widespread in connection with the precarious economic situation, as well as with the intensification of globalization processes. According to statistical data, the cumulative number of labor migrants in the last 25 years from the Republic of Moldova exceeded 1 million people.

International labor migration can be considered beneficial for the Republic of Moldova. It reduced unemployment and the pressure on the labor market, contributed to the increase of incomes and well-being of the population, to the reduction of the poverty level, in general, it ensured a perspective of sustainable development. The financial resources that entered the country ensured a stability of the national currency, an economic growth, as well as a change in the consumption pattern of the population.

At the same time, labor migration has also generated a series of social risks, such as the decline of employment on the labor market, the aging of the population, the expansion of transnational families, the problem of children left behind by migration.

It should be noted, that the expansion of transnational families is characteristic of all countries, in the context of globalization processes and the intensification of international migration in the world. Each country facing this phenomenon develops its own policies to mitigate its negative effects.

The expansion of transnational families affects the integrity of the family and can generate certain risks related to the situation of children left behind after migration, including their psycho-emotional development, their health, their education, their socialization. The psychological impact of the parents' migration on the children left after the migration is characterized by the feeling of loneliness, lack of affectivity, emotional deprivation, which negatively influences the children's personality development.

The central and local public authorities in the Republic of Moldova are aware of the risks of international labor migration related to the situation of children left behind after migration and try to overcome them quite effectively, either by adapting the regulatory framework, or by promoting coherent and effective public policies, or by developing new social services for social groups affected by migration. Several strategic documents were developed (Strategy for Child Protection for the years 2014-2020), normative acts were approved (Law no. 140 of 14.06.2013 "Regarding the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents") which provided for a series of multidisciplinary actions aimed at ensuring the protection and well-being of children left behind after migration.

It should be noted that the phenomenon of transnational families and children left behind by migration manifested itself in different ways in various periods of the history of labor migration from the Republic of Moldova, which determined the need to organize systematic



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research in the field, which led to the continuous improvement of the framework legislation and methods of intervention by public authorities to manage this phenomenon.

In 2021, a research (CASTLE) was initiated that aimed to improve the legislative institutional framework for the protection of transnational families in correlation with similar legal practices and norms in the European Union, including based on solid empirical research evidence. The research highlighted certain challenges related to the phenomenon of transnational families and children left behind after migration, including: the problem of monitoring children whose parents are away working abroad in the urban environment due to the large number of inhabitants; the lack of effective intervention tools, especially in the urban environment; the lack of qualified specialists who could work with this category of people; the small number of trainings for specialists (social workers, psychologists, etc.) for perfecting intervention methods in managing the situation of children left behind after migration.

Recommendations

However, there are also certain gaps, the overcoming of which would lead to the avoidance of several problems and challenges related to the phenomenon of transnational families and children left behind by labor migration, including:

- Complementing town halls in all rural localities with qualified personnel, psychologists, specialists in the field;
- Streamlining the process of delegating guardianship or custody for children without care whose parents are away working abroad;
- More active involvement in the management of the problem related to children following migration, the involvement of other partners: civil society, individuals, companies, etc.
- Organizing systematic research in the field to improve both the legislative framework and the methods of intervention by public authorities;