

THE IMPACTS OF MIGRATION ON CHILDREN IN MOLDOVA

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THE IMPACTS OF MIGRATION ON CHILDREN IN MOLDOVA

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The Impacts of Migration on Children in Moldova

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Executive Summary

There is increasing awareness about the links between migration, poverty and a lack of employment opportunities. Yet concern about the welfare of children living in migrant households has yet to become part of anti-poverty development strategies. As recent surveys show, in Moldova and other labour-sending countries, remittances have represented a way out of poverty for migrant households. However, parental migration can also put children at risk of social exclusion: in many cases the absence of their parents hinders children's social participation; these children are often stigmatized as "different" and potentially dangerous by other parents and even by their teachers. In addition, because they receive remittances they are seldom classified as "poor," and social programmes tend to exclude them.

As in most countries with high out-migration, in Moldova information on the welfare of children left behind is scarce. Basic data on their living conditions, their needs and the barriers to the realization of their rights is needed for the design of protective and anti-poverty policies.

UNICEF Moldova has launched an initiative to improve the existing information on children in migrant households, in the context of a broader UNICEF global study on the impact of migration and remittances on children. During its initial phase, the Moldova studies on the impact of migration on children left behind gathered existing quantitative and qualitative secondary data and carried out quantitative and qualitative research on children living in migrant households. These materials helped draw a broad picture of the incidence and magnitude of migration, and of the barriers children face in the realization of their rights.

What does this broad picture teach us? Their parents' departure has multiple impacts on children's material conditions and on their emotional development, social relations and school performance. Children's feelings after their parents' departure include guilt, sadness, isolation, fear of abandonment, and some even develop aggressive behaviour. In numerous cases care-givers perceive that parents' absence hampers children's school performance, mainly because they cannot count on parental guidance or support.

The studies also show that the evaluation of the school performance of children left behind is far from "objective;" it is heavily influenced by teachers' attitudes (positive or negative) towards the children of migrant parent. Some teachers are trained and able to understand these children's problems, while others tend to penalize them in various ways.

In addition, the studies suggest that health and behavioural risks are more abundant among children living in migrant households: the availability of money, peer pressure and low supervision can often lead to substance abuse and related troubles. The studies and the literature review revealed other impacts of migration on children: the reactions of the "community" and of adults, including teachers, health officials and even care-givers.

In contrast to this description, other sources have emphasized the positive economic impact of remittances on migrants' households: remittances have been the main cause of a drop in poverty, which tends to be higher in non-migrant households (CBS-AXA, 2007). Furthermore, these sources stress the positive impact of remittances on school attendance and health care for children left behind.

It is important to note that both tendencies can coexist: on the one hand, the positive economic impact of remittances, which alleviate economic poverty at the household level and facilitate children's access to social services; on the other hand, the negative impacts of parents' absence on children, which affect their psychological well-being and their schooling and health. And, over and above these factors, as in other countries, the migration of parents helps create in society an image of these children as "different."

Designing and implementing social policies targeting the children of migrants requires further research: more accurate and more detailed information will be needed to identify the specific needs of these children and the type of actions that can address these needs. This endeavour will require funding, as well as the establishment of collaborative agreements with local and external institutions in order to implement more comprehensive studies.

The present report is based on the materials produced and gathered during the initial phase of UNICEF's global research. It is organized as follows:

Section one briefly summarizes the main migration trends in Moldova, relating them to the number of children left behind and the types of households they reside in.

Section two examines the results of the qualitative study, focusing on the main differences between children in migrant and non-migrant households and the role played by communities and care-givers.

Section three summarizes the public policy initiatives that relate to children in migrant households.

The last section presents conclusions, policy recommendations and suggestions for further research, policy design and implementation.

Resumen Ejecutivo

Cada vez hay más datos sobre los vínculos que existen entre la emigración, la pobreza y la falta de oportunidades de empleo. Sin embargo, la preocupación por el bienestar de los niños que viven en hogares donde los progenitores han emigrado no forma parte todavía de las estrategias de desarrollo contra la pobreza. Como indican los estudios más recientes, en Moldova y en otros países donde emigran los trabajadores, las remesas han representado una salida de la pobreza para los hogares de los migrantes. Sin embargo, la emigración de los progenitores puede poner a sus hijos en situación de riesgo de exclusión social: en muchos casos, la ausencia de los progenitores dificulta la participación del niño en las actividades sociales; otros progenitores, e incluso sus maestros, estigmatizan a estos niños al considerarlos a veces como “diferentes” y potencialmente peligrosos. Además, debido que reciben remesas, en pocas ocasiones se les considera “pobres”, y los programas sociales suelen excluirlos.

Como ocurre en la mayoría de los países con una elevada emigración, la información sobre el bienestar de los niños que permanecen en su país de origen es escasa en Moldova. Para establecer políticas de protección y contra la pobreza se necesitan datos básicos sobre sus condiciones de vida, sus necesidades y los obstáculos a la realización de sus derechos.

La oficina de UNICEF en Moldova ha comenzado una iniciativa para mejorar la información existente sobre los niños de los hogares de migrantes, en el contexto de un estudio mundial más amplio de UNICEF sobre las repercusiones de la emigración y de las remesas sobre los niños. Durante su fase inicial, los estudios en Moldova sobre las consecuencias de la migración entre los niños que permanecen en el país de origen reunieron datos secundarios cuantitativos y cualitativos existentes sobre los niños que viven en hogares de migrantes. Estos materiales contribuyeron a establecer un panorama más amplio de la incidencia y la magnitud de la emigración, y los obstáculos que afrontan los niños en la realización de sus derechos.

¿Qué nos indica este panorama general? La salida de sus progenitores del país tiene numerosas repercusiones sobre las condiciones materiales de los niños y su desarrollo emocional, sus relaciones sociales y el rendimiento en la escuela. Los sentimientos de los niños después de que sus progenitores salen del país incluyen culpabilidad, tristeza, aislamiento, miedo al abandono y, en el caso de algunos niños, incluso una conducta agresiva. En numerosos casos los cuidadores perciben que la ausencia de los progenitores obstaculiza el rendimiento escolar de los niños, principalmente porque no pueden contar con la orientación o el apoyo de sus progenitores.

Los estudios indican también que la evaluación del rendimiento escolar de los niños que permanecen en su país está muy lejos de ser “objetiva”, ya que en ella influyen bastante las actitudes (positivas o negativas) de los maestros con respecto a los hijos de un progenitor migrante. Algunos maestros están capacitados y pueden comprender los problemas de estos niños, mientras que otros suelen penalizarlos de distintas maneras.

Además, los estudios sugieren que los riesgos para la salud y la conducta son más numerosos entre los niños que viven en hogares de migrantes: la disponibilidad de dinero, la presión de los pares y una escasa supervisión pueden a menudo conducir al abuso de sustancias y a otros

problemas relacionados. Los estudios y los materiales informativos revelan otras repercusiones de la emigración sobre los niños: las reacciones de la “comunidad” y de los adultos, entre ellos los maestros, los funcionarios de salud e incluso los cuidadores.

En contraste con esta descripción, otras fuentes han hecho hincapié en las consecuencias económicas positivas que tienen las remesas sobre los hogares de migrantes: las remesas ha sido la principal causa de un descenso en la pobreza, que suele ser más elevada en los hogares no migrantes (CBS-AXA, 2007). Además, estas fuentes hacen hincapié en las repercusiones positivas de las remesas sobre la asistencia a la escuela y la atención de la salud para los niños que permanecen en el país de origen.

Es importante señalar que ambas tendencias pueden coexistir: por una parte, las repercusiones económicas positivas de la remesas, que alivian la pobreza económica a escala del hogar y facilitan el acceso de los niños a los servicios sociales; por otra parte, las consecuencias negativas de la ausencia de los progenitores sobre los niños, que afectan su bienestar psicológico y su escolarización, así como su situación en materia de salud. Y, por encima de estos factores, al igual que ocurre en otros países, la emigración de los progenitores contribuye a crear en la sociedad una imagen de estos niños como “diferentes”.

Diseñar y aplicar políticas sociales adaptadas a los hijos de los migrantes exige una mayor investigación: se necesita una información más confiable y detallada para determinar las necesidades específicas de estos niños y el tipo de medidas que puedan abordar estas necesidades. Esta tarea exigirá financiación, así como el establecimiento de acuerdos de colaboración con instituciones locales y externas a fin de llevar a cabo estudios más amplios.

El presente estudio está basado en los materiales producidos y reunidos durante la fase inicial de la investigación mundial de UNICEF. Está organizado como sigue:

La sección uno resume brevemente las principales tendencias en la emigración que se dan en Moldova, relacionándolas con el número de niños que permanecen en el país y los tipos de hogares donde residen.

La sección dos examina los resultados del estudio cualitativo, centrándose en las principales diferencias entre los niños que viven en hogares de migrantes y los que viven en hogares de no migrantes, y el papel que desempeñan las comunidades y los cuidadores.

La sección tres resume las iniciativas de política pública relacionadas con los niños en hogares de migrantes.

La última sección presenta conclusiones, recomendaciones de política y sugerencias para una mayor investigación, diseño de políticas y aplicación.

Résumé Analytique

On a de plus en plus conscience des liens qui existent entre la migration, la pauvreté et le manque de perspectives d'emploi. Pourtant, se préoccuper du bien-être des enfants vivant dans des ménages de migrants ne fait pas encore partie des stratégies de développement anti-pauvreté. Comme le montrent les récentes enquêtes, en République de Moldova et dans tous les pays fournisseurs de main-d'œuvre, les envois de fonds ont représenté une porte de sortie de la pauvreté pour les ménages de migrants. Toutefois, la migration des parents peut exposer les enfants à l'exclusion sociale : dans bien des cas, l'absence de leurs parents entrave la participation sociale des enfants ; ces enfants sont souvent stigmatisés comme « différents » et potentiellement dangereux par d'autres parents et même par leurs enseignants. De plus, parce qu'ils reçoivent des fonds de l'étranger, ils sont rarement inclus dans la catégorie des « pauvres », et les programmes sociaux tendent à les exclure.

Comme dans la plupart des pays à émigration élevée, les informations en République de Moldova sur le bien-être des enfants laissés au pays sans leurs parents sont rares. Il est nécessaire de se procurer des données de base sur leurs conditions de vie, leurs besoins et les barrières qui entravent la réalisation de leurs droits pour mettre au point des politiques protectrices anti-pauvreté.

UNICEF/République de Moldova a lancé une initiative pour améliorer les informations existantes sur les enfants des ménages de migrants, dans le contexte d'une étude mondiale plus large de l'UNICEF sur l'impact de la migration et des envois de fonds sur les enfants. Au cours de cette phase initiale, les études moldaves sur l'impact de la migration sur les enfants laissés au pays rassemblaient les données secondaires quantitatives et qualitatives existantes sur les enfants vivant dans des ménages de migrants. Ce matériel a permis de dresser un vaste tableau de l'incidence et de l'ampleur de la migration, et des barrières qui entravent la réalisation des droits de ces enfants.

Que nous apprend ce vaste tableau ? Le départ de leurs parents a de multiples impacts sur les conditions matérielles auxquelles ces enfants sont soumis et sur leur développement affectif, leurs relations sociales et leurs résultats scolaires. Les sentiments des enfants après le départ de leurs parents vont de la culpabilité à la tristesse en passant par la peur d'être abandonnés, et certains développent même un comportement agressif. Dans de nombreux cas, ceux qui s'occupent d'eux remarquent que l'absence de leurs parents nuit à leur rendement scolaire, principalement parce qu'ils ne peuvent pas compter sur les conseils ou le soutien parentaux.

Les études montrent aussi que l'évaluation des rendements scolaires des enfants laissés au pays est loin d'être « objective » ; elle est lourdement influencée par l'attitude des enseignants (positive ou négative) envers les enfants de parents migrants. Certains enseignants sont formés et capables de comprendre les problèmes de ces enfants, alors que d'autres tendent à les pénaliser de multiples façons.

De plus, les études suggèrent que la santé et les risques liés au comportement sont plus abondants chez les enfants vivant dans des ménages de migrants : la disponibilité d'argent, la pression des camarades et une surveillance insuffisante peuvent souvent conduire à l'abus d'alcool ou d'autres drogues et aux problèmes qui y sont liés. Les études et l'examen de la littérature publiée à ce sujet ont révélé d'autres impacts de la migration sur les enfants : les réactions de la « communauté » et des adultes, y compris les enseignants, les responsables de la santé et même les dispensateurs de soins.

En revanche, d'autres sources ont souligné l'impact économique positif des envois de fonds sur les ménages de migrants : les envois de fonds ont été la cause principale d'un déclin de la pauvreté, qui tend à être plus élevée dans les ménages de non-migrants (CBS-AXA, 2007). De plus, ces sources mettent l'accent sur l'impact positif des envois de fonds sur l'assiduité scolaire pour les enfants laissés au pays.

Il est important de noter que les deux tendances peuvent coexister ; d'un côté, l'impact économique positif des envois de fonds, qui atténue la pauvreté au niveau du ménage et facilite l'accès des enfants aux services sociaux ; de l'autre, les impacts négatifs de l'absence des parents sur les enfants, qui affectent leur bien-être psychologique, leur scolarité et leur santé. Et surtout, comme dans d'autres pays, la migration des parents contribue à créer dans la société l'image que ces enfants sont « différents ».

Mettre sur pied et appliquer des politiques sociales ciblant les enfants de migrants demande davantage de recherche ; des informations plus précises et plus détaillées seront requises pour identifier les besoins spécifiques de ces enfants et les types d'actions qui peuvent répondre à ces besoins. Cette entreprise demandera un financement, ainsi que la mise en place d'accords de coopération avec les autorités locales et extérieures afin de réaliser des études plus complètes.

Le présent rapport est basé sur la documentation fournie et rassemblée au cours de la phase initiale des recherches menées au niveau mondial par l'UNICEF. Il est structuré comme suit :

La section 1 résume brièvement les tendances principales de la migration en République de Moldova, faisant le lien avec le nombre d'enfants délaissés et les types de ménages dans lesquels ils résident.

La section 2 examine les résultats de l'étude qualitative, en mettant l'accent sur les différences principales entre les enfants de ménages de migrants et de non-migrants et le rôle joué par la communauté et les dispensateurs de soins.

La section 3 résume les initiatives de politique publique qui ont trait aux enfants des ménages de migrants.

La dernière section présente des conclusions, des recommandations décisionnelles et des suggestions pour d'autres recherches, et pour l'élaboration et l'exécution des politiques.

Introduction

The Republic of Moldova, which became independent in 1991, is (after Armenia) the second smallest member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The country has an estimated population of 4.3 million, including Transnistria, and the highest population density of all of the independent states of the former Soviet Union. Since its independence, Moldova has suffered severe social and economic crises, largely due to the breakdown of Soviet-era trade and supply links.

Endowed with rich agricultural land and a temperate climate, Moldova has relied heavily on agriculture throughout its history. Currently, agriculture and agro-processing activities account for roughly 30 percent of the country's GDP, and many people still make their living in this sector. Over half the population lives in rural areas.

In recent years, Moldova's economic performance has been commendable, in contrast to its weak performance through most of the 1990s. Since 2000 the country has successfully stabilized. It launched structural reforms to stimulate growth and started setting up an effective social protection system. Real GDP growth has been strong at an average of 6 percent during the last six years. With economic recovery, the national poverty rate has dropped from 73 percent in 1999 to less than 26.5 percent in 2004. In 2006, however, the poverty rate increased to 29 percent, largely as a result of an increase in poverty in rural areas and small towns. As a result, Moldova is still one of the poorest countries in Europe with GDP per capita significantly below the average for Central European countries.

At present the country's economy relies heavily on agriculture and the food-processing industry. The land reforms undertaken in the agricultural sector in the late 1990s and the creation of many small private farms have provided a buffer for workers from lost industries, but have not helped stop the deterioration of living condition for the majority of the population. Unemployment, low incomes and deteriorating living standards encourage people to improve their livelihoods by leaving to seek work abroad.

1. Migration Trends and Children Left Behind

1.1 Who is Migrating?

In their 2006 study, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that 252,000 Moldovans were working abroad and more than 1.5 million Moldovans were living in households receiving remittances.



Prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and even during most of the first decade of Moldova's independence, migration rates were negligible. Before 2000, migration was mostly driven by ethnic or political motives. Since 2000, in the wake of the 1998 regional economic crisis that affected Moldova particularly hard, the search for better economic opportunities abroad pushed migration rates up.

The Moldova Demographic and Health Survey (MDHS), conducted by the Ministry of Health in 2005 shows that 17 percent of Moldovan households had at least one member living and working abroad. Although this figure differs according to different sources, the total may exceed a million people. The percentage is about the same in urban and rural households (16 and 17 percent, respectively).

Approximately 75 percent of all migrants leave the country between the ages of 15 and 39. The most common age for Moldovan to migrate is between the ages of 20 and 24 (25 percent of all emigrants). The majority of migrants have higher education: they are experienced teachers, medical doctors and nurses. More than 25 percent of migrants living abroad have left behind a wife or husband in their household of origin.

1.2 Why are Moldovans migrating?

According to the MDHS, the need for work is the main reason for migration: for 83 percent of female migrants and 91 percent of male migrants, work was the main reason for moving abroad. Only 7 percent of women and 3 percent of men migrated in order to accompany their spouse or other family members abroad. Many migrants, however, are not in financial difficulties and leave only because they want to improve their living standards: completing housing construction or buying an apartment are cited among the most frequent reasons for migration. Seventy-six percent of children interviewed during the qualitative survey (the Impact of Migration and Remittances on Communities, Families and Children, UNICEF-UNDP, 2007) said their housing had improved to a great or to a certain extent. For many young families, the lack of their own home was the main reason for leaving the country in search of work, as the majority of families left behind reported housing problems diminishing after one family member's departure.

“Mother explained that she is going to earn money in order to buy a house and a computer for me,” said an 11-year-old rural male quoted in the UNICEF qualitative survey.

1.3 Where are the households that are left behind located and where are migrants going?

According to the MDHS of 2006, the highest percentage of households with at least one migrant is located in the South of the country (21 percent) and the lowest percentage in Chisinau (13 percent). Overall, households with migrants tend to come from the middle (23 percent) and fourth (21 percent) economic quintiles, and fewer come from the richest and poorest quintiles. Most emigrants actually come from rural households; 64 percent are male and 36 percent are female.

Overall, the proportion of migrating females is lower than the proportion of migrating males: 42 percent of migrants are women and 58 per cent are men. However, in Chisinau and the Southern part of the country, a higher proportion of migrants are female than male. Migrants from rural areas are significantly younger than those from urban areas: 43 percent of migrants from rural areas are between the ages of 20 and 29, compared to 32 percent from urban areas. For both areas of residence, but especially for rural areas, migration therefore represents a significant loss of labour and reproductive potential.

Migration flows are determined by the closeness of the destination country and knowledge of its language. Women leave mainly for European countries while men go to Russia. In fact, fully half of Moldova's migrants move to Russia, Ukraine and other CIS countries. One third of all migrants move to Western Europe, with Italy as the primary destination, followed by Portugal, Greece and Spain. Other destination countries include Turkey, the USA, Israel and Romania.

Economic and social conditions will continue to push migration rates up. According to IOM estimates, in 2006 the number of potential migrants in Moldova was 551,000, of whom 340,000 had worked abroad in the recent past and 211,000 intended to go abroad in the next 12 months.

1.3.1 Households with children left behind

What is the impact of migration on the households left behind?

Migration has a considerable impact both on family structure and family development. According to the 2005 MDHS, more than 25 percent of both males and females living abroad left behind a wife or husband in their households of origin. Over half of all migrants are the son, daughter, son-in-law or daughter-in-law of the head of the household. This massive migration results in a decline in the birth rate as well as in family restructuring and an aging population. At present, the phenomenon is becoming highly visible and appears to be on the rise, affecting mainly rural areas, according to the study, *The Impact of Migration and Remittances on Communities, Families and Children* (UNICEF-UNDP, 2007). This trend is aggravated by an internal migration of young families who prefer to leave villages to settle in cities where they can build houses or buy flats, where the infrastructure and the access to basic services is better and there are more opportunities for children.

How many children are left behind?

Once a year, the Ministry of Education and Youth uses the school system to register the number of children left behind; apart from this, there is no system for gathering data on the number of children left behind and on those who have migrated abroad. The report prepared for UNICEF Moldova, *The Situation of Children Left Behind by Moldovan Migrants* by Valeriu Prohnițchi, (EXPERT-GRUP, 2005) and the IOM survey conducted in July and August of 2006 give an estimate of around 177,000 children under 18 left behind by parents working abroad. About 37.1 percent are 10 to 15 years old, 50.8 percent are female and 49.2 percent are male, according to the IOM report.

Indeed, Moldova is one of the countries with the highest proportion of children left behinds in the CIS region: according to the MDHS, approximately one third (31 percent) of children under age 15 years do not live with both parents. Seven percent of Moldovan children do not live with either of their parents. Overall, the median age of children left behind is 11 years old. The majority of these children (79.5 percent) live in rural areas. One fifth of them are under 5 and one quarter or more are age 15 and above. Among children under age 9, there are proportionally more left behind in rural households than in urban households. This trend is reversed for children age 10 and above.

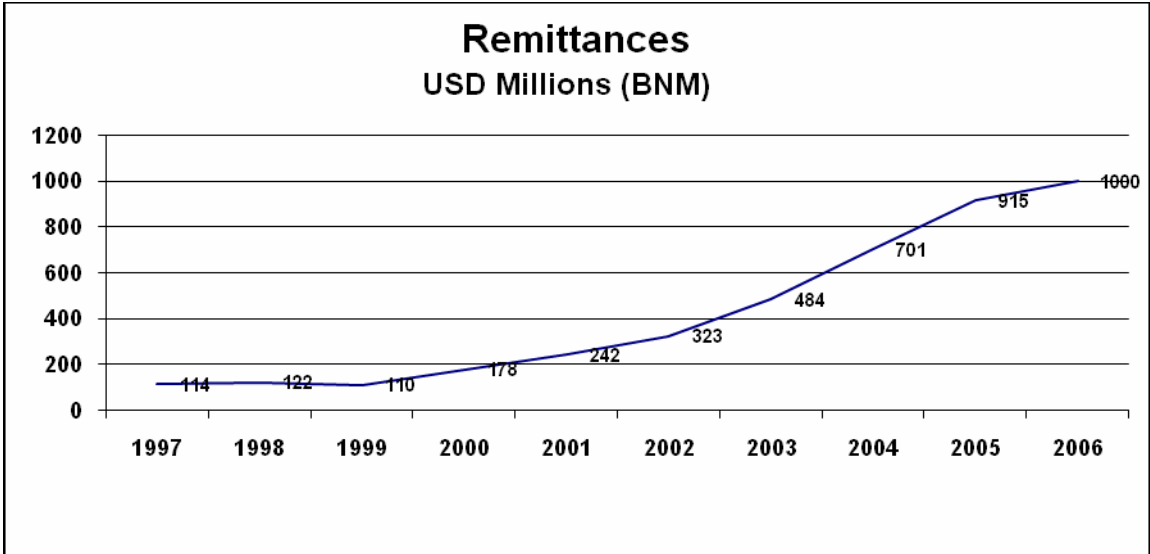
Nearly half (44 percent) of households with a member living abroad are caring for at least one child left behind. This proportion is higher in rural than in urban areas: 47 and 40 percent, respectively. Thirty-seven percent of migrants from urban areas and 45 percent from rural areas left at least one child behind and 40 percent left two or more children behind.

Recent information, coming mostly from qualitative studies, indicates that an increasing number of parents who have settled legally in their destination countries are taking their children with them. This trend is expected to increase in the next few years as more and more parents succeed in legalizing their new residences. This trend was also confirmed in discussions with children who mentioned that their parents were preparing documents for them to leave the country in the near future. Others were waiting to go when the academic year was over or when they got permission from the other parent. However, some cases of migrants' children who interrupted their studies in host countries to come back to Moldova were also reported.

1.3.2 What do remittances represent for households left behind?

Migrants are a major source of income for the Moldovan economy. According to the National Bank of Moldova, the transfer of workers' remittances has increased rapidly over the past few years. In 2006 remittances amounted about US\$ 1 billion. They represent the equivalent of 30 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

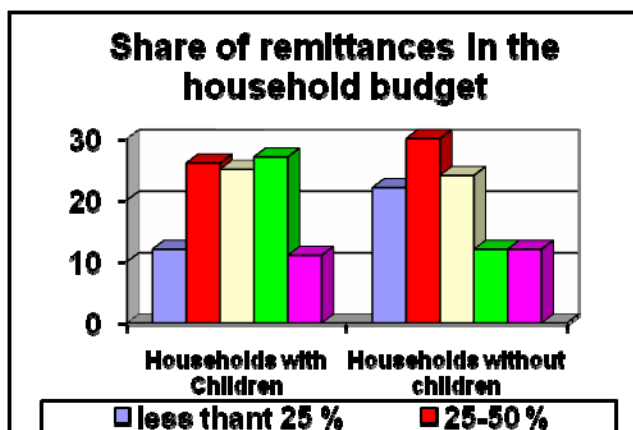
Figure 1



In Moldova, the first objective of the transfer of remittances is to improve family incomes. The great majority of participants (78.4 percent) interviewed during the qualitative study, *The Impact of Migration and Remittances on Communities, Families and Children* (UNICEF-UNDP, 2007) reported an improved financial situation after one of their members had left, with remittances constituting their main source of income.

In 52 percent of households with children under 18 years and a family member working abroad, remittances constituted more than 50 percent of the family budget, as compared to 36 percent for families without children. The presence of children is a key determinant that helps increase remittances flows towards the family. Remittances constitute more than 75 percent of the family budget for 27 percent of families with children, compared with 12 percent of families without children. Remittances represent more than 75 percent of the budget for 26.9 percent of families with children and for 11.8 percent of families without children. Indeed, the presence of one or more children plays a role in increasing the flow of remittances to the family budget. Remittances constitute more than 50 percent of the family budget for 51.6 percent of households with children under 18 who have a family member working abroad and for 35.7 percent for families without children.

Figure 2

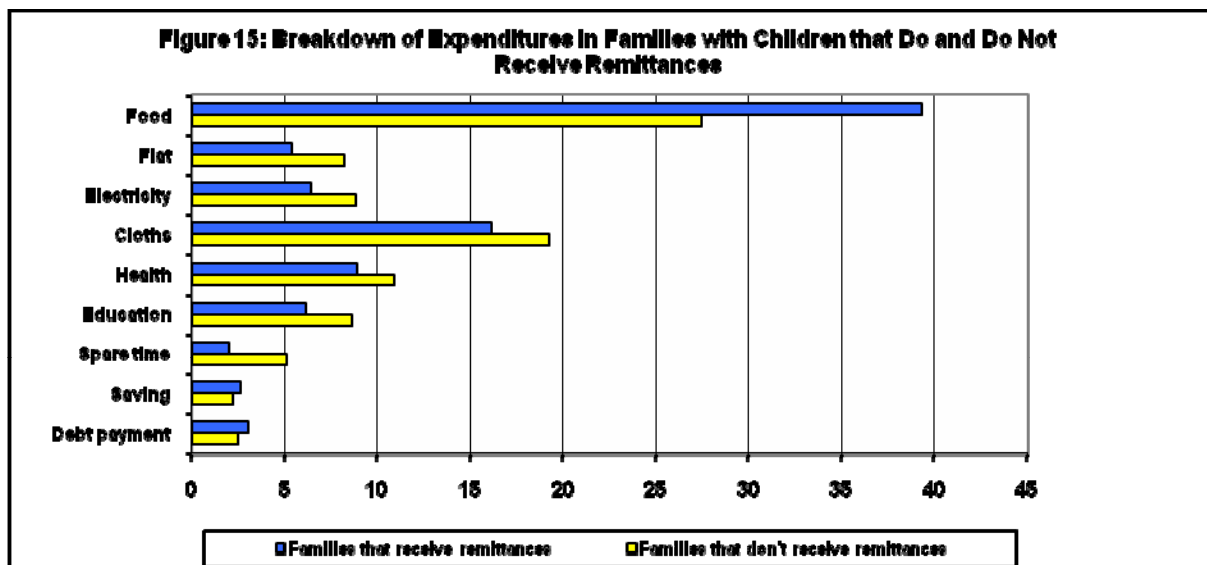


According to the World Bank report, *Moldova, Opportunities for Accelerated Growth*, (World Bank, 2005), more than 80 percent of Moldova’s migrants remit funds and more than 70 percent remit more than half of their earnings. The majority of these flows are used to fund basic household consumption, consumer durables, purchases of housing and debt repayment. A small proportion of these flows – less than 7 percent – is being used to finance business investment.

1.3.3 How are remittances used?

Families with children that receive money from abroad spend more than households with children that do not receive remittances. Remittances are mostly used by families to purchase food and clothing (Table 1) and to cover other basic needs. These patterns have changed since 2004 and remittances are now also often used for improving housing, as well as food. The qualitative survey confirmed the analysis made in 2004 *Labor Migration and Remittances in the*

Figure 3



Analyses of remittance use patterns show that money sent back by migrants may not be used in a very pro-child way.

Figure 4

	Families with children <18	Families without children
Food	31.5 per cent	36.9 per cent
Clothing	18.2 per cent	10.9 per cent
Health	10.2 per cent	16.5 per cent
Education	7.8 per cent	2.9 per cent
Flat-Electricity	15.3 per cent	17.8 per cent
Others	18,9 per cent	13.1 per cent

Families with and without children have the same consumption patterns except for the fact that monthly expenditures for food are twice as high in families receiving remittances. Expenditures on health and education are almost equal. Households with children that receive remittances manage to save three times as much as other households.

Families also use remittances to pay debts, since many of those who leave to work abroad, especially in European countries, have to borrow money for the trip to their destination countries (the equivalent of 3500-4000 Euros for these who migrate to western European countries). The debts of families with children that receive remittances are five times greater than those of

families without children that receive money from abroad, which suggests that the financial situations of households with children under 18 years is much worse.

Although it is difficult measuring remittances impact, it is clear that for Moldova remittances are one of the most important sources of foreign exchange after foreign assistance and foreign direct investment. Remittances served as a cushion against the economic and political turbulence brought about by the transition and it is expected that remittances will continue to play an important role, with a mild positive impact on long-term patterns of macroeconomic growth. Remittances are also an important and stable source of income for many households, especially in the rural areas.

However, evidence suggests that the impact of remittances on poverty and social exclusion is mixed. Remittances contribute to household income and thus, in the short term, reduce poverty. However, surveys also show that remittances can sharpen inequality in the short term by breaking down traditional family and community ties, thus negatively affecting the lives of households left behind. The specific impact of remittances on children left behind is discussed below.

2. The Impact of Migration on Communities, Families and Children Left Behind

Until now, research and policy discussions on Moldovan migration have commonly concentrated on the migration of adults and on remittances. The results and analyses cited below present the Moldovan experience from the perspective of children and of the communities they live in. This section examines how communities, families, children left behind and local authorities perceive the effects of migration and to what extent they understand the nature and level of deprivation it can cause. It also explores the role of remittances in community cohesion and whether they help children to have better education and health. The surveys supported by UNICEF are not nationally representative, since they used very small samples and were based on subjective assessments. Nevertheless both surveys included localities and families from the three regions of Moldova and were based on strong methodologies that enabled researchers to capture data and information on the wellbeing of children left behind and on the other variables at the household and community levels.

2.1 What effects do migration and remittances have on the structure of the communities left behind?

Recent research has stressed the importance of social networks. In addition to removing social barriers, they help to reduce the vulnerability of people who are most at risk. In Moldova, qualitative surveys found that migration challenges fundamental Moldovan values: traditional community structures such as close relationships, openness between neighbours, and solidarity are affected, sometimes severely. The people left behind acquire new behaviours that often affect traditional community cohesion and increase risks for children.

“Many people who remain in Moldova without their life partners avoid going to parties, weddings or christening dinners, which are the main source of socialization in our communities and the main opportunities for establishing new relationships. Can you imagine that a boy gets married and his parents do not come to the wedding because they are abroad, or he is without godparents as they are in Italy and everything is being done through a bank transfer?” (Rural teacher)

Although people who work abroad regularly send money home, they interact less and less with those left behind. Communication and relationships are mainly maintained only within immediate families and sometimes only with close relatives.

“...relationships between community members have changed, becoming less friendly. People are more prejudiced, more withdrawn, more envious, and more insular.”

“Migrants do not pay for health insurance. Although they have children and parents who are pensioners and who receive a medical insurance policy free of charge... A large part of their income is transferred through banks while the other part is remitted in person without being registered... They don't bring revenue to the state.” (Rural school director)

In addition, the families of migrants that become richer tend to form a new social group that gradually loses the sense of belonging to its neighbourhood.

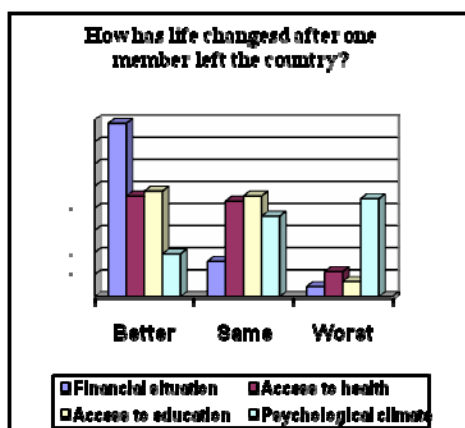
All of these behavioural changes are source of conflict between people and result in the breakdown of community networks that directly affects the activities that traditionally benefit the overall community. Local projects based on community participation such as gas and water pipe projects or the repair of public buildings no longer receive the same interest and participation as before. The inability of those working in Moldova to contribute at the same rate as those receiving remittances is another main reason for this situation. However, it should be noted that education is less affected as the support provided to schools has stayed the same and indeed has frequently increased with significant contributions for technical equipment.

“There were situations when people who left the country contributed to the solution of particular school problems, to the implementation of the school radio project with 500 lei, 1000 lei and 1600 lei per family. A group that was working in Moscow contributed to the purchase of mats for the sports hall. They were very expensive and they bought four. Another group contributed to the reconstruction of the heating system for the sports hall...some people even came with food.” (Rural school director).

2.2 What are the consequences of migration and remittances for the families left behind?

Remittances affect children’s lives by changing family and community resources. Likewise, remittances affect housing conditions as money received from abroad is mostly invested in improving family living conditions (e.g., better housing, nicer clothes). However, remittances are also altering existing social networks without producing immediate positive changes in communities. Likewise, remittances increase the vulnerability of marginalized families of migrant parents, especially given the scarcity of public services. They must often rely on informal networks to sustain their children’s development.

Figure 5



When a family member migrates, the most visible and immediate impact is the material benefit, in particular improvements in the financial situation of the family. In all qualitative surveys conducted in Moldova, 78.4 percent of both adults and children repeatedly mentioned that after the parents’ departure, clothing, housing, food and household equipment improved.

Nevertheless, despite all of its material benefits, migration is detrimental to the psychological climate of the family and its subsequent effects on overall child development.

More than one quarter of both males and females living abroad have left behind a wife or husband in their household of origin. This situation changes family configuration, affecting family cohesion and the behaviour of family members. In the UNICEF-UNDP study of 2007, around 40 percent of adults reported that the absence of the father or the mother or both result in a rapid deterioration of the family’s morale. (See Table A3, Appendix 1). However, most affected families tend to rapidly develop their own coping mechanisms to reduce their stress. Two explanations are reported: first, as migration is widespread in Moldova, people got used to it, and second, households with migrant members who achieve better living standards tend to help the newly affected families to manage the emotional trauma caused by the departure. Adjustments that the families have made are sometimes altered on the migrant’s return: families became so accustomed to the loss that they may exclude the migrant parent from the daily routine; the periodic visits of the migrant become inconvenient.

‘The family, and especially the children, should be assisted by a psychologist during the period of adjustment. After their parents’ departure, children became withdrawn, whining more. They can enter into a depression that leads to the aggravation of chronic diseases.’
(A rural family doctor)

Migration also results in a new division of labour for domestic tasks for the family members left behind. After a period of transition that lasts from a few days to a few months, family members

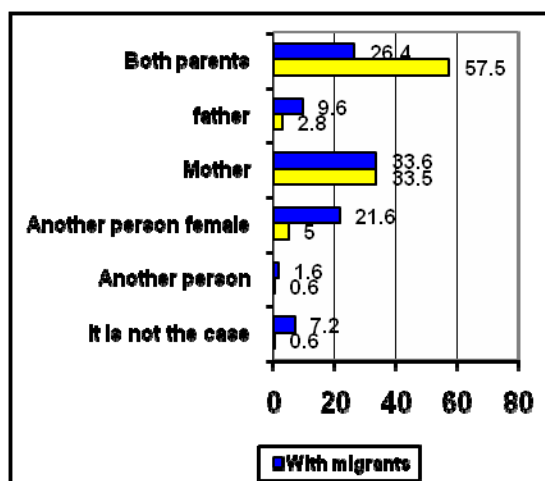
take over the roles and responsibilities of those who have left and adults and children are asked to perform new tasks (see below for more details in the chapter on children left behind).

2.3 How do migration and remittances affect the care provided to children left behind?

The absence of parents has significant effect on family life, especially when mother are absent for long periods, which has such a significant effect on all the family “that [it] can no longer be considered as a normal family”. For children, the absence of parental care may represent a major deprivation, due to lack of supervision, support, encouragement and role models. Children whose parents are absent also have limited place and limited roles in their communities and their rights to participate are not respected. This can affect their development, socialization, relationships and autonomy.

The new configuration of the family entails changes in duties and tasks for the members left behind. In the majority of Moldovan families, mothers take care of the family and perform tasks such as cooking, cleaning, taking children to health facilities, helping them with their homework and supervising them during their leisure time. The traditional role for the father is earning money, although many roles are shared by fathers and mothers. The qualitative survey found that the departure of one or both parents leads inevitably to the rearrangement of gender roles and entails redistribution of responsibilities. The nature and extent of these changes depend on the parent who has migrated: when the father is the migrant parent, 64 percent of mothers continue playing their traditional role of direct care-giver. When mothers migrate, only 46 percent of fathers take on the role of direct care-giver and perform all the duties previously carried out by mothers. When mother leave, the care that is provided to their children is subject to more frequent and more significant changes.

Figure 6



Children often have difficulty adapting to the new family configuration and the new division of responsibilities. According to the 2006 survey on the wellbeing of the children of migrants, A Qualitative Study on Parental Deprivation and Child Development, Child Rights Information Center, Moldova, carried out by the Child Rights Information Center (CRIC) for UNICEF, children left behind by one or both parents take on more responsibilities in their households, and this sometimes ends up in an overwhelming load of duties. In rural areas in particular, the children of migrants are more involved in their family’s agricultural activities than their peers. Children

interviewed in the survey asserted that their new responsibilities did not allow them time for

play, and this affected their peer relationships. The negative impact of parental migration on time devoted to education and leisure, and hence on child development (particularly for younger children) seems to be high.

“My sister and I now do everything that our mother was doing when she was at home, and our father works in the yard.” (15-year-old female).

“I take care of the ducks, one of my brothers takes care of the poultry and the elder takes care of the hog. We wash the dishes and the clothes, which mother used to do when she was at home” (11-year-old rural male).

“Both my parents had left and it was very hard as neither mother nor father was nearby. Then I got used to it, but it isn’t the same. It is not a big deal, but I am anxious without them.” (15-year-old rural female).

As a result of new family configuration, the care provided to children left behind changes. The nature and level of these changes depend on several factors, such as the sex of the parent who left, family relationships with the care-givers, the presence of other children in the immediate neighbourhood and the attitudes of direct and indirect care-givers. The negative changes are sometimes reduced by the protective systems that parents establish to minimize the disruption to their children before they leave the country. When both parents leave to work abroad, young children are most often left in the care of grandparents. In some cases, children are left alone with the oldest child playing the role of care-giver.

“Out of a class of 20 pupils, the parents of 16 children work in Italy, Portugal, Spain and Russia. Three of these children are being brought up by their grandparents, and in the rest of the cases, the father is abroad and the mother is at home. Six families have fallen apart for good and do not live together anymore as he or she has remained abroad” (rural primary teacher).

The majority of parents, tutors and local leaders interviewed for the qualitative survey mentioned repeatedly that it is much better for children to live with their parents: 75 percent of families without migrants disagreed with the statement that it is more important to provide financial support than to live with their children and this opinion is also shared by 87 percent of families with migrants parents. Long absence also creates tensions with care-givers and can result in family breakdown. Many respondents to the UNICEF-UNDP qualitative survey of 2007 reported that divorce is a direct and frequent consequence of going to work abroad (See Appendix 2, Case Study 1). In turn, this change in the family involves crucial issues of family composition, child custody, and property division.

Despite protective systems, many children left behind are often affected emotionally, sometimes under-protected and inadequately supervised. In general, they receive little or no physical or emotional nurturing from their care-givers. Very often, children experience a sense of abandonment. Some children interviewed felt that grandparents are not the best care-givers,

particularly if they are of advanced age. Children are often stressed, lose their self-esteem and are vulnerable to abuse or violence.

Since the child-care roles of parents vary according to their gender and the child's age, it was important to explore the links between the sex of the migrant parent and the impact of their absence on children. The UNICEF surveys found that the sense of abandonment is exacerbated when the mother is the migrant: in 14 percent of families with a migrant mother, the children's perception is that nobody is taking care of them, while only 3 percent feel this way in families with the father abroad. The survey results indicate that in 23 percent of families with migrants, no one took the children to the doctor and in 10 percent no one was responsible for their education. However, it was not possible to assess whether mothers' remittances are used differently from those of from fathers.

“It was very difficult, very, very difficult. There was no one to wake me up in the morning or to prepare meals until I learned how to do what mother or father usually did, but now I can do this myself” (15-year-old rural male).

“Children who are raised by their grandparents show the psychological development of an old person as they are always talking to their grandparents and have their grandparents' manners and habits” (wife with husband working abroad).

Figure 7

PARENTS' ABSENCE AND ITS EFFECT ON BOYS AND GIRLS						
	Mother left		Father left		Both Parent left	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Extra work at home	Moderately affected	Highly affected	Affected	Affected	Moderately affected	Highly affected
Relationship with remaining parent	Not affected	Girls above 15 affected	Affected	Affected	Highly affected	
Has established a coping mechanism with a female caregiver or close relative	ND	care giver play a role of mother	ND	ND	ND	Highly affected

Adapted from the UNICEF-UNDP qualitative survey, 2006

In some cases, the departure of parents is accompanied by a series of upheavals for their children, one of which is moving out of the family home. These children must part with their friends, school and familiar places which implies another adjustment, often a new life style, and represents an additional stress over and above that of their parents' departure.

“I came here to my grandparents, and this is a village. I liked it more in the city, since here there is a lot of work around the house and I have to help my grandmother” (11-year-old male).

Children have less spare time to play as they are more involved in household chores.

“Dad doesn’t let us go to play anywhere, just sometimes on holidays, but mom allowed us to go play. Father doesn’t allow us because we’ve got things to do at home.” (11-year-old rural male)

The departure of one parent not only affects the daily life of children but also their relationship with the remaining parent. Some cases of abandonment were reported, but the magnitude of this issue was not adequately determined. This phenomenon seems to happen more frequently when mothers migrate. The father finds a new partner and leaves his children with other care-givers.

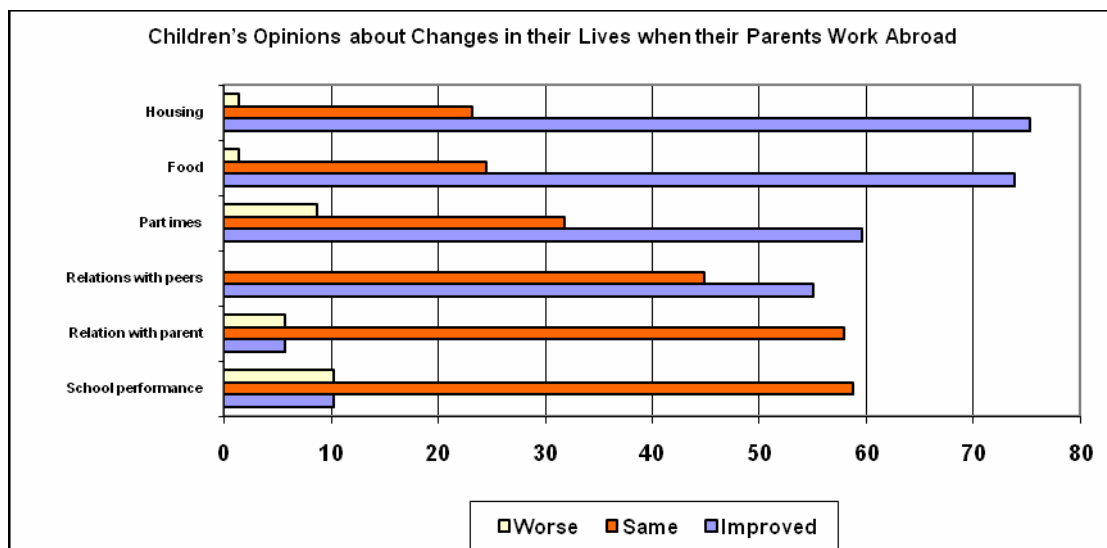
When they need help, children left behind appeal to different people depending on their age and the issue. Children over 12 years of age prefer their friends, colleagues or elder sisters and brothers rather than adults. Younger children appeal more to the people who are caring for them. Children with both parents absent rely heavily on their friends.

Girls left behind living with their fathers encounter more difficulties than boys as they cannot talk with their fathers about problems related to their physical maturation. They say they also cannot discuss these problems over the phone with their mothers and have to seek support from other females living in the same community, usually friends and close relatives.

2.4 How do children left behind perceive their parents’ departure and how do they adapt to their new life?

After the departure of one or both parents, children have to adjust to new roles, adapt and reorganize their lives and their relationship with the parent left behind and with their peers. The nature and magnitude of these changes depend on the age of the children and the length of the separation, but also on the new configuration of the family as described earlier.

Figure 8



Information gathered from qualitative surveys provides a mixed picture. Overall, children tend to have an optimistic view about the separation from their parents. In general, they perceive their own status as improving: 90 percent of children think that they have better clothing; for 61 percent the most positive outcome is the financial support; 75 percent have better housing and 74 percent have better food too. Children surveyed consider that their relationships with their parents working abroad were good. Only 6 percent felt these relationships had deteriorated to a certain extent while 58 percent thought they were the same as before and 36 percent thought they had improved slightly or significantly. Many children said that migration did not have much of an effect on their relationships with their parents, as 58 percent thought that their relationships hadn't haven't changed and only 6 percent thought they had gotten worse. Relations with their peers improved or stayed the same in all cases, and only 10 percent of children thought their academic performance had suffered.

Despite these positive perceptions, children – especially those whose parents have been working abroad for many years – state that their parents left them too early and should have waited until they had grown up a little. The CRIC qualitative survey of 2006 found that the majority of children are also worried about their future and mentioned that they might face problems such as difficult relationships with their parents, relatives and peers and difficulties in ensuring both personal and family welfare. These fears seem to be linked to the parents' long absence. According to the IOM study, seasonal migrants to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and legal migrants to the European Union (EU) stay on average five months and 14 months respectively. People who work illegally in the EU, on the other hand, and have paid a great deal of money to reach the host country cannot risk coming back to Moldova for regular, if at all.

“She comes near me for a while, preferring to hug her grandfather. She asks me why I have asked her to come to me and goes to her grandfather to sit on his lap” (Mother working abroad).

“It's 15 years since we married, and for 10 years he has been coming and going. I have raised the youngest boy myself mainly. For a year and three months he wasn't at home, and when he came he brought candies, but the child took the candy quickly and came to me saying, ‘Mother, there is a stranger.’ My husband started to cry” (Mother with husband working abroad).

2.5 How do migration remittances affect the relationship between children left behind and their neighbourhoods?

Many children experience difficulties with their care-givers. Some cases of abuse were reported in the qualitative survey. A number of cases of ill-treatment by guardians, sometimes even close relatives, have also been reported by community members or by children themselves: insufficient food, poor living conditions or discriminatory treatment. Sometimes money sent by the children's parents is used for the care giver's own needs. Even the parcels sent by the parents to their children were “checked” first by the guardians and only things they did not need were given to the children. However, the scope and magnitude of these issues are not clear. One of the most

frequent issues reported is the conflict between the child left behind and the child of care-givers: the children of the care-givers often believe that their parents are favouring the children left behind.

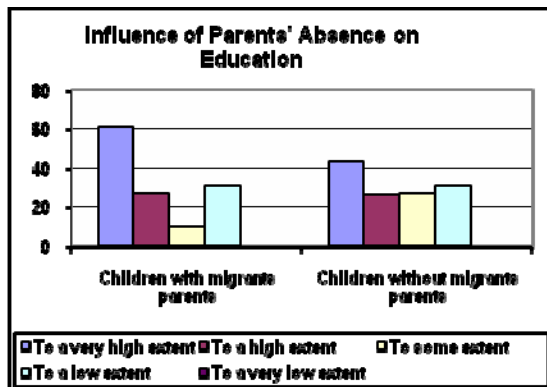
Separation may cause psychological distress that is manifested through deviant behaviour, “acting out,” or withdrawn and depressive behaviours. Local leaders and teachers generally think children left behind undergo a negative change of attitude. “Children are rather more prone to offences related to injuries, i.e., beating, hooliganism and that kind of thing than to robbery and burglary. In their relations with members of the community, children of migrants are more arrogant, aggressive and rude compared to other children. “They become more likely to miss school and get involved in alcoholism and drugs. The misbehaviour is linked to a lack of parental supervision, as “Children must be constantly supervised by parents. The importance of emotional changes is frequently mentioned by teachers who underscore that irrespective of age and nature, all children of migrants display vulnerability to the subject of parents. They report that children left behind have fewer and fewer relationships with their peers and show signs of behavioural and emotional disorders. However, the survey was not able to determine the relationship between these effects and their possible causes as reported in the international literature (divorces, new roles inside the family...).

2.6 How does parental absence affect children’s education?

In Moldova, education has always been considered by the state and communities as a “value sphere” and as a result it has continuously been given high priority. Despite this strong interest, very little research has been done to empirically evaluate the effects of migration on educational outcomes Moldova. However, there are several indirect indications that demonstrate that parents are deeply interested in their children’s academic performance; achievements in education are high and enrolment rates exceed the levels of many surrounding countries. In general, when migrants return home, they visit their children’s school to talk with the teachers. In the rural areas where relations with teachers are less formal, some parents call from abroad to inquire about their children’s school achievements.

In exploring the question as to whether migration and remittances are increasing children’s educational attainment, the qualitative surveys found that although positive, the impact of remittances on education is in most cases quite modest, with parents’ absence having a negative impact on children’s morale and school performance.

Figure 9



Almost all children, care-givers, teachers and local authorities agree: the performances of the children of migrants are significantly lower than those of children living with their parents. The vast majority (99 percent) of people interviewed during the CRIC qualitative study of 2006 believed that the lack of parental support and control, psychological suffering

and an increase in family duties negatively impact children's education.

However, it should be noted that the above opinion is not supported by any quantitative test of children's performance. The worst cases are when the migrant parent is the mother because mothers usually help their children with their homework. In the case of children with both parents abroad, 57.2 percent of care-givers mentioned having problems explaining school material to their charges. Many grandparents cannot read Latin script and are not able to help their grandchildren with their homework, even in the primary grades. However, no cases were reported of grandparents neglecting their grandchildren.

"I have a hard time at school. I used to study well but since mother left, there was no one to help me check my assignments. My grades started to drop and I didn't have much interest in studies." (17-year-old rural male).

The majority of teachers think that children left behind who receive money from abroad show less interest in their studies, are not prepared for classes and are more likely to be cheeky and untidy. In the opinion of school staff, these children have lower academic performance compared to other children. The money received is frequently spent on activities that are not proper for them. This causes a significant decrease in their interest in school and they don't see education as a means to have a better future. Caregivers mainly try to clothe and feed their charges well and, if necessary, visit the school where the children study. They do not pay much attention to their academic performance. On the other hand, there are situations where parents are not interested in the school achievements of their children, and this attitude has repercussions. However, it was not possible to estimate the magnitude of this issue.

"For three years the parents were abroad and sent money and everything for the support of their child, who was left in the care of relatives – neighbours. As a result, the child is in the fifth grade and doesn't know basic things: he cannot write, and cannot read" (rural teacher).

The effects of remittances on education are also difficult to assess. Remittances improve children's access to information technology if parents work abroad but their role in improving school performance has not been demonstrated. While parents can pay for additional classes, generally children do not attend them regularly and do not prepare their assignments. Or, they may not pay attention in school and therefore rely on such individual tutoring instead of studying. They often also usually have all the school supplies they need.

Remittances don't play any determinant role in improving access to the high school and college as there is no significant difference in expenditures on education between families that do and do not receive remittances. Major discrepancies emerge for higher education which entails living and tuition expenses. According to the opinions of 73 percent of families without migrants, the children of migrants would have more opportunities for higher education. "Children left in care and who receive money from their parents working abroad have better chances to continue their education than other children."

The quality of education is also affected by the way children perceive the teacher and his or her authority. Overall, teachers no longer have a privileged status in the community and do not constitute a role model for children, a situation determined by a series of factors that will not be addressed in this report. It is, however, significant from the viewpoint of children whose parents are abroad as they often have a better financial situation than their teachers and are better dressed. This is frustrating for some of the teaching staff and leads to their reserved attitude towards these children. Teachers also tend to be older, which creates a communication barrier. Therefore when abuse from care-givers or other family problems occur in which a teacher's intervention would be very helpful, the children do not trust the teachers and their ability to help.

Community leaders believe that in future parents will take their minor children to the countries where they work. This is normal, but someone will need to pay attention to what these children do in the host country.

An analysis by Francesco Manaresi of the Faculty of Economics, University of Florence in 2005-2006 using a specific theoretical framework to process data from the household Budget Survey found that only one group of children is positively affected by parental migration, i.e., female children living in urban settings whose father is a migrant. According to this analysis, children left behind by migrant fathers in rural areas experienced an increase in school absenteeism irrespectively of their gender. On the other hand, the effect of maternal migration on children left behind is an increase in school absenteeism in urban areas, while children left behind by their mothers in rural areas do not report any effect at all. Nevertheless, these results should be treated with caution, since they may be caused by several different factors. For example, the fact that children left behind by migrant mothers are relatively older than those left behind by their fathers and hence they are absent from school more often. In addition, child labour is particularly important in rural areas, explaining the increase in school absenteeism.

2.7 How does parental absence affect children's health?

Evidence from the international literature shows that migration can affect the health of those left behind both positively and negatively: with additional money coming from remittances, people have easier access to health services, can buy expensive drugs and eat more food. However, several surveys also show that the absence of parents may negatively affect children's health: children don't receive needed care and drugs in a timely fashion and the food they have access to is of bad quality. Hence the surveys tried to determine if changing individuals' and communities' resources by migration and remittances affect also health of Moldovan children left behind.

Due to the multidimensional relationship between migration and health, the study was not able to determine to what extent migration and remittances affect children's health status. In addition, high levels of out-migration deprive the country of essential skills and have reduced access to essential services such as health care. (Moldova: Opportunities for Accelerated Growth, A Country Economic Survey, World Bank, 2005). While it was not possible to assess this impact, it should be pointed out that children's health is one of the most frequently raised issues when people talk about the impact of migration.

Most people believe that the absence of parents affects children's physical and psychological health. In the opinion of 87 percent of families surveyed by UNICEF-UNDP in 2007, children who live with both parents are physically healthier compared to 69 percent of children in families with migrants. One reason might be their nutritional status since, 'Children do not eat regularly, which has a negative impact on their health.' According to the CRIC study of 2006, another reason could be that in the absence of their parents, children usually tend to "hide" certain "health problems" and postpone visits to the doctor for various reasons.

Health is also the most frequent subject of conversation when migrant parents call home. In situations where only one parent has left the country, people often hold the parent in Moldova responsible for any health problem the children might have.

"Their meals are better; they take vitamins" (Medical worker).

"... they eat only fast food products and many girls have allergy problems of the skin... and stomach aches" (Teacher).

"Very many children with parents abroad do not have regular and healthy meals" (Teacher).

"I will refer only to my class and I will say that children without parental care are clean and proper" (Teacher).

2.8 What role does migration play in child protection?

As little was known about children left behind and the risk of abuse, exploitation and violence, the surveys tried to explore the potential of migration as a risk factor for this category of children. Based on the assumption that children left behind suffer multiple deprivations such as prolonged separation from their parents, a lack of role models for their development and difficult relationships with their peers, it was expected that these children would more often be subject to violence, human trafficking or be left in institutions.

Child trafficking is considered a serious issue in Moldova. Existing data provided by the IOM indicates that most victims of trafficking are mothers (26.2 percent in 2004) and many are single mothers. However, there is no information on whether the children left behind by migrant parents are victims of trafficking. One of the qualitative surveys found that children are aware of this issue and its impact on life.

Among the problems that they thought they might confront, children mentioned human trafficking, including child trafficking. They also reported that they knew of various cases of trafficking of migrant adults who and that they are afraid this could happen to their parents. At present we may consider that the children of migrants may be more vulnerable to trafficking, and that the children of trafficking victims represent a group that is particularly at risk.

Child institutionalization

One of the main concerns regarding Moldovan children is the high numbers who live apart from their families and are placed in residential care institutions and orphanages. Abundant literature indicates that children passing through these systems suffer various deprivations that affect their development and may hamper their ability to be integrated in society. The majority (71 percent) of Moldovan children who are institutionalized are considered to be social orphans temporarily deprived of parental care. Most of these children are placed in institutions by their own parents (85.6 percent) for different reasons, the most common being the child's disease or disability (35.5 percent), their parents' poverty (27 percent) or the death of a parent (16.2 percent).

However, only 3 percent of social orphans are institutionalized because their parents migrated abroad. A survey carried out for UNICEF on child abandonment¹ found that 44 percent of children are temporarily placed in institutions while 21 percent are informally abandoned. But this study was not able to determine the link between the migration phenomenon and the abandonment phenomenon. More interesting is the assessment carried out in 2007 by the EU-UNICEF project². Preliminary information from this assessment of boarding schools carried out by UNICEF Moldova and the Ministry of Education and Youth of the Republic of Moldova in January 2006 seem to confirm that far more children are institutionalized after their parents' departure than official figures indicate. Out of 11,551 children institutionalized, 785 (7 percent) were placed in the institution because parents had migrated abroad. Of these 785 children, only 39 were registered as disabled.

These figures, considered to be official and representative of all Moldovan institutions, point in the same direction: there is a link between parental migration and child institutionalization. In general, adults living close to the children left behind know the risk of institutionalization and are aware of its impact on child development. In the opinion of many adults who were interviewed, among other things, divorce is a frequent phenomenon in migrants' families that can increase the risk of institutionalization.

“In the city of Balti about 60 percent of families with one member abroad are divorced. Because of the lack of alternative models for taking care of children left without parental care, there is a risk that children with parents working abroad will be institutionalised”
(Qualitative study).

Summary

Recent surveys and studies conducted in Moldova are clear about the links between migration and remittances and the social, psychological and emotional development, as well as the education and health status of children left behind. The design of these surveys took account of different forms of parental absence: fathers' absence, mothers' absence and the absence of both parents. They compared children from migrant families with children whose parents are non-

¹ *Child Abandonment in the Republic of Moldova*, UNICEF, 2006.

² UNICEF, Not published.

migrants. Among other things, the studies confirmed that children left behind experience loneliness and abandonment, but at the same time they also understand and accept their parents' departure. The studies found that the children of migrant parents lagged behind in school performance compared to children with both parents at home.

Children left behind also tended to be less socially well-adjusted than children whose parents were both present. In terms of emotional development, the studies suggest that the absence of parents has a negative impact. The mothers' absence plays a greater role and affects children more. On the whole, the study found that in the absence of parents, the community and authorities were not prepared and did not fulfill their responsibilities in caring for and rearing the children left behind. However, additional surveys are needed to deepen the analyses of the main findings as they pertain to Moldova in order to effectively tailor the policy responses that need to be developed.

3. Policies Regulation Migration and the Assistance Provided to Children Left Behind in Moldova

3.1 Existing policy initiatives affecting children in migrant households

This section discusses Moldova's system of state social institutions, to be considered as a framework for the analysis of issues relating to migration and children. As described below, the Moldovan government provides a range of social services that are directly relevant to children left behind through various policy instruments regulating the areas of labour and social security, as well as direct policies addressing vulnerable groups (poor households, children, the disabled). State social interventions include a wide range of social services and a system of cash transfers. Access to these services is regulated by a number of rules and is either universal or targeted to specific groups. The orientation of social policy directly influences the welfare of the population; countries with universal social policies tend to combat inequality more efficiently; on the other hand, targeted policies have narrow impacts, and in many cases actually stigmatize the beneficiaries.

When discussing the welfare of children affected by their relatives' migration, it is important to take into account the global panorama of prevailing social policies, in order to integrate the proposed programmes within the set of already existing state interventions. The international literature shows that targeted policies are incapable of integrating disadvantaged children into the mainstream of society; among the main problems faced by children in many developing and transition countries are the dangers of neglect, stigmatization and social exclusion. The way to tackle these problems is through integrating social policies for every child, with no children out left out: i.e., in this case, the children of migrant households. But it should be borne in mind that the design of policies exclusively directed to this segment could contribute to further distancing them from the rest of the community. Inclusive social policies involve more than well-targeted, small-scale programmes with limited coverage. They mobilize state and social resources, complementing public and private efforts for guaranteeing welfare.

The following sub-sections present a brief overview of the main efforts that have been made in social policy and point out those that can be complemented by specific programmes in order to ensure the realization of the rights of children left behind.

3.2 Policies regulating migration issues

Despite a relatively strong network of protective services, various policy barriers prevent the children of migrant families from accessing existing public programmes. One explanation for this is insufficient public concern about children left behind. The section below presents the main policies prevailing in this area.

Before the Declaration of Independence in 1990, migration issues were not regulated at the national level in Moldova. All migration issues were the responsibility of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs according to Soviet legislation, as reflected in the legislation of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic. Following independence, the country adopted its first law on migration in 1991, but established no comprehensive management of migration issues. During all of this period, a number of significant areas were left unaddressed and there was no comprehensive migration policy in place.

In 2001, in order to safeguard the rights and interests of Moldovan migrants, the government established a State Service for Migration with the main objective of promoting a state migration policy and coordinating all procedures relating to the temporary employment of migrant workers and ensuring their social protection. However, the duties assigned to this service did not cover the full spectrum of migration problems, since they dealt primarily with migration and employment abroad.

In 2002, a decree concerning the Migration Policy Concept of Moldova was adopted. The objectives of this policy were to regulate migration in a way that limits its negative impact and ensures national security. The concept paper covers several issues relating to illegal migration, the trafficking of human beings and the protection of migrants' rights. It describes the public authorities that should be involved in migration issues and lists a number of activities that must be undertaken by the relevant public authorities; including the elaboration of a national programme. However, it is weak with regard to families left behind.

As prescribed by this concept paper, a Law on Migration was adopted in 2002 and a National Action Plan on asylum and migration was developed and approved in 2005. Among other things, the law states that citizens of Moldova are free to leave the country unless they are under some restriction (e.g., sentences or investigation for criminal offences) and all persons leaving Moldova must be registered. However, this law and other laws regulating migration (the Law on Citizenship, the Law on Holding Dual Citizenship) do not include any provisions on households and children left behind.

The social impact of migration on children left behind began to be addressed in 2004 during the development of the National Poverty Reduction Strategy (also called the Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy). The former National Bureau of Migration made proposals to assess the migration phenomenon and its social costs. Unfortunately, these proposals were not accepted, possibly because they were not considered a priority in the Poverty Reduction Strategy. Other

attempts were made in 2005 when the authorities were developing the EU accession Action Plan for the new status of Moldova as an EU member country. These attempts focused on activities such as adjusting the regulatory frameworks for legal and illegal migration, readmission, visas, and asylum but again, little attention was paid to the social impacts of migration.

Other recent missed opportunities include projects funded by donors in the social protection area. A majority of these projects continued to target the areas of migration control and regulation (i.e., national capacity-building for border patrols and fighting illegal migration) as well as the economic aspects of remittances from the perspective of using the money for poverty alleviation. Some of these projects included trafficking as a symptom of migration-related problems, but showed little concern for the households left behind.

3.3 The social protection framework and its impact on the needs of children left behind

The framework regulating Moldova's policies on social protection outlines different types of social services for disadvantaged persons and families. However, it remains undeveloped, non-inclusive, and inconsistent and it is not well enforced. In fact, the category of children left behind by migrant parents is not clearly defined in this framework and falls implicitly under the general category of children in difficulty.

3.3.1 The overall social protection policy framework

The Law on Social Assistance makes local public authorities responsible for analyzing social problems and providing social assistance at the local level. It also provides that local public authorities can, independently or in partnership with civil society, develop institutions and specialized agencies of social assistance. However, although it does assign responsibilities, this Law does not provide sufficient financial resources to adequately address the problems identified.

The most effective elements of the social protection policy framework are the 2002 National Concept on Child and Family Protection and the 2003 National Strategy on Child and Family Protection. These documents acknowledge the challenges posed by migration to children's welfare and they mention issues such as illegal migration and the risk of human trafficking. They identify categories of children in difficulty, including children living without parental supervision. The Strategy covers several aspects of social protection, including policy design. It adjusts the existing legal framework to the requirements of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international instruments. It calls for the development of institutional and human resource capacities, creates a monitoring mechanism, develops appropriate financial mechanisms and addresses the issue of developing the capacity of families and communities. The authorities consider this strategy relevant to children left behind since it implies that children left behind by parents working abroad fall under the general heading of children without parental supervision. However, at this writing the Strategy remains too broad and little has been done to make it focus more explicitly on children left behind.

Other policies that may be relevant to children left behind include the National Strategy on Education for All and its Action Plan and the National Strategy for Youth and its Action Plan.

These policies can be viewed as indirectly addressing some of the problems of children left behind. The Education for all Strategy is the most comprehensive framework: it is based on a holistic approach to child development and its National Action Plan includes a series of measures aimed at achieving better education and development for vulnerable children. Although the category of vulnerable children is not clearly defined, these measures can be understood as also targeting children left behind. The Action Plan proposes organizing community services to assist and support children in difficulty and stimulate their development. It advocates creating assistance services for children in especially difficult circumstances at the local level, services aimed at preventing school dropouts and protecting children from falling prey to dangerous situations.

3.3.2 Specific frameworks regulating access to services for children in difficulties

Moldova has a sophisticated social benefits system to which children in difficulties could potentially be eligible. The benefits include indirect forms of social assistance and social benefits, allowances, free public services, price discounts, tax exemptions and in-kind support. A child left behind who is in difficulties is, by law, eligible for almost all of these forms of social benefits. However, in the majority of cases such children are prevented from having access to these benefits because of a misconception that they are not in economic difficulties.

The most frequently available assistance is allowances for children under tutelage and/or trusteeships paid by the local budget. For families that become single-parent households as a result of the migration of one of the parents, there are several means-tested allowances available. However, they are smaller in size and value than the minimum child subsistence amount. Moreover, because of a lack of information it is difficult to know to what extent they benefit children of migrants who are in difficulties.

The legal provisions regulating tutelage and/or trusteeship date from 1972 and are not well designed, with the result that local authorities have difficulty interpreting and applying them. For instance, the Family Code specifies that the tutelage authorities are responsible for the protection of the rights and interests of children left without parental care as a result of the parents' decease; the loss of their parental rights; or the certification that the parents are incapable, in poor health or absent for a long time; or in cases where the parents simply refuse to fulfill their duties. Nothing was done, however, to update the code and to make it relevant to the current situation of children left behind by migrants.

According to Government Decision No. 198, children left without parental care are eligible for a child allowance payable out of the local budget. However, inconsistencies in the regulatory framework cause serious problems for the correct implementation of this Decision: allowances are payable only to children under tutelage and/or trusteeship. Anecdotal information indicates that mayors' offices sometimes establish arrangements of tutelage and/or trusteeship at the request of departing migrant parents only on condition that the child allowance claim be waived or refused in order to avoid paying the child allowance damage to children left behind by migrants.

Through recent modifications to Government Decisions, district executive committees and village mayors' offices must provide, free of charge, out of the local budget, special food

products for all children under 1 year and for children under 2 from families with many children and from socially vulnerable families. This measure has the potential to improve the condition of small children of migrants who are in difficulties, such those in poor families, irrespective of whether tutelage was established concluded or not. However, popular misconceptions limit the access of these children to the benefits to which they are eligible.

The Moldovan social assistance system proposes a set of benefits and services for disadvantaged groups, including children. The right to this social assistance is granted by law to citizens who depend entirely on one individual's income. The law provides a list of potential beneficiaries, including children and youth whose health, and whose physical, psychological and moral development and wellbeing are endangered by the circumstances in which they live. The decision does not specify the exact category of children left without parental care, and leaves its interpretation to the discretion of public authorities, who often limit the access of children left behind by migrant parents to these benefits.

The impacts of these public policies on children's welfare, therefore, are still small. When analyzing the situation of children affected by migration, the lessons learned from the experience of foster care institutions should be considered. Targeting these children without the complement of other public state policies can result in unwanted stigmatization.

Summary

In conclusion, it should be noted that social protection policies have been improved considerably during the last decade. Although these regulations and policies have increased potential for preventing the negative consequences of parental migration on children, helping children to cope with these consequences and mitigating them, they nevertheless have many inconsistencies that prevent them from fully meeting the needs of children left behind who are in difficulties. The biggest problem lies in the gap that exists between the financial assistance function, including efficient targeting, and the protective function which is still mostly viewed through the basic approach of tutelage and/or trusteeship. Little attention is paid to prevention, except for recent actions aimed at ensuring that teachers keep record of children left behind. This lack of attention is due mainly to the limited financial and human capacities of local authorities to effectively address the problem of children left behind, as well as to insufficient cooperation among local stakeholders.

4. Policy Recommendations to Better Protect and Assist Children Left Behind in Moldova

General issues concerning social policy and children are an important context for designing future interventions for children in general and for children affected by migration in particular. Moldova has much work to do to ensure that the problems of children left behind are adequately addressed. It is important to deepen the diagnosis of both the social policy system on the one hand, and to improve regulations and social requirements and provisions of assistance on the other. In short, strong social policies are still needed.

4.1 Implications of the UNICEF/SU-SSC studies

The studies and surveys recently carried out in Moldova produced a better understanding of the social costs of migration, particularly highlighting the very high costs paid by children left behind. They also suggested several important avenues for further research and policy development at the national and local levels. However, there is still a need to better explore the social impacts of migration. Priority should be given to investigating the relationships between migration, remittances and family structure, and in particular to assessing the impact of the departure of mothers. In addition, it will be helpful to identify preferred models of guardianship of children. There should also be an effort to gain a better understanding and anticipate the effects of migration on future generations. Lastly, there is a need to explore the link between girls left behind by migrant parents and human trafficking, illegal migration through marriages with foreigners and teenage pregnancy. The findings of these studies will help decision-makers to adjust major strategies and investment plans to make basic decisions that will secure a better future for the next generation.

4.2 Specific designation of children left behind

The set of existing policies and regulations should be revised to go beyond the notion of vulnerable groups and make specific mention on children left behind. A specific effort should be made to identify and address this issue within national development frameworks such as the National Development Plan. This will help to attract and secure funding from the national budget and from the donor community to improve the nature, level and quality of services provided to children in difficulties.

4.3 Encouraging short-term migration

The surveys found that regulations governing the entry and exit of migrants strongly influence family migration strategies and the ability of parents to maintain contact with their children. As a large share of Moldovans think that temporary and seasonal migration for two or three months represents the best way of reducing the impact of migration on families left behind, the Moldovan authorities should develop and implement projects and policies that give priorities to this type of short migration.

4.4 Facilitating the reunification of children with their migrant parents

The Moldovan government, in the context of its bilateral relations with host countries, should seek agreements to facilitate the reunification of children with their migrant parents. It should empower Moldovan diplomatic missions to enable them to undertake the types of actions that can strengthen the ties between migrants and their families left behind, including providing advice for Moldovans living in destination countries. Consular services could also play an active role in gathering, simplifying, clarifying, disseminating and updating information pertinent to the lives of migrants in the countries in which they live.

4.5 The impact of economic regulations on children's rights

Children's rights cannot be ensured when the rights of parents to choices of employment are restricted. Neither can they be ensured by depriving families of the ability to decide what they perceive is best for the wellbeing of their members. It is evident from recent surveys on children left behind that children understand and approve of the fact that their parents often go abroad in order to give them a better future. Restrictive decisions that impose additional burdens have a huge impact on parents from the poorest segments of society. The continued poverty of these families that results from these restrictions is likely to put children at even greater risk than the actual absence of their parents. Regulations, therefore, should be revised to properly secure the rights of children left behind and of their parents.

4.6 The need to raise public awareness about migration and support the role of fathers

The surveys and studies also make it clear that all current or potential migrants, and the general public in Moldova, should have better access to accurate information on migration issues. The Moldovan authorities and other stakeholders who play a role in migration should make the existing information about studies, policies and services widely available. This will increase awareness and will help families make informed decisions that prioritize children's welfare when preparing to migrate to work abroad. Although the Convention on the Rights of the Child stresses the role of both mothers and fathers in childrearing, in light of the specific characteristics of Moldova, awareness projects should be developed to specifically educate fathers and to equip them with the knowledge they need to constructively support their children left behind, especially their daughters.

4.7 The importance of relevant, inclusive social protection mechanisms and services

Having relevant social protection mechanisms and services in place is a duty of the State and of families. However, despite many years of reforms, such policies are still not inclusive and thus do not meet the needs of all children in difficulties. In particular, children left behind by migrants are still regarded as belonging to rich segments of the population and are thus discriminated against. The existing protection frames should be adjusted to include children left behind by migrant parents.

4.8 Building the capacities of care-givers

A significant proportion of children left behind suffer from emotional problems due to a lack of sensitivity, knowledge and capacity on the part of their care-givers. Projects should be developed to empower and support care-givers as they deal with their own specific problems. Specific attention should be paid to grandparents who have their own specific needs.

Conclusion

Migration has many positive implications. It can alleviate poverty or reduce the risk of falling into poverty. Money sent home by migrants increases domestic consumption and improves access to basic goods. However, migration has a negative impact on demographic outcomes, on population age levels, on families and on the development of child left behind.

Migration also affects community cohesion and reduces the power of the very concept of the family. Communities are no longer able to regulate the interactions between the members of the society and this increases the vulnerability of children, including those left behind. If, in monetary terms, most children left behind are better off than their peers, there is no evidence that remittances actually alleviate poverty for most of these children, nor do they reduce their social deprivation.

Current literature indicates that the most significant impact of parental migration on children is emotional and psychological distress. This is compounded by the higher likelihood of family disintegration in cases where the mother or both parents are absent for long periods. In the popular perception, the children of migrants are more likely to be marginalized, mistreated or even abused. Anecdotal information also reports that these children can be victims of human trafficking.

The most significant evidence of a policy gap is the lack of understanding about the magnitude of the migration issue and the impact that it can have on the country's development. Policy-makers should pay more attention and give more priority to children living without their parents. These children are particularly vulnerable to becoming poor and to being socially deprived and they are at risk of abuse, neglect and exploitation.

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