

## **THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF ROMANIAN PARENTS' EMIGRATION ON THEIR CHILDREN'S DESTINY**

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**ABSTRACT:** *“Mother has been gone for six months to work abroad for me, so that I can have a better future. I miss her every day. Sometimes I tell myself it's just a dream and when I wake up mother will be by my side. Dream or reality? Reality or dream? (A sixteen – years old adolescent). The paper shows that are general factors of emigration after post revolutionary period in Romania and also present few aspects of the migration phenomenon from this country and after that it is presenting the social and economic effects of Romanian parents emigration on their children`s destiny.*

**KEY WORDS:** *migration phenomenon; socio-economic effects; emigration; children left at home; parents go abroad.*

**JEL CLASSIFICATION:** *Z10.*

### **1. GENERAL FACTORS OF EMIGRATION AFTER THE POST REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD IN ROMANIA**

The post-revolutionary period in Romania had important consequences on the labour market's structure. Giving up government control in the industrial field in the 90's led to massive restructuring in governmental sectors like mining or metallurgy that allowed families secure living conditions and work places before the above-mentioned period. The world market had a great influence upon States, either by determining an economic growth and implicitly a consumption growth, or by creating an international specialisation and changing the structure of national economies (Popp, 2011, p. 338).

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The decrease in work places, massive personnel discarding in the industrial fields and the lack of any viable alternative jobs led to Romanian people that were able to work getting hired abroad.

This was the trigger factor of a phenomenon that grew considerably: the emigration of Romania's labour force to other European countries that held hiring opportunities, especially the migration of parents looking for a well-paid job in order to support their families in Romania.

From a social assistant's perspective, one of the most important causes that led to emigration in Romania, as a follow up of the national economic and industrial restructuring, is of a social nature, based on the problem of poor families, both in the urban and the rural areas, the lack of working places for the adult population, insufficient material resources, along with high monthly current expenses (as a result of prices' alignment to the European level, compared to the wage level that is still very low), and families with many children and no income.

As a result of these factors, both political, economical and social, an adult population emigration phenomenon began, with the purpose of finding a work place abroad that would satisfy the needs of the children and other family members at home.

### **1.1. A short description of the migration phenomenon in Romania**

As Romania lines up to the general European norms and politics, the total percentage of labour force availability in Romania (57.9%) is quite low compared to the European average (62.5% in 2003), and to the desired percentage in the EU for 2013 (70%), and this is the main factor that leads to work force emigration from Romania to other European countries ([www.infoeuropa.ro](http://www.infoeuropa.ro)).

The unemployment rate can increase because the labour mobility is more powerful, and as the duration of unemployment is not changed in the sense of the increase, it is a sign of a higher efficiency of the labour market because it intervenes to replace during the same period a higher flow of workers (Popp, 2010, p.121).

There aren't enough feasible statistic data regarding the components of emigration at this moment. Romanians' predilection to emigrate is very high in the context of possible more permissive emigration policies in the western, developed countries of the E.U. High parameter economic growth in the developed European countries has led to a more important growth of Romanian labour force in these countries. Thus we are facing the complex issue of temporary emigration in seek of working places: the problem regarding parents that go abroad to find work and that temporarily abandon their children in Romania. "We don't have trustworthy statistics regarding the number of Romanians working abroad.

The fact that after 2001 – once the entry visas in most European countries were discarded – hundreds of thousands of Romanians left for the countries in Southern and Western Europe in order to escape poverty is well known. It is estimated that the number of emigrants rises up to about 2 million people, from all the regions of the country, which enhances us to speak about the existence of a national phenomenon, given its dimensions, implications, and emigration origin geography" (<http://www.muncainstrainatate.anofm.ro>).

The National Child Rights Protection Authority, the institution responsible by law for monitoring the children left at home as a result of the parents' emigration, made public statistics according to which on the 30th of June 2007, the total number of children in that situation raised up to 82464 (under 18), coming from 56202 families (<http://www.copii.ro>).

### **1.2. The general situation board concerning children left at home due to parents' emigration**

The emigration phenomenon took by surprise the Romanian society that was not prepared to take the shock of such great changes that had never previously occurred, without risk (Miftode, 2006, p.3). The main sources of change, and thus the factors justifying its necessity, are: evolution in the field of technologies; explosion of knowledge; rapid outdateding of products, labour conditions; changes regarding the nature of the labour force (Popp, 2011, p.72). So the emigration phenomenon had a direct effect on the next component: The emotional and educational development of children that were left behind as a result of one or both parents' departure abroad, with general school performance decreasing and emotional dysfunctional events; The nature of the human relations between the members of the natural or extended family to persons left abroad to work (husbands\wives, parents, other relatives), with conflictual issues occurring due to low quality communication between partners, especially when one member of the couple is gone working abroad; The communities and the society in general, with certain areas of Romania where the difference between the financial situation of families gone abroad and the families that didn't leave the country is becoming more and more obvious; The modification of the values system of the entire population, with the general belief that decent living conditions are impossible to achieve in the country, and the children continuing the society model, hoping to emigrate, in their turn.

The individual situation of each child that has emigrant parents are very diverse and are hard to place in different categories. Generally,- according to the children's' and the extended family members' testimonies – one or both parents leave the country in order to find a better paid working place, with the purpose of offering decent financial situations to their children and other family members. According to the time length during which parents are absent, the family receives financial resources and material goods that they could not have accumulated in their own country. The decision to temporarily “abandon” the children is taken by the emigrant parents together with the extended family members that generally take responsibility for the children left behind. So in very many situations of this kind, children with emigrant parents are entrusted to relatives up to the fourth degree: aunts, uncles, grandparents. Legally, according to Order 219\2006 and Law 272\2006, emigrant parents must make a statement as to who is going to be responsible for the children while they are gone to the local authorities. Children generally adapt to their parents' departure, with emotional issues especially during the periods following the parents' departure, and they get used to the parents' being away after some time, but show behaviour caused by the negative effects of the parents' departure abroad.

Some important factors generated by the parents' emigration that children left behind deal with are:

- ✘ One or both parents leaving abroad - in most cases, men\ fathers left first, then wives\ mothers followed, (Soros Romania Foundation, 2007, p.15);
- ✘ The time length the children are left without one or both parents - generally the period parents are missing is quite large, over six months<sup>1</sup>;
- ✘ The time frame that parents use to go back abroad (in most cases parents return during time periods, especially during holidays, and then emigrate again<sup>2</sup>).

Another recent study in Romania regarding the children separated from one or both parents as these are gone to work abroad, proves that "in the case of children left behind, parents' being away for long periods of time can have negative effects on the children's development. The parents' absence can be associated with a series of issues or with not satisfying certain needs the children have." (Luca et al., 2007, p.9)

## **2. THE REPERCUSSIONS OF THE PARENTS' EMIGRATION ON THE CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND**

Undoubtedly, the ones most affected by the parents' departure abroad are the children. The parents' emigration shows both positive and negative implications regarding the children. The positive facts – as identified by the Soros Romania Foundation in their study "The effects of migration on the children left behind" – regard the well being of the child whose parents are gone abroad, resulting in the increase of the child's life quality as a result of the income sent from abroad. Children left behind are emotionally neglected by the parents that are abroad as they are deprived of parental care and attention that are irreplaceable for any child growing up.

The main risks (Luca, et al., 2007, pp. 52-53) that children left alone face are: dealing with too many tasks – early adult responsibilities, taking care of smaller brothers; A deficitary apprehension of ethic and moral norms – the risk of copying the model of affective neglect in the family and applying when they become adults; Social risk factors vulnerability; Dysfunctional inter-relations with other persons; Affective immaturity; Attention disorders; Indifferent, stubborn, or aggressive behaviour; Delinquent behaviour – they become part of delinquent groups as a way to fulfil their unsatisfied needs of attention and appreciation; Feelings of abandonment, uncertainty, sadness, anxiety, depressive moods as they miss their parents; The decrease of their school performance, the risk of school abandon, low attendance; Social adaptation difficulties; Over self assessment – regarding other children with a more precarious material situation –or under self assessment – regarding children that receive parental care.

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<sup>1</sup> Relating of childrens from Valea Jiului has remained home and has parents that go abroad

<sup>2</sup> Relating of families from Valea Jiului had remained home

## **2.1. The causes of the parents' emigration and the perception of the children left behind regarding these causes**

The main causes that lead to emigration, as identified by specialists (Miftode, 2006, p. 3), are structured by the following motivations:

- The lack of social and professional perspective in the country;
- Economical and material dissatisfaction (low salaries, insufficient income);
- The lack of alternatives or professional opportunities in the country;
- The uncertainty of the social and economic future;
- Birocracy, "the barriers" in the way to self-affirmation and achievement of individual and family objectives;
- Social insecurity (the street, the family, the household, the job);
- Trans-national interaction with successful emigrants;
- European appealing financial and material perspectives;
- The perspective of European social better valuing regarding the professional career;
- The chance for a more civilized, more certain and free life.

But what do parents say about the reasons that drove them to the decision to leave abroad in search of a work place that would give their children a better future? And how do the children left behind see their parents' departure for a better payed job?

## **2.2. Case studies**

*Here are some direct testimonies from parents left abroad regarding the motivation for temporary abandon of their children and also how children see these situations:*

*Case Gheorghe, 30 years-old, unqualified worker, married, one child:*

*"My family became complete in 2000 when my son was born. For a few years I worked as a mining worker in a mine in the Jiu Valley, then I quit thinking I'd find a better job. But that didn't happen. All I found was temporary ill-paid jobs in the area.*

*Until one day a friend from the mine asked me if I wanted to work abroad for a much better salary than the one in Romania. I accepted. I did it for my family and my son.*

*I'm young and I want to live better. That's how I ended up working in constructions. As an unqualified worker. Construction work is hard. It's easier and more convenient to work at the dinner restaurant or at the farm, but that requires some abilities in that field.*

*How do I feel about having left my children home? Grief and resignation. That's it! I have to support my family. My son has to go to school and learn more than I did and have a better life, but it's hard for me and my wife that waits for me at home.*

*I want to buy a house and a car. I already began saving money for this."*

*Case –Luminita, 16 years old, divorced parents, mother left to Spain*

*“I miss my mother but she’s gone to work for me”  
 “My grandmother takes care of me since my mother left to Spain three years ago...And I’m not sad anymore, I’m used to it.  
 My grandmother is old and has some difficulties understanding me.  
 School doesn’t go to well, but I’m not worried. I have time to study.  
 My mother sends us money and presents so that we can live better. I miss my mother but she’s gone to work for me”*

*Case Ionuț -12 years old, divorced parents, mother gone to Spain*

*“I want mother back home”  
 “I have my sister and my grandmother by my side.  
 We have what we need because mother sends us money every month. But I want mother back home, near us, like it used to be before.  
 It’s very hard for grandmother and she’s ill.  
 I like studying, not like my sister, Luminita. I’m a good pupil but I miss my mother very much. She promised me she’d be home in the winter holidays.”*

### **3. THE SOCIAL ASSISTANT’S APPROACH FROM A MULTIAXIAL PERSPECTIVE TO THE PROBLEM OF CHILDREN LACKING PARENTAL CARE DUE TO PARENTS LEFT ABROAD TO WORK**

Taking into consideration the situation in Romania, the social policies in the field approach the problem of children left behind as a result of parents’ emigration from a multi-axial perspective. Thus, the law perspective in Romania foresees and stipulates the means of approaching and dealing with cases of children whose parents are gone working abroad through the following normative laws:

- Order 219\15.06.2006 issued by the National Authority for Child Rights Protection (the law stipulates the activities of identifying, intervention, and monitoring of children lacking parental care);
- Law no. 272\2004 regarding the protection and promotion of child rights;
- Order 286\2006 issued by The National Authority of Child Protection;
- Law no. 156\2000 regarding the protection of Romanian citizens that works abroad.

In the present context of limited spending resources for social assistance, agencies need innovative strategies to harness information for the benefit and in the best interest of the individuals and communities that they serve (Iovu, Runcan, 2012, p.66).

From the *territorial competence perspective* (Luca, et al., 2007, pp.82-83), the approach to cases regarding children temporarily lacking the care of parents left abroad is to be taken care of by the Social Assistance Public Services, responsible with the children's family home or for the area in which the children's family is situated, at city\town\village level (272 Law/2004), and from a *institutional competence perspective* (Luca, et al., 2007, pp.83-84), the following governmental institutions are responsible with such cases: the SPLAS<sup>3</sup>, the DGASPC<sup>4</sup> and Courts of Law.

Thus, Local Social Assistance Public Services have certain main tasks: identifying children in such situations, an initial assessment of children in such situations in order to plan suitable services that come to meet the needs of such children, implementing the plan for services based mainly on support services for the family where the child is and on counselling services for the child as well, the involvement of the Social Assistance General Department regarding the cases with the purpose to take special protection measures for these children, re-evaluating and monitoring the children's situations periodically\ trimestrially, providing physical and law protection for children in such situations.

Another Romanian institution responsible with these issues is the General Social and Child Rights Protection Department that functions at county level and mainly takes over cases from the SPLAS, proposing child protection measures to the committee according to each case, elaborates and implements an individual protection plan, re-evaluates the situation of the child.

In certain situation, the courts of Law are obliged to establish proper protection measures deciding as to who is to take over parental obligations or setting the monthly quantum regarding parents' contribution to children support. From the perspective of the parents' responsibility they are obliged by law to notify the SPLAS of their intention to go abroad and regarding the person or persons that are going to take care of the children left behind during their absence.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

The situations I have presented, whether unusual, dramatic or touching, are only a small part of the general picture that specialists name "the working force immigration phenomenon". This generated a complementary phenomenon: that of a generation that is-even for a short while-deprived of life in a normal family.

The main negative consequences of working force migration are mainly cast upon the family. Being away from the family especially affects the children emotional needs. The external migration phenomenon become larger after the enlargement of the European Union, when labour force in less developed states.

It is certain that parents absence during long periods of time generates negative effects on the children left behind and constitutes a challenge for the professionals in the social assistance field that are involved into repairing things.

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<sup>3</sup> Social Assistance Public Local Services

<sup>4</sup> General Social Worker and Child Protection Direction

The problem of children left behind as a result of the parents' departure in search of a job is complex and this article does not exhaust the multidimensional faces of these.

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