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THE ROLE OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA IN SUPPORTING TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES AND CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND BY LABOR MIGRATION

Labour migration from the Republic of Moldova, which registers a new intensification after the COVID-19 pandemic, increased the number of transnational families and children left behind. During the last 20 years, international labour migration from the Republic of Moldova has reached an impressive level. Thus, in 2017, according to the Labor Force Survey, the number of persons who went abroad searching for a job was about 319 thousand or about 18% of the inactive population aged 15 and over. Men constituted 66,4%, while women – 33,6% of the total number of migrants. The share of people who left rural areas was 70,5%. Unofficial sources estimate the extent of labour migration from the Republic of Moldova at 1 million people. The problems of transnational families and children left behind due to labour migration have already been studied in the Republic of Moldova. Several field studies have been dedicated to this issue, and public authorities have developed policies and intervention tools to manage this problem as efficiently as possible. Current research on the left behind children's conditions becomes increasingly important in the situation where transnational families and children left behind to take on new forms of manifestation and generate new social risks. This research aims to study the needs of transnational families and children left behind after migration and to improve the legislative and institutional framework in correlation with similar legal practices and norms of the European Union. The research aims to reveal the potential positive or negative impact of policies on the protection of children in the Republic of Moldova and inform transnational families and representatives of public authorities about the realities and practical aspects of labour migration. This article reflects the opinions of representatives of public, central, and local authorities participating in the CASTLE research project (mayors, social workers, specialists of government institutions, etc.) on the situation in the Republic of Moldova regarding transnational families and children left behind. The article comes with a series of conclusions and recommendations regarding minimising the negative effects of labour migration, such as the development of social services necessary to prevent these effects.

Keywords: migration, labour migration of parents, transnational families, children left behind, public authorities.

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РОЛЬ ОРГАНІВ ДЕРЖАВНОЇ ВЛАДИ РЕСПУБЛІКИ МОЛДОВА У ПІДТРИМЦІ ТРАНСНАЦІОНАЛЬНИХ СІМЕЙ ТА ДІТЕЙ ПОЗА УВАГОЮ ЧЕРЕЗ ТРУДОВУ МІГРАЦІЮ

Трудова міграція з Республіки Молдова переживає нову хвилю активізації після пандемії COVID-19, що сприяє збільшенню кількості транснаціональних сімей та дітей, які залишилися без піклування батьків. Протягом останніх 20 років міжнародна трудова міграція з Республіки Молдова досягла вражаючого рівня. Так, у 2017 р., за даними Дослідження Робочої Сили, кількість осіб, які виїхали за кордон у пошуках роботи, становила близько 319 тис. осіб, або близько 18% економічно неактивного населення віком від 15 років. Чоловіки становили 66,4%, а жінки – відповідно 33,6% від загальної кількості мігрантів. Частка осіб, які виїхали із сільської місцевості, становила 70,5%. Неофіційні джерела оцінюють масштаби трудової міграції з Республіки Молдова в 1 млн осіб. Проблеми транснаціональних сімей і дітей, які залишилися без піклування батьків внаслідок трудової міграції, вже досліджувалися в Республіці Молдова. Цьому питанню було присвячено ряд польових досліджень, а органи державної влади розробили політику та інструменти втручання, щоб якомога ефективніше розв'язати цю проблему. Сучасні дослідження стану залишених дітей стають дедалі актуальними в ситуації, коли транснаціональні сім'ї та діти, які залишилися без піклування батьків, приймають нові форми прояву та формують нові соціальні ризики. Це дослідження спрямоване на вивчення потреб транснаціональних сімей і дітей, які залишилися без піклування батьків внаслідок міграції, а також на вдосконалення законодавчої та інституційної бази у співвідношенні з подібною правовою практикою та нормами Європейського Союзу. Дослідження має на меті виявити потенціал, позитивний або негативний вплив політики щодо захисту дітей у Республіці Молдова та поінформувати транснаціональні сім'ї та представників органів державної влади про реалії та практичні аспекти трудової міграції. У цій статті викладено погляди представників громадських, центральних і місцевих органів влади, які беруть участь у дослідницькому проєкті CASTLE (мерів, соціальних працівників, спеціалістів державних установ тощо), щодо транснаціональних сімей та дітей, які залишилися без піклування батьків, в Республіці Молдова. Надано рекомендації щодо мінімізації негативних наслідків трудової міграції, зокрема розвитку соціальних послуг, необхідних для запобігання цих наслідків.

Ключові слова: міграція, трудова міграція батьків, транснаціональні сім'ї, діти без піклування батьків, органи державної влади.

Labour migration from the Republic of Moldova, which registers a new intensification after the COVID-19 pandemic, increased the number of transnational families and children left behind.

During the last 20 years, international labour migration from the Republic of Moldova has reached an impressive level. Thus, in 2017, according to the Labor Force Survey, the number of persons who went abroad searching for a job was about 319 thousand or about 18% of the inactive population aged 15 and over. Men constituted 66,4%, while women respectively 33,6% of the total number of migrants. The share of people who left rural areas was 70,5%¹ [1]. Other sources, official or less official [2; 3], estimate the extent of labour migration from the Republic of Moldova at 1 million people.

¹ From 2019, the Survey defines temporary international labor migrants as only those people who are abroad for only 12 months. For this reason, the number of temporary labor migrants has decreased to 112 thousand people. The rest of the people are considered permanently migrated.

It should be mentioned that the problems of transnational families and children left behind due to labour migration have already been studied in the Republic of Moldova. Several field studies and researches [4] have been dedicated to this issue, and public authorities have developed policies and intervention tools to manage this problem as efficiently as possible.

Various strategic documents were developed, such as the Child Protection Strategy for 2014–2020²; the normative framework was perfected by the launch of the Law "On the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents"³, several social services provided at the community level by social workers, school psychologists, etc. have been developed. The migration process becomes more and more intense, especially considering globalisation, which can generate new problems for transnational families and children left behind. This requires the most efficient management and in-depth studies of migration-related issues to prevent new social risks.

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

In 2021, according to the CER-103 survey (Children at risk and children separated from their parents) [5] managed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, the total number of children separated from their parents registered by local public authorities was 34,107 children, of which 24,763 children are from the rural area. Of this number of children, 29,186 are children whose parents/one parent are temporarily abroad, of which 21,684 are from rural areas.

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

In this context, **the objective of the article** is to analyze the situation of children left behind by labour migration, and the problems they face, as well as to analyze to what extent the social services provided by social workers to this social group satisfy their needs.

This article is focused on reflecting opinions of the representatives of the central and local public authorities participating in the CASTLE⁴ research project (mayors, social workers, specialists of institutions that deal directly with labour migration from the Republic

² Decision of the Government regarding the approval of the Strategy for child protection for the years 2014–2020 of 10.06.2014 No. 434. URL: https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=18628&lang=ro

³ Law "On the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents" of 14.06.2013 No. 140. URL: lex.justice.md/md/348972/

⁴ Children Left Behind by Labour Migration: Supporting Moldovan and Ukrainian Transnational Families in the EU.

of Moldova, etc.) regarding transnational families and children left behind. It is mainly about their attitude towards the normative framework and policies regarding guardianship as an official and unofficial measure of child care and protection; the respondents' attitude towards the existing practices regarding parental responsibilities and official and unofficial guardianship within the system of child care and protection; the challenges faced by child protection authorities.

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

For a more in-depth analysis of the research topic, the authors analysed a vast literature in the field, research, monographs, articles, normative acts, and official data from government institutions concerned with the social protection of children left behind because of labour migration (bibliographic sources are reflected at the end of the article in the references) [6–9].

Among these sources, we can mention the study "Specific needs of children and elderly left behind as a consequence of migration" [10], which reflects the results of qualitative sociological research, carried out in 2010 as part of the project of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) "Supporting the implementation of migration and development", a component of the "EU-Moldova Mobility Partnership". The study explains migration's psychological, social, and economic impact on children and the elderly left behind by migrant family members. The study highlights the consequences of migration on the level of the family, community, and society. The data were based on interviews with community social workers, family doctors, police officers, and representatives of the local and central public administration (officials of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, and Social Protection).

Another relevant study to the research of transnational families and children left behind by labour migration is research conducted by the UNICEF initiative "Children without adequate parental care. Assessment of legal and informal guardianship in childcare and protection in the Republic of Moldova" in 2015 [11]. The study aimed to make suggestions and recommendations for improving relevant laws, policies, procedures and practices regarding custody in the childcare and protection system, including monitoring the so-called "temporary guardianship" decision regarding termination of parental rights, decisions to institute guardianship and other care and protection actions.

In the article "The quality of children's life – a factor of impact in the sustainable development of the Republic of Moldova" [12] by scholars Olga Gagauz and Mariana Buciuceanu-Vrabie, the well-being of children as an indispensable condition for the well-being of the entire community is analysed. According to the authors, the quality of children's life is determined, to a large extent, by a complex of factors, including the unstable socioeconomic situation, low incomes and the inability to provide a decent

living for the family, poverty, work migration of parents and the spread of deviant behaviour (alcoholism, drug addiction, family violence, suicide, delinquency). Economic progress, development of social infrastructure, especially in rural areas, and attracting investment in health, education and social protection could positively impact the situation of children.

The research results from the CASTLE project on the impact of migration on transnational families and children left behind following parental migration serve as empirical material used in the article. Qualitative sociological research methods, such as sociological observation, document analysis, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions, were used. The article analyses the opinion of 11 research participants. Representatives of various institutions (representatives of central and local public authorities) related to transnational families and protecting children left behind whose parents are working abroad were interviewed. Social workers, school psychologists, mayors, district council representatives, and the National Agency for Employment, whose focus is the labour migration problem, of the Diaspora Relations Office of the State Chancellery of the Government were interviewed.

The research tools (interview guides) were developed with colleagues from Babeş-Bolyai University, partners in the CASTLE project and adapted to the realities of the Republic of Moldova. The research data not only focuses on welfare issues but also includes such aspects as education or access to health services.

Assessment of the situation at the national and local level. Government and local public authorities have been aware of the need to take strengthened measures to protect children left behind whose parents are working abroad. In this context, several initiatives launched at the national level can be mentioned. Various strategic documents were developed, such as the Strategy for the protection of children for the years 2014–2020⁵ the normative framework was perfected by the launch of the Law "Regarding the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents"⁶, several social services provided at the community level by social workers, school psychologists, etc. have been developed. The efficient management of the problem of transnational families and children left behind due to migration becomes increasingly important, especially considering the globalisation processes. Migration will register an even greater intensity, and the problem of transnational families and children left behind because of labour migration will become even more widespread, and it will acquire new forms of manifestation that can generate new social risks.

For this reason, the opinion of experts and decision-makers directly involved in managing the problem related to transnational families would be critical in improving public policies. In the given research, representatives of various institutions (representatives of

⁵ Decision of the Government regarding the approval of the Strategy for child protection for the years 2014–2020 of 10.06.2014 No. 434.

⁶ Law "On the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents" of 14.06.2013 No. 140.

central and local public authorities) connected with the problems related to the issue of transnational families and the protection of children left behind whose parents are working abroad were interviewed.

Thus, some experts pleaded for the obligation to record and monitor children whose parents went to work abroad:

"Currently, in the locality, there are more than 100 families where both or at least one parent is working abroad... It would be good if the parents were asked at the border when they leave, not for a period longer than 2 months, as stipulated in law no. 140, but even for a week, in whose care they left the children" (representative of the Chisinau municipality mayor's office).

At the city level, monitoring children whose parents are working abroad is difficult due to the large number of residents. Most often, the record of this category is made in schools:

"At the municipal level, there are many transnational families, but no record at the directorate level. The schools make the records: the directors record the cases and send the lists twice a year (October, March) to the Education, Youth and Sports Directorate, respectively, a copy must come to us" (representative of the mayor's office of the municipality of Chisinau).

The situation is different in the countryside. At the village level, with a much smaller number of inhabitants than in cities, transnational families and children are recorded and monitored:

"The social workers have a special register, in which they keep track of children left without either one or both parents. It is also a collaboration between the social worker, the family doctor and the police. The record is kept anyway if parents leave with the children. When both parents leave, or in the case of „incomplete families” [please provide that it means a family with one parent; this is a rather „Soviet-style” term that stigmatises these kinds of families], one of the parents, the form of protection is established – custody, the package of documents is prepared, the person who will remain responsible for the child is determined, it is registered and a record is kept" (representative of the mayor's office of the municipality of Chisinau).

The police, the social worker and the family doctor form an interdisciplinary team that monitors these children. The social worker has a register where he keeps track of children left without one or both parents. The same happens in institutions where the principal carries out the records. Less often, this is done by medical personnel because there are certain deficiencies in the rural medical system. Currently, the medical check-up of children is no longer mandatory as it used to be. Children's medical check-up is done only at the request of the parents, guardian, or custodian. The problems of the children concerned are discussed at the meetings of the local and district councils. There is a lack of lawyers in town halls, medical institutions or schools specialised in managing the given problem who would aid these children. There is also an acute lack of specialists in psychology or psychopedagogy who would provide qualified psychological assistance to these children. However, even guardians or custodians need psychological assistance to be able to solve certain problems of these children:

"...Even if a single child were to stay with us without parental protection, I think that this is already a problem...this departure of our citizens abroad often solves financial problems, but it makes them disappear all those human qualities we have inherited from our ancestors. ...Today's grandparents didn't have a mobile phone, today's grandparents didn't have tablets, didn't have online lessons, they need training, schooling, why not, so that in different situations of children's behaviour, to know how to proceed" (representative of the Family and Child Protection Social Assistance Directorate, Soldănești district).

To deal with the situation related to the problem of transnational families and children left without care after migration, local public authorities in various localities, in collaboration with representatives of civil society, come up with various social initiatives to make life easier for children in this category. The Center for Children and Youth "UDO JURGENS"⁷ in Budești commune exemplifies a successful practice. This centre provides services for children from socially vulnerable families and children from families where one or both parents work abroad.

The centre's mission is to monitor the situation of children, including those from migrant families, and to attract them to extracurricular activities within the Centre. Within the Centre, a psychologist offers free consultation to children and their parents but also carries out individual activities with the parents, child-parents, etc. Interest clubs activities within the Centre, and the materials used there are free of charge. The budget of the Local Public Administration covers the given expenses.

There are also various partnerships. One is carried out in the educational field with the South Korean authorities. The town hall of Budești also collaborates fruitfully with the "Salvation Army" Mission, organising activities in which children from migrant families participate.

A database of those who have gone abroad is prepared in the locality, and when the parent leaves or intends to go abroad, he must go to the town hall and submit an appropriate application for custody of the child. Parents in the community are well-informed, and social assistance is actively involved.

It should be noted that not all localities have such practices and resources for protecting children left behind following labour migration.

Community responses to the needs of children left behind. At the rural level, local public authorities make great efforts to deal with the situation created to avoid the risks related to the problem of transnational families. In this context, communication with potential migrant parents is ensured:

"At the community level, social workers sensitise all parents who are going to go abroad. Parents are invited to the town hall to inform them about any problems that may arise" (social worker, Filipeni town hall).

Also, social workers and mayors came up with the proposal of organising some pieces of training to perfect the methods of intervention by social workers, psychologists, and, if possible, the organisation of interdisciplinary teams, or the problem of transnational families

⁷ Centrul pentru Copii și Tineret "UDO JURGENS". *Primăria Comunei Budești*. URL: <https://budesti.md/>

and children left behind is much more complex than ensuring the well-being of this social group:

"...There must be a collaboration between all the members of the multidisciplinary team, where the doctor is also included so that he knows what the situation is from his sources, from the first source – what the pedagogue, the social worker and the community worker says and why not, the collaborator of the police inspectorate and the psychologist if applicable" (President of Soldănești district).

Some mayors believe that a psychological service would be needed at the locality level to help children and minors overcome their problems more quickly if the parents are not at home, and the psychologist, the social worker and the police officer must be subordinate to the mayor.

Experts suggest the necessity of the development and diversification of extracurricular services for children that would help them to spend their free time overcoming the psychological shock they are going through:

"It is necessary to organise extracurricular activities for children (sports, arts), including attending creative centres, and art schools in order for them to be busy with something. In the district, there are only 2 schools of this type, respectively not all children can attend them. The organisation of training programs regarding the professional orientation of young people would be welcome" (President of the Șoldănești district).

The representatives of the public authorities in rural communities also report about other needs they face: the lack of qualified specialists who could work with this category of people (children left behind):

"There is a lack of specialists in the field of psychology or psychopedagogy who would offer more assistance to these children" (social worker, Filipeni town hall);

"We have town halls where we have virtually no specialist in the protection of children's rights" (President of Soldănești district);

"Unfortunately, there is only one policeman for two villages, and there is only one doctor for two villages, a doctor is an elderly person, everything is up to the social worker" (representative of the mayor's office of the municipality of Chisinau).

The presence of a specialist in the problems of families with children at risk would greatly help these families. The fact that these families can apply for social assistance to solve their pressing problems, including financial ones, and they are on the record of local community social workers, is also important:

"We have town halls where we have practically no specialists in protecting children's rights. The case I told you about above, about the family with five children, is a crying situation. Only the community social worker, who has daily assistance of 20–30 beneficiaries, cannot pay enough attention to this case, therefore in town halls, the position of a specialist in the protection of children's rights must be established, at least in town halls with a larger population greater than 1500–2000 inhabitants" (social assistant, Filipeni commune);

"...I believe that not all, but a good part of pedagogues, need new skills to cope with the current demands, including to direct their knowledge specifically to these children who are left without parental care" (social worker, Cojušna commune).

The Republic of Moldova also has a psycho-pedagogical service at the district level. The given service has a mobile team travelling around the districts to counsel at-risk children. However, it would be good if this service were supplemented by qualified psychologists who specialised in protecting at-risk children. It is revealed that there is no specialised position on child protection issues in the town halls. Also, no lawyers in the town halls would offer help in the case of transnational families.

It should be mentioned that in some educational institutions, there are different extra-curriculum and creative centres able to ensure free time for children at risk. At the same time, more attention is needed from the teaching staff. In many schools, no licensed psychologist could more effectively solve the problems of this group of children. Teachers need to develop new skills to deal with the problems faced by children whose parents are working abroad.

However, it is found that at the district level, there is effective collaboration between the social assistance department, the education department, and the police inspectorate. At the locality level, such effective collaboration between institutions is only being attempted to be established to solve the problems of children from transnational families.

It should be noted that those children whose parents are young and are familiar with information technologies more easily integrate into social networks compared to children from transnational families who do not have phones, tablets, or computers. They isolate themselves and feel frustrated in the group of other children.

Having parents at a distance, of course, has a psycho-emotional impact on children. There are vulnerable families whose children are considered at risk. Most of these children are registered by social workers. As a rule, they are from the category of those left in the care, either of grandparents or of relatives or neighbours. If the transnational family has been identified as facing problems and the child's status is legalised by the General Directorate for the Protection of Children's Rights, the support mechanism is established for the child in difficulty through the Commission's decision. This mechanism can be manifested as psycho-emotional support or the provision of social services. For example, in Chisinau, such services are provided by the Youth Friendly Center, which also offers medical and psychological services.

In rural localities, social workers sensitise all parents who will work abroad. Parents are invited to the town hall to inform them about any problems that may arise. This is also done through social media.

"...In the situation when the parents leave without announcing, however, we find them on social networks, through the social worker or the local mayor, we sensitise them at the first opportunity..." (social worker, Filipeni commune).

Experts point to the fact that municipal and local programs, such as support for children in schooling, include the financial resources needed for first-grade enrollment and subsequent enrollment in other educational institutions. There are also various funds to help

families in difficulty. It is crucial to establish the status of the child in order to be eligible for application to these funds. However, there are also unusual situations:

"3 children remained at home. The oldest is in the 12th grade, and she has another sister or brother in the 6th grade and one more in kindergarten. And then, this older one, in the 12th grade, is put in the situation of having to: cook and wash, and clean, and take the little one to kindergarten, bring him, see if the second is taken care of, she is washed, she has done her homework...and so she assumes the role of caretaker, although she herself is a student in the 12th grade and...she is a child – she herself needs care. She is exhausted" (School psychologist Cojusna village, Straseni).

Such situations also require specific intervention from the public authorities.

When parents go abroad, children take over their roles not only in maintaining the household but also in terms of taking care of younger brothers and sisters. The internal balance of the family is disturbed by the departure of a parent and is disturbed even more by the departure of both parents. The family must reorganise and adapt to the new conditions, which is a long process that can take several months. This period is felt by children as a crisis and is considered the most challenging period. This process ends by restoring a balance when other family members can share and take over the roles and responsibilities of the departed.

In this situation, the biggest problem is that children do not have the necessary knowledge, and there is no one to inform them about health-risk behaviours, life skills and sexual education. Under these conditions, they fill this informational vacuum from discussions with their peers by searching for information on the Internet, etc., which is not always the most appropriate. Lack of knowledge and life skills is the leading cause of sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies and abortions that harm reproductive health.

Although access to medical services, according to the legislation in force, is offered free of charge to all children, older children who take care of a minor do not know and cannot act promptly on changes in the health status of the little ones. Thus, some acute diseases have a high risk of complications and serious developments. Also, the lack of guardianship complicates the procedure for medical assistance in case of invasive interventions.

Children with parents who have gone to work abroad often do not establish friendly relations with their peers either because they are not understood, do not want to divulge family secrets, or because of a lack of free time, etc. The support networks of these children are poorly developed, most often limited to discussions with class masters, teachers, and psychologists. Migration weakens the interaction between the child and the migrant parents, worsens the child's relationship with the educational institution due to the lack of supervision and control from the parents, the multiple "new" responsibilities of these children, misunderstandings from teachers and peers, the lack of connection between family and school, etc.

It should be noted that the long-term effects on children left behind due to labour migration are incredibly significant. The following generations will take over the migratory behaviour of their parents. Children perceive and internalise the family model within they grew up, including the lack of psycho-emotional responsibility towards their children.

Children explain the migration of family members as being determined by several factors: the intention to escape poverty or improve living conditions, the lack of employment opportunities, the impossibility of ensuring the continuation of children's studies, etc. At the same time, the degree of acceptance or non-acceptance of the parents' migration by children depends on their age, how parents requested the children's opinion, the person in whose care they remained and the frequency of communication between the children and the parents.

The experts suggest the organisation of continuous training for improving intervention methods by social workers, psychologists and, if possible, the organisation of interdisciplinary teams because the problem of transnational families and children left behind is much more complex than ensuring the well-being of this social group.

"Actually, they have less financial needs. But, they need communication, attachment, the expression of emotions, hugs, support, encouragement..." (social worker from the village of Cojusna, Straseni).

Experts, especially those from the urban environment, mention the fact that they cannot always intervene to overcome some risk situations related to the conditions of transnational families:

"...But you can't interfere. We don't have tools. Even in the local community, it is possible and known that person X is away, but the child is not legalised, and the state cannot intervene with material support, even if the people who take care of the child are in difficult situations, because the child is illegally left in their care" (representative of Chisinau City Hall).

The problem of children left behind following labour migration is perceived differently by the interviewed experts from the three ministries – the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Research. Thus, if the ministries that address specific aspects of a child's life, such as the Ministry of Education and Health Protection, do not differentiate between children with migrant parents and children with parents at home, looking only at the access to educational services, academic success, health status in the context of general supervision standards, then the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection is the ministry with the most significant responsibility and impact that monitors the situation of children left without multidimensional care.

Regulatory framework and supporting policies. Once the problem of transnational families and children left behind due to labour migration became quite stringent in the Republic of Moldova, the need to adapt the legal framework appeared to effectively overcome this problem. Thus, in 2013 Law "Regarding the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents"⁸. Later, a Strategy for Child Protection was developed for 2014–2020⁹ to develop public policies and social services for at-risk children.

⁸ Law "On the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents" of 14.06.2013 No. 140.

⁹ Law "On Amendments to Some Normative Acts" of 27.11.2020 No. 212. https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=124474&lang=ro

It should be noted that the representatives of local public authorities believe that this regulatory framework allows them to effectively exercise their functions regarding the situation of transnational families and children left behind following migration:

"Law no. 140 solved several problems regarding children left at home whose parents are abroad" (Social worker, Filipeni town hall).

The permanent legislative framework is perfected and responds promptly to the challenges related to the problem of transnational families. In 2020, the Law "On Amendments to Some Normative Acts"¹⁰ provides for a more simplified mechanism for establishing custody for children left behind following labour migration instead of guardianship:

"...They are guided in their activity by Law 212, of 2020, regarding Custody, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Civil Code, Law 140 for Children at Risk, the Law regarding social assistance, charity services, Framework regulation regarding the day centre service, etc." (representative of the mayor's office of the municipality of Chisinau).

At the same time, representatives of local public authorities also invoke specific gaps in the regulatory framework regarding the protection of children left without care:

"Here, in the Republic of Moldova, the legislation is strong, but, unfortunately, we do not respect it: nepotism, friends..., so in this field, the legislation is very good" (representative of the mayor's office of the municipality of Chisinau).

Experts believe that custody as a form of child protection is appropriate, but:

"...There is also the risk of what kind of person the child is left with. When the parent leaves the child with an 80-year-old person, the child will not grow adequately. I mean, custody must have some criteria" (representative of the Employment Agency).

The experts also suggest the organisation of systematic research in the field to improve both the legislative framework and the methods of intervention by public authorities:

"Now the legislation has been harmonised, specifically for them, this form of protection – custody – has been created specifically for migrant children, which is quite good. It would be good to amend the legislation to monitor these children to liquidate certain loopholes and develop legislative proposals. In the same way, the office of Migration and Asylum, Terre des Hommes to do some research and, based on them, to make proposals for improvement" (representative of the mayor's office of the municipality of Chisinau).

Therefore, it can be concluded that the public authorities in the Republic of Moldova are aware of the seriousness of the situation and react promptly to the various forms of manifestation of the problem of transnational families and children left behind as a result of labour migration either by perfecting the legal framework or by developing new public policies and social services for this category of people.

Conclusions. Labour migration from the Republic of Moldova has solved many problems related to well-being and the fight against poverty. However, it also caused several problems, including the problem of transnational families and children left behind due to migration, which became increasingly pressing, taking on new forms of manifestation.

¹⁰ The same.

Under the conditions of globalisation processes, the picture of migration from the Republic of Moldova has changed over the years so that migration enters a new phase of maturity. If initially, people left with the idea that they would return after solving their material problems, now the tendency to emigrate with the whole family is becoming more and more evident.

However, on the background of the intensification of migration processes, the number of transnational families whose children are left without care due to labour migration is overgrowing. Many children from transnational families, in which one or both parents have left, suffer from their absence, cannot fully integrate into social networks, and face various social problems requiring prompt and effective intervention by public authorities. However, some consequences of this situation will already be felt when it is too late, and it is unknown if it will be possible to make up for what was omitted in time.

Central and local public authorities in the Republic of Moldova are aware of the problem of transnational families and children left behind due to labour migration and react effectively to all challenges related to this problem either by adapting the legal framework or by developing new public policies and social services.

However, there are also many gaps, the overcoming of which would lead to the avoidance of several problems related to transnational families and children left behind as a result of labour migration, including:

- completion of town halls in all rural localities with qualified personnel, psychologists, and specialists in the field;
 - improving the process of perfecting guardianship or custody for children whose parents are working abroad;
 - the most active involvement in managing the problem related to children left behind;
- the involvement of other partners: civil society, individuals, companies, etc.
- organisation of systematic research in the field to improve both the legislative framework and the methods of intervention by public authorities.

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