

Foreignland: **Dreamland or Nightmare?**

Research study on the migration phenomenon from Oas

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About FRCCF

The Romanian Foundation for Children, Community and Family is a Romanian non-governmental organization whose mission is to protect the rights of the child, stressing the active and responsible role of the family, the community and the State.

All FRCCF's projects promote the child's best interest and ensure to every child their right to physical and mental health and development, the right to be raised in a family, as well as all the other rights stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Romania in 1990.

FRCCF implements different types of projects in the counties of Cluj, Bihor, Salaj, Maramures and Satu Mare: urban community development projects, rural community development projects and childcare institution-based projects.

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FORWARD

The migration phenomenon, triggered by social and economic factors, has greatly developed in the last couple of years.

The number of legal or illegal migrants to Western Europe has significantly increased in some parts of Romania. As far as the region of Oas is concerned, in every second family at least one family member has left for another country (as said by the families interviewed by FRCCF). The indirect consequence of this trend is that a series of children have gone abroad, accompanied or not by their guardians, and have had to face great difficulties at times or even committed crimes.

In 2004, representatives of French authorities and NGO's visited the county of Satu Mare, driven by the growing migration phenomenon and the isolation and risks migrant children were exposed to abroad. The visits aimed at contacting Satu Mare county child protection authorities, institutions and non-governmental organizations in order to start joint projects targeting prevention of migration, child trafficking and exploitation dangers. According to the French authorities, a rising number of Romanian children are found in France, unaccompanied by their parents or another family member. Migration can lead children to dangerous situations or even trafficking. The way children get abroad, the relationship they have with their parents and the importance they give to money can make them end up in difficult positions with great impact on their health, their personal development and future.

Many of these migrant children are from Oas, which means the actions should focus on this region. FRCCF tries to draw attention on the risks unaccompanied children migrating to Western Europe are exposed to through a high-scale child migration prevention campaign. As mentioned above, migrant children sometimes end up in difficult situations or are even trafficked. The county of Satu Mare is the promoter of a child migration and trafficking risks prevention project, carried out in the region of Oas.

Child trafficking has become a reality nowadays. Migrant children, unaccompanied by their parents or by any other family member, get in the hands of traffickers who use them for criminal acts.

Our research highlights the great impact community issues, the system of values and migration, mainly the risks under age children are exposed to abroad, can have on a child's development. The child protection authorities and NGO's must take action and prevent child migration dangers. They must break the silence about the risky situations migrant children can find themselves into abroad.

Summary

In order to identify the high migration risk areas from the region of Oas, we have gathered information about the number of children and adults who migrate, their reasons for going abroad and local authorities' interest to start a migration prevention project.

Eight Oas communes were visited as potential project locations, but only four of them (Bixad, Calinesti-Oas, Gherta Mica, Târsolt) were eventually selected based on the following criteria: high number of unaccompanied children abroad, high number of school children, and local authorities open to child migration and trafficking issues.

Due to the scale of the phenomenon and the seriousness of child migration consequences, in July 2004, FRCCF started a child migration and trafficking prevention project, in partnership with UNICEF, Terre des Hommes and the French organisation Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement (CCDF).

The project had two goals: to prevent the child migration and trafficking dangers in the region of Oas and to provide viable alternatives to children at risk of migration. This very research study brought relevant information, which helped the project team in its later actions.

Our efforts focused on the following issues:

- Raise awareness of and inform local communities;
- Develop a county child migration and trafficking prevention network;
- Set up an intervention team of experts which would use specific tools in preventing child migration and trafficking;
- Develop partnerships with INGO's to prevent the child migration and trafficking phenomenon;
- Start local information and counselling offices to deliver social services related to child migration and trafficking.

Two training sessions were organised for the project experts, aiming at getting them acquainted with the best practices in the field and the Terre des Hommes practical guidelines drawn up for the NGO's who fight child trafficking. An experience exchange to Albania was also organised for better understanding the project actions. The project team and three representatives of partner authorities had the chance to see, for a week, how Terre des Hommes Albania child migration and trafficking experts worked in different parts of the country (focusing mainly on the widespread child trafficking phenomenon). At the roundtables from Albania, Terre des Hommes experts shared their four-year experience in the field and talked about the relationship they had with the authorities and the beneficiary families.

Informative prints were distributed to raise awareness on child migration and trafficking risks. Information and counselling offices were set up in the four project locations to

provide social care, legal and psychological counselling services. The project social workers, the psychologist and the community workers organised children focus groups in schools. The groups concentrated on the prevention of the dangers unaccompanied children are exposed to abroad.

The children / youngsters who want to come back home are now helped reenrol in school and reintegrate in the community. They receive social and medical care, psychological and legal counselling as well as representation in court if they have been charged with criminal acts.

As there are few schooling, training, and employment opportunities for young people in the region, migration to Western Europe has become an alternative which gives them the chance to get an education, professional training, a job and later residency papers.

On the other hand, in the region of Oas the living standard is higher than in other rural areas, which shows that, after all, migration has a positive impact on the economic growth of the region.

1. Research Study Purpose

The French authorities have recorded a great number of unaccompanied children in France, who are committing crimes like stealing, begging and prostitution. The research carried out to find out the home countries of these children has showed that more than a third of them, 841 children, are Romanian. Over 80% of these Romanian children, in other words 675 of them, committed crimes (according to 2001-2003 data received from the French Association Parada¹). Moreover, 38% (257) of these 675 children come from Oas and Maramures.

Oas is a historical region located in the north of Romania, in the County of Satu-Mare, right at the border with the County of Maramures. Local people and experts disagree on the number of settlements that the region is made of. Some say the region is made up of eight communes, while others believe it comprises 16 communes. Nevertheless, according to both theories, the four locations (Bixad, Calinesti-Oas, Gherta Mica and Târsolt) where our research study has been run belong to the Oas region. Therefore, we think that some of our remarks and conclusions apply to the whole region.

The purpose of this study is *to better understand the scale and the roots of the child migration phenomenon*. We researched the above-mentioned four locations, where FRCCF works, to find out:

1. The number of children who have left the villages and their current whereabouts;
2. What makes Oas children migrate;
3. What makes the parents let their children go abroad, sometimes unaccompanied by a grown-up.

¹ Parada France: *Soutien aux mineurs roumains en situation de rue et sans referent parental, Mars 2002 – Decembre 2003 (Supporting Romanian Unaccompanied Children Living in the Streets, March 2002 – December 2003)*

To find the answers to these questions and find out the scale and development of the Oas child migration phenomenon, we decided to look at the way of living and the way of thinking of the adults and children from the four researched locations.

2. Study Methodology and Limitations

To set off this study, we gathered all the information, the studies, and other documents researching the migration phenomenon from the region of Oas (see Bibliography). We paid visits to Satu Mare county and local authorities, to the schools and churches from the villages where a great number of migrant children/families had been recorded. Based on these pieces of information, we decided on the proper research (quantitative and qualitative) methods and developed the working tools (questionnaires, interview guidelines, activity reports, database, etc.), all described later in the study.

The data were gathered between September and November 2004 in the four locations that had been chosen for research and intervention: Bixad, Calinesti-Oas, Gherta Mica and Târsolt. Eight local community workers, two sociologists, two social workers, and a psychologist collected all the field data. We also received statistical data from local town halls and schools.

Working Tools

A. Statistical data from local public institutions

We gathered demographic data regarding population, age groups – based on the 1992 and 2002 censuses –, employment, the number of households, the number of private businesses, the number of building permits, and the number of registered still running vehicles. We also tried to find how many social files had been forwarded between 2001-2004 and the number of families benefiting from Law 416 on the guaranteed minimum income, which could be accessed by no income or low-income families.

All the data were provided by the four **town halls**, based on a standard form that we had drawn up. **Appendix A** includes the standard form we used.

The **schools** were asked to provide statistical data related to the number of secondary school children (5th – 8th graders), the number of children with subject matter or grade retentions, the number of dropouts, the number of school children having passed the 8th grade exit exams, and school children's absence records between 1998-2004. The reason why we asked for data starting from 1998 was because the local people seemed to agree that that was the year when the child migration phenomenon started in the region. Most of them said the phenomenon started around 1998 and developed in 2002, once the visa requirements to enter Western European countries were abolished for all Romanian citizens.

After long insisting, we managed to receive only some partial school data from the four locations, as apparently there were no school data archives. The form used to gather statistical data is enclosed as **Appendix B**.

Still, it is important to mention that the **police** of one of the communes gave us three-year retroactive data regarding children abroad.

B. Questionnaires applied to locals

Questionnaires were applied to see how the subjects perceived the problems their community was facing, the values they followed, the place and role of children in their system of values, the number of adults and children working abroad, the overall standard of living. Some questionnaire data could be compared with national data. The questionnaire is enclosed as **Appendix C**.

The sample is balanced from the point of view of the main demographic indicators. The age average is 45.6, with a standard deviation of 0.49. The youngest subject was 18 years old, and the oldest was 85 years old. Most of the interviewed subjects were 37 year-olds. As to gender, men were slightly outnumbered. 56% of the subjects were women and 44%, men.

As far as employment goes, many of the interviewed people were unemployed; they were either taking care of the house or were retired. Most of our employed subjects worked in farming, constructions, as state employees, salesmen, teachers or ran their own business.

At first, we thought of using a 600-people sample (see Table 1), but we later cut it to 500, due to lack of time or increasing de-motivation (triggered by the interviewees' unfriendly attitude and many locals' refusal to cooperate) of the community workers applying the questionnaires.

Gathering data using questionnaires was a hard thing to do. We had to face two obstacles, which made the data less representative statistically. The first one was the great number of locals' refusing to answer to our questions, and the other was the fact that many house owners were abroad when the questionnaires were applied.

According to the instructions, the poll operators (the FRCCF community workers) were supposed to visit a household, selected based on the statistical step, three times, at different hours. If there was nobody home, they had to go back one house. For each village, the statistical step was worked out by dividing the number of houses to the number of questionnaires to be applied. Thus, the smallest statistical step was five, and the biggest, ten.

According to the community workers, there were houses where they didn't manage to talk to anybody because there was nobody home. After asking around, they would find out nobody was living there at the time as everybody had gone to work abroad.

Sometimes, the poll operators were turned down. Some of the questionnaires were not fully answered because the subjects refused to go on (the questionnaire was just three-page long and it could be applied in about 15 minutes). Some refusals were strangely aggressive. The community workers were threatened that if they got inside the courtyard the owner would let the dogs out. Other community workers had to help around (carry

potato bags, for example) for some answers. Therefore, some of the questionnaires comprise no-answers.

This refusal and no-answer tendencies of the people from Oas differ a lot from the attitudes recorded in other researched country areas. In Romania, the rural environment refusal rate is generally low as compared to the urban rate. Villagers have a positive reaction when someone tries to talk to them because they get to feel important and they feel that their opinion matters. Another rural environment common feature is that once the subject has agreed to fill in a questionnaire, it is highly unlikely that he wants to stop during the interview. Sometimes, even the passers-by are asking the interviewer: Will you come to us too? Why don't you talk to me as well?

The four rural locations where the questionnaire was applied are unusual from this point of view. Some of the subjects would insist with questions like: Why are you asking me that?, How will you use the information I give you?, Why do you want to know?. A poll operator was even threatened: he was told that if something happened to the subject's child, who was in France, he would bear all the blame; the subject went so far as to say he knew where the community worker applying the questionnaire was living and would aggress him physically. Obviously, the matter we approached was a sore point with those communities and their biggest fear was that the family members abroad (some there illegally) would be sent back home. The community workers noticed that some of the interviewees gave false answers and were reluctant to talk about their household and the family members abroad.

Table 1. Initial and final sample

Commune	Village	Number of houses	Proposed sample	Final sample	Notes
Bixad	Bixad	700	70	45	
	Boinesti	520	40	20	
	Trip Bai	600	70	29	
Calinesti-Oas	Calinesti	333	80	60	We could get only data regarding the number of households, thus the sample was set based on these.
	Coca	706	40	32	
	Lechinta	243	30	30	
	Pasunea Mare	84	10	11	
Gherta Mica	Gherta Mica	890	130	118	
Târsolt	Târsolt (and Aliceni hamlet)	800	130	109	
<i>Total</i>		<i>4,876</i>	<i>600</i>	<i>454</i>	

We couldn't employ external poll operators, as initially wanted, due to lack of funds. Therefore, the questionnaires were applied by the project community workers, who were

living in the very communes where the study was run. To get a greater number of answers and avoid expected responses as a result of many opinion questions, each community worker applied questionnaires in other communes than the one he/she was living in.

Another problem was the attitude of some community workers, who felt highly uncomfortable as poll operators. They seemed reluctant to this work. This was clear when we suggested that one of us, the sociologists, should apply questionnaires as well to win some time. One community worker replied: it would be better if she didn't humiliate herself as well. Another community worker quit, saying she wouldn't go on with the questionnaires. The numerous negative reactions of the local people made applying the questionnaires de-motivating for most community workers.

All these mean that the processed questionnaire data cannot be considered highly significant from a statistical point of view for the four communes and the entire region of Oas. Nevertheless, the project team learned a lot from this experience. As the data proved to be useful and relevant, we decided to include them in our migration phenomenon research study.

C. Interviews with key community people

A series of semi-structured interviews were run with key community people. We had been told they were opinion leaders or were always in contact with the rest of the community (teachers, for example). The aims of these interviews were: to follow up real child migration or trafficking cases, to find out how community members perceived each other, to see what they thought of children or adults working abroad, to learn more about migration reasons and target migration countries, as well as how community members kept in touch with those abroad. Our subjects were mayors, teachers, policemen and parents whose children were suspected to have been sent abroad or trafficked.

These people, mainly the secondary school teachers and school headmasters, looked quite open and ready to talk about everything.

In spite of having agreed to do the interview, some subjects avoided certain matters, especially those related to adults working abroad and migrated children. Some answers were expected. We could call this phenomenon the law of silence. You can find the interview guidelines enclosed as **Appendix D**.

D. Children Focus Groups

We talked to children in order to find out their opinions about four matters: school, family, community and migration.

Hence, we organised four focus groups (one in each location), attended by 10 to 15 secondary school children (a total of 50 children). We selected a school in each commune and we asked the teachers to pick children from each school grade, girls and boys equally, who were open and talkative; we wanted to talk to children with good school results and also to children with bad marks. As a general rule, many children wanted to

take part in these groups because it was something new to them. Others wanted to be a part of it so that they could miss some classes.

The biggest sample distortion regarded the school results of the participants, as most children we talked to had very good grades and wanted to go to school. We can assume that the teachers chose their best students so that we could think highly of their school. Some of the teachers were curious to find out what we would talk about with the children, insisting on participating too, although we had made the aim of these focus groups clear to them. Three of these four focus groups were successful, but one didn't reach its initial goal. You can find the focus group interview guidelines enclosed as **Appendix E**.

The children were the most honest interviewees of the research study. Among other things, we approached matters which some adults were reluctant to, matters related to the children's parents – most of them working abroad –, to their wish to go abroad or stay home in the future, to some of their colleagues who had gone abroad. During the four groups, the most uncomfortable topic concerned children and adults committing crimes abroad. We realised that all the children had information about that, but did not dare to speak up. When a child agreed to talk about it, the other children would get noisy, signing him to stop talking or softening his points of view.

In one of the focus groups, we didn't manage to establish with the children the trusting relationship we needed. The various methods we used didn't help us create a feeling of mutual trust, therefore we ended the interview there. It may have been a space organisation error. This was the only school where we forgot about desks and we sat all on chairs, in a circle. We think the children were not used to find themselves in an open obstacle-free space like that. Some of the children admitted they would like to answer the questions but they were too nervous to do it. We could hear their voice tremble when they were talking. We do have to mention that in the other schools, the children sat behind their desks, in a circle or semi-circle.

Another theory to the children's inhibition is the behaviour of the teacher who had selected them. This is merely a supposition that we cannot prove, but we did notice that the teacher was quite nervous and he didn't behave properly. Before starting the focus group, we talked a little to settle some organisation and context details right (the meeting room, who will lock the room at the end of our meeting, how the children had reacted to our invitation, etc.). The teacher was calm and friendly to us. During our conversation, a child, who was going to take part in the group, came in and the teacher was very nice to him too. However, after we finished our talk and we headed to the room, one of the colleagues saw the teacher raising his voice to the children that we were about to talk to. Moreover, the teacher was very surprised to find out it was not necessary of him to be in the room during our meeting.

E. Direct observations

In some cases, this was the only method that helped us find information about some delicate matters, like the activities and experiences that migrant children and adults lived

abroad. Sometimes, the individual or group interviews inhibited our subjects, as the setting was too formal. For this reason, we counted a lot on the field observations and experience of the project team, especially on those of the social workers and community workers.

3. Community Issues

Generally, people move or change their job for new opportunities, for a better life. As to the region where we have run our research, besides the above-mentioned reasons, we can also talk about a century-old tradition of working away from home.

Because most of the labour force from the researched settlements was working abroad, we decided to ask our subjects to name the three most serious issues that their community was facing. We asked open questions so that our subjects would feel free to name any problem. We looked at these aspects using a reverse, slightly speculative reasoning: we could say that if those problems were solved, people would lead a better life in their home community and they wouldn't go abroad anymore.

Further on we will list the problems that have been mentioned, but first we should make two remarks:

- Due to the particularity of the sample, the data are relevant mainly for farmers, unemployed people taking care of the house or pensioners.
- Considering that the population of these communes is of all ages, we can say that the category missing from our sample is the working population, as most of it works abroad.

1. Bixad

If we consider all the three problems that our subjects named and we ignore the cases where no problem was mentioned (25.6%), we could say that in Bixad the problem perceived as the most serious is road infrastructure (25.2% of answers), then the running water issue (13% of the answers) and connection to the gas distribution network (12.2%). The lack of a landfill and street lighting or the dirty streets were among other things named as serious problems.

2. Calinesti-Oas

In Calinesti-Oas, the first two problems are the same as in Bixad, although a higher number of people mentioned them than in the previous commune. Hence, almost a quarter of the interviewees mentioned bad road infrastructure (29.2%), and 16.8% lack of running water as serious problems. The third problem, which came very close to the second one, was unemployment and low wages (14.9% of answers); this was mentioned in all the other communes, but in Calinesti-Oas it seemed to have a bigger impact.

3. Gherta Mica

Using the same methodology, we can say that in Gherta Mica the most serious problem is also bad road infrastructure (30.6%), then connection to the gas distribution network (21.1% of answers) and the running water issue (16.6%).

4. In the Târsolt commune, of all problems, bad roads came first (25.2%). The second serious problem was running water, and the third was an issue specific solely to this commune – lack of shared pastures for animals.

Hence, the data show that the population thinks the most important problem regards infrastructure, in other words bad roads, which need paving, cobbling, water drainage ditches and bridge reinforcement. The running water issue seemed to be of second concern, after the road issues; the respondents suggested that water supply connection works should start or be finished where they had been started already. A third serious issue was the lack of connection to the gas distribution network.

Having analysed other research studies, we could say that this sort of problems is common to rural communities. Most of Romanian communes lack running water, gas and their roads are in a very bad shape.

In all the four locations, street lighting, lack of connection to the electricity network and of landfill were named as still to be solved problems. As far as waste disposal is concerned, many talked about the problem of garbage being thrown straight in the streets of the village.

The economic problems seemed to be of secondary importance. Except for Calinesti-Oas and to a certain extent Gherta Mica, the people from the other communes don't see the low wages issue as a significant problem.

Some subjects did mention school as a problem, due to bad-shaped facilities and lack of kindergartens (especially afternoon-care kindergartens). Some of the interviewees also said that children had problems getting to school. However, only thirty-one people, in other words 2.8% of all, talked about school or children issues.

Other problems named were lack of public and landline telephones, cable TV, of proper medical care (including drugstores, clinics, medication). Some also mentioned the lack of shops in the commune as a problem. To get more details on community issues, you can have a look at **Appendix F**.

Another question on community issues concerned **who was responsible for solving the problems**. Those who answered this question said that the mayor (78.2%), the government (8.2%) or the parliament should solve the problems they had named. It is worth mentioning that only 2.2% of the respondents cared about the role of the community in problem-solving: 8 subjects alone considered that the problem they had mentioned is the responsibility of both the community and the town hall, and 11 people thought that everyone in the community should get directly involved in solving their community problems.

4. Standard of Living

We started off from the **hypothesis** that the living standard of the people from Oas is higher than in other rural areas of the country, due to the income people get from working abroad.

We asked the respondents to (subjectively) estimate their income. Most of them (43.6%) think their income covers only their basic needs. Others (34.8%) say their income does not even cover their basic needs.

Table 2. Subjective income estimates

How do you estimate your family's current income?	Percentage
1. It does not even cover our basic needs.	34.8%
2. It covers only our basic needs.	43.6%
3. It provides us a decent living, but we cannot afford expansive goods.	17.5%
4. We afford some expansive goods, but there are things we cannot buy.	3.2%
5. We can afford everything we need without any restriction.	0.9%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.00%</i>

If we take a look at the minimum incomes the inhabitants of the four communes think as necessary for their living, we can see that they are way above the Romanian minimum wage. Thus, at the end of 2004, the minimum wage was 2,800,000 ROL, which is around 70 Euros. The minimum wage is worked out taking into account the daily minimum consumption basket, in other words the goods and services an individual needs per month. When asked: "What is the minimum amount your family needs for living?", many named amounts in Euros, not in the Romanian currency. The interviews have pointed out that the people working as bricklayers in Oas earn about 100 Euros a day. The FRCCF research studies² carried out in four Transylvanian towns (Cluj-Napoca, Satu-Mare, Cîmpia Turzii and Oradea) on a sample of 1,472 needy families, benefiting from the FRCCF family helper projects, revealed that a bricklayer's daily wage is between 6 and 30 Euros. Comparing these data, we can see that somebody from Oas earns ten times more than somebody from another part of the country for the very same work.

Almost a quarter (23%) of the respondents stated they needed over 200 Euros per month per household for running costs (see Table 3). We noticed the people from these communes earned or at least were used to such big amounts when talking to them as well. A teacher told us that when she was trying to motivate her school children to learn Mathematics using practical problems, like "if you have this amount of money in your bank account and you have this interest, how much money will you have by the end of the year?", one of the children worked out the problem but then asked the teacher "what am I supposed to do with 1.5 million ROL [45 Euros approximately]? My mother brings home 1,000 Euros. What's a 1.5 million ROL?".

Table 3. Minimum income

The monthly minimum income per person your family needs for living...	Percentage
100 Euros (4 million ROL)	43.4%
Between 100-150 Euros (4.01-6 million ROL)	24.0%
Between 151-200 Euros (6.01-8 million ROL)	9.0%

² Statistics on the families enrolled in FRCCF family helper projects, March 2004

Over 200 Euros (8 million ROL)	23.6%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

38% of the respondents think they are living better now than before 1990 (see Table 4). A long-time tradition in Oas is competing with your relatives and neighbours for having more expansive goods, bigger houses, etc. Sociological studies have repeatedly showed that, generally, when people are asked to compare what they have with their neighbours they think they live pretty much as well as the latter. In our case as well, half of the interviewees believe they live just like their neighbours, but almost a third of them say they live better. This is the reason why we think the competition regarding the way of living and owned goods that people talk about is real in the locations researched in Oas.

Table 4. Living standard comparison

Your living standard as compared to ...	Before 1990 (the communist regime)	Your neighbours'
Better	38.0%	31.2%
The same	35.8%	50.1%
Worse	26.2%	18.7%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

If we look at the goods the respondents own, we see that some of them are more common in these four rural areas than in others: cell phones, cars and automatic washing machines. A rural barometer³ made in December 2002 – February 2003 tells us that only a third of the country's rural population owns a cell phone compared to half of the inhabitants from our sample locations. Another national poll⁴, including towns and the capital, suggests that 28% of Romanian households own an automatic washing machine. As to our sample, 38.4% of households have an automatic washing machine.

The poll operators said that people were finding it hard to declare their goods. When asked if they had a cell phone, they would wait for a minute to think whether they should declare it or not. They had the same reaction when it came to cars: some looked at the garage and if their car could not be seen they preferred to say they didn't have one. One of the community workers knew for sure the respondent had a car but, still, the latter didn't declare it.

Table 5. Consumer goods

Do you have ...	Yes	You cannot afford it	You don't want it
A cell phone	65.3%	25.8%	8.8%
A car	35.3%	55.2%	9.5%
A computer	6.7%	71.7%	21.6%
Internet	1.3%	74.2%	24.4%
Modern heating equipment	4.9%	83.1%	12.0%

³ Open Society Foundation, *Rural Barometer*, 2002-2003 (www.osf.ro)

⁴ Open Society Foundation, *Public Opinion Barometer*, May 2003 (www.osf.ro)

An automatic washing machine	38.4%	58.7%	2.9%
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The biggest part of the money earned from working abroad is invested in house repairs back home. 92.2% of the subjects renovated their house after 1990. 83.6% of the renovations and house constructions were made after 1999. As years go by, a growing number of people renovate their houses. 17.4% houses were renovated in 2004 alone.

15.9% of the interviewees did not tell us what the renovations consisted of. From the answers we got, we found out that most of them had run exterior and interior finishing: painting, plastering, tile layering, wood flooring or roof retiling. They renovated the bathroom and the kitchen, built stoves, introduced running water in the house and installed thermopane windows. In 43 cases (11% of the respondents), we were told they were building a new house or expanding the old one.

From the town hall data we found out that, between 1998-2004, 20% of the households from Calinesti-Oas, 13% from Gherta Mica, and 6% from Târsolt filed applications for building permits. As far as the communes Calinesti-Oas and Gherta Mica are concerned, the highest number of applications was filed in 2001 (51 applications in Calinesti-Oas, 42 applications in Gherta Mica) and 2002 (112 applications in Calinesti-Oas, 31 in Gherta Mica).

Table 6. Number of applications for building permit

Year	Calinesti-Oas	Gherta Mica	Târsolt
1998	14	16	4
1999	19	28	7
2000	19	9	3
2001	51	42	9
2002	112	31	12
2003	19	30	10
2004	45	10	15

Note: No data available for Bixad

The way people use these houses is most interesting. The following quote is relevant in this respect: "I've talked to someone. I said, you have a big and beautiful house, all set up, and you're living in the one-room summerhouse. Why do you crowd your family in there? « I live in the big house only for holidays. I don't want to make a mess there or break anything. » That's a crystal house for them that they just dust from time to time; very few live in their big house or say they've built the house to live in ... Many houses stay empty while they're living there, in that small summerhouse which has one room. If someone comes, they can show off with what they have, the big house, all the goods, the custom-made furniture, which cost millions of ROL, thousands of Euros. They take you to the big house...look what we've done, look at our bathroom. The neighbours are coming to ask you what you've done in the house, but actually all they wanna do is spy on you. If he has a two-tower roof, I'll make a six-tower roof for my house; if he has two stories and attics, I'll have three stories. I've noticed this sort of competition. The people from Oas are a bit proud; I reckon they are really proud. But there's a good side to it

‘cause the village blossoms. You build a big, strong, beautiful house and the village already looks better... The only problem is they don't live in them, they build them for nothing.”

The houses they build are really luxurious, some have even elevators. They are not built to be practical and useful, but as a proof of the owner's social status and wealth. Apparently some houses are big and beautiful on the outside, plastered and endowed with thermopane windows, but they are not finished off on the inside and they are impossible to live in. The exterior matters the most as it shows how rich the family is.

5. The System of Values

To better understand the mentality of the people from Oas, we tried to see how important some values were to them and what the adult community members were thinking of some children's rights issues.

A national public opinion barometer⁵ used a set of questions regarding values important to individuals. We replicated the questions to compare Romanians' mentality to that of the people from our four communities.

Table 7.a Values important for succeeding in life, Oas

How important is it for someone from Oas ...	Very important	Important	Quite important	Not really important	Not important at all
To be born in a rich family?	25.1%	24.2%	17.4%	22.4%	11%
To have luck/opportunities?	73.4%	23.1%	2.9%	0.4%	0.2%
To believe in God?	95.8%	4%	0%	0.2%	0%
To have connections?	44.5%	38.4%	12.4%	3.6%	1.1%
To be intelligent/smart?	66.6%	26.9%	5.3%	0.7%	0.4%
To look good?	25.7%	26.4%	22.1%	20%	5.9%
To go to school?	63.4%	17.8%	11.7%	5.5%	1.5%
To work hard?	27.2%	36.7%	18.3%	15.4%	2.4%
To steal?	2%	3%	0%	1.3%	97.6%
To know how to manage in life?	79.2%	16.5%	2.7%	0.9%	0.7%

Table 7.b Values important for succeeding in life, Romania⁶

How important is it for someone from Romania...	Very important	Important	Quite important	Not really important	Not important at all
To be born in a rich family?	37%	32%	13%	11%	3%
To have luck/opportunities?	41%	40%	10%	5%	2%

⁵ Open Society Foundation, *Public Opinion Barometer*, May 2003 (www.osf.ro)

⁶ The percentage to 100% represents no-answers

To believe in God?	52%	30%	8%	6%	2%
To have connections?	41%	37%	12%	5%	1%
To be intelligent/smart?	52%	34%	9%	2%	0%
To look good?	18%	30%	21%	23%	4%
To go to school?	52%	33%	8%	3%	0%
To work hard?	49%	32%	10%	5%	1%
To steal?	4%	5%	6%	8%	69%
To know how to manage in life?	50%	36%	9%	1%	1%

People from Oas seem to value faith in God the most. 95.8% of our respondents stated that faith is very important for someone to succeed in life. Another strong value for them is luck/opportunities. 73.4% of the interviewees think this is very important, and 23.1% think it is important. They strongly believe in fate. Almost at the same level, we find the answers to the following question: How important is it for someone to know how to manage in life? Thus, 79.2% of the respondents think it is very important, and 16.5% think it is important (see Table 6). The term “to manage in life” is a colloquial phrase meaning the ability to cope with anything [authors’ note]. For the people from Oas, someone who has managed in life is usually someone who has been abroad and found a well-paid job or who has earned a lot of money through different ways. The research Terre des Hommes conducted in the region of Oas has revealed that some people there think that cheating the state, for example, is not really stealing. They may use the phrase “manage in life” when talking about such acts.

It is known that some of the children and adults from Oas who are abroad steal. We tried to find out if the community accepted stealing and to what extent. The answers show that stealing is condemned in public. Only 5% of our respondents said that stealing was important for someone to succeed in life.

The respondents had different opinions regarding the importance of looks, the family someone is born in and the work they do. Work seems to be less valued than at national level as only 63.9% of the respondents thought it was important or very important for someone to work in order to feel fulfilled. School is appreciated, but less than at national level: 81.2% of the interviewees from Oas believe school is important or very important to succeed in life compared to 85% at national level. There were also some conflicting opinions regarding the importance of having connections; however, more respondents seemed to think this was important. **Appendix G** comprises a diagram illustrating these answers.

We asked a checking question in order to scale the above-mentioned values according to their importance. When we asked our subjects to choose the most important value for succeeding in life, 55.9% of them chose faith in God, whereas luck or opportunities came second. Actually, these two values came first in the previous tables too, which proves a kind of constancy in this respect. As a second choice value, we find the need to know how to manage in life. If we summon up the two answers (first and second choice) the

order stays the same as in the first choice case. You can find a detailed description of the answers in Table 8.

Table 8. Value classification according to importance

How important is it for someone from Oas...	Oas			National level	
	First choice	Second choice	Both choices together	First choice	Second choice
To be born in a rich family?	4.4%	2.9%	3.7%	16%	6%
To have luck/opportunities?	17.1%	23.4%	20.2%	10%	10%
To believe in God?	55.9%	15.6%	35.8%	15%	9%
To have connections?	2.2%	6.9%	4.6%	11%	11%
To be intelligent/smart?	4.7%	10.3%	7.5%	12%	13%
To look good?	0%	0.9%	0.4%	0%	1%
To go to school?	2.2%	6.9%	4.6%	10%	10%
To work hard?	2.0%	8.9%	5.1%	8%	17%
To steal?	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%
To know how to manage in life?	11.5%	24.8%	18.1%	10%	14%

We asked the same question to the people we talked to, using other tools than the questionnaire (interview, focus group, etc.). The answer of both adults and children was unanimously the same: the most important value is money. One of our subjects told us: "...the people from Oas are driven to get money, they care less about themselves, as fortune is the only thing that matters on earth ... and, you know, I come back in the village to show off my car and build a house in a couple of years." Money is the main reason why they go abroad as it is a proof of the family's fortune.

The Gallup public opinion barometer run for the Open Society Foundation in May 2003, which we have previously quoted, shows that to most Romanians the most important thing needed to succeed in life is to be born in a rich family (22%), to have faith in God (24%) and to be smart/intelligent (25%). Thus, the most frequently named values were intelligence/smartness and hard work (25% both).

The people from Oas have different values. Most of them think the most important thing you need in order to succeed in life is faith in God (71.5%), then luck/opportunities (40.5%) and thirdly to know how to manage in life (36.3%).

In conclusion, we could say that compared to the values of the whole Romanian population, the people from Oas value more faith in God, luck and the ability to manage in life. On the other hand, they don't think having connections, school, intelligence as important as the rest of the Romanians.

6. The Child's Role and Place in the Family

We used the questions below to find out how the adults from the four communities perceived the role and place of the child in the family. We think that the answers to these questions can reflect the education and guidance provided to the children from the four locations. These questions were meant to test one of the **initial hypotheses** – children are seen as income generators – as well as the adults' attitude towards work, money, and migration.

Table 9. Views on school and children

To what extent do you agree with the statement ...	Totally disagree	Partially disagree	Partially agree	Totally agree
1. The child belongs with his parents.	1.8%	0%	14.7%	83.5%
2. Nowadays, school is worthless.	47.6%	22.1%	21.4%	8.8%
3. Nowadays, it is not worth living in Romania.	24%	30.5%	34.2%	11.3%
4. You should do anything for money.	49.4%	26.7%	18.4%	5.4%
5. It is hard for the children coming back from abroad to find their place in the community.	37.4%	20.4%	23.5%	18.8%
6. It is better for a child to earn money than go to school.	40.4%	24%	27.2%	8.4%
7. The parents working abroad should take their children with them.	4.8%	5.9%	21.5%	67.9%
8. Child migration has become a tradition in Oas.	3.1%	17%	29.2%	50.7%
9. Children should help their parents financially.	28.8%	17.7%	30.2%	23.4%

“The child belongs with his parents”

The interviews and the talks we had with the school children showed that many times, when the parents are working abroad, both the school and pre-school children live with their grandparents, other relatives or the so-called babysitters. We talked to an older lady holding a three-year-old child who told us that he was her ninth grandchild she was raising while his parents were working abroad.

Despite the statistics according to which many children live parentless, almost all our respondents stated that the child belongs with his parents. Because of this, some of our interviewees think the parents working aboard should take their children with them: 68% totally agree with this statement, and 21.5% partially agree with it. Numerous school children said that many of their colleagues had been taken abroad by their parents who were working there. Nevertheless, some parents cannot support their children in the country where they work. A mother of six working in Austria had to leave her children at home because she doesn't have enough money to pay the kindergarten fees or hire a babysitter. Another mother who had worked abroad a couple of years came back and went to the kindergarten to pick her daughter. The teacher told the girl to say hallo to her mother, but the girl looked at her and called her “auntie” because she didn't recognize her. The mother cried and promised she would never leave her child again. Still, in a few months she went abroad again without the girl. We heard from many people that some children don't recognize their parents anymore because they don't see them for years. In these cases, the relatives are the ones taking care of the children for a long time.

“Nowadays, school is worthless”

There are different points of view as to how useful school is: 8.8% of the respondents believe today school is worthless, and 21.4% agree with this statement partially. The negative attitude towards school comes basically from comparing the income of people working aboard and that of a person working in the country. A school employee, who has a lot of influence on children's way of thinking, told us that after six years of university and two years of internship, a medical doctor earns less in Romania than an untrained

worker employed in Western Europe. [We have to point out that in Romania the most gainful professions, perceived as holding important social status, are those of a lawyer and medical doctor]. This is a Oas region specific attitude and other research run twenty years ago reached the same conclusion⁷. This shows us that the people from these communities agree with those who quit school because the professions that were once well-paid and highly appreciated in Romania are now paid just as any untrained work carried out in the West. Some children take on this negative attitude towards school. A teacher told us "... a few years ago I told them if you don't go to school you won't get a driving licence. No licence for those who don't finish eight grades. The young people who work abroad come back with cars, but if you don't finish eight grades you won't get the licence for driving your car. And the answer I got was: my neighbour who can't even write and has only four grades went there [to the driving licence issuing police department] with 3,000 Euros, he didn't take any driving lessons or anything and he had the licence in a week. That's what a child said to my face: "why should I go to school? I'm going to Italy...". These statements underline that "managing in life" is more important than going to school.

"It is better for a child to earn money than go to school"

8.4% of the people filling in the questionnaire consider that it is better for a child to work than go to school, while 40% of them totally disagree with this statement. Nevertheless, those thinking that in Romania school is worthless nowadays outnumber by 10% those saying it is better for a child to earn money than go to school. The answers however have pointed out that there are more parents who cannot afford to pay the tuitions after compulsory schooling years than those who don't want to send their children to school at all. The former don't have the money to send their children to high school as the school costs (transport, board and lodging) are high. In the four communes, there are only schools that go up to the 10th grade. For this reason, education could be encouraged if financial support were granted to the parents who want their children to go to school after they have finished their compulsory schooling.

Under these circumstances, after they finish compulsory schooling, some children stay home and help their parents around the house, they get a job in the country or go abroad where they work as untrained workers.

Some of the parents (and their children) believe that school is not the best investment for the future due to low employment and/or low wages.

As to the answers to the question if children should help their parents financially they vary. A quarter of the respondents totally agrees, another quarter totally disagrees, and the others partially agree or disagree with this statement. These answers can help us understand why some parents are willing to send their children to work: for them it is only normal that children help their parents financially. As to younger children, this kind of thinking may lead to exploitation and emotional abuse, as children are given more responsibilities that they can take. Even if they are not sent to work for money, some children have to work the land with their parents. During farming season, parents take their children out of school to help them work the land.

⁷ G. Focsa, Tara Oasului [The Region of Oas], Bucharest, 1975

A school headmaster told us: “there are kids whose parents work abroad and they have to take care of the entire farmhouse, including the livestock, 24 hours a day. I reckon this is a problem as well. They stay home with their grandparents and they manage the whole farm. As they are hardworking and take good care of the house, they kind of neglect school and get low grades. Still, they can’t leave the land unworked, or not take care of the cow and the horse because that’s what they are living on. Around here, the 5th graders are already working the land. ... I talked to one of them and I asked him, why haven’t you done your homework? Because I had to go work the cornfield. I was simply sorry for that child because he leaves school at 2 p.m. and you make him work hard at home till night and then expect him to study too...it is hard for him to study for school after those long working hours. One winter, I asked a 6th grader: why haven’t you done your homework – he answered he had had to go and get wood. These kids have so much on their shoulders...”.

The teachers’ attitude was rather interesting: they seem to embrace this sort of behaviour and are doing nothing to change the parents’ mentality or make children spend more time studying for school.

Another interview stresses these statements: “... some parents overuse their children and don’t send them to school today, tomorrow, the day after tomorrow until harvesting is over. But then, there are parents who sort out their work differently: we’re going in the field today because it’s sunny, after you come from school, but tomorrow, the day after tomorrow you go to school, we [the parents] go to work the land and when it’s a good day for harvesting you’re coming too... In our school at least children ask for the teacher’s permission to miss the next school day. “Madam, tomorrow I would like to stay home if it’s alright because we will pick grapes, potatoes”....”

The parents send their children to work abroad hoping they would help them and the brothers at home. The interviews revealed that they send their boys to work abroad when they reach 14-15. They work illegally, mainly in agriculture and constructions, with their father, uncle, older brothers or relatives. As they work illegally, nobody asks for their ID papers. A mother that had let her son go abroad told us how she had made her decision: her boy was in the 8th grade at the time. Her husband and her were both unemployed, they only worked occasionally helping villagers during farming seasons. They don’t own any land. Due to all these they couldn’t send their child to school. One day, their son let them know he would go abroad to work because he had heard how well things were going for their fellow villagers there. They couldn’t come up with a better option for him so they let their 14-year-old son go to France.

“Nowadays, it is not worth living in Romania”

The statement “Nowadays, it is not worth living in Romania” was totally or partially disagreed by 69.7% of our subjects. There are two ways to explain this score.

On one hand, it is well known that the people from Oas have a long tradition of working away from home (in mining, deforestation, ballast digging) but always coming back

home. The interviews have showed that when they go to work abroad for the first time the people from Oas are thinking they will come back home. Working abroad is just a temporary income source. With the money earned in a western country you can live better in Romania than in that country because everything is cheaper. If we consider this statement, we can explain why three quarters of our subjects say it is worth living in Romania these days. Working abroad is considered just a transition period.

Nevertheless, many case studies underline that numerous families do not want to come back home. Some say they have legal papers now and prefer to settle down abroad. Others have started off an increasingly prosperous small business or have invested in constructions and decided not to come back to Romania. This may be a new stage of the Oas people migration tradition, which is still to be researched.

On the other hand, when we look at this aspect, we have to take into account how representative our sample is because most answers came from people living in the country not from those currently abroad.

“You should do anything for money”

This part was meant as a checking question for a question related to important values for succeeding in life, more precisely the one on the importance of stealing. The 5% who have agreed that someone should steal in order to succeed in life reflects here as those who totally agree that you should do anything for money. We can see that only half of the respondents (47.4%) totally disagree with this statement, and the others are rather ambiguous about it (partially agreeing or disagreeing). We have to mention that there was a 2% no-answer rate to this question. If we were to put these figures the other way around, we could state that half of our subjects do not totally disagree with doing anything for money.

Children coming back from abroad

The people from Oas have different points of view on how children coming back from abroad manage to readjust to their community. This matter is not openly debated within the community. It is worth specifying that this set of questions held the highest no-answer rate (14.5% - I don't know or I won't answer). When talking to the locals, each point of view was argument supported. Some say it is hard for the children who come back from abroad to readjust because they earn more money abroad and they usually have to come back to modest living conditions. This is one of the reasons why the children and the young (but not only them) want to go abroad again. On the other hand, in a letter sent to his family a child from abroad writes that he would like to come home because he is tired of hard conditions, loneliness, and homesickness. When interviewed, the children remembered the same things about their experience abroad: missing their friends, the people and the places they were familiar with.

We hope the answers to this question will be useful to the team of experts working on the reintegration of the children coming back from abroad, although only few children have returned so far.

Unaccompanied Children and Criminality

The questionnaire answers (Table 10) underline the fact that unaccompanied child migration and crimes are apparently related and the public opinion is aware of this. According to our interviews, the community knows what is going on with their fellow villagers abroad: "... a lot of kids go there to beg, to steal, do this and that ... and God knows who they run into there, other youngsters of their age, I don't know, Albanians, Serbs, 'cause now there are immigrants from all these countries... and one gets an idea and at this age you can easily make a child steal or do anything like that. They don't think of consequences. They do it if they can 'cause they'll get a stereo or two or something else. They talk about it first, then they steal, they get caught but then the police let them go eventually. They sometimes steal from grocery stores too a can of something, a chocolate bar, anything. And they do it many times."

One of the FRCCF local collaborators tried to convince us that we would not be able to talk about it openly. She said that for example her mother would always tell her that nobody had to know what their family talked about. It is not because they have something to hide but that is how they are used to do things there.

Often, when we would ask around about children whose whereabouts were unknown, we would get answers like: "I don't know", "I'm not getting into this", "It's none of my business", or "I don't care what others do, I just mind my own business".

Nevertheless, when filling in the questionnaire, anonymously, a quarter of the locals said they had heard that some underage children from Oas were abroad unaccompanied and more than a third of them knew that these children were stealing, begging or prostituting themselves abroad.

Table 10. Opinions on unaccompanied children abroad

Did you know that some children from Oas go abroad unaccompanied by a grown-up?	Yes	No	I don't know/ I won't answer
	24.8%	75.2%	6.8%
Did you know that some children from Oas are stealing, begging or prostituting themselves abroad?	Yes	No	I don't know/ I won't answer
	34.3%	65.7%	5.1%

7. Respect of the Rights of the Child

We asked our subjects to tell us how important some underage childcare issues were for them. The following table includes the valid answer percentages. The no-answer rate to this question is under 2%.

Every statement below refers to the rights of the child (especially to the basic ones). These data are most useful to the project implementation team in assessing the way adults' perceive the rights of the child and in setting out how adults and children should be approached during future awareness campaigns.

Table 11. Opinions on the rights of the child

How important is it for a 7-16 year old child...	Very important	Important	Quite important	Not really important	Not important at all
To be healthy?	96.2%	3.8%	0%	0%	0%
To live with his family?	69.6%	20.2%	9.8%	0.4%	0%
To go to school?	66.4%	19.1%	12%	2%	0.4%
To be in the care of a grown-up?	61.2%	27%	10.5%	0.9%	0.4%
To learn what hard work means?	30.4%	18.7%	21.1%	24%	5.85
To be free from hunger?	95.1%	4.7%	0.2%	0%	0%
To keep warm?	95.6%	4.4%	0%	0%	0%
To not be battered?	72.4%	9.8%	12.7%	5.1%	0%
To have his will taken into account?	37.4%	32.1%	20%	10.5%	0%
To go abroad accompanied?	5.4%	15.5%	19.1%	24.8%	35.1%

14% of the subjects don't think school is important, and they don't see it as every child's basic right to education. 10% of the adult subjects have stated it is not really important to take the child's will into account, and 20% of them have thought this is important enough.

60% of the adults don't find it important for a child to go abroad accompanied, although many of them know the dangers these children are exposed to.

8. Adults' Working Abroad

A very high percentage, 50% of the subjects, admits that someone in their family is currently working abroad. There were subjects who confessed that someone from each family had temporarily been abroad to work at least once.

Table 12. Number of family members working abroad

How many adults from your family are working abroad?	Percentage
1	30.2%
2	12.8%
6	0.3%
More family members (children, brothers, wives)	6.2%

No data (no-answers)	17.6%
None	31.9%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Table 13. Kin relation between the subject and the person working abroad

<i>The family position of the adults working abroad</i>	Percentage
Son/daughter	25.6%
Husband/wife	18.5%
Brothers	2.9%
Parents	2.0%
Son-in-law, grandchild	1.3%
Nobody in the family is working abroad	17.4%
No answer	32.4%
Total	100.0%

Table 13 shows that **half of our subjects have a first or second-degree relative working abroad**: husband, brothers, children, son-in-law, and grandchild. In some cases, both parents are abroad and only the children and the grandparents who take care of them are left home.

Work Migration

According to the locals, the work migration phenomenon started in 1990, when many crossed the border illegally. Back then, there were a series of networks helping people cross the border for money. Nowadays, things happen easier and legally, using just your passport. Still, many economic migrants cross the border illegally.

People in Oas talk about Romanian citizens abroad who employ the entire labour force from Oas: “Some already have a construction company there and many people from the village are working for them. ... Someone else who is in Italy with legal papers wants to start up a butcher’s shop. He went abroad and look what he’s accomplished. Maybe some time ago his family had no money and now they have a house, money, he has a job. Many who left for Austria got a job for a thermopane product company and now they have their own thermopane product business.”

Some interviewees said that most of the employers who don’t respect the rights of their employees abroad were Romanians.

Somebody remembered that it had all started with five men who found a black market job abroad. Then, they called their relatives, their brothers, cousins and neighbours. The interviews suggest that everyone who migrates has a contact person waiting for them, sometimes even with a work promise. The same thing happens with children. Certainly, each commune can now access network of acquaintances, which is fully used.

As indicated by a national research, migrants from different Romanian counties or communes clearly prefer one country to another, mainly because of the informal contact networks used for work migration.

This is obvious if we take a look at the countries where the school children's parents work. As far as Bixad commune is concerned, more than two thirds (67% of cases) of the parents from the Bixad village are in Italy, whereas in Trip and Boinesti they clearly prefer France (62% of the cases from Trip and 69% from Boinesti).

Table 14. Countries where Bixad commune school children's parents work

Village	France	Italy	Austria	Total
Bixad	14	101	16	149
	6.1%	73.7%	22.5%	
Trip	128	0	54	205
	56.1%	0%	76.1%	
Boinesti	85	36	0	123
	37.3%	26.3%	0%	
Other village ⁸	1	0	1	2
	0.4%	0%	1.4%	
Total	228	137	71	479
	100%	100%	100%	

Work Migrants' Target Countries

Some say that the first Oas work migrants went to Austria, which is quite close to Romania, where they started working on the black market. However, nowadays more and more of them manage to be employed on legal basis and some have even become citizens of the country where they have been working for years.

Others think people migrated first to France and then to Italy. More recently they turned to Spain and Portugal. As far as France is concerned, people there were very open. According to some, the French liked the Romanians from the very beginning. Right after the fall of communism in Romania, for a while the French even provided housing to the Romanians who were in France. On the other hand, France is a good country for stealing and begging due to a more permissive legislation compared to Austria or Italy, where sanctions are harsher.

Somebody remembered that, during the communist regime, people would immigrate illegally to Yugoslavia, then they would get to Italy and from there they would head to the United States of America. Thus, the migration phenomenon existed already back then.

Table 15. Countries where adults work

Where does the adult member of your family work abroad?	Percentage
United States of America, Canada	1.1%
Great Britain, Ireland	2.6%
Austria	8.1%
Belgium	0,7%
France	12.1%

⁸ The children live in another commune than Bixad, but go to school in Bixad

Italy	20.5%
Portugal	2.2%
At least 2 countries: Italy, France, Austria, Great Britain or Spain	3.5%
No family member is abroad	7.7%
No data (No answer)	41.4%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Table 15 illustrates that most of the adult family members are in Italy and France. All the statistical data collected during our research suggest that the people from the four communes do prefer these two countries.

Migrants' Top Lines of Work

Migrants usually perform long-hour untrained work in constructions, house cleaning, restaurants, farming, interior home finishing: "Some are known to be good workers ...connections, networks have already been set up there. They get 10 euros per hour and they work 12, 13, 14 hours, of course they make money. But then, you see, they sleep three or four hours. So, they go there only for work. They work on Sundays as well if possible. My brother-in-law has been abroad for 14 years. He worked two years without a contract but now he has a contract with the very same company. He lived in a shack for two years. Everyone who went to Austria after the fall of communism had to live in shacks, nobody spoke the language, they had no one to turn to for help: my brother-in-law was better paid when he worked without a contract than he is now. Even today, he has both a legal job at this company and a black market one which he starts at the end of the other shift."

Somebody we talked to knew many people who were working in the same place abroad: "for example, most of them are in France because that's where the first ones went and they made connections and friends there. I know that my neighbour lives there, his cousin is there as well and so on." People are sometimes called by phone: "come to France because I found you a job or come to Italy because there is work here" without knowing what exactly they will have to do there.

But not everyone who goes abroad "gets lucky". They say sometimes people go abroad with their long-time savings or borrow a huge amount of money hoping they will be able to return it after working abroad for a while. If they don't find a job there they get back home without money or with less than what they had when they went away.

Then, there are those who don't like to work or have drinking problems. The community condemns these people. When we asked if everyone had improved their financial status after working abroad, we were told that some drink or gamble the money earned and they come back without any savings.

The migration phenomenon grew immensely in the last decade. According to one of the mayors, at the beginning of the 90's, 20 people were abroad, whereas "now about 200 families are abroad".

9. Children Abroad

The teachers gave us the most pieces of information about children abroad. The children focus groups highlighted that many school children had already been abroad on different occasions. This is why we think that the questionnaires our respondents filled in are incomplete. As an example, the percentage of those who answered in the questionnaire that “no one in the family is or has been abroad” is actually higher than the percentage worked out after processing all the data available.

Table 16. Kin relation between the child working abroad and the respondent

What relation is the under age child who has been abroad to you?	Percentage
Nobody in the family is or has been abroad	85.5%
Son	10.0%
Daughter	1.4%
Brother/sister	0.9%
Grandchild	2.0%
Son and daughter	0.2%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

We found out real cases of children from the four researched communes who are working abroad:

- Somebody has told us that France is preferred as a target country because it is tolerant with under age children who steal and especially because they don't send them to prison: “There is someone here, now he's grown up, who used to steal: cigarettes, electrical appliances. He got loads of money from selling the stolen goods on the black market...”
- A single mother has an over 18-year-old son abroad. Her younger son finished the 8th grade and went to his older brother who had been working in constructions there for many years. His dream had always been to go abroad, but as he was under age he was not allowed to cross the border. Still, he managed to cross it after somebody had advised him to say his papers had been stolen. When he got abroad, he went to a place where he knew the police would find him for sure and told them again the story about his papers having been stolen. They sent him to a halfway home and he is happy to live there.
- A highly educated teacher went abroad with a tourist visa and didn't come back. Her child was going to school in Romania, but she took her out of school to go and work with her abroad. The employer the teacher was working for needed labour force and he preferred those who had already worked for him.
- A boy with good school results went to a high school here but then decided to drop out of school. He didn't go abroad unaccompanied. He waited for his father to come back home for Christmas and went with him. We can say that parents make their children think and want to migrate.

Table 17. The country where the under age family member is right now or has been gone to

The country where the under age family member has been gone to	Frequency
---	------------------

Great Britain	4
Austria	2
France	29
Ireland	1
Italy	23
No data available	395
<i>Total</i>	<i>454</i>

The locals say the French are much more generous than the Italians: In France “some youngsters sell newspapers and reach their hands for money. They say people there are merciful and give them money without even taking the newspaper. So, they always get money there.”

As illustrated in Table 17, 29 people said the under age family member had been to France and 23, to Italy. They generally see things as follows: the children go to France to work, steal or beg and to Italy to go to school.

Some people think that the most migrant children’s parents are less educated and they don’t appreciate school. However, research has showed there is no connection between parents’ schooling and the child migration. Actually, many teachers themselves go to work abroad: “The problem is that there are not many educated people here in the commune. Our school has no teachers because on one hand those who finished high school go abroad and on the other very few have finished high school lately. Three teachers from here, who worked in schools, quit and went abroad.”

On the other hand, it is thought that the children going abroad are not the poorest in the commune. Poor families don’t have money to cover for their child’s transport to the target country.

Sometimes, parents think: “... I see schooled people from the commune who have gone to France. Why should I waste my time with school when I’ll get to France anyhow? It’s all because of the Romanian system. If my child finishes school, he should get a job and good wages, but he gets nothing. And then, what should he stay here for?”

Table 18. Children working abroad when the questionnaire was applied

Do you know any (under 18-year-old) children who work abroad?	Number of answers	Percentage
Yes	237	52.2%
No	198	43.6%

Even if our subjects did not admit that they had under age family members abroad, at school or at work, 52% (237 people) of those who answered the question said they knew of children from Oas working in Western Europe. Some even told us what they had talked with some of these children: “I was listening to some boys who were saying they used to go at night and rob lorries. They would sell everything they had stolen from the lorry to the same buyer.”

Table 19. Purpose of children's stay abroad according to the adult subjects

The purpose of the under age child's stay abroad ...	Number of answers
Visit	6
School	25
Work	29
Other	2
<i>Total</i>	62

This table shows that 29 children have been or are working abroad, and 25 are there at school. Sixteen of the children who have been or are in France right now are working there, 9 are at school, whereas in Italy 12 are at school and 8 are at work. Although the number of children who go to school in Italy is higher, as far as our sample goes, there isn't any significant connection between the country and the purpose of stay.

Table 20. Period of the child's stay abroad

For how long was the child abroad?	Number of answers
A few months	6
1 year	10
2 years	5
3 years	4
4 years	1
More than 4 years	9
Unlimited period	3

We can assume that the children that stayed abroad only for a few months were there on visit, the others stayed there for at least one year (Table 20). The children who go abroad hope to attend a vocational school to learn a trade, and get a job afterwards. After three years of apprenticeship, a number of children started working on contract for carpenter's shops or pizza restaurants.

Table 21. Number of children currently working abroad according to our subjects

How many children who are currently working abroad do you know approximately?	Number of answers	Percentage
1-5	92	43.2%
6-10	62	29.1%
11-20	30	14.1%
Over 20	4	1.9%
A great number	15	7.0%
A few, a small number	10	4.7%
<i>Total</i>	213	100.0%

Most of them (43.2%) say they know maximum one or five children who are working abroad, while 29.1% know between six and ten children in that situation. The rest of the

interviewed people either say they don't know underage children working abroad or they didn't answer the question.

Table 22. Migrant children's occupation

To your knowledge, what are these children doing abroad?	Number of answers	Percentage
Begging, stealing	5	3.0%
Farming	17	10.1%
Constructions	10	5.9%
Occasional Work	75	44.4%
School and work	51	30.2%
School	11	6.5%
<i>Total</i>	<i>169</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

When asked what these children were doing abroad, **90% of the respondents said they were working occasionally**. This is due to the fact that they are not trained and they are not old enough to work on contract. Around 75 children have various occasional jobs, and apparently 51 go to school and work at the same time (Table 22). The rest of the subjects didn't answer this question.

Only 3% of the respondents say that these children are begging or stealing, whereas the answers in Table 10 show that 34% of the adults know of children who are doing this.

10. Future Child Migration Trends

In order to get the picture of future child migration trends, we used three data sources: (a.) the school abandonment rate of the last years, (b.) the percentage of school children with parents working abroad, and (c.) the FRCCF database comprising data on migrated or trafficked children or children at risk.

We have to say from the start that the data received from the four schools are merely approximate. After comparing several types of data, we realised there were numerous errors in the school records we received. This is mainly owed to the lack of school data archives. The research team asked for statistical data from the last seven years. In some cases, the data centralisers had to start from the grade books of those years. Despite some irregularities regarding the exact figures, the trend and data evolution seemed to match **(see Appendix H)**.

Hence, the statistical school data from the four communes reveal that between 1998-2004, 235 (according to Table 24) to 444 (according to Table 23) children dropped out, which is 5.3-10% of the 5th – 8th graders.

Table 23. School abandonment between 1998-2004

School from the village of ...	Number of school dropouts between 1998-2004 on grades				School abandonment rate between 1998-2004 ⁹ on grades			
	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th
Bixad	13	22	13	18	5.7%	10.1%	5.8%	8.7%
Boinesti	11	9	6	9	5.2%	4.2%	3.0%	4.4%
Trip Bai	50	20	38	22	11.2%	4.7%	9.6%	5.7%
Calinesti-Oas	14	14	19	10	5.2%	5.7%	7.4%	4.3%
Coca	8	1	2	10	4.5%	0.6%	1.3%	6.1%
Lechinta	8	11	5	1	7.7%	10.4%	5.0%	1.0%
Gherta-Mica	8	4	13	14	1.8%	0.9%	3.1%	3.5%
Târsolt	21	11	23	16	6.3%	3.8%	7.5%	5.7%
<i>TOTAL</i>	133	92	119	100	6.0%	5.1%	5.3%	4.9%

Table 24. Number of school children between 1998-2004 in the four communes

Grade	Number of school children	Number of dropouts	Calculation method
5 th grade	2216	-	-
6 th grade	2096	120	2216-2096
7 th grade	2072	24	2096-2072
8 th grade	1981	91	2072-1981
Total		235	

The centralised data gathered from six schools from the four communes show that the 8th grade exit exam promotion rate is 82%. In other words 82% of those who finished 8th grade can enrol in high schools. The other 12% can attend vocational or apprenticeship schools.

Only half (53%) of the children who finished 8 grades (compulsory schooling) in three of the eight schools¹⁰ between 1998-2004 are still in school. As to the other half, **19% are still in the country, but don't go to school**, 17% (160 children) are abroad unaccompanied and 8% of the children are abroad either with an adult or alone but are included in a care and monitoring system.

As seen from Table 21 and Appendix I, the future trend seems to be attending schools in the country. The number of children going to school in Romania in 2004 has almost doubled as compared to 1998, although the number of school age children has not increased.

Moreover, the number of children who are staying home has constantly grown from 1998 to 2004. In 1998, 42% of the children who finished compulsory schooling in the three schools mentioned above went abroad, accompanied or not, whereas in 2004 only 12% of them went abroad.

⁹ Percentage of the children who have abandoned school of the total of enrolled children

¹⁰ Schools from the villages of Coca and Calinesti, the commune of Calinesti, and the village of Târsolt from the commune of Târsolt. As to the other schools, no data were available.

Table 25. 8th grade graduate children (three schools from two communes)

Year	Children who are in the country and		Children abroad	
	Go to school	Don't go to school	with a grown-up or at school	Unaccompanied
1998	46	33	8	49
1999	58	36	19	40
2000	63	34	11	29
2001	62	34	20	17
2002	85	18	6	12
2003	80	11	7	8
2004	87	12	8	5
Total	481	178	79	160

This decrease in the number of children going abroad after they finish 8th grade does not mean that *fewer children are migrating, but only that some migrate before even finishing compulsory education as the number of school children in the country has been constantly decreasing in the last seven years.*

We found out from talking to the teachers that the children most frequently drop out of school because their parents take them abroad. The table below comprises centralised data from one of the four researched locations. The data regard the number of school children who have at least one parent working abroad.

Table 26. Children with at least one parent working abroad, 2002-2003

Child's grade	Both parents	Only the mother	Only the father	Total
1 st grade	29	13	15	57
2 nd grade	26	6	19	51
3 rd grade	39	4	13	56
4 th grade	37	5	16	58
5 th grade	34	14	14	62
6 th grade	46	9	20	75
7 th grade	31	7	15	53
8 th grade	32	10	25	67
<i>Total</i>	<i>274</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>137</i>	<i>479</i>

57% of the school children from the commune have both parents abroad. They are in the care of their grandparents or of a relative, mostly of an aunt. When talking to the children, we could see that despite the fact that they are left in the care of an adult, they actually take on their parent's responsibilities: they take care of their younger siblings, of the livestock, household, they cook. They have to do it all to support themselves. They

also go to school. 28% of the school children have their father abroad. We can assume that in some families where both parents are abroad, one day they will come and take their children with them.

Table 27. Kin relation between the school child who has at least one parent abroad and his/her carer, 2002-2003

The children with parents abroad are in the care of....	Number	Percentage
One of the parents	261	54.38%
Grandparents	132	46% of these children are raised by other people than their parents
Aunt	41	
Sister, brother	6	
Cousin	3	
Neighbour	2	
Friends	4	
No data available	30	
<i>Total</i>	<i>479</i>	<i>100%</i>

The third information source that we could use to anticipate future trends of the child migration phenomenon was the FRCCF database which contains data on children identified as migrated, trafficked or at risk of being migrated or trafficked. **Migrated** children have been defined as children who are or have been abroad for a shorter or longer period of time, whereas children **at risk** are those that meet at least one of the following criteria:

a) school abandonment; b) poor financial status of the family; c) desire to go abroad; d) close relatives abroad.

These criteria were set after talking with Oas locals about the common features of migrating families /children. Nevertheless, some children meeting one of these criteria are not recorded. Only the children at real risk of migrating, identified by the community worker who assesses that child and family, are recorded.

During a year of project implementation (around nine months of field work), in the four communes where FRCCF works, **468 children have been database-recorded as migrated (170) or at risk (298)**. Social enquiries have been run for these children and their families and they are constantly monitored. At the same time, the team project provides migration risks prevention services.

Of all the database-recorded children and youngsters, 195 (41.6) are girls and 274 (58.4) are boys, 1 to 22 years old (see Table 28). Most of them are 15 and 16 years old, the common age when a child finishes compulsory schooling.

Most of the identified children come from Târsolt (157 cases), then from Calinesti-Oas (127 cases), and Gherta Mica (117 cases). The smallest number of cases was recorded in

Bixad (67 cases). The figures are rough as the data variation between the communes could be owed to lack of staff or FRCCF staff turnover.

Table 28. Database-recorded children according to age

Child's Age	Migrated	At risk	Total
0-6	11	1	12
7-10	14	27	41
11	4	20	24
12	5	17	22
13	11	57	68
14	9	50	59
15	21	48	69
16	27	46	73
17	34	21	55
18	23	7	30
Over 18	8	-	8
No data available	4	4	8
Total	171	298	469

The migrated children's target countries are mainly Italy (93 cases) and France (56 cases), then Austria (10 cases), Great Britain (5 cases), Portugal (4 cases), Belgium (1 case) and USA (1 case), as seen below, in Table 29:

Table 29. Target countries of the FRCCF database-recorded children

Country	Number of answers	Percentage %
France	72	28.9
Italy	82	32.9
Austria	33	13.3
Great Britain	15	3.0
Spain	2	0.8
Portugal	22	8.8
Belgium	2	0.8
USA	2	0.8
France or Italy	10	4.0
France or Austria	1	0.4
Italy or Austria	2	0.8
Italy or Spain	2	0.8
Austria or Great Britain	2	0.8
Spain or Portugal	2	0.8
No data available	49	
Total	298	100

Twenty (11.8 %) of the migrated children are abroad unaccompanied. 123 (72.4 %) of the children are accompanied by at least one of their parents, 23 (13.5 %) of them by

their brothers or sisters, 4 (2.4 %) by an acquaintance, and for one of them we have no data available.

A database field includes other relevant information about the child. This sort of information explains the status quo, the family situation, the case particularity, and reasons for migration or plans to migrate. Thus, we could identify three major reasons for migration: trip or holiday, work/financial gains, and desire to study abroad (see Appendix J).

Most of the database children have a close relative abroad. 247 of the 298 children at risk of being migrated or trafficked have at least one family member abroad. The top target countries are Italy and France in this case too as 53 % of the relatives of the children at risk are there (Italy – 82 cases, France – 72 cases). 33 of the recorded children have relatives in Austria, 22 in Portugal, 15 in Great Britain, two in Spain, two in Belgium and two in USA. 19 of the children have relatives in at least two of these countries: France, Italy, Austria, Spain, Great Britain, and Portugal. Of the 297 children recorded in the FRCCF database as at risk of migration, 49 have already expressed their wish to go abroad, naming financial gains as their main reason.

The conclusion we can draw from the three types of data is that in the future a high number of underage children are expected to migrate, either because their parents who work abroad want it, or because the children want themselves to go to their brothers or relatives abroad.

11. Best Practices of Child Migration and Trafficking Dangers Prevention Work in Oas. An FRCCF Team Perspective

This chapter is based on the one-year experience of the FRCCF team, which worked on sharing information about child migration and trafficking risks with the communities from four Oas region communes – Bixad, Calinesti Oas, Gherta Mica and Târsolt.

We do believe that sharing experiences in the field can help other NGO's, who are just starting out, plan future actions. In this respect, we would like to present the types of actions our field team used.

At the beginning of our migration and trafficking prevention work, we received significant support from Terre des Hommes Albania. They shared with us all the working tools they had developed and used for preventing and fighting child trafficking. An experience exchange organised in Albania gave us the chance to get acquainted with some of their successful working methods and techniques. Of course, the Oas region particularities and problems differ quite a lot from the Albanian issues. Hence, we had to draw up new working tools or adjust the Albanian ones, when possible, to the region where the project was implemented. These working tools will be presented later on in the study, so that those who plan to carry out child migration and trafficking prevention projects can use them. (**Appendices K-R**).

Our project was based on a Terre des Hommes research run in France and on the visits our French partners paid to Romania as well as the information they passed on to

us. The purpose of these frequent visits to Romania was to help our partners see the work Romanian local authorities and NGO's were running in the field, but also to draw the attention on the growing migration and trafficking phenomenon.

Main Causes of the Oas Region Child Migration

To better understand the child migration phenomenon and to intervene more efficiently, it was necessary to firstly identify the reasons why the children wanted to leave the country. Thus, we ran a sociological study to help us get better acquainted with the scope and roots of child migration. We tried to find out how many children from the four locations where FRCCF was working were abroad, their whereabouts, what made them migrate and what made their parents let them go abroad, sometimes unaccompanied by an adult.

Thanks to the sociological study, the regular meetings with institution representatives and informal community leaders, as well as to all the work carried out with the children and their families, we managed to get a clearer picture of child migration, community issues and Oas people's mentality (**Appendix S**). The theoretical framework that we based our intervention on is described below.

The factors influencing the child's decision to leave the country are:

- 1. Personal factors:** lack of school interest, looking for adventure, desire "to be someone";
- 2. Family-related factors:** parents or relatives abroad, parents' encouragement, family problems;
- 3. Community-related factors:** little importance to education, great importance to money, the success stories of those who have come back from abroad, competition within the community for material belongings (house, car);
- 4. Social and economic factors:** small number of job training opportunities at home, lack of jobs, family's financial problems.

Children go abroad the legal way, usually crossing the border with their passport and their parents' written consent or even with their parents. According to the Oas people's mentality, 14-15 year-olds are already grown-ups; they must get on in life by themselves and make life decisions. In general, they are supposed to help out their parents either by working in the house or by providing financial help. Consequently, if a teenager who is over 14-15 years old wants to go abroad, his parents find it right to accept his decision even if they don't agree with it.

Migrant children can get in different positions:

- 1. Work**
Some children, mostly those who have finished 8 or 10 grades and don't want to continue their education, leave Romania with a family member, a relative, a friend or even alone to work abroad. They can get a job only on the black market, usually in constructions, farming and house cleaning.
- 2. School**

The children enrolled in a school abroad live there with their parents who have been in that country for a few years, they have legal papers, and they have the money to support their children. Nevertheless, many of the children who have gone abroad alone or with their parents/relatives end up in halfway homes, where they get board and lodging, and they have access to language courses and trade learning. Other children live in deserted buildings; during the day they attend NGO-supported centres where they can eat, wash themselves and take part in educational and leisure activities. In these cases, the children tell their parents on the phone that they go to school there.

3. Crimes

The most frequent crimes are begging and stealing. We have little information on this phenomenon because no one admits that they or their children have committed crimes. Many of those who had been abroad on visit or to work told us they had seen many Romanian children (even from their village) begging in the street, pickpocketing, and shoplifting.

The communities know nothing of child prostitution. They mentioned just a few cases of adults practising prostitution abroad. Still, it is possible that some children practice prostitution, but the community does not know about it.

4. Child trafficking

No child trafficking case was pointed out to us in the region of Oas. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the children from Oas are not exploited or trafficked once they get to Western Europe, especially unaccompanied children or those who are accompanied only by their far relatives or friends who eventually let them manage on their own.

Even if migration to Western Europe has significantly developed in the last years, the migrants come back home and invest the money earned in building or renovating their houses. Most of them confess that they do want to come back to Romania when they get old and they cannot work anymore and, consequently, they will no longer be welcome in foreign countries. Many of those who had worked abroad said they hadn't liked it; they had migrated mainly because of the better-paid jobs from Western Europe.

In order to send a clear, easy to grasp message to the community, it has been important for us to get information from our foreign partners. For an NGO carrying out this kind of work, it is essential to collaborate with the institutions and the NGO's from the countries where Romanian migrant or trafficked children have been identified.

These organisations can send regular information on children found in different situations in their country and they can work with Romanian institutions to solve cases, whenever possible.

Such bilateral partnerships can help develop strategies regarding the work to be carried out, problemsolving approaches and fieldwork.

In order to intervene more efficiently, it is important to have deep knowledge of that specific project region, the community issues and their causes as well as how community members perceive them.

Why should we intervene?

Wrong picture of the reality abroad

We thought that one of the things we were supposed to do in the region was to inform and prepare the children with regard to the circumstances they could get into if they decided to leave Romania. This was necessary mainly because the majority of the Oas children already knew and were thinking solely of the positive side of migration, ignoring the difficulties and the dangers of it. The community members who have come back from abroad talk only about beautiful things. Hence, the community, especially children, get the wrong picture of the reality abroad, an illusion promising to children anything they have dreamt of: loads of money, an easy life, a top-of-the-line car, fashion clothes. The material side of things has such a strong impact on the people from this region that sometimes, even if they are perfectly aware of some of the migration risks, they simply don't take them into account. Moreover, the grown-ups hide the migration dangers from their children.

All migration and trafficking prevention or fight work must always start from informing the community on migration risks.

Violation of the rights of the child

Working daily with the project communities, we could see that often the basic children's rights were not respected, maybe even out of ignorance. Our information activities targeting grown-ups highlighted the great number of children's rights violated when parents agreed to their children's going abroad and they were meant to raise the parents' awareness. Moreover, an important part of the information classes held in schools consisted in presenting and explaining the children's rights, and then talking about the rights which are violated for the children who go abroad unaccompanied.

We printed posters and leaflets on the children's rights as stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which our work team distributed in schools and to the project-targeted families.

Often parents violate the children's rights out of ignorance. Consequently, it is imperative to inform children and adults on the rights of the child and the parents' duties to raise, educate and protect the child.

Migration dangers and potential consequences

The people of Oas think that money is the most important thing in life and that the way to money goes through Western Europe. Most children from the region have the wrong picture of the life abroad. Due to all these, migrant children are exposed to a number of risks.

The children who migrate unaccompanied or accompanied by far relatives/neighbours/friends who eventually let them manage on their own are extremely vulnerable to trafficking. Homeless, without money or protection, they can easily be trapped into stealing or begging networks. Some of them end up in the hands of prostitution networks and they are sexually exploited. Trafficked children are often battered, raped and tortured, which has a strong long-term negative impact on their body and psyche.

Types of intervention (prevention, protection, reintegration, lobby and advocacy)

The field data helped us set an action plan appropriate for the community issues.

I. PREVENTION

The main project goal was prevention. We set off an information and awareness campaign on prevention in the four project communes from Oas, targeting both children and adults – parents and teachers.

I. 1. Information Activities in Schools

To plan the whole information campaign, we used the activity pattern of Terre des Hommes Albania, that we adjusted to the region of Oas. The starting point for the leaflets targeting children and for the talks we had with school children was a story. We chose the story of a boy who drops out of school and goes to France hoping for a better future; however, his dreams don't come true as he ends up in difficult and dangerous situations. The main purpose of the information school classes was to provide to children real pieces of information on migration and life abroad. We stressed the negative side and the dangers of migration, as children knew little about them and they were not aware of them. We wanted to help those who were thinking of migrating to be fully informed so that they could weigh the pros and cons of such a decision. We also wanted to make them know how they could protect themselves from dangers and where they could get help when facing hard times.

On the overall, this kind of information classes were quite successful among children as the discussion points and the approach were new to them and all the information and tools were children-friendly. The majority of the children showed a real interest in the issues discussed and they got involved, talking about friends, relatives or even brothers who had been or were abroad.

An immediate outcome of these activities was that the children started talking more openly to each other about the migration cases they had heard of and they started thinking of the dangers that they could face when they were away from home. As a result to our activities, some children who went abroad with their parents came back after a short period of time and went to school in the village. Some children who were getting ready to go abroad for the summer holiday turned to our community workers asking for

further information on the dangers that could come their way and the services they could access if they faced hard times.

During the above-mentioned activities, we noticed the success stories of those who came back home to visit had a strong impact on the children. Many children had already spoken to someone who had come back to Romania after some time abroad and who had told them about great living conditions and schools that provided high quality education. If we were to compare the Romanian educational conditions with the Western European ones, especially craftsmanship and trade learning, we would see there is a great difference indeed. In the Romanian rural areas, there is only one trade school for girls and one for boys. Most of the times the trades taught do not meet the interests of the young people today.

Another drawback, frequently pointed out, is the lack of or few public transportation means connecting the villages to the towns where there is a higher variety of vocational schools. In Western Europe, the trade-learning offer is wider, and the family doesn't have to pay school tuition because it is fully covered by the authorities.

Before these activities started in schools, we had informed the schoolteachers about them. Still, we think we didn't pay enough attention to them as we focused more on building trusting relationships with the children and their families.

Some of the teachers admitted they didn't think the project would work. They said if we didn't offer money and jobs to the families, they would eventually migrate, taking on the risks of such a decision. Other teachers told us everything we were doing was in vain and they even agreed with child migration. Still, most of the teachers were aware that child migration was a serious issue, but didn't think they had the means to do anything about it. We noticed that teachers chose not to get involved during our activities because our approach was new to them as well and they didn't know how to participate.

The International Migration Office (Office des Migrations Internationales) gave us significant support during the information campaign, sending us informative materials on child trafficking: video tapes with trafficking victims testimonials, guidelines for teaching activities, leaflets, imprinted T-shirts, pens and key rings. They were all distributed to children and teachers.

On the initiative of Terre des Hommes, we included HIV/AIDS in our information campaign as well as HIV infection is one of the greatest migration risks. It is a real danger as many young people go abroad uninformed on HIV/AIDS transmission and protection. The Terre des Hommes HIV/AIDS resource officer helped us with the campaign and sent us a lot of information, working methods and tools that we needed.

We held information classes with 8th-10th graders and distributed leaflets and posters on the issue to teenagers and teachers. This action was very useful because the people from the rural environment have little knowledge of HIV/AIDS mainly because most of the awareness campaigns take place in big towns. Some of the teachers even asked us for more informative materials to use with other school children, who were involved in our campaign.

It is important to inform and prepare the teachers about the topic to be discussed in school. This must be taken into account every time we carry out school actions. Moreover, we think that debates on real cases would have made teachers get more involved in the information activity.

The actions held in schools must always be interactive to guarantee children's active participation.

I. 2. Family Work

The project team paid regular visits to the families whose children had been identified as being at risk of migrating or of being migrated, in order to inform and provide them social care services. Most of the visited families were reluctant to our information work because, according to them, they didn't need our services.

Some of the families we talked to knew the risks unaccompanied migrant children were exposed to. Nevertheless, they didn't pass the information on to their children. Often, the adults said they were ready to take a risk and leave aside the negative aspects that we talked about with them as their wish to make money was stronger than anything. Many of the parents told us there was nothing they could do if their child wanted to leave the country. In their opinion, parents have no more responsibilities once the child turns 14-15 years old.

The families whose children had already been abroad were unwilling to provide information about their children's whereabouts, why they had left or what they were doing abroad. The parents were afraid that once they gave us these details we would try to look for their child and send him/her back home. Our fieldwork got even harder because of the County Child Protection Department social workers who were running social enquiries in the area, on the request of the Romanian National Authority for the Children's Rights Protection and foreign authorities, in order to assess the family situation of unaccompanied children abroad. In time, the reluctant attitude towards FRCCF started to change when a part of the community realised that we had not sent any child back home and that we had helped some of the families to solve their problems.

When we presented the leaflets targeting parents, most of the families agreed that unaccompanied children abroad were exposed to a series of dangers. Still, they have different opinions on what unaccompanied child and danger mean. In their opinion, when a child goes abroad with a friend, a neighbour or a far relative, he/she is not exposed to any risks. According to them, the child is accompanied and, consequently, he/she is safe. They don't even take into account the fact that once the children get abroad, they are on their own and have to earn money alone.

Families named different reasons for migration, chiefly social-economic ones: "They have no future in Romania". There are no jobs or they are very low-paid and the salary income doesn't provide a decent living, the children have no money to continue or finish school, and those that do finish school don't find employment. Second to these reasons, there is a strong area-specific motivation: they want to have a house at least as beautiful as the neighbour's. Once they get abroad, they know that if they find a job they can earn enough money to build a beautiful house back home, and the children can get to halfway homes, where they can study or learn a trade. Those who manage to get some job training abroad and learn the language have many chances to find well-paid employment there.

The community workers recruited for the project came from the communities where the project was implemented. They were real middlemen between the project team and the community. The community worker and the social worker would run

family visits, followed by care plans drew up for each case based on the visit assessment.

As community members were involved in the project we could work and establish trusting relations with the family.

I. 3. Public Meetings

Based on the experience of a community project run in another Satu Mare county region, where community meetings take place regularly to discuss community issues and find solutions, we planned similar meetings in the four Oas project communes. We started from the hypothesis that the whole community was involved in the migration phenomenon. Thus, our work had to address the entire community, and regular meetings could give us the chance to approach a high number of people. However, this plan seemed undoable for various reasons:

- This sort of meetings have never been organised in the region of Oas, people there are not used to gather up and discuss matters of shared concern. There is a weak community spirit and people are not at all interested in community issues as everyone cares about their own matters. A community worker told us the people there were very envious: “if someone sees that his neighbour has a penny more than him, he won’t help him out with anything... not even to die”.
- Most of the grown-ups are working abroad. Only the children and the aged are still in the village. The grown-ups that are at home work the field all day long.
- We found out that the parents don’t even attend school parent meetings. Most of them are abroad and those who are at home (parents or grandparents), are not interested in their child’s school results or problems.

The only place where the villagers meet up is the church. Consequently, with the help of a priest from one of the communes, we presented the project to a big group of people and we handed them informative prints. The participants looked indifferent and passive and many of them left the churchyard in the middle of our presentation. Based on this experience, we decided that our information work would be more efficient if ran this sort of activities at family visits.

Where possible, the village priest informed the other communes about the FRCCF migration prevention project. The social worker had drawn up a written document that the priest presented in his church and handed out informative prints. We have to mention though that this happened just in a few churches where the priests agreed to.

For this type of activities, it is essential to identify formal and informal leaders to be trained and informed on the project goal, objectives and activities. It is important to find the right way to involve these leaders efficiently in the project according to their participation will and the role played within the community.

II. PROTECTION

II. 1. Information and Counselling Offices

This sort of offices were set up in every project commune in order to provide social care, psychological and legal counselling to the community. The offices and their schedule were promoted through posters and at church: the priests made an

announcement at the end of the mess and the community workers handed out flyers and leaflets at the church entrance. However, these information and counselling offices were not widely accepted. Very few people turned to our professional services and only after the community worker had visited them and guided them to these offices based on the problems identified. This attitude could be explained by the local people's mentality: people don't trust strangers and don't share their problems with them. The only person they trust is the priest because they know he won't give away what they tell him.

It was easier to inform and counsel families during the project team visits.

II. 2. Teenager Support Groups

The purpose of the support groups was to provide teenagers with a setting where they could talk and receive information about age-specific issues, like: peer relations, relationship with their parents, communication, conflicts, smoking, drinking and migration.

The teenagers looked very interested in these groups, as this was the first action of this kind to be organised in their schools. The group discussion points were selected according to the psychologist and social worker's suggestions, who coordinated the whole activity. The participants' suggestions were taken into account as well. The working methods were chosen in such a way so that the meetings would be both useful and fun. Thus, we made use of a great number of games, pair or group exercises, cartoons, collage and debates. We tried to encourage every child to get involved and freely express their opinions and feelings throughout the meetings.

Most of the teenagers thought they learnt many new, useful and interesting things; some of them made new friends; others saw these meetings as a way to spend their spare time. Obviously, teenagers need this sort of activity, allowing them to talk about their problems and receive issue-related information or even advice, taking into account that most of the parents are working abroad and cannot give them this kind of support.

When organising these activities, it is most important to always choose the debate topics with the group participants.

II. 3. Support for Continuing School or Getting Professional Training

Some of the children from these communities drop out of school after the 8th grade because their family doesn't have the financial means to let them continue school. On the other hand, the rural environment schools offer limited training opportunities: one trade learning possibility for girls and one for boys (often the same as for girls).

Through a project funded by a French foundation FRCCF will support 12 children who want to go to high school in town but don't have enough money. We will cover the transportation or accommodation costs for them. Moreover, we will provide financial support and counselling to young people in order to help them get professional training and integrate in the society and on the job market (find a job or start a small business).

III. REINTEGRATION

FRCCF's involvement in Romanian migrant children repatriation consisted chiefly in fieldwork. In other words, FRCCF visited the families whose children were abroad and decided to come back home. In these cases, the project team assessed the

family's situation, drafted care plans and came up with the best measures and services for their social and professional reintegration. We worked very well with French partner organisations, which referred to us cases of unaccompanied Romanian children abroad.

In most cases, the children/young people changed their mind about coming back to Romania after having spent some time abroad. The foreign laws on underage repatriation say that repatriation is possible only if the child agrees with it. Appendix T illustrates the repatriation process, as we understood it.

It would be better if a project team member who does not belong to the village community assesses the situation of the families with unaccompanied children abroad, on the request of the partner organisations. The organisation running this type of work must be very familiar with the current county resources and services as well as the legislation in the field.

IV. LOBBY AND ADVOCACY

As far as lobby and advocacy were concerned, the first step was to set up a group sharing the same goals, which could meet regularly to talk and draw up joint working strategies. Hence, the county child migration and trafficking prevention network was created, made up of representatives of various child protection public and private institutions from the county of Satu Mare. The network members are: The General County Social Care and Child Protection Department, The County School Inspectorate, The County Customs Police Department, The County Police Department, The Court Service for Victim Protection and Social Reintegration of Criminals, The County Employment Agency. A number of the network members took part in the team project trainings.

To render the network even more efficient, information exchanges were organised between the network members and experts from other countries. Thus, the former had the chance to get to know the work of other organisations, within meetings with Terre des Hommes Albania, Terre des Hommes Moldavia and Hors la Rue from France.

During the network meetings, a joint action plan was drawn up setting a homogenous framework for the actions needed to be taken to prevent and fight the phenomenon.

A network problem was the membership change, which engendered a longer period needed for group adjustment and cohesion.

It is most important to set up a team whose members are involved in preventing child migration and trafficking within the institution they represent. It is essential to identify the right people as potential members of the network so that they don't have to be replaced. Constant network meetings should be organised, the goal and objectives should be clear and embraced by all. A joint action plan can increase the network efficiency and the county cooperation on migration and human trafficking dangers prevention.

Future Activities

- Develop partnerships with national and international institutions competent in human trafficking prevention and fight.
- Enter current regional or national networks or structures combating child migration and trafficking.
- Set up community services in the four project communes aiming at preventing school abandonment, family abuse and child migration. In this respect, we shall identify current local resources and shall work with local authorities.
- Support the children / the young who want to continue school or get professional training.
- Continue the information campaign on child migration and trafficking risks.
- Social and professional reintegration of repatriated children/young people.

12. Conclusions

- The migration phenomenon grew intensely in the last ten years. The data show that in 1990 only 20 people from a certain community were abroad, whereas now 200 families are abroad. The analysed statistical data make us believe that in the future we should expect the migration trend to continue as a great number of children have both parents abroad.
- There is a migration network that migrants use: the more acquaintances, relatives, family members an adult or child has abroad, the more chances they have to migrate; a common feature of the children recorded in the database is that most of them have a close relative abroad.
- Most of the grown-ups that go to work abroad (even those who have legal papers) wish to come back home. Nevertheless, as to the children leaving Romania accompanied or unaccompanied and who end up in a halfway centre or enrol in school, it is most likely that they won't return home: this trend seems to be a more recent migration pattern. If we look at case studies, many families say they will not come back to Romania. Some of them have managed to get legal papers and, hence, they prefer to settle down in that foreign country. Others have started a small developing business or have invested in construction business and so they have decided not to return.
- The main reason why they migrate is to make more money than they earn in Romania. The wish to make money is strongly rooted in their values: there is a constant competition between relatives and neighbours regarding the living standard.
- For the members of the project communities, money comes before school. In their opinion, you don't necessarily need a job training to get wealthy. In other words, half of the respondents would do anything for money.

- Neither adult migration nor child migration is perceived as a problem, but as means helping the family to achieve financial security and the community to develop. This was obvious from our interviews during which the advantages of migration were strongly stressed while the risks were overlooked.
- The teachers seem to accept this sort of behaviour and they do not try to change the parents' way of thinking or make the children study harder.
- Contrary to the initial hypothesis, it is not the poorest children in the village that migrate because their families don't even have the money to cover the transportation costs to the target country.
- The children know the dangers they face and the opportunities they have when going abroad, but they don't talk about this matter and are not aware of the consequences of migration.
- People in Oas don't know of trafficked children cases, which can only mean that the trafficked children get in the hands of traffickers only when they get abroad. This is a real danger especially for unaccompanied migrant children.
- One third of the adults do not take into account the will of the child who is under 14 years old. It is important to say that, in Oas, people believe childhood ends at 14-15.
- Parents consider their 14-15 year old children real grown-ups and, consequently, they let them decide their future by themselves. They believe they have no more parent duties to their child when they turn that age. According to them, their children have to help them out as soon as possible just like they have done. They talk very little about the parents' duty to protect and foster the child until the age of 18.
- Local people know that the children migrate mainly to make money not to go to school abroad.
- There is no connection between the parents' level of education and the children's going abroad.
- Local people do not think school is a priority; they do not see this as the child's right to get an education.
- 60% of the adults don't find it important for a child to go abroad accompanied, although half of the subjects know for sure that these children steal, beg or prostitute themselves abroad.

- There is a sort of “law of the silence” regarding migration and work abroad, which is mentioned in other studies run in the very same region. Locals don’t talk openly about these matters.

13. Recommendations

- ? A lot of data have been collected through this research. They could be used in secondary analyses or longitudinal studies. This study can be replicated in any other region of the country where migration is a growing phenomenon or child trafficking is recorded.
- ? The methodology we used was hard to apply due to the very nature of the migration and working abroad matters. We recommend to avoid applying questionnaires (due to the high no-answer rate) and use qualitative methods for future research.
- ? We can talk about a new stage of the Oas migration tradition: young people settle down in Western European countries. This new trend should be researched by contacting these youngsters during their summer holiday, when they usually come home for a short period of time.
- ? Many of the children who had been abroad talked about missing home, their friends and the people they knew. These testimonials could be of great help to the professionals who will work to reintegrate the children who come back from abroad. Still, the number of children returning home is quite small at the present.
- ? There is an alarmingly increasing number of children who are left home without parent supervision: if we take into account only the data from Table 27– more precisely, those showing that in one of the communities 479 children have at least one parent abroad, and 46% of them are in the care of other people than their parents – an urgent intervention seems mandatory. There is a similar situation in the other project communities as well.
- ? Our conclusion is that we can talk about a new category of children who are at risk (of being abandoned, of dropping out of school or being trafficked) and need special intervention. A possible solution could be setting up local day-care centres where children can receive a hot meal after school and homework support from professionals (teachers, special education teachers), if possible. In these centres, the children could talk about their learning problems or get school and vocational guidance from a special education teacher or a pedagogue.
- ? The intervention should start as soon as possible because there is already a wrong illusion-like perception of the reality abroad, widely spread among children. Moreover, the adults, regardless their social status, minimise the risks of migration or trafficking. From the point of view of children's rights, things are alarming because those who should protect children do not even respect their basic rights.
- ? The most successful FRCCF activities were those in which children were involved: school information campaign, support groups, support for continuing school.

? The FRCCF experience has showed that the intervention should focus on prevention, protection and reintegration, according to the case.

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APPENDICES

Research Working Tools

APPENDIX A – Town Hall Statistical Data Form

APPENDIX B – School Statistical Data Form

APPENDIX C – Questionnaire

APPENDIX D – Interview Guidelines

APPENDIX E – Children Focus Group Guidelines

Statistical Data

APPENDIX F – Community Issues Perceptions

APPENDIX G – Values

APPENDIX H – Number of School Children in the Four Communes

APPENDIX I – 8th Grade Graduates

APPENDIX J – Reasons for Migration: Individual Cases

Community Intervention Working Tools

APPENDIX K – Social Enquiry

APPENDIX L – Child Record Card

APPENDIX M – Service Recording Form

APPENDIX N – Family Visit Report

APPENDIX O – Care Plan

APPENDIX P – Monthly Report

APPENDIX R – Meeting Report

Theoretical Methods

APPENDIX S – Migration Factors – Theoretical Basis for Intervention

APPENDIX T – Unaccompanied Child Repatriation Procedure