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Impact of labour migration on left-behind children

Committee Opinion¹

Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons

Rapporteur: Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO, Ukraine, European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance

A. Conclusions of the Committee

The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons welcomes the timely report on the “Impact of labour migration on left-behind children” prepared by Mr Viorel Riceard Badea (Romania, EPP/CD) for the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development.

The Committee agrees that member States should do more to protect children who are at risk of being left behind in the countries of origin of labour migrants. With this in mind, the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons wishes to propose a few specific amendments to reinforce the text.

B. Proposed amendments

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 1, add the following sentence:

“The Council of Europe member States need to address the root causes of this situation and to provide specific support to the left-behind children and their families, as underscored by the Assembly in its [Resolution 2310 \(2019\)](#) “Labour migration from eastern Europe and its impact on socio-demographic processes in these countries”.”

Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 2, insert the following paragraph:

“Labour migration has been growing across Europe, due to economic disparities between countries and freedom of movement within the European Union. For example, it is estimated that in Romania, Bulgaria and Poland 500 000 to 1 million children are affected. Such large-scale migration has profound socio-economic consequences, both for the countries of origin and of destination of labour migration.”

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 14537](#), Reference 4385 of 12 November 2018. Reporting committee: Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development. See [Doc. 15173](#). Opinion approved by the committee on 6 November 2020.



Amendment C (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 2, insert the following paragraph:

“Moreover, the Assembly is alarmed by the hardship of children in the regions affected by military conflicts. Military actions lead to displacement and migration, which put children at risk of being left without parents. In Ukraine, many families are separated because of the Russian aggression. Parents often stay in the occupied territories while children are sent to live with grandparents in the free territories.”

Amendment D (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 2, insert the following paragraph:

“Protecting children from the adverse effects of labour migration should be a priority for the Council of Europe member States. Specific obligations should be entered into by receiving countries to refrain from policies driven exclusively by economic interests, including the race for the cheapest labour on the market. Such policies run to the detriment of human rights protection commitments. By contrast, specific obligations should be entered into by sending countries to reduce poverty of families with children and to ensure that when children are left-behind the State provides adequate protection for them.”

Amendment E (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 5.2.3, delete the words “reduce obstacles that discourage parents from informing authorities about their departure”.

Amendment F (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 5.2.2, insert the following paragraph:

“notify parents who intend to travel abroad about social services that may be provided in their absence for their children and their parenting obligations towards them; ensure that adequate delegation of responsibility or guardianship is in place and is in accordance with child’s best interest; create opportunities for keeping contacts with children (including through new technologies) using public service centres; and reduce obstacles that discourage parents from informing the authorities about their departure;”

Amendment G (to the draft resolution)

At the beginning of paragraph 5.2.3, insert the following words:

“improve data collection on left-behind children by social services and promote evidence-based care provision, set up information management systems to monitor the well-being of children who receive social services, legal aid and guardianship as well as those who are not receiving such services or aid;”

Amendment H (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 5.2.3, add the following words:

“furthermore, adequate information should be provided to children in a manner they can understand, appropriate for their age and education level;”

Amendment I (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 5.2.4, after the words “preventing school dropout”, insert the following words:

“; strengthen the capacity of education professionals, school psychologists and medical workers to detect and prevent child neglect and abandonment”

Amendment J (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 5.2.4, add the following paragraph:

“taking into account the gendered implications and the feminisation of migration, introduce specific support measures in the wider frameworks of action to support women, assisting them to maintain contact with their children as much as possible (including using new technologies) and favouring family reunification whenever possible;”

Amendment K (to the draft recommendation)

In paragraph 1, after the words “its Resolution ... (2020) “Impact of labour migration on left-behind children”, add the following words:

“and to its [Resolution 2310 \(2019\)](#) “Labour migration from eastern Europe and its impact on socio-demographic processes in these countries””

C. Explanatory Memorandum by Mr Oleksii Goncharenko, Rapporteur for opinion

1. Labour migration existed in Europe for many years. In the past, people from poverty-driven areas travelled to places where they could earn a living for themselves and their families. This helped meet the short-term needs of those who went abroad, but the consequences for families left behind were dramatic. This is still the case today, unfortunately, despite the decades of socio-economic progress. Last year, the Parliamentary Assembly debated this issue, based on the report by Mr Ionut-Marian Stroe on “Labour migration from eastern Europe and its impact on socio-demographic processes in these countries”². He depicted the sad story of family separation in Eastern Europe with a focus on Ukraine, Poland, Romania and the Republic of Moldova.

2. In my country, Ukraine, children left behind are commonly divided into two categories: those who are left behind, but whose parents will eventually return, and those whose parents will not return. According to a study of the International Organization for Migration, one in every five left-behind Ukrainian child is permanently abandoned. According to the Ministry of Family, Youth and Sport, there are about 200 000 children left behind in Ukraine. Others estimate these figures being much higher, as mentioned by Mr Badea in his report: “many left-behind children are unreported and statistics in this area are highly unreliable. Research is patchy and interventions tend to be ad hoc and driven by international donors and civil society organisations”³.

3. Many eastern European countries, including Ukraine, do not have viable social security systems to allow for adequate health protection for children, when parents are abroad. Moreover, drug addiction can develop rapidly amongst children left behind under the phenomena referred to as “social orphanhood”⁴. This particular problem of left-behind children is not covered by Mr Badea’s report and I feel it is important to mention it. In this context I would like to refer to the Assembly’s work on the issue, and in particular, the report by Ms Hannah Bardell (United Kingdom, NR) on a “Drug policy and human rights in Europe: a baseline study”⁵ where it is highlighted that the Council of Europe’s Pompidou Group’s Stavanger Declaration recalled the right of children to be protected from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychoactive substances⁶

4. I would also like to mention that in many cases, mothers or fathers, who have left, find new partners abroad. Children suffer the most in such cases. The lack of socialisation of left behind children coupled with the consequences of family breakdowns have serious consequences on child up-bringing and future life chances.

5. In the regions most affected by emigration, nearly one-quarter of all children are raised by one parent. The majority are adolescents, an age during which many studies find that children are at their most vulnerable. In the case of transnational families in Ukraine, many left-behind children experience abandonment and neglect, which could prove detrimental to their development and transition into adulthood. Juvenile delinquency is also a widespread problem among children left behind. Furthermore, labour migration

2. [Doc. 14956](#).

3. [Doc. 15173](#).

4. Ilyk KH. V., “Social orphanhood in the context of modern migration processes in Ukraine”, Thesis for Candidate’s degree in sociological sciences.

5. [Doc. 15086](#).

6. See Chapter 6.2 on “Children and young people”.

not only has an effect on the children but also on the family as a whole. It often happens that the departure of the primary caregiver, especially the mother, is accompanied by a general crisis of family relations and socio-economic conditions. In particular, long periods of parents being away from their families seriously undermine the parent-child relationship and families could be indefinitely separated causing the alienation of children from their parents.⁷

6. An additional point worth mentioning is that parents often contribute financially to supporting their children through remittances. The well-being of such families depends on this. Therefore, facilitating migrants' remittances and reducing the money transfer costs to make sure that families can survive, despite the hardship of separation, is of utmost importance.

7. **Resolution 2310 (2019)** "Labour migration from eastern Europe and its impact on socio-demographic processes in these countries" was adopted on 4 October 2019 and I would like to draw attention to some specific measures that need to be implemented in the Council of Europe member States to ensure that children are protected from neglect and abandonment that results from their parents' migration for work.

8. In this resolution, the Assembly called for concerted action by both sending and receiving countries to "alleviate the negative impact of labour migration on the countries of origin, while doing everything needed to preserve the positive aspects". On the matter of children left behind, the Assembly, as regards the sending countries:

"5.3. calls for the improvement of social care and support systems in order to address and prevent the abandonment and neglect of children left behind by parents working abroad, which is detrimental to their development. Specific measures are also needed during these children's transition into adulthood. Systems such as "SOS families" should be supported, allowing children to stay in the system until they can be reunited with their parents. All measures taken must be in the best interest of the child;

5.4. asks that measures be taken to ensure that children left behind because of parents' employment abroad do not drop out of school or risk finding themselves in a lower level of education as a result of this. Specific psychological support and counselling should be provided in this context, as necessary;"

9. I welcome the report of Mr Badea and hope that it will help raise public support to improve child protection in Europe. I would like to propose only a few amendments to highlight some aspects that require further attention. I invite the committee to support these amendments, when voting for the final texts based on Mr Badea's report.

10. I should like to propose adding at the end of paragraph 1: *"The Council of Europe member States need to address the root causes of this situation and to provide specific support to the left-behind children and their families, as underscored by the Assembly in its Resolution 2310 (2019) "Labour migration from eastern Europe and its impact on socio-demographic processes in these countries".* **(Amendment A to the draft resolution)**

11. Mr Badea's report rings the alarm bell about the high number of families in Europe affected by labour migration today and the children left behind. I suggest including a specific reference (from his report) at the beginning of the draft Resolution, to further highlight how dramatic the situation is in Europe⁸: *"Labour migration has been growing across Europe, due to economic disparities between countries and freedom of movement within the European Union. For example, it is estimated that in Romania, Bulgaria and Poland 500 000 to 1 million children are affected. Such large-scale migration has profound socio-economic consequences, both for the countries of origin and of destination of labour migration".* **(Amendment B to the draft resolution)**

12. I should also like to draw the Assembly's attention to the hardship of children in the regions affected by military conflicts. I, therefore, propose adding a new paragraph in the draft Resolution, after the one proposed in Amendment B, as follows: *"Moreover, the Assembly is alarmed by the hardship of children in the regions affected by military conflicts. Military actions lead to displacement and migration, which put children at risk of being left without parents. In Ukraine, many families are separated because of the Russian aggression. Parents often stay in the occupied territories while children are sent to live with grandparents in the free territories".* **(Amendment C to the draft resolution)**

7. [Doc. 14956](#).

8. www.dw.com/en/the-plight-of-europes-euro-orphans/a-17268091.

13. Both sending and receiving countries bear responsibility for the fate of children deprived of their parents who went abroad to work. I would like to stress this issue by including a new paragraph after the paragraph suggested above: *“Protecting children from the adverse effects of labour migration should be a priority for the Council of Europe member States. Specific obligations should be entered into by receiving countries to refrain from policies driven exclusively by economic interests, including the race for the cheapest labour on the market. Such policies run to the detriment of human rights protection commitments. By contrast, specific obligations should be entered into by sending countries to reduce poverty of families with children and to ensure that when children are left-behind the State provides adequate protection for them”*. **(Amendment D to the draft resolution)**

14. I suggest splitting paragraph 5.2.3. The first action proposed addresses the situation of migrating parents, while the rest of the paragraph speaks about actions to protect children. I suggest deleting the words *“reduce obstacles that discourage parents from informing authorities about their departure”* **(Amendment E to the draft resolution)** and inserting a new paragraph that addresses this issue as follows: *“notify parents who intend to travel abroad about social services that may be provided in their absence for their children and their parenting obligations towards them; ensure that adequate delegation of responsibility or guardianship is in place and is in accordance with child’s best interest; create opportunities for keeping contacts with children (including through new technologies) using public service centres; and reduce obstacles that discourage parents from informing the authorities about their departure”*. **(Amendment F to the draft resolution)**

15. Given the lack of adequate and reliable data on left behind children, more needs to be done to improve the sending countries’ capacity to record the data and implement support programmes leaving no child behind. I, therefore, suggest adding in paragraph 5.2.3, at the beginning of the sentence: *“improve data collection on left-behind children by social services and promote evidence-based care provision, set up information management systems to monitor the well-being of children who receive social services, legal aid and guardianship as well as those who are not receiving such services or aid”*. **(Amendment G to the draft resolution)**

16. In its [Resolution 2310 \(2019\)](#), paragraph 5.5, the Assembly also “encourages public authorities to set up support systems for potential labour migrants, providing clear information on opportunities and risks associated with labour migration, including through public awareness campaigns.” I should also like to stress the need to give children adequate information in a manner they can understand. I should, therefore, like to propose adding, at the end of paragraph 5.2.3: *“Furthermore, adequate information on available support should be provided to children in a manner they can understand, appropriate for their age and education level”*. **(Amendment H to the draft resolution)**

17. Mr Badea underscored the risk of child suicide with left behind children. As stated in his report, 80 Romanian children, whose parents worked in Italy, had committed suicide. States should therefore do more to prevent this. School psychologists or medical workers should act promptly to detect and prevent child neglect and abandonment. Unfortunately, the lack of funding in education has deprived many schools, especially those located in rural areas, of competent psychologists. Teachers are often asked to do more, including provide psychological support, even though some lack adequate preparation for that. School psychologists or medical workers are better placed. They do not give children marks for their homework and are more approachable than teachers. I should, therefore, like to propose including in paragraph 5.2.4, after “preventing school dropout”: *“, strengthen the capacity of education professionals, school psychologists and medical workers to detect and prevent child neglect and abandonment”*. **(Amendment I to the draft resolution)**

18. States should also pay greater attention to gendered implications and the feminisation of migration. The 2015 Migration Policy Institute study had shown that women comprised 48% of the international migrants worldwide, and as high as 70% in some countries. Many studies have found that maternal migration, which was growing, had a stronger negative impact on children left behind. However, women have generally been found to be more responsible migrants – remitting a larger portion of their earnings, keeping in touch more frequently, and staying loyal to their partners and families⁹. Certain trends in the feminisation of migration and rise in children left behind transcended national borders. The growing number of children left behind amid the feminisation of migration sets the stage for targeted in-country policies for monitoring and assisting transnational families, with a particular focus on migrant mothers and their left-behind children. I, therefore, suggest adding the following sentence: *“Taking into account the gendered implications and the feminisation of*

9. www.migrationpolicy.org/article/children-left-behind-impact-labor-migration-moldova-and-ukraine.

migration, introduce specific support measures in the wider frameworks of action to support women, assisting them to maintain contact with their children as much as possible (including using new technologies) and favouring family reunification whenever possible". (Amendment J to the draft resolution)

19. Finally, given these considerations, I suggest including in the draft Recommendation, paragraph 1, after the reference to Resolution ... (2020) on the Impact of labour migration on left-behind children, the reference to [Resolution 2310 \(2019\)](#), as follows: "*and to its [Resolution 2310 \(2019\)](#) on Labour migration from eastern Europe and its impact on socio-demographic processes in these countries". (Amendment K to the draft recommendation)*. The draft Resolution put forward in the report by Mr Badea and the [Resolution 2310 \(2019\)](#) are complementary and provide several specific recommendations with a view to improving the protection of children's rights in Europe.