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### CHILDREN'S OPINION ABOUT THE MIGRATION OF THEIR PARENTS (THE CASE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA)

*To develop effective social policies and social services for children left behind by migration in the communities, it is necessary to know the specific needs of children affected by migration and deprived of their family members' care. The article offers the opinion of children left behind from the Republic of Moldova about their parents' migration and, indirectly, how international migration influences modern families. Also, the article presents the impact of parents' migration on children and children's opinions on how to mitigate negative consequences. To do this, the author used the primary data collected from children left behind migration in the European Union project CASTLE (Children left behind as a result of labour migration: supporting Moldovan and Ukrainian transnational families in the European Union), coordinated by the Babeş-Bolyai University and the Terre des hommes Romania Foundation in collaboration with Terre des hommes Moldova and the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova. The data were collected through individual in-depth interviews (4 interviews conducted by child researchers and two by adult researchers) and focus group discussions (2 discussions moderated by adult researchers). The research results highlight children's perception of migration, including their attitude towards parents' migration, the communication with their absent parents, the psychosocial effects, and the migration impact on children's physical and mental health, suggestions of children left behind by migration to peers in a similar situation, including authorities of the Republic of Moldova. The research reveals that peers and sometimes teachers do not understand children left behind. A support network for these children is less developed, proving the necessity to undertake new measures within the educational institution to reduce the negative impact.*

**Keywords:** migration, parents' migration to work abroad, children left behind migration, families at a distance, transnational families.

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### ДУМКА ДІТЕЙ ЩОДО МІГРАЦІЇ БАТЬКІВ (НА ПРИКЛАДІ РЕСПУБЛІКИ МОЛДОВА)

*Для розроблення ефективної соціальної політики та соціальних послуг для залишених внаслідок міграції дітей необхідно знати особливості потреб дітей, на яких вплинула міграція та які були позбавлені піклування членів сім'ї. Розглянуто думки залишених вдома дітей з Республіки Молдова про міграцію їхніх батьків і про те, як міжнародна міграція впливає на сучасні сім'ї. Показано вплив міграції батьків на дітей і думки дітей щодо пом'якшення негативних*

наслідків. Для цього автор використав первинні дані, зібрані від залишених вдома дітей у межах проєкту Європейського Союзу CASTLE (Діти, які залишилися внаслідок трудової міграції: підтримка молдовських та українських транснаціональних сімей у Європейському Союзі), координованого Університетом Бабеш-Бояй та Фондом *Terre des hommes Romania* у співпраці з *Terre des hommes Moldova* та Академією економічних досліджень Молдови. Дані зібрано шляхом індивідуальних глибоких інтерв'ю (чотири інтерв'ю проводили діти-дослідники, два – дорослі дослідники) та фокусованих групових дискусій (дві дискусії модерували дорослі дослідники). Результати дослідження висвітлюють сприйняття дітьми явища міграції, зокрема їхнє ставлення до міграції батьків, спілкування з відсутніми батьками, психосоціальні наслідки та вплив міграції на фізичне й психічне здоров'я дітей, поради дітей, які залишилися внаслідок міграції, одноліткам, які опинилися у подібних умовах, а також пропозиції владі Республіки Молдова. За даними дослідження, однолітки, а іноді й вчителі не розуміють залишених вдома дітей. Мережа підтримки цих дітей є менш розвиненою, що свідчить про необхідність вжити нові заходи у закладі освіти для зменшення негативного впливу.

**Ключові слова:** міграція, трудова міграція батьків за кордон, залишені вдома діти через міграцію, сім'ї на відстані, транснаціональні сім'ї.

**The phenomenon of labour migration in the Republic of Moldova.** The Republic of Moldova continues to be one of the countries significantly affected by migration [1, p. 32]. Many people perceive this phenomenon as a chance to provide for their families, including offering their children a better education, as a way of asserting themselves. Remittances from Moldovan migrants constitute an essential share in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – 15.1% in 2020, Moldova raking in the top 10 countries with the most remittances in the GDP from Europe and Central Asia (1.6 million USD) [2, p. 36].

Labour migration abroad has positive and negative consequences in different areas – economic, social, and political [3, p. 143–168], including demographic situation [4, p. 80–84]. However, the most significant impact is on the nuclear and extended family members. *The national research regarding the situation of children in need and children left behind*, conducted in the Republic of Moldova in 2012, had as its objective to reveal the number of children deprived of parental care due to migration and their specific needs. Thus, 105 270 children were identified with at least one parent engaged in the migration process in 2011, representing 14.5% of the total number of children in the Republic of Moldova. Of them, 53 695 had their father abroad, 29 950 – mother abroad, and 21 625 – had both parents [5, p. 11–14].

*The impact of migration on children left behind in Moldova*, 2013 [6] evaluates the well-being of children left behind by migrant household members in Moldova. Different dimensions of child well-being were empirically evaluated using data from a nationally-representative, large-scale household survey conducted between September 2011 and February 2012 among 3,255 households across Moldova. The well-being of children in Moldova was divided into eight dimensions, each of which was comprised of several indicators. Well-being outcomes were analysed by age group, primary caregiver, migration status of the household (current migrant, return migrant, or no migration experience), and by who has migrated within the household. It was found that migration is not associated with

negative outcomes on children's well-being in any of the dimensions analysed. However, children living in returned migrant households attain higher rates of well-being in specific dimensions like emotional health and material well-being.

The qualitative research *Specific needs of children and elderly left behind because of migration* [7] elucidates the psychological, social, and economic impact of migration on children and older adults, revealing the implications on the family, community, and society in general. Children and older people explain the migration of family members as being determined by the intention to escape poverty or to improve their living conditions, the lack of employment opportunities, failure to provide for children's further education, etc.

The nationally representative research on *Migration and child health in Moldova and Georgia* [8] highlights that children of migrants have overall positive or no differing health compared to children in non-migrant households. However, significant gender differences are found in both countries. Often, Moldovan and Georgian girls are more at risk of having poorer health when living transnationally. These results add nuance to a field of research that has mainly emphasised negative outcomes for children in transnational care.

The high number of Moldovan migrants working abroad, including children left without parental care due to migration, made the government adopt specific legislative measures to minimise the adverse effects of parental migration on children. Consequently, *Law No. 140 on the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents*<sup>1</sup> was adopted, requiring the record, monitoring, and protection of children deprived of parental care due to migration.

**The article aims** to present how children left behind from the Republic of Moldova perceive their parents' migration and, indirectly, how international migration influences modern families. The research results also highlight children's perception of migration, the migration impact on children's physical and mental health, suggestions of children left behind by migration to peers in a similar situation, including authorities of the Republic of Moldova.

**Methodological aspects.** It was decided to involve children in studying the parents' migration – an innovative data collection aspect. Children are "experts" in the problems they face. Consequently, they are essential sources of collecting data from their peers [9]. Thus, children benefited from training in collecting sociological data and conducting in-depth individual interviews. Child researchers have conducted 4 of the 6 in-depth individual interviews with their peers whose parents left abroad. Data collected via individual interviews were supplemented with two focus group discussions led by adult researchers. The participatory approach enabled the identification of challenges from the first source and provided valuable ideas on improving services and policies related to migration.

The outcomes of the research conducted in 2022 are qualitative and highlight the perception of migration of the children left behind and the feelings and emotions they experienced, highlighting some consequences in the development of their personality.

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<sup>1</sup> Law on the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents of 14.06.2013 No. 140. URL: <https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/Moldova%20Law%20No.%20140.pdf>

***Children's perception of migration and attitude toward the migration of their parents.***

Children's perception of migration and their attitude towards the migration of parents is determined by several factors: i) who has left (mother, father, both parents, the parent/parents have taken one of the children); ii) the child's age when they were left with relatives/other people or with one of the parents; iii) parent/parents migration period; iv) the person taking care of the child as a result of migration (parent, grandparents, other people); v) friends of children left behind and their support.

Mother's departure was more painfully for children, compared to the father's, which is explained by the special bond between children and their mother, including in the case of boys: *"I was used to dad going, bringing a backpack of chocolates and me being the happiest in the whole world, but when my mum has left too, I felt broken"* (girl, 15 years). The situation was even more complicated in the case of single-parent families when the only parent has left abroad or when parents have separated the siblings taking one abroad and leaving the other one in the care of some people in Moldova: *"I was very angry with them. They took me then, but not her. She could not understand why they took me but have left her"* (girl, 16 years). However, regardless of who has left abroad – mother, father, or both parents, the migration profoundly affects children's physical and mental well-being.

The parents did not ask their children's opinions about their migration in most cases. When children asked their parent(s) about leaving, they did not get honest responses: *"I will be back quickly", "I will be right back"*. Children's opinion was not asked either when both parents decided to go abroad: *"They even did not ask us whom we wanted to stay with"* (boy, 17 years); *"They left me with strangers. They are my grandparents, but I practically did not know them. Things were changing at school, my friends were changing, and I was developing physically and mentally. The money has stolen my childhood, sometimes I regret it, sometimes I am glad"* (girl, 16 years). This is why some children have felt betrayed by their parents: *"I was 11 years old. I was very young. Now I am 15. I was angry with them then for being lied to"* (girl, 15 years).

Children's statements show that their opinion was practically not considered when deciding to leave, nor were their feelings or challenges they experienced. The research data reveal children's wish for their parents to discuss this aspect with them and, honestly, thus, help them to accept parent/parents' departure.

Parents did not prepare children for their departure abroad, only explaining that they were leaving for their sake: *"They prepared me in a way, they told me that everything they do, they do it for me, for my future"* (boy, 15 years). Thus, most parents explained to their children that their departure abroad was influenced by the attempt to offer better conditions and well-being in the future: *"Parents did not go to have fun but to work. They did it for us so that we could have a better future. They went to earn money for a house, apartment, or our education"* (girl, 16 years). Thus, it is essential to emphasise the need to instruct parents to avoid blaming children, directly or indirectly, for their migration decision.

Children's attitude about migration is only sometimes positive: *"I have a good and a bad opinion simultaneously"* (boy, 14 years); *"I do not have a good opinion about my mother's departure as it is difficult, and I would like to have her by my side. Children need their*

parents as their role is vital in our lives. I need her support and want her to always be by my side" (girl, 14 years); "I think it is awful that parents are leaving because children do not have enough support, especially during adolescence" (boy, 16 years); "I cannot be happy that my mum or dad is leaving home. There is no joy" (girl, 14 years).

This attitude results from the day-to-day experience of children left behind their emotional needs that no one met, their comparison with peers whose parents are home, etc.: "I experienced this for a few years, but my brother lived with grandparents from an early age. He lived with grandparents almost his entire life" (boy, 15 years).

When being asked about the benefits of their parents' migration, most children pointed out that these are missing: "There are no benefits, except the financial situation has improved in comparison with five years ago" (boy, 16 years); "I do not complain I am always clean and well dressed, and this is an advantage" (boy, 17 years). During the focus group discussions, children left behind mentioned that money cannot compensate for "parental care and warmth." Life is not only about material things. They mentioned, "It is complicated as not everything consists of money, and the parental warmth will always be missing" (girl, 16 years). Children pointed out multiple disadvantages of migration: "I do not have that affection for my parents as other children have. The child learns from parents everything he/she knows. The parent is the first person the child should open to" (girl, 13 years); "It is sad when the family is incomplete. You feel bad, uncomfortable like you are missing something when you do not have parents close" (boy, 14 years); "I miss my mum's support. My mother is wasting her health. Every child tries to mentally solve the problem of parent's absence and accept the issue as it is, but it affects me quite a lot" (boy, 16 years); "We do not see our parents as often as others see them" (girl, 16 years).

**Children's communication with the parents.** Information and communication technologies have brought significant changes and facilitated the communication of parents with children left behind due to migration [7]. The research data show that children communicate with their absent parent/parents almost daily, "every day," and "we talk quite often, depending on the time available." Children left in the care of relatives do it even more frequently "we talk 4–5 times a day". Communication depends on certain practices that have developed over time but also on the job peculiarities of the absent parent: "I communicate with my mum every day, but with my father, we do it in a day or two as he has a more intensive job, he is always tired, and we talk when he calls me" (girl, 14 years).

Subjects discussed refer to children's daily activities such as school and school results, extracurricular activities, health, and sometimes to their feelings and challenges they experience: "How do I feel, how is the school" (girls, 13 years); "How things go, if we are healthy and what is happening home" (boy, 14 years). Less often and only a few parents discuss the cultural peculiarities of the country they work in: "traditions existing in Italy. They tell me about the food, drinks, toys and many other things" (girls, 11 years). Communication is often reserved: "Communication was always the same, as my mum left when I was one year old, then I do not know what we were talking about, and she would only say a few words" (girl, 16 years); "I hide my problems from my mother. I do not say anything personal, that I like someone" (boy, 17 years); "Since they were not here, I could not open

up, and I realised that they are not so happy there as they have to work, and I thought that if I told them, it would make them even more upset" (girl, 13 years); "We do not discuss problems. I do not want them to know" (girl, 11 years).

On the one hand, children are afraid to express their feelings and the challenges they face, but parents also limit themselves to formal communication without revealing the issues they confront. In such circumstances, the close relatives taking care of the children sometimes have involved "grandma knows as we talk to her, and she tells our mum about" (girl, 14 years).

The social distance determines reticent communication, camouflage of the truth, and control of emotions: "It is one thing when you see your parents when you can hold and kiss your mother, but it is quite different when you talk to her and just hear her voice" (girl, 15 years). Parents' openness also triggers children's unwillingness to communicate with them. Children have also said that parents "do not often speak up," "they rarely do," revealing problems they face or "how difficult is living there." The less sincere, sometimes cold relationship between parents and children makes the latter estranged from their children while children emotionally distance themselves from their parents.

More open communication was revealed in the case of single-parent families or families divorced as a result of migration: "She tells me about the person she takes care of, and I realise that it is difficult for her, and I try to encourage her. She does not always tell me to avoid making me sad and bothering me with her problems" (boy, 16 years).

Most children participating in the research emphasised that their parents try to understand their problems. Most often, the health issues and challenges they have experienced made them realise that parents can understand them and that they must be more open: "Lately, we get along well with my mom. I had some health issues this fall. It was the first time I went to the hospital alone, scared about what would happen and what they will tell me. Now I understand that being 16 years old, and I can handle it; I mean, going alone to the doctor..." (boy, 16 years).

There are also situations when children complain that their parents fail to understand them and even fight with their parents, being at a distance: "There were a few times when we quarrelled over nothing" (boy, 14 years); "It happens that we have different points of view, and everyone stands by his opinion. I could say that the whole family, my mother, and my grandma, have character, and we all stick to our opinion. We do not give up so easily" (boy, 17 years).

Children whose parents left to work abroad prefer to tell them about their success and joy, but parents are not always the first to find out. Thus, joys are shared faster with people who are closer to children: siblings, grandparents, and after that, with parents that are at a distance.

**Parents' return home.** Parents who leave to work abroad try to come home at least once a year. Only a few do it more frequently, 2–3 times a year. Some parents return for holidays. Others, however, when having specific problems to solve: "They have something to do in Moldova" (girl, 13 years); "She comes home if, for example, we run into problems" (boy, 14 years).

Most children receive parent/parents' return home with joy as they see an enormous difference in the communication process *"talking on the phone is one thing, face to face is completely different."* Children expect parents to return home to get parental love and, in return, to give their affection. This proves that children want to enjoy themselves with their parents and experience a caring, practical, supportive attitude.

Parents' stay in Moldova is diverse, from a few weeks to 1–2 months. More important, however, is that most parents need to spend this time improving communication with their children and being with them. Parents are more interested in visiting relatives, which frustrates children as they have awaited them for a long time and would like to spend at least a little time with parents: *"When parents come home, we mostly visit relatives and dine out. My mum comes home having a schedule saying: I have to go there as I have not seen them for a while and if I do not go, they will say I am swagger"* (girl, 15 years). Although some children believe that such situations also bring benefits *"when parents come home, I see, explore half of Moldova"*, the large majority prefer to spend more time with their parents: *"I like to spend my free time with them when they are coming home"* (girl, 16 years).

**Psychosocial effects and impact on children's mental health.** The departure of one or both parents tremendously affects the emotional condition of children. Data research reveals that parents' migration has influenced various aspects of children's lives, leaving a solid mark on the parent/child attachment and the essential family emotional processes, including on children's personality development. Children's descriptions of their psychological and emotional condition after their parents' departure are given: *"Sadness, you feel bad when parents are not home. I remember how they left, the feelings and the sadness, and I feel like crying"* (boy, 14 years); *"Sadness. I miss them."* (girl, 15 years); *"Sad. I missed him a lot. If my father goes abroad, I am looking forward to his return"* (girl, 11 years); *"Desolation, because when I was little, I knew that my father was going abroad, but when I was left with my sister, grandmother, and younger brother, this sadness felt even deeper"* (boy, 15 years).

The absence of one or both parents leads to emotional suffering and temporary and broken relationships between parents and children. Affective disorders are more severe and irreversible in children left behind early. Sadness, longing, and desolation/lack are the direct consequences triggered by the absence of parents and lack of parental care. The indirect effects children avoid talking about include the lack of a safe environment, anxiety, suffering, and depression.

The departure of the parent/parents puts them in an unfavourable situation, deprived of maternal/paternal/parental affection. Emotional deprivation harms children whose parents left to work abroad, manifesting anxiety, reluctance, and hiding feelings. Children attempted to develop self-defence mechanisms: *"I tried to understand to avoid depressive episodes"* (girl, 14 years); *"Little by little, I got used to the idea, and I started to live with it"* (boy, 15 years); *"I was at the end of the forth from when my mum has left for the first time, and I thought I will be freer. Still, I quickly realised that I miss her support and understanding"* (boy, 16 years).

Children lack parental warmth and love, especially on holidays, including birthdays. Usually, in educational institutions (kindergartens, schools), children create artistic works that they present to their parents. Namely, during these holidays, children with migrant

parents can no longer control their feelings as no one comes to see them appreciate their effort. Parents do not see their struggles or their feelings. No one can hug them and express love: *"New Year, 8 March, celebrated in every institution. You sing, dance, you make an effort, and some strangers stare at you because your parents are far away making money instead of coming and supporting you, applauding"* (girl, 14 years).

The situation is similar when parents do not spend with their children even the most essential family holidays – Christmas, Easter, etc.: *"Holidays are to be spent with the family. Children whose parents are in Moldova celebrate together in the family with their parents. And we, those whose parents are abroad, do not have this opportunity to feel that family spirit. It is not a sorrow neither a pain; we miss it"* (girl, 16 years). Even worse, some children have not celebrated their birthdays with the family for several years: *"I did not celebrate my birthday with the family since I was 10, more than six years ago"* (boy, 17 years). In this context, it is essential to emphasise that not only children are deprived of their parent's love and affection, but also their parents. Parents do not have the opportunity to be with children and enjoy their achievements every day.

During the focus group discussions, children mentioned that migration affected their family unity: *"My parents have divorced. I do not talk to my father because he does not want to, I am renting now, and the woman I am staying with takes care of me", "my parents have divorced. My mother has been working in Italy for 15 years, and I live with my grandparents"* (boy, 14 years). The situation mentioned by participants in the focus group discussions is typical for about 30–40% of their peers.

An important aspect is that migration has not only influenced the break-up of the relationship between parents but also, most often, their communication with the child: *"My father is deprived of parental rights", including the child's communication with the relatives "after my parents split, maternal relatives do not talk to me. I do not know what happened, but my father's relatives do not talk to me either"* (boy, 14 years).

Parents' absence thus contributes to growing up faster, controlling emotions *"we are more reserved"*, too contradictory feelings, and to certain independence.

Children participating in the research mentioned their losses from parents' migration: childhood, affection, and parental education: *"Being still a child, I have lost faith in people"* (girl, 15 years). At the same time, they tried to identify positive aspects of their parent/parents' departure abroad: *"I started to read, to understand adults, their way of thinking and how do I think"* (girl, 16 years); *"We have (me and my brother) a financially secure life"* (boy, 15 years). Still, the heart of these children is full of defiance and often anger: *"I blamed money because they (parents) left me, left me for money. I cursed money as money is not everything. However, there will always be financial problems"* (girl, 16 years).

Children express disagreement with their parent's behaviour. In the case of certain children, this disagreement is expressed through the refusal to communicate while others show deviant behaviour. During the focus group discussions, the participants gave examples of peers who showed their disapproval of their parents' departure: *"A seventh-grade girl wants to be with her mum, and since she is gone, she misbehaves. She said she would not have decent behaviour until her mother was turning back"* (girl, 14 years).



Some children became attached to their grandparents. They try to get along with them, be obedient, and help them in difficult situations, even if they require emotional support and help. Children have learned to do things on their while longing for the parental love they do not have.

Data collected from children show that their parents' departure emotionally affects them through lack of care, love from parents, and feelings of sadness, regret, and longing. Feelings experienced by children whose parents left abroad prove that the nuclear family is seriously affected and does not provide the necessary support for the child's harmonious development: i) does not ensure security, protection, and emotional support, love from parents; ii) raises challenges that hinder socialisation; iii) creates challenges related to child's attachment but also the feeling of belonging and cohesion to a particular family.

The mentioned above influenced the behaviour of these children, who said that: *"I became even more introverted"* (girl, 13 years); *"I am a more independent person, and I want to solve my problems by myself. I am quite introverted and do not like sharing my secrets and fears with others. I can rarely confess to my mother or elder brother"* (girl, 14 years).

The research outcomes show that children deprived of parental care due to the migration experience more emotional problems and face more pressure from society than their peers who enjoy the love and support of their parents.

**Physical health and aspects of health education.** Most children pointed out that they are in *"good"* health condition. Only a few children reported headaches, backaches, and vision problems due to online learning. Although they have health issues, children do not always inform their migrant parents about them. Certain children stressed that they talk about this to: *"My grandmother as she takes care of me"* (girl, 13 years).

Parents' absence affects the check-up schedule because children go to the doctor once a year, rarely twice a year. This fact does not enable the early identification of health problems until it is too late.

Most of the parents left to work abroad, besides neglecting their responsibility for the regular check-up of the child, have also failed discussions about sex education in children. However, the latter need truthful information about their age and understanding capacity. Appropriate sex education is essential in reducing the risks of unprotected sexual intercourse. The lack of this knowledge is the leading cause of sexually transmitted diseases with a significant impact on reproductive health.

Most children reported no discussions with their parents regarding health education in general and sex education, in particular. Being asked about sexual maturity, some children said that this is characterised by *"physical changes."* In contrast, the others focused only on: *"You have better opportunities, you can go to the club, you can drive a car"* (boy, 14 years). The sources of information for these children on this subject are: i) school *"we are being told at school"*; ii) individual sources identified by children *"I figured it out on my own"*; *"I studied it on my own"*; iii) very rarely parent *"my mum tackles the subject, and she tells me"*.

**Future plans.** Parents' absence also affects the discussion and choice of children's careers. The large majority of children participating in the research said they do not know what career path to pursue in the future: *"I have not thought of this yet"* (girl, 11 years);

"I have not decided yet" (boy, 14 years); "I still do not know and the idea of thinking about the job I would like to have scares me" (girl, 13 years). This shows that most parents, intentionally or unintentionally, neglect their children's future.

Regarding their distant future, several children said they see it outside the country: "Most likely abroad because in Moldova, you do not have the chance to do what you want, and there are no opportunities" (girl, 13 years). The others underlined that they would continue their education and stay in their country of origin: "I will stay in Moldova because I love my country" (girl, 15 years). A few children who had the opportunity to visit their parents abroad mentioned that they want to stay in Moldova because: "They have a different mindset abroad (Italy)" (boy, 16 years); "I would like to go to Italy, with my father and the whole family, but only to visit" (girl, 11 years).

If they had the opportunity to change something in their lives that affects their future, children mentioned that they would do everything so that their parents would not go abroad or leave when they are "more mature" leave for "shorter" periods. They must return home as often as possible: "My parents left when I was very young; maybe they should have done this later and come home more often during the year" (girl, 14 years); "I was young, and I did not understand that my mum was leaving. She left me; I mean, she left me for a long period. Only growing up, I realised she will work to ensure a better future for her and me" (boy, 16 years); "I think it is good if the parents do not go abroad for more than 3–4 years, as it should not be a long period. Because the child learns everything, he/she knows from the parent. The parent is the first person to whom the child can tell anything" (girl, 13 years). According to children, these moments would influence their personality, but also the relationships they now have with their parents "it would influence my character and way of thinking but also my love for them". Some children said they would be honest with their future kids: "I would tell them how I feel, what I do, what I like, and what makes me sad" (girl, 16 years).

If children were in their parents' shoes, they would decide to migrate together and leave with the entire family: "If I were my father, I would take my family. It is better to have your family near whatever you are. You take your family, and afterwards, you settle in that country. The children go to school, and you go to work, and everything is good when the family is together" (boy, 16 years); "I would take my entire family because it is a big mistake to leave your children in the care of someone else, regardless of circumstances. I think the child who does not live with his parents will require more attention and affection in the future as he missed it" (girl, 16 years); "I will not make my child experience what I went through. I would not have the courage my parents had" (girl, 15 years).

**Suggestions of children left behind by migration to the authorities and peers in a similar situation.** Children participating in the research submitted the following suggestions to the authorities:

– to acknowledge the importance of raising children by their parents: "I think the laws should focus on this aspect and take into account children as they represent the future of the Republic of Moldova, as well as to realise the need of every child for parental support encouraging parents to stay home" (boy, 16 years);

– to carry out various extracurricular activities in the educational institutions: *"We could simply talk to each other, influence younger children in a similar situation and explain to them that the parents are not to be blamed for this situation"* (girl, 14 years);

– psychological support from school psychologists or reliable people: *"There should be someone in the school to advise children"* (girl, 15 years);

– to create jobs: *"We should talk to those who make the law about creating more jobs, and perhaps our parents would stay in Moldova"* (boy, 16 years);

– better salaries: *"There are many vacancies in Moldova, but the problem does not lie in the job but in the salary. My parents have left hoping to find a higher salary and better opportunities to provide a living"* (boy, 15 years);

– to keep a record of children left behind, providing support to those who need it: *"There are families with 3–4 children, where parents left abroad, the situation is complicated there. I know a family from the neighbouring village I lived before, and their mother works in Turkey. They were being cared for by their grandpa and had nothing to eat for a while because their mother did not send money"* (girl, 16 years).

Advice for other children whose parents left abroad: *"To accept the idea and avoid being angry with parents, understanding that it is also difficult to them as it is for us"* (girl, 15 years); *"To avoid being upset and continue to love their parents as they did before"* (boy, 17 years); *"To wait and be patient and maybe one day a miracle will happen, and the parents will return home"* (girl, 16 years); *"Not to make a big deal of the fact that their parents left to work abroad, but simply to accept that parents will not stay there for good, they will return home anyway"* (boy, 16 years).

**Discussion and conclusions.** The perception of parents' migration of the children left behind migration depends on several factors: who has left, the children's age when they were left, parent(s) migration period, the person taking care of the children because of migration, friends, and their support.

The research data attest to the positive impact on children's well-being; however, children are affected psychologically. The psychological impact on children left behind is characterised by loneliness, lack of affection, and emotional deprivation, supplemented by early maturity and anxiety. Children are frustrated not only because they cannot receive affection but also because they are to provide it. These emotional disadvantages leave a mark on the child's mental development by influencing self-perception and impeding the social integration and assimilation of social roles. The child's communication with his parent(s) through technical means reduces the effects of emotional deprivation.

The problems and difficulties that children must face make them think of their values and future. Thus, the family and its integrity are at the top of their priorities.

The research reveals that peers and sometimes teachers do not understand children left behind. Support networks for these children are less developed and prove the necessity to undertake new measures within the educational institution in order to reduce the negative impact of migration on children: i) compulsory introduction of psychological services that would help both children with migrant parents and children that have parents in Moldova, to provide them necessary support; ii) organising social activities to reduce loneliness and

increase the level of communication; iii) working out and disseminating various information sources for teachers and other professionals; etc.

Keeping a record, monitoring, and protecting children left behind due to migration by social workers, teachers, etc., even though it was stipulated by Law No. 140 in 2013, still represents a challenge. Also, the forms of support and social services provided to children are less developed and limited to some civil society organisations' initiatives.

Finally, improving communication between parents and children is essential. Parents should be guided to be more sensitive to the subjects discussed by the children before and after their migration.

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