



ORIGINAL PAPER

Effects of Parental Migration on Families and Children in Post-Communist Romania

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Abstract

Migration is considered a form of socio-economic behaviour. Previous research in the field shows that migration became a strategy of life after the fall of the communist regime for many Romanians, due to the difficult transition to democracy. Aside from the economic benefits of migration, this strategy of life has sometimes negative social effects on family, as migration becomes a destabilizing factor for the family especially when children are left in Romania. Children often find themselves responsible for tasks usually completed by the adult members of the family (such as housework and even agricultural work in the case of children from rural areas), leaving aside their obligations to attend school. According to official statistics, over 80 thousands children living in Romania have at least one parent working abroad. However, numerous NGO's activating in Romania argue that the actual size of this phenomenon is still unknown, despite the fact that efforts are made by the public authorities to determine the real number of children living in this country and having at least one parent who works abroad. The biggest concern is that of children who remain in their home country completely deprived of parental care. The absence of the mother is one of the important factors that contribute to changing family model, taking into account the traditional family model where mothers have the most important role in household labour (i.e., housework and childcare). Or, changing the roles of family members in terms of childcare represents a challenge for family protection policies in Romania. This article presents the new model of transnational family and uses a sociological approach regarding the impact of parental deprivation and analysis the migration intentions of Romanian parents with special focus on the effects on children left behind. In order to reach this objective, authors used data from the Special Eurobarometer 337 exploring Europeans' mobility experiences and intentions.

Keywords: *parental care, parental deprivation, migration for work, transnational family, family policies, transnational parenthood*

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Introduction

Migration is considered a form of socio-economic behaviour. Scholars came to acknowledge that in recent decades women equalled men regarding the rate of migration for work, although in the past women were seen as the passive followers of males migrating for work. Children are the main reason behind their parents' decision to migrate for work, as a consequence of the lack of employment opportunities in their home countries. After all, migration was defined by Gailbraith as the "oldest action against poverty" (Gailbraith, 1979). But parents are not always aware that their migration decision will have strong negative impact on their children who are left at home, such as school drop-out. There is a causal effect of parental migration on children's educational attainment, especially when the mother is the one migrating for work, leaving her children back home with their father (Antman, 2012). Mothers are the ones that mainly deal with the care and education of the children, thus having the central position in terms of emotional capital (Thoma, 2010). So, children's educational outcomes may differ depending on who is the migrant parent and who is the one who stays at home with children.

In 1947, Romania became a communist country. During the communist regime, there were very restrictive exit policies applied by the government, so migration diminished. After the fall of the communist regime (i.e. 1989), Romania's transition to a market economy has given rise to a series of changes both in structural and behavioural plan regarding family. Phenomena such as unemployment and poverty have emerged and expanded in the post-communist period, families being forced to adapt to these new situations. Migration to foreign countries has become one of the solutions to adapt to this new situation after the fall of communism, especially in the case of those less educated and those from rural areas who have fewer opportunities to access the labour market from their home country. Romania became a country of emigration, and the temptations to leave the country were even greater given Ceausescu's restrictive migration policy during his dictatorial regime. For many Romanians, migration became *a strategy of life* after the falling of the communist regime. Migration for work accounts for the largest part of out-migration flows in Romania. Still, permanent migration from Romania is relatively low, temporary migration for labour being the dominant, especially since 2002 when Romanians were able to travel without restrictions in Schengen area. In 2007 Romania joined the European Union and the circular character of Romanians' migration accentuated. Basically, the estimation of number of Romanian migrants abroad became a difficult task because of the circular character of the phenomenon of migration (Sandu, 2010). Due to the circular character of Romanian's migration, children are usually left at home by the parents who leave their home country looking for work.

Aside from the economic benefits of migration, this strategy of life has sometimes *negative social effects on family*, as migration becomes a destabilizing factor for the family especially when children are left in Romania and at least one parent is working in a foreign country. Thus, for families and especially for those with children, migration has brought changes with regards to the *functions of the family*, including the functions related to statuses and roles of family members judged within. In the case of families with children, the most affected function of the family is caring for children. The absence of the mother in the family indicates increased risk for children, taking into account the traditional family model where mothers have the most important role in raising children and therefore children are more attached to their mothers, especially at younger age. At the same time, the absence of the mother in the family is one of the important factors that contribute to

changing the Romanian family model in terms of roles played inside and outside the family, given the fact that after year 2001, Romanian female migrants for work became as numerous as male migrants (Sandu, 2010). Or, changing the roles of family members in terms of homecare and children's care and education represents a challenge for the family protection policies in Romania from the perspective of migration phenomenon.

According to official statistics, in 2014 over 80 thousands children living in Romania had at least one parent working abroad. However, numerous NGO's argue that *the actual size of this phenomenon is still unknown in Romania*, despite the fact that efforts are made by the public authorities to determine the real number of children living in this country and having at least one parent who works abroad (Save the Children Romania, 2007; Soros Foundation Romania, 2007; UNICEF Romania, 2008). The biggest concern is that of children who remain in their home country completely deprived of parental care and supervision. This article employs the concepts of transnational families and transnational parenting and argues that children left behind by their migrant parents represent a social problem that needs special attention from the Romanian government, especially in the case of children deprived of maternal care. Finding the best ways to respond to the needs of transnational families in order to protect the rights of children left at home is a difficult task for the Romanian Government that needs to develop appropriate tools enabling remote parenting and supporting transnational parent-school communication. The article uses analysis of official statistics with regards to the children remaining in their home country while parents migrate for work. Also, authors used data from the Special Eurobarometer 337 - Geographical and labour market mobility. This special Eurobarometer is part of Wave 72.5 survey and was conducted in 2009 on behalf of the European Commission, under the responsibility of the Directorate-General Communication. The survey was designed to take a closer look at Europeans' mobility experiences and intentions. For this paper, the Romanian national sample was used, composed of 1,008 subjects, in order to present Romanians' opinions with regards to the effects of migration on family and their willingness to move if unemployed. Data were analysed using SPSS 19. Descriptive statistics were used while running the database, based on the post-stratification weights. This weighting procedure ensures that each country is represented in proportion to its population size aged 15 and over, by gender, age, region (NUTS II according with EUROSTAT nomenclature of territorial units for statistics) and size of locality.

Families in migration and the concept of transnational parenting

A great deal of research on migration and its effects concentrated on remittances and their impact on poverty reduction (Adams, Page, 2005; De Haas, 2005; Ratha, 2003). On the other hand, there are many researches concentrating on migrants' process of adaptation in the country where they migrate for work (Berry, 1997; Bhatia, Ram, 2001; Feliciano, 2006; Portes, Fernández-Kelly, Haller, 2008). But apart from the study of impact of remittances on poverty reduction and the migrants' integration in their host countries, there are other important aspects that should call the attention of researchers regarding the study of migration. The impact of migration on family members left at home is one of the important aspects that need more attention from scholars, as families are, after all, providers not only of material, but also emotional support. For example, when parents migrate for work in a foreign country and their children or dependent elderly are left at home, they lose care and may create social costs for society in terms of social policies supporting family members left at home.

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The need to promote comprehensive research regarding the effects of migration on family members in their countries of origin generated at the beginning of the '90 the *transnational approach* with the aim at studying the linkages that migrants maintain with their country of origin. But *transnational families* and the concept of *transnational parenting* became a topic of interest only later, after the year 2000 (Bryceson, Vuorela, 2002; Schiller, Basch, Szanton-Blanc, 1992; Parrenas, 2005; Pribilsky, 2004; Levitt, 2001). So, the transnational approach into the conceptualization of the family and into the methodologies used to study migrant families represents a recent development in the field of sociology. The sociology of the family typically emphasizes proximity as a prerequisite, but recently scholars incorporated transnational approach into the studies on families, by analysing the consequences of a transnational lifestyle for children who are left behind by migrant parents. *Transnational families* were defined as “families whose members live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely ‘familyhood’, even across national borders” (COFACE, 2012). *Transnational parenting* refers to adults’ parenting from a different country than the one in which their children reside.

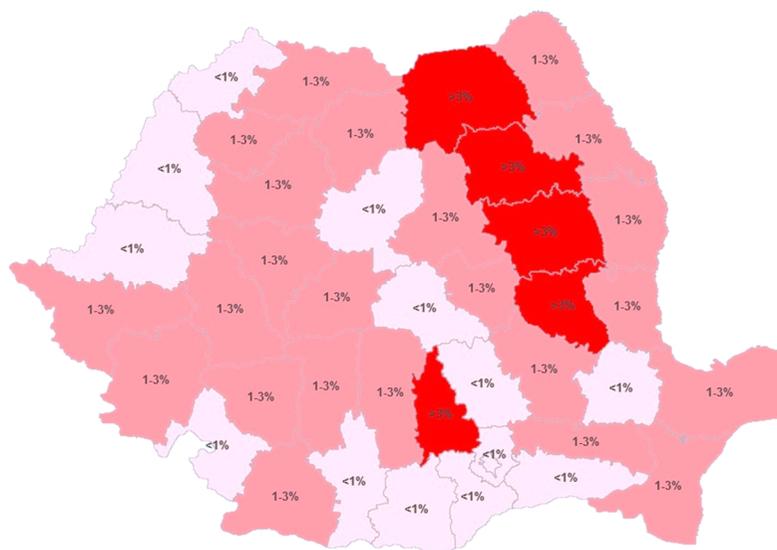
Studies on the new family model (i.e. *transnational families*) have drawn attention to the fact that children left behind by their parents, and especially by their mothers, face emotional problems that are even greater when they find out that their parents started a new life with a new family in the host country (Levitt, 2001). Apart from the emotional costs, there are also social costs incurred by the separation between parents and children due to migration, costs that are not compensated by remittances or by the care provided by other persons (Castaneda, Buck, 2011). Moreover, evidence shows that migrant families experience reconfigurations and shifts with regards to the roles played by the family members (UN Women, 2013). Children come to take place of the missing parent, assuming tasks that normally were performed by adult parents. The following step is losing their interest in school (poor results at school and even drop-out). In order to prevent such situations, scholars emphasised on the importance to develop tools to support transnational parent–school communication in migration-separated families. Current technologies offer great opportunities in developing information and communication platforms enabling communication among parents, guardians, and educators about the left-behind children (Brown, Grinter, 2014).

However, the model of transnational family and the study of transnational parenting are still in early stage of development. The main significant gaps regarding transnational family studies are, on one hand, that these studies are small-scale studies and, on the other hand, they do not collect data systematically. Furthermore, these studies omit to take into consideration a comparison group, so it is hard to determine if research results indeed characterise transnational families or there are other families with the same characteristics or behaviours and transnationality is not the determinant factor. There are important questions that scholars need to answer when using the transnational approach in their family studies: how does migration change the roles and responsibilities that different family members have towards each other and how are these changes negotiated between members? What are the non-economic effects of transnational families on children, parents, the elderly and caretakers? What makes transnational families to be different than other families living together? What effects do they have on all the social actors, not only children? What is the effect of the different types of transnational child rearing arrangements (children raised by a caretaker in the extended family, children raised by either their biological mother or father, children raised by a non-kin caretaker)?

Romanian children left in their home country while parents migrate for work

According to official statistics published by the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of the Child and Adoption, over 80 thousands children belonging to almost 60 thousands families are left in Romania by their parents who migrate for work to other countries. Most of these children are left in the care of their relatives and around 4% of these children are placed in the care of public authorities. According to official statistics, most children whose parents migrate for work in foreign countries remain in Romania in the care of *one parent*, while the other parent leaves to work in another country (around 60%). More than a quarter are left in their home country with their relatives, as *both parents* decide to migrate for work in foreign countries leaving their children completely deprived of parental care. The third category of children is the one raised by *single parents* who also leave their children with their relatives when migrate for work. There are certain counties from Romania where the percentage of children whose parents migrated for work is particularly high. Thus, in 2013, the counties with the highest percentages of children having at least one parent working abroad were mainly from the Nord-East development region (i.e. Neamt, Suceava, Bacau), as shown in Figure 1. This is also the region with the highest poverty rate and the highest risk of social exclusion in Romania. According to the National Institute for Statistics, the poverty rate in the NE development region was 33.5%, while at risk of poverty or social exclusion rate (AROPE) was 48.9% in year 2013.

Figure 1. Percentage of Romanian children having at least one parent working abroad in the total population of children at county level, 2013



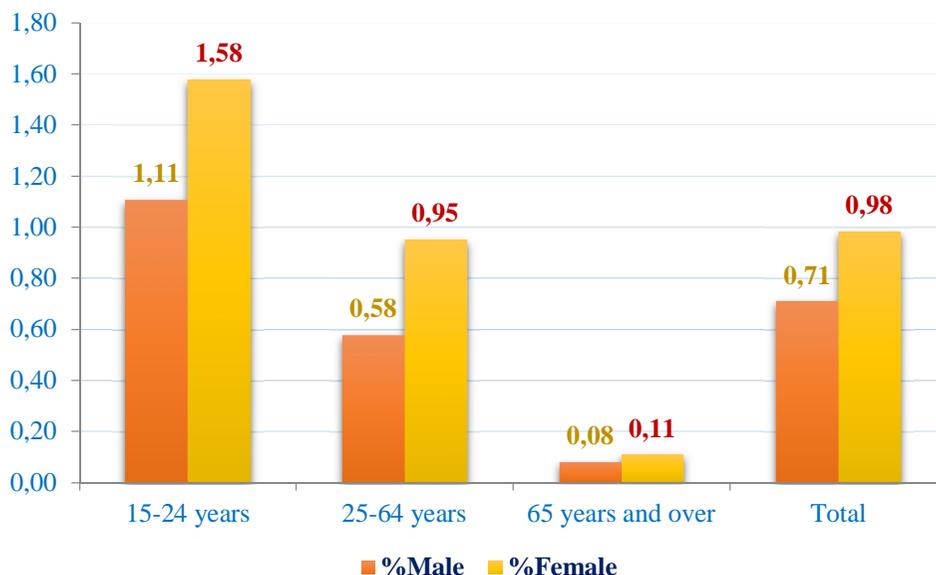
Source: data computed by authors based on national official statistics provided by the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of the Child and Adoption and the National Institute of Statistics

As showed above, during recent years the number of Romanian female migrants exceeded the number of male migrants. Moreover, the percentage of female temporary

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migrants in the female population with Romanian citizenship domiciling in Romania is higher than in the case of male population, as showed in Figure 2. Given these figures, we can only assume that the number of children deprived of maternal care also increased in the last years.

Figure 2. Percentage of Romanian temporary migrants in the total population of Romanian citizens domiciling in Romania, 2013



Source: data computed by authors based on national official statistics provided by the National Institute of Statistics

A series of studies developed at national level revealed that the number of children whose parents are working abroad is excessive undersized by the public authorities. Several NGOs (i.e. UNICEF Romania, Social Alternatives Association, Soros Foundation Romania) developed important national field research revealing that the total number of children deprived of parental care is much higher than suggested by administrative data.

The national study developed by UNICEF Romania and Social Alternatives Association in 2007 estimates that the real number of children having at least one parent working abroad was of 350,000 children, representing about 7% of the population under 18 years old (UNICEF Romania, 2008). More than one third from these children was completely deprived of parental care, as both their parents were working abroad. Moldova was the region with the highest number of children left at home by their migrant parents. More than a half of children affected by migration were living in rural areas. Rural areas are also the ones where the number of children completely deprived of parental care is higher (both parents were working abroad). When motivating their decision to migrate for work, parents working abroad invoked economic reasons. They also mentioned that children were not consulted when decided to leave the country for work. Worrying is the

fact that only one fifth of the parents who worked abroad considered that separation from children and family represents an argument against the idea of migrating for work. What is even worse is the fact that around one third of the migrant parents said that their families' economic situation and their standard of living did not improve after they migrated. Even if parents decided to migrate and leave their children at home as a survival strategy oriented to avoid the risk of poverty of the family, a significant number of parents fail to achieve their goals. The result is that family members left at home get to suffer not only of emotional poverty, but also of economic poverty.

Soros Foundation also developed a national study regarding children aged between 10 and 14 years old and concluded that the real number of children whose parents migrated for work was two times higher than the number presented by the officials (Toth, Toth, Voicu, Ștefănescu, 2007). The national study conducted by Soros Foundation revealed the changes in family roles and functions generated by the relocation of family members for extended periods of time. Children often find themselves responsible for tasks usually completed by the adult members of the family such as housework and even agricultural work in the case of children from rural areas. The time consumed with domestic activities affects their free time but also the time children need to study and prepare their homework for school. Housework is generally a task which is performed by girls especially when the mother or even both parents leave the country for work. So, children's right to education and also their right to leisure and play are violated.

Romanian authorities included children affected by migration in the category of vulnerable children within the National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Child Rights 2014-2020, motivating that these children have low school performance and are at high risk of dropping out of school. Parental involvement is very important for the proper social and cognitive growth of a child. In this context, it is important to support children left at home and their migrant parents by developing, among others, appropriated tools to unble transnational parent-school communication, especially in the case of children deprived of maternal care. Yet, finding the best ways to respond to the needs of transnational families in order to protect the rights of children left at home is a difficult task. On one hand, even obliged by the law, parents rarely inform authorities about their intensions to migrate for work. On the other hand, local authorities are confronting with the lack of human and material resources necessary to manage this phenomenon. Moreover, there is a lack of training of the personnel with attributions in managing the case of children left behind by their migrant parents.

Romanian's opinions expressed within the Special Eurobarometer on labour market mobility

Effects of migration on family

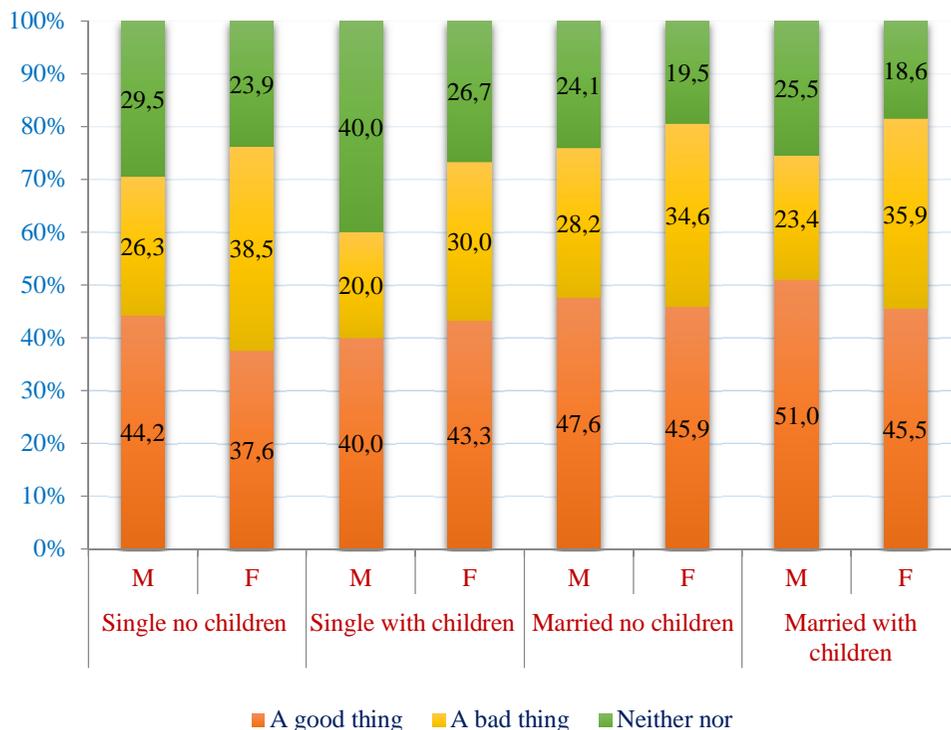
When Romanian respondents were asked if, generally speaking, they thought that when people move across regions or countries within the European Union it is a good, bad or neither a good nor a bad thing for family, most of them have said that moving to another country would be a good thing (45.4%), around 30% said it would be a bad thing and less than one quarter (24.1%) said it would be neither a good nor a bad thing for family. Female respondents from Romania are more convinced than men that moving across regions or countries within the European Union is a bad thing for family regardless of family structure.

Female respondents from Romania are more convinced than men that moving across regions or countries within the European Union is a bad thing for family regardless

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of age group also. Among least supportive of migration in terms of impact on the family are women older than 40 years.

Figure 3. Romanians' opinions with regards to the effects of migration on family by family type



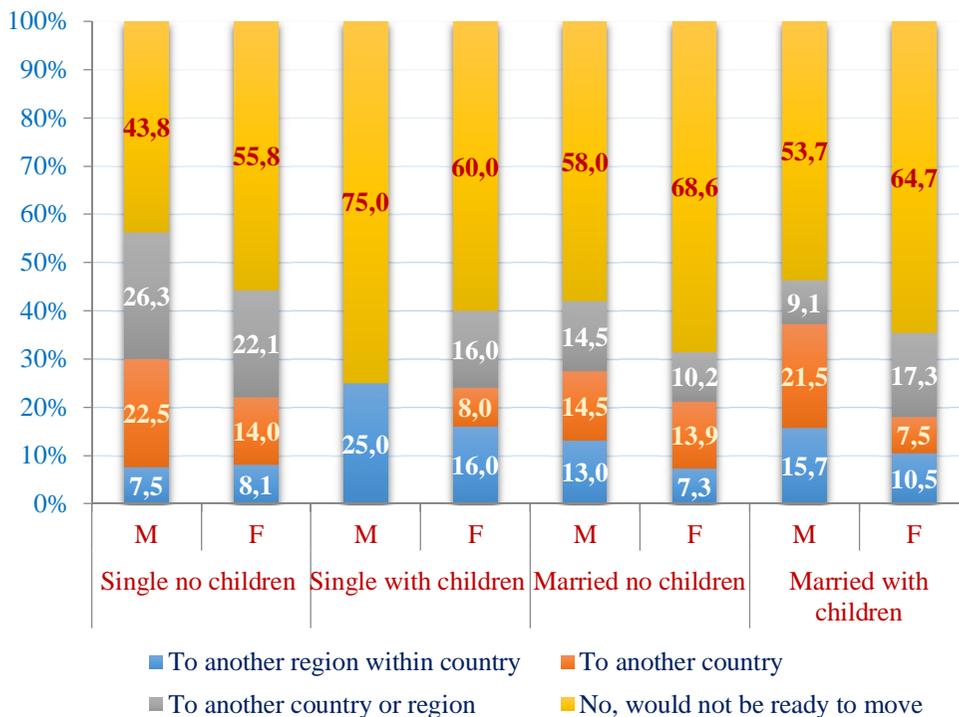
Source: Eurobarometer 72.5 (October-November 2009)

Place of residence is also a variable which separates women from men when asked if moving across regions or countries within the European Union is a bad thing for family. Women from rural areas think in a greater extent that moving across regions or countries within the European Union is a good thing for family (49%) by comparison with women from urban large areas (only 40.6% of women from large towns consider that moving across regions or countries within the European Union is a good thing for family).

Willingness to move if unemployed

If they were unemployed and had difficulties finding a job in their place of residence, most Romanians (56.6%) would not be ready to move to another region or country to find one, while 16.2% would be ready to move to another country in order to find a job. Single-parent families are the ones most resistant to the idea of moving to another region or country, especially in the case of families represented by males. Married families are also less willing to move, especially if the respondents are females. By comparison with female respondents, men are more willing to move to another country if unemployed, especially in the case of families with children.

Figure 4. Romanians' willingness to move if unemployed by type of family



Source: Eurobarometer 72.5 (October-November 2009)

Age is also an important variable with regards to the willingness to move if unemployed, especially in the case of female respondents. Still, women are the least willing to move for work, regardless of age group.

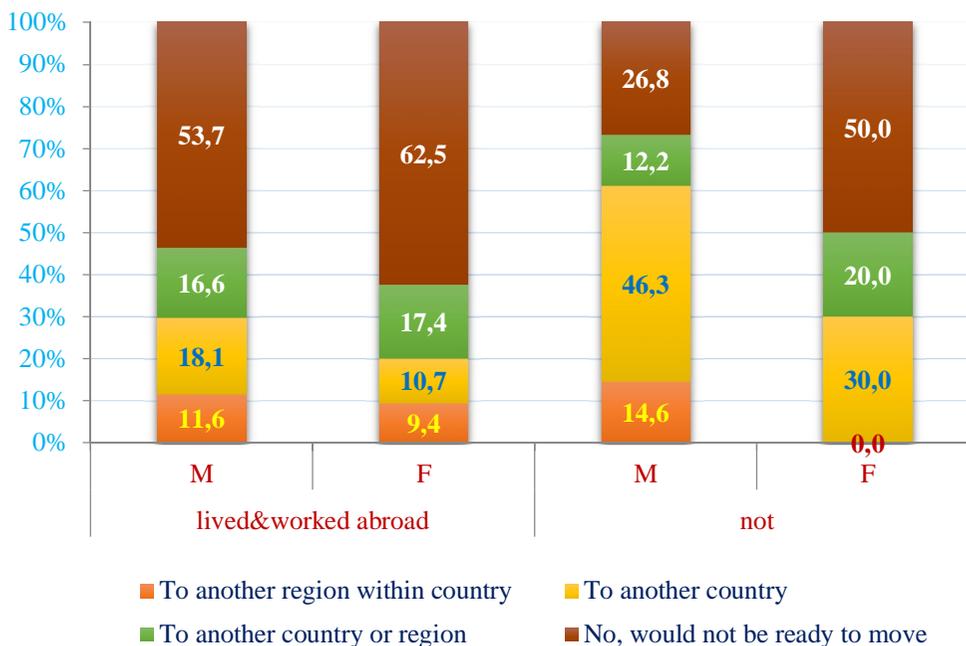
The most willing to move to another country if unemployed are male respondents from the age group 15-24 years.

Women are the least willing to move for work when taking into account respondents' place of residence, also. The most willing to move to another country for work are men from large towns. The least willing to move for work are respondents from rural areas, despite the fact that people most affected by poverty and unemployment, are the ones from rural areas and small towns.

The willingness to migrate for work to another country varies depending on previous experience in living and working abroad.

Thus, people who lived and worked abroad in the past are less willing to move from their current place of residence in Romania. Both in the case of the ones with previous experience abroad and in the case of the ones who never left their home country, women are less willing to move to another country by comparison with men.

Figure 5. Romanians' willingness to move if unemployed



Source: Eurobarometer 72.5 (October-November 2009)

Conclusions

After the fall of the communist regime, migration became one of the most important demographic phenomenon in Romania, as many Romanians failed to find a good job inside their country in order to provide for their family a decent standard of living. Migration was seen as the only way to improve family standards of life and assure a better future for children. Yet, parents' migration for work conducted to changes and new negotiations with regards to statuses and roles of family members who remain in their home countries. The costs of these changes translate into both social and emotional effects. Migration leaves children vulnerable and deprived of parental care, of physical, psychological or emotional protection. A new family model developed in Romania, the transnational family. Children left behind by their migrant parents represent a social problem that needs special attention from the Romanian government, especially when parents, under the effects of poverty and unmet needs, do not realize the negative effects on children deprived of parental care. Of course, family has the freedom to decide on adopting a migratory behaviour and to separate the children from one or both parents. In a democratic society, the State cannot interfere in this decision. Yet, the State can and is obliged to formulate policies and intervention measures in order to protect the rights of vulnerable children left at home and to meet the needs of transnational families. Given the effects of parental migration on children's educational outcomes, it is important to support children left at home and their migrant parents by developing, among others, appropriated tools to unable remote parenting and transnational parent-school communication.

Finding the best ways to respond to the needs of transnational families in order to protect the rights of children left at home is a difficult task. Unfortunately, data sources about migration are scarce and incapable to reflect both the magnitude and structure of the phenomenon of children with migrant parents. The transnational approach developed in recent years represents a good method to promote comprehensive research regarding the effects of migration on family members left in Romania.

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