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THE IMPACT OF LABOR MIGRATION FROM THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA ON CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND (PERSPECTIVES FROM PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS)¹

The article presents the results of a sociological study that reflects the impact produced by the labour migration of parents from the Republic of Moldova on left-behind children seen from the perspective of adults – migrant parents, stay-behind parents, and caregivers. In December 2021 and January 2022, during the CASTLE (Children Left Behind by Labour Migration: Supporting Moldovan and Ukrainian Transnational Families in the EU) project, in the Republic of Moldova, 36 adults (labour migrant parents, stay-behind parents and caregivers) were interviewed. And during April 2022, 13 migrant parents and parents who stay home with their children participated in the focus group discussions. Sociological research has primarily focused on the following aspects: the general context of labour migration; relations with the local public administration; caring for left-behind children; the influence of labour migration on the physical health and psycho-emotional state of children; the influence of labour migration on academic success, kindergarten activities, and children's social integration; communication between migrant parents and left behind children; the influence of labour migration on the well-being of transnational families and the material support given to children; plans for the future and expectations from the state. Among the main problems faced by children left at home and other members of transnational families, the following can be mentioned: communication deficiencies, the difficulties of remote education of children, the negative influence of migration on the psycho-emotional status of left-behind children, and the challenges of left-behind children's socialisation. Parents and caregivers report other problems, such as communication deficiencies with local public administrations, communication problems within the community, and problems related to caring for children left at home. The absence for an extended period of one or both parents can cause inadequate care and support for left-behind children and many other problems. The study shows that some parents are very dissatisfied with what the state does for them. Adults (parents and caregivers) believe that the state is mainly to blame because the citizens are forced to leave. Even if there are specific positive influences on left-behind children and transnational families in general, such as material well-being, the negative influences of migration prevail. The article concludes that the impact of the labour migration of parents on left-behind children is vital. As a result of migration, there are many problems. State authorities and civil society must make joint efforts to support both migrant parents and left-behind children affected by migration.

Keywords: children left behind, labour migration, transnational families, migrant parents, stay-behind parents, caregivers.

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ВПЛИВ ТРУДОВОЇ МІГРАЦІЇ З РЕСПУБЛІКИ МОЛДОВА НА ДІТЕЙ ЗАЛИШЕНИХ ВДОМА (ПОГЛЯД БАТЬКІВ ТА ОПІКУНІВ)

Показано результати соціологічного дослідження, які відображають вплив трудової міграції батьків з Республіки Молдова на залишених вдома дітей з точки зору дорослих – батьків-мігрантів, батьків, які залишилися вдома, та опікунів. У грудні 2021 р. та січні 2022 р. під час розробки проекту CASTLE (Діти поза увагою: підтримка молдовських та українських транснаціональних родин, залучених до зовнішньої трудової міграції в країнах ЄС) в Республіці Молдова опитано 36 дорослих (батьки – трудові мігранти; батьки, які залишилися вдома зі своїми дітьми, та опікуни). У квітні 2022 р. 13 батьків-мігрантів і батьків, які залишилися вдома зі своїми дітьми, взяли участь у фокусованих групових дискусіях. Соціологічне дослідження зосереджене переважно на таких аспектах: загальний контекст трудової міграції; відносини з органами місцевого самоврядування; догляд за залишеними дітьми; вплив трудової міграції на фізичне здоров'я та психоемоційний стан дітей; вплив трудової міграції на успішність і соціальну інтеграцію дітей; спілкування між батьками-мігрантами та дітьми, які залишилися вдома; вплив трудової міграції на добробут транснаціональних сімей і матеріальну підтримку дітей; плани на майбутнє та очікування від держави. Серед основних проблем, з якими стикаються діти, які залишилися вдома, та інші члени транснаціональних сімей, можна назвати такі: дефіцит спілкування, труднощі дистанційного навчання дітей, негативний вплив міграції на психоемоційний статус дітей, які залишилися вдома, труднощі соціалізації дітей, які залишилися вдома. Батьки та опікуни повідомляють про: недоліки у спілкуванні з місцевими державними органами, проблеми спілкування у суспільстві та проблеми, пов'язані з доглядом за залишеними вдома дітьми. Відсутність протягом тривалого часу одного або обох батьків може стати причиною недостатнього догляду та підтримки за дітьми, що залишилися вдома, і спричинить інші проблеми. За результатами дослідження, деякі батьки дуже незадоволені тим, що робить для них держава. Дорослі (батьки та опікуни) вважають, що переважно винна держава, оскільки громадяни змушені виїжджати. Навіть якщо є певні позитивні впливи на дітей і транснаціональні сім'ї (зокрема, матеріальне благополуччя), негативні впливи міграції переважають. Виявлено сильний вплив трудової міграції батьків на дітей, які залишилися вдома. Внаслідок міграції виникає багато проблем. Державні органи та громадянське суспільство повинні докладати спільних зусиль для підтримки батьків-мігрантів і дітей, залишених внаслідок міграції.

Ключові слова: залишені вдома діти, трудова міграція, транснаціональні сім'ї, батьки-мігранти, залишені вдома з дітьми батьки, опікуни.

As a result of labour migration from the Republic of Moldova, many children grow up dealing with separation from their migrant parents. The labour migration of parents has many effects on children left without parental care, and many of these effects are negative. Children's well-being is essential to the well-being and the future of all human communities, and labour migration is a phenomenon that can have various negative effects on their well-being. Specific problems appear when only one parent goes to work abroad, but these

problems are exacerbated when both parents go. Children are a vulnerable social category, and parents' departure can affect their psycho-emotional state, partially compromising their socialization process, impairing their ability to communicate with peers, and affecting their capacity to integrate comfortably into society.

The problems of labour migration from the Republic of Moldova and those of left-behind children were highlighted in the works of many Moldovan scientists. The authors have studied various aspects of labour migration of parents and the conditions of left-behind children. M. Buciuceanu-Vrabie [1] suggested that at present, families tend to make decisions that involve one or both parents migrating and separating from children, with the state having no ability to intervene. 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" are reflected in "Specific needs of children and elderly left behind as a consequence of migration" [2]. The work reflects labour migration's psychological, social, and economic effects on children left behind and the elderly that stayed at home. In M. Robila [3] opinion, higher economic pressure was associated with children's lower psychological functioning, academic achievement, and satisfaction with life. D. Vaculovschi [4] emphasized that migration is no longer a phenomenon that affects only those who leave but also those who stay in the country of origin and those in the destination country. G. Gorbunov [5] stated that children marked by parental labour migration show shallow values on all modules and essential characteristics of quality of life.

In December 2021 and January 2022, during the development of the CASTLE (Children Left Behind by Labour Migration: Supporting Moldovan and Ukrainian Transnational Families in the EU) project, in the Republic of Moldova, 36 adults (labour migrant parents, parents who stayed home with their children, and caregivers) were interviewed. Furthermore, in April 2022, 13 migrant parents and parents who stayed home with their children participated in the focus group discussions. The main aim of the qualitative study in the frame of the CASTLE project is to assess the needs and rights of left-behind children in the two beneficiary countries (Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova) and to formulate recommendations and enact actions for their support. This article is based on the data collected in the Republic of Moldova, and **its main objective** is to analyse how the labour migration of parents from the Republic of Moldova to the European Union influences various aspects of children's left-behind lives, such as their activities, their communication with parents and other children, their academic success, and other aspects. The lens through which the adults view the migration process is, in general, slightly different from that of the children, and therefore capturing the perception of migration by adults (parents and caregivers) was essential for the research that was carried out.

During the interviews and group discussions, the following aspects were focused on:

- the general context of labour migration;
- relations with the local public administration;
- caring for left-behind children;
- the influence of labour migration on the physical health and psycho-emotional state of children;

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

The general context of labour migration. The Republic of Moldova is seriously affected by migration. The scale of migration from our country is a significant problem [4; 6, p. 337–338]. About 25% of the economically active population is engaged in labour migration to work [6, p. 337–338; 7, p. 257-259; 8]. Migration has become an indispensable factor for the economic development of the Republic of Moldova and a tool to reduce poverty [9, p. 4]. As a result of migration, transnational families appear, and many children are left at home. According to the CER-103 survey (Children at risk and children separated from their parents) managed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, the total number of children separated from their parents in 2021, registered by local public authorities, was 34,107. Among them, 24,763 children are from the rural area. Also, 29,186 are children whose parents/one parent are temporarily abroad, of which 21,684 are from rural areas [10].

The main reasons for labour migration from Eastern European countries are economic, social and legal. Among the principal reasons, cited by most parents as well as caregivers, that forced them to work abroad, three can be highlighted in particular: lack of jobs; financial reasons: low income that could not cover even the most necessary expenses; the desire to have a better life for oneself, and especially for their children: *"I left because in our country you do not make enough money... to support the family and the children are growing up... you cannot support the family with the salaries we have in Moldova"* (labour migrant father of a son aged 5). These reasons are found in the stories of most of the interviewed adults: *"Because we had nothing for supporting the children, because here in Moldova the salary is low and... you can buy nothing, you can only pay the communal expenses; they also go there for the food. Moreover, you cannot buy anything else"* (labour migrant mother of a son aged 12 and a daughter aged 6).

Parents have to migrate while leaving their children at home for various reasons. In most cases, parents do not go abroad with their children from the beginning for two reasons: they do not want to because they intend to return home, or they do not have the opportunity to take their children with them. Children often are left behind because of financial constraints and the transient nature of the work that migrants may encounter at their destinations [11].

The duration of a family member's absence can be associated with a series of problems or with the failure to provide for some necessities of the child [12, p. 131]. Parents' departure for a short period is difficult for children, but leaving to work abroad for several months, or even years, is even more difficult for them. Prior discussions with the children about the departure are beneficial in such circumstances. The study reveals that most of the parents informed their children that they were planning to leave for work abroad, and in cases when they did not inform their children, it was because the children were too young and would not

have understood. Most parents had discussions in which they tried to explain to their children the necessity of labour migration: *"I told them that I was going to leave and that I was doing it for their good"* (labour migrant mother of two sons aged 15, and 2, two daughters aged 8 and 2 and a 9-months-old daughter).

Most parents ask for their children's opinion and approval, which, even when it is formally done, can lead to the preservation and strengthening of trust between family members: *"I said: look, dad is leaving, so that we can try to make a better home repair. That was our first intention. We will get a better car. And the kids accepted"* (labour migrant mother of two daughters aged 11 and 8).

In some cases, however, parents had to leave, despite their children's hesitation to consent. This can affect the psycho-emotional state of the child. Sometimes, parents had to leave their children downright depressed: *"A week before me leaving abroad, she could not eat. She went into depression. Later, I also went with her to a psychologist, and she has been suffering ever since"* (labour migrant mother of two daughters aged 18 and 13 and a son aged 8).

Almost all parents from transnational families said that their children become sad whenever they have to leave for work abroad. On the other hand, it should be noted that going to work and leaving the children at home is also quite tricky for migrant parents: *"It is very sad... My feeling is that I want to stay at home with the child and work here and have a decent salary, the prices should not be exorbitant in Moldova so that I could support my child and raise him, and he could also see that there is a future in Moldova"* (labour migrant father of a son aged 5).

The research shows that just as children can be psychologically traumatized, parents can be psychologically affected too: *"All the time, when I returned to the country, I was traumatized because I left my children. Indeed, I suffered a lot"* (labour migrant mother of two daughters aged 18 and 13 and a son aged 8). This should not be left without attention because traumatized parent cannot effectively carry out their parental functions and cannot properly support their children.

Labour migration of parents leads to the weakening of kinship ties within the family, especially if the children were left with caregivers at a very young age: *"She (left behind girl) knows that she has a mom and she calls her mom, but you know, like in the wind. They're not close friends, no!"* (caregiver, woman).

Many parents are worried about being separated from their spouses while being abroad: *"And that was a minus because one should go in one direction and one in another and this is not a family anymore. You know, both should be together"* (labour migrant mother of two daughters aged 6 and 4). Being away from each other represents an additional risk for family preservation: *"...I divorced from my ex-husband because he had left before me and as they say going abroad either binds couples more or they..."* (labour migrant mother of two children).

Relations with local public administration. The research showed that most parents notified the local public authorities about their departure. This was valid in the cases of children left at home with nannies or caregivers: *"We went to the town hall (primaria), we made custody, I signed and also did the father that we leave children in the care of the*

grandmother" (labour migrant mother of a son aged 4 and a daughter aged 3). However, if children are left at home with the stay-behind parent, then in most cases, local public authorities are not notified.

Parents only left their children in someone else's custody when both were gone. In these cases, around half of them did not leave the children in official custody but only made an oral agreement with the caregivers. This can create great difficulties, for example, when, in the case of urgent surgery, the consent of an official representative of the child is needed. Parents who did not leave their children in custody are usually not even aware of the fact that they need to leave them in the custody of someone: *"It is as if I did not even feel the necessity that, look, something needs to be done and because of the lack of authorizations it is not done..."* (labour migrant mother of three sons aged 19, 15 and 3).

Many of the parents and caregivers reported that representatives of the local public administration have never visited the families where there are children left at home because of the parents' labour migration and that they showed no interest in the conditions in which these children live: *"And the city hall (primaria) knows, but no one has ever checked us. We wanted someone to come and check on me, but no one came. Nobody checked on me. Moreover, the doctor knows all, but no one checked me..."* (caregiver, woman). Parents and caregivers also say they have not received help or advice from local administration workers. The local administration gets involved rather when help is requested and when there are difficulties in the transnational families. Among the objective reasons here can be mentioned the insufficient number of staff in town halls.

Caring for left-behind children. Most children are left at home in the care of one of their parents or their grandparents. However, some children were left in the care of relatives or neighbours. Choosing the right person for a caregiver, who is compatible with the left behind child, is very important for the well-being and comfort of the child. Some parents were responsible for this choice: *"Obviously, I talked to them first, before I talked to the children, I talked to them (caregivers)... If they can, if they feel that they can do this, if they can carry this task, because it is not an easy task at all, and they support me in my beginnings... After the discussion with them, I already initiated the discussion with the children"* (labour mother of three sons aged 19, 15 and 3).

Parents are generally satisfied with caregivers who were left with children, except for some aspects: *"...There were times when we were expecting more..."* (labour migrant mother of two sons aged 6 and 3). The dissatisfaction seemed to appear when the choice of the caregiver was not suitable: *"...I left them with a cousin of mine. Yes, she was young, she was single. They stayed in the house of my father-in-law. It was my father-in-law there too. Yes, the children suffered. When someone is a mother, she's a mother, and when... (she cries)"* (labour migrant mother of two daughters aged 18 and 13 and a son aged 8).

Parents consider grandparents the most preferred caregivers: *"...I would advise parents to leave children in the care of grandparents, who are closer in spirit, and who no longer have other children in their care"* (labour migrant mother of two sons aged 6 and 3). However, some parents reported that grandparents are too lenient with their grandchildren, and they do not receive the necessary education: *"They do not educate them properly,*

children are allowed to do what they want, but we want them to have a decent education" (labour migrant mother of two daughters aged 6 and 4). Although even if grandparents usually love their grandchildren a lot, when children are left in their care, some generational issues arise, such as significantly different interests and priorities, difficulties helping the grandchildren with their homework, difficulties in giving advice related to technology, the internet, and so on.

Most of the interviewed caregivers reported no problems with the children who were left in their care. Only some encountered specific problems: *"Even if she was sending me money, but I needed to exchange them, and there was no one to help me...and that is how it was here. It was challenging here"* (caregiver, woman). Caring for the child is difficult for the caregivers: *"Much responsibility. God, I did not sleep whole nights"* (caregiver, woman).

The influence of labour migration on children's physical health and psycho-emotional state. Health is one of the most important values, and if we talk about children, its importance increases even more because the foundations of health for the entire life are laid in childhood. The interviewed parents and caregivers believe that their children's physical health is good; they had no severe problems except colds and other minor health problems. They saw no changes in children's physical health after one or both parents left to work abroad. Some children had more severe health problems or disabilities before their parents left. They continued to be treated, and parents did not notice any changes in their children's health or noticed changes for the better.

Some migrant parents noticed a connection between the deterioration of their child's physical health and the fact that they were away: *"...The girl... when I came home when I came back there were big changes in her health. And to this day she has diabetes. For a while I blamed myself that everything happened because of me..."* (labour migrant mother of a daughter aged 15 and a son aged 13). Another parent migrant mother of two children reported a similar case: *"When I returned home, the boy was already three and a half years old, and I noticed that he has some speech problems. I think that is because I was absent"* (labour migrant mother of two children).

Therefore, parents' departure and separation from their children for an extended period can negatively influence the development and psycho-emotional state of children left at home. The imbalance of the psycho-emotional state can persist over time, even when the parent has returned home: *"Now when we go somewhere, and she hears the music specific for our airport, she tells me that she does not even want to hear it, and I realize that the departure remains a trauma for her"* (labour migrant mother of a daughter aged 15 and a son aged 13).

Separation from parents can cause psycho-emotional traumas, and younger children are especially vulnerable. Children can become angry with their parents because they left, and this can be manifested as a reluctance to communicate when parents return: *"...When I came back after 3 months, he did not even want to come to me to hold me, I would come and hold him in my arms, he would push me..."* (labour migrant mother of a son aged 7).

The help of psychologists and other specialists is sought in cases of imbalances and psycho-emotional traumas. Otherwise, these problems can create difficulties in communication with other children and adults and hinder socialization.

The influence of labour migration on academic success, kindergarten activities and children's social integration. Even if good academic success is not necessarily an indicator of the value of general or global intelligence of a student, it can highlight several points: the child's discipline, the ability to concentrate, the degree of memory development, obedience, the ability to collaborate with teachers or sometimes with classmates. In general, academic success is a value traditionally desired by parents. Interviewed parents said they are interested in their children's success, and during the school year, this is one of the main topics of discussion in their communication.

From the parents' explanations, their children's success in school and kindergarten and their extracurricular activities did not change or did not change considerably with the parents' migration. Parents link the differences in academic success not only to the child's gender but also to his/her personality, character, and perseverance: "*They have different characters: the older one likes to show his interest, to do, because he understands something, but the little one often says: "if I do not want to learn, I do not learn"* (labour migrant mother of two sons aged 6 and 3). In some cases, parents believe it is characteristic for boys to learn less or be less involved in the class: "*The girl goes with pleasure (to kindergarten), but the boy... I think he is lazier...*" (labour migrant mother of a son aged 4 and a daughter aged 3).

The study also shows that from the parents' perspective, if a child's success has become weaker, one of the reasons is that he spends more time thinking about his parents and is unable to concentrate: "*Yes, yes, the learning (academic success) has changed a little, and the teacher said... her mind is focused elsewhere*" (labour migrant mother of a son aged 12 and a daughter aged 6).

Regarding children's involvement in kindergarten activities, when they reported about it, parents and caregivers claim that nothing has changed since the migrant parents left and that children are usually quite active: "*...Children have manifested very well ... at kindergarten...*" (labour migrant mother of two sons aged 6 and 3).

Children left at home may struggle to communicate with their peers and integrate into different social groups. The causes can vary: the lack of the parents' communication model with other people, the lack of their parents, and so on. Thus some left-behind children develop aggressive reactions as a form of defence: "*...Children left in someone else's care are distinguished by scandalous behaviour. It is not their fault, they just do not understand the situation, and parents, often feeling guilty, compensate for their lack of money. Here, children get out of control and acquire bad behaviours*" (stay-behind parent mother of two sons aged 6 and 3, also a school psychologist). Sometimes, however, on the contrary, children become shyer, which can impede integration into society: "*For example, I noticed in the boy that he became a little more, more, more withdrawn, quieter. But even now, he is thirty-one years old, I think that the time since then has affected him, it has affected him, because as I said, he is more withdrawn, quieter, more... he does not communicate, he is not like other children...*" (labour migrant mother of two children).

Communication between migrant parents and left behind children. The value of communication for human society, its evolution, and the initiation and development of relationships between people is inestimable. Nevertheless, within transnational families, communication is reduced, most of the time, to communication via phones and computers.

Migrant parents are aware of the limits of this communication: "*We talk on social media, but it is not like you are there to hold them, hold them and tell them how much you love them*" (labour migrant mother of a son aged 17 and a daughter aged 14). However, because migrant parents have no alternatives, except for when they return home or when their children visit them, they continue to use phones and computers to communicate.

Communication with left-behind children helps migrant parents to be aware of their problems and achievements and to act promptly when needed. Frequent communication between migrant parents and children left at home benefits both parents and children. Parents can "keep their finger on the pulse" of children's lives, and children can tell parents about their lives and thoughts. They usually communicate daily so that children can inform their parents about their daily problems and difficulties.

Available smartphones and different messengers and applications, such as Viber and WhatsApp, through which someone can communicate for free or cheaply, greatly facilitated communication between parents and children left at home. Compared to the previous periods, when those who left could call home once a week or even once a month, things have improved significantly.

Migrant parents say they communicate with their children at least once a week, but most parents say they communicate once a day or at least once a day: "*Every day, usually in the evening, we talk with the whole family for at least an hour*" (stay-behind parent mother of two children aged 6 and 3). Moreover, when migrant parents have the possibility, the communication can last for several hours a day: "*I call...all days, about ten, twenty times a day...*" (labour migrant mother of a son aged 4 and a daughter aged 3).

It is essential for the parents to communicate with video cameras, so they can see their children's facial expressions and their eyes: "*Rather... that we could see their faces*" (labour migrant mother of two daughters aged 6 and 4).

Most often, routine issues are discussed: "*We were discussing how they feel, what they ate, who upset them, how they were at school if they were at school if they were on vacation, have they been to their grandmother's or other relatives*" (labour migrant mother of a daughter aged 15 and a son aged 13).

The impossibility of always being near their children makes migrant parents try to educate their children through distance communication: "*We were talking about their studies, their behaviour, the time at which they should be at home, about not talking to strangers or approaching unknown cars, and instead walking straight home*" (labour migrant father of a daughter aged 14 and a son aged 12).

Migrants try to parent from abroad. However, some parents have doubts about the possibilities of education when being so distant: "*I do not know who can educate children over the phone... As such, I do not have... I have not solved the problems myself... if you are two thousand km away... yes... you talk to your son or daughter... tell him to be nice, or to do this, to do that...*" (labour migrant father of a daughter aged 15).

Besides remote communication, migrant parents communicate with their children whenever they return home from abroad. Most parents mention that during these short periods, they try to spend as much time as possible with their children: "*...The boy is always with me as long as I am at home...*" (labour migrant father of a son aged 6 and a daughter

aged 2). However, even when they return home, parents sometimes encounter obstacles in communication because children may distance themselves from them and withdraw into themselves: *"I will put it this way: children distance themselves from their parents, regretfully... I am very sorry they do not want to talk. Every time I ask them to say something to me, they are very closed, they have become closed..."* (labour migrant mother of a son aged 17 and a daughter aged 14). Thus, prolonged separation during the labour migration of parents can disrupt parent-child relationships and cause psychosocial difficulties in communication. This situation could be improved by periodic mutual visits of migrant parents and left behind children. But it is challenging to organize children's visits in the countries where their parents work, especially when migrant mothers live and work in families or when migrant fathers live in the vehicle in which they work. Therefore, the support of state authorities would be very beneficial.

The influence of labour migration on the well-being of transnational families and the material support given to children. One of the reasons for parents leaving to work abroad is the family's precarious financial situation, and therefore, parents leave to earn more: *"You can save money working abroad, come home to do something bigger, to fulfil your goals... That is why we are going there..."* (labour migrant father of a daughter aged 4).

Some migrants improved their living conditions in the Republic of Moldova: *"...I managed to get an apartment here..."* (labour migrant mother of a son). Some parents managed to solve their children's medical problems, problems that they would not have been able to solve otherwise due to the lack of money: *"Me, when I went abroad, I thought about this – to put brackets to her, a lot of money was needed, and little by little, it was done..."* (labour migrant father of three daughters aged 17, 14 and 8). Some parents managed to take their children on vacation to the sea, on trips and excursions.

Parents can spend more on children by going to work abroad and having a decent income. The study reveals that parents send all necessary things for their children: *"Food, toys, clothes all that children need"* (labour migrant mother of a son aged 4 and a daughter aged 3).

Sometimes solving material problems improves the relations between spouses, which is beneficial for all family members: *"In any case, our financial situation has improved... The financial stability also calms the "climate" in the family... as they say..."* (labour migrant father of a daughter aged 15).

Parents must provide for their children, but the provision has to be done with great care, developing all the aspects of communication and interaction between parents and children, because otherwise parents will not be appreciated, and only money will be expected from them: *"...Her mother has said, that "I am only a purse for her (daughter); otherwise I do not exist"* (caregiver, woman).

In general, the well-being of transnational families tends to increase, but the migrant parents are very aware of the price they have to pay for this: *"I earned some money, built a house. But I lost the most beautiful years of the children's lives, and first of all, my health"* (labour migrant mother of a son aged 17 and a daughter aged 14).

Plans and expectations from the state. More than half of the migrant parents would like to return to the country: *"Back to Moldova, to come back, to get a house to stay near*

the children" (labour migrant mother of a son aged 12 and a daughter aged 6). Some would like to settle down and live abroad, but the fact that their parents are in the Republic of Moldova, that they have relatives and friends here, and that here they understand the language, the culture, and the traditions well stops them from settling down in a foreign country: *"I plan to leave then to go back home to my parents, to my family"* (labour migrant father of a son aged 3).

Almost all migrant parents interviewed in the study perform unskilled jobs abroad, even if some have higher education. They earn money quite difficult, making physical effort, sometimes combined with great emotional effort, especially when working as caregivers for elders. That is why many of these parents want a better future for their children. And in most cases, they dream of their children going to college: *"I told them like this: "You have to learn. I work for you. I will make this money for you. I invest all my money in your studies"* (labour migrant mother of two daughters, 18 and 13 and a son aged 8).

The study shows that some parents are very dissatisfied with what the state is doing to support them: *"A foreign country helps much more than our own country. Our country does nothing!!! Nothing!!! How did it help us? With nothing!"* (labour migrant mother of two daughters 18 and 13 and a son aged 8). Adults believe the state is mainly to blame because the citizens are forced to leave. And if migrants have a high qualification, they are downright perplexed that the state does not value and appreciate their qualification: *"...The fact that you lose some specialists with experience.., is very serious, I think it is bad for a state because it does not know how to value its citizens, it does not know how to value its people, and that is very, very bad, I think"* (labour migrant mother of two children). This is a "brain drain", a situation in which people with a high level of training and professional skills engage in unskilled jobs in the destination countries, a phenomenon that is extremely widespread today [12, p. 62].

Parents consider that the state should help them: *"Maybe more jobs. Let people have a place to work, because that is why people leave the country because there are few jobs, you have nowhere to work, there is no work..."* (labour migrant mother of a son aged 4 and a daughter aged 3). Having high expectations from the state, some migrant parents still denote a passive attitude regarding society's problems: *"But we cannot do anything until they do something..."* (labour migrant father of a daughter and two sons).

Conclusion. The results of the sociological study conducted in 2021–2022 in the Republic of Moldova among migrant parents, stay-behind parents and caregivers revealed that the impact of parental labour migration on children left at home is high. Members of national families, especially children, face a multitude of problems. Adults (parents and caregivers) are generally aware of the risks of migration and try to make efforts to minimize them and make children's lives better and more manageable.

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

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

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