

THE EFFECTS OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION ON FAMILIES AND CHILDREN A COMPARATIVE STUDY 2006 – 2009

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Abstract

This study focuses on the migration phenomenon from the perspective of the influence and effects on the children whose parents work abroad, and has as starting point these children's perceptions of the situation they find themselves in, irrespective of their wish. Special attention was paid to the analysis of migration dynamics and its effects on the family environment. For this reason we have chosen to comparatively analyze two samples of pupils attending schools and high schools from the municipality of Iasi, and who were interviewed in 2006* and 2009** respectively. What were the main reasons of the parents' migration during these years? How did the absence of the parents affect the children? What type of problems did they face? Who helped them solve these problems? These are some of the questions that are in fact a part of the present study.

Key words: migration, migration effects, family, child.

Despite the forecasts that the global economic crisis would make the Romanians working abroad become unemployed and return home, international migration continues to be a present phenomenon. The Romanian citizens that lost their jobs abroad have not returned back home yet, so that the characteristics of the phenomenon are still within the limits of the previous years.

Following the dynamics of migration between 2006 and 2009, this study starts from the results of two researches on two representative samples for the population of pupils in the fifth to the twelfth grades in Iasi municipality. The

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volume of the 2006 sample was 737 pupils and that of the 2009 sample was 744 pupils.

The validity of the results is determined by the fact that the two samples are comparable in volume and structure, with certain similarities concerning the socio-demographic data characteristic of pupils. The respondents have a similar age average (14.9 years old in the 2006 sample and 15.2 years old in the 2009 sample), and the gender distribution has the same equilibrium: 42.20% male and 57.80% female in 2006, and 44.40% male and 55.60% female in 2009. The children included in the 2006 sample come from families with 1.5 children on an average, whose parents are, with a 75.80% balance, between 25 and 45 years old, and the children included in the 2009 sample come from families with 2.4 children on an average, whose parents are, with a 75.40% balance, between 25 and 45 years old.

The present study starts from the identification of the very family members leaving to work abroad. A common note for the two samples is that the mother is most often the family member choosing to emigrate. There are less cases when the father or both parents leave to work abroad. This situation may be explained by the fact that women are the more flexible labor force and manage to find a job more easily. A second explanation is that women feel more responsible for the family and the household than men, and migrating is often a mixture of self-sacrifice and material interest. Of course there are cases when a woman's emigration is her attempt to evolve, gain freedom or distance herself from an unhappy marriage, but in most cases women are altruistic and prepared to sacrifice for the family (Tacoli, 1999).

However, the parents' absence is no longer short to medium term. If 82.10% of the parents of the 2006 sample children had left home for three years at most, only 58.40% of the 2009 sample children had left for three years at most. Therefore, we can say that the migration of parents is no longer short to medium term, but a long term (often unknown) migration. Even if parents go abroad in order to solve certain problems, they ultimately start over a new life with new objectives and even a new identity.

The parents' motivation to leave the home and work abroad

The analysis of the decisional factors determining the absence of the parent/parents and their working abroad comprises both for 2006 and 2009 material factors, on the one hand, and socio-affective factors on the other hand. The material factors include unemployment, scarcity of money and lack of housing, and the socio-affective factors refer to spouse conflicts, conflicts between parents and their children, and the absence of one of the parents. Compared to 2006, the 2009 hierarchy of these inducing factors did not change significantly, but the importance of some of them followed a strongly decreasing trend between 2006 and 2009.

Both in 2006 and 2009 the material factors are the main reason why one of the parents or both emigrate. Most respondents stated that the lack of financial capital determined the parents to leave home and work abroad (77.30% of the 2006 respondents, and 73% of the 2009 respondents). Closely related to the scarcity of money is the lack of a job, which is stated by approximately half of the 2006 and 2009 respondents, but also the lack of housing (23.10% of the 2006 respondents and 12% of the 2009 respondents).

As for the socio-affective factors underlying the migration of one or both parents to work abroad, the absence of the other parent is one of the main reasons for emigration. By correlating this with the degree it affects the family structure we note a differentiation between the cases with a migrating mother, and the cases with a migrating father. Thus, the mothers of the interviewed children left the home frequently because the father was absent. This option is not without negative consequences, given that if the couple reunites this means a break from their own children. Therefore, the choice of consolidating the couple damages the relation with the children, and the mothers may even not realize this fissure in the first place. However, more respondents in such situations point to the lack of the love and care from their parents, as well as to insufficient communication with the migrant parents.

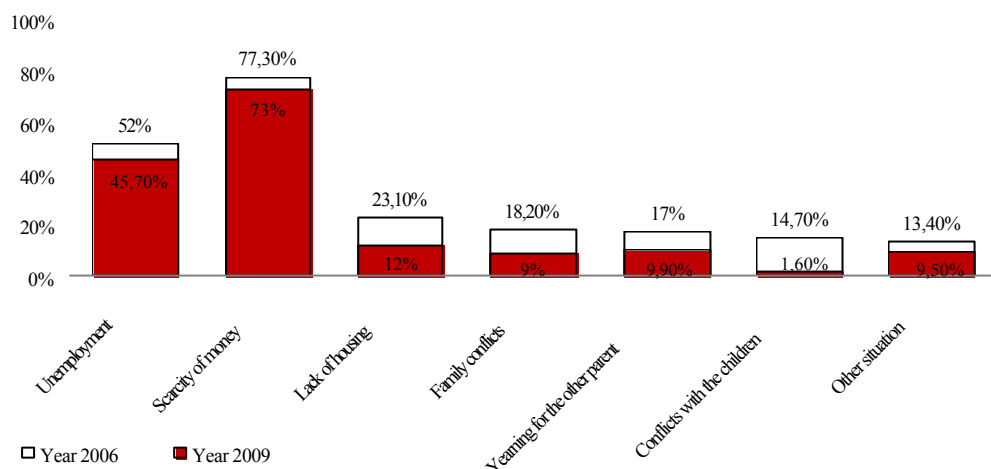
Family conflicts and conflicts between parents and their children can also count as reasons why parents migrate. It is difficult to evaluate whether migration leads to solving these conflicts or, on the contrary, to their intensification. However, it is certain that the children in these situations are negatively affected as far as their school, social or even material performance is concerned.

On comparing the results from the two samples under scrutiny, we note a diminishing of the cases of children declaring that the main reason why their parents left was because of family conflicts (18.20% of the 2006 sample and 9% of the 2009 sample), conflicts with children (14.70% of the 2006 sample and 1.60% of the 2009 sample), and the absence of the other parent (17% of the 2006 sample and 9.90% of the 2009 sample). Thus, the socio-affective factors consolidate their position as secondary factors determining the migration of one/both parents to work.

On the other hand, the material factors had a decreasing trend, as less parents opted to work abroad because of the lack of housing (23.10% in 2006 and 12% in 2009). However, the material motivation remains sufficiently solid in both years, especially when it implies money.

After mentioning the main reasons why parents migrated, the study seeks to identify the extent to which, according to the respondents, these reasons are justified or not. Special notice must be made that in analyzing the importance of the reasons that determined the parents' migration we took in consideration only the cases when the pupils mentioned *a priori* the existence of that certain reason.

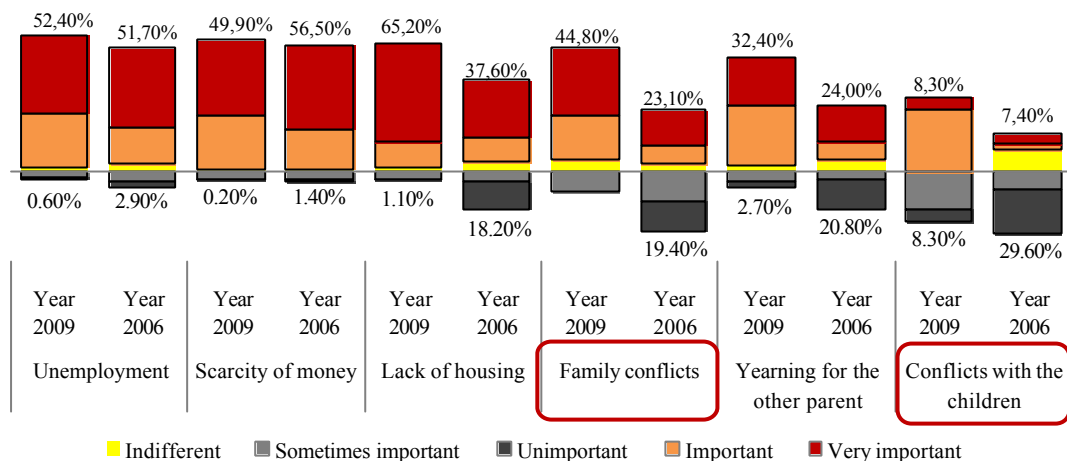
The main motivation of parents to work abroad, in 2006 and 2009



From the perspective of the children whose parents live and work abroad, the unemployment and scarcity of money are important reasons. This is proved both by the 2006 and the 2009 statistics, and only a small percentage of the sample respondents believe that these determining factors are of no importance. On the other hand, the children's perception of the lack of housing, the absence of a parent and especially of the family conflicts and the conflicts with children changed dramatically in 2009 as compared to 2006. Three years ago the above mentioned motivations were quite unimportant, yet at present, according to the children, they are very important. This dynamics can be attributed to a better communication between parents and children, because the parents explain the children the motive underlying their migration, and the children understand and even accept it. In fact, the results of the 2009 study show that in the cases where parents discussed with their children about the fact that they would leave and work abroad for a certain period of time, the children understood better the importance of the adults' material motivations (scarcity of money, unemployment and lack of housing).

Therefore we cannot invoke a conflict between the parents' decision to work abroad and the pupils' opinion because the latter understand the necessity of this measure. We can even speak of a certain level of altruism of the entire family: the parent/parents decide to migrate and work abroad, on the one hand, and the children have the power to understand and accept this decision, on the other hand (Sana and Massey, 2005).

Importance of parents' motivation to work abroad, in 2006 and 2009



The amplitude of the motivation of financial gains makes us wonder whether one/both parents' migration to work is indeed a way of solving financial difficulties. Is emigration a solution or, on the contrary, is this phenomenon an illusion?

The following table shows the percentage of cases where the lack of financial resources was the reason why parents left home to work abroad. However, a part of these cases invoke the lack of money after parents left as well (12.50% in 2006 and 12% in 2009). Therefore, we can say that this a failed migration if we relate to its main objective and to the extent to which it was accomplished. Despite that parents left abroad wishing to solve financial difficulties, a part of the interviewed pupils point to the existence of this problem after the migration. Even if their percentage is small, we note its consistency between 2006 and 2009. It is interesting that the cases with an invoked scarcity of money after the migration of the parents are mainly cases where they had not left for long (31.70% had left for less than 6 months). Therefore, there is an adaptation period of the adults to the new socio-economic and cultural environment, and their financial development proper starts after half a year of accommodation.

Migration can be analyzed by taking into account its positive aspects, which we listed in the 2006 study. When questioned about the potential positive effects of their parents' migration, only 75.90% of the pupils whose parents left because of the scarcity of money stated that the increase of their financial capital was an advantage. Therefore, it is possible that in 24.10% of the investigated cases

the improvement of the economic situation is insignificant or the respondents do not especially appreciate this aspect.

	2006	2009
Total number of cases where the main reason for migration is scarcity of money	77.30%	73%
<i>of which</i>		
Total number of cases where money is scarce after the parents' migration	12.50%	12%

The problems children face after the migration of the parent/parents

The family may be less influenced when the functions and roles of the parent/parents who migrate to work are taken over by other members of the close family (brothers, sisters) or by members of the extended family (grandmothers, uncles, aunts, etc.). Both in 2006 and 2009 the grandparents, other relatives, the brothers and sisters were the main persons taking care of the children whose parents migrated. However, there are cases when there is nobody to take care of the children or when there is not a clear delegation of the parenting responsibilities. Such instances have specific consequences. The cases when children stated that after the migration of the parent/parents they were not taken care of by a certain person are also cases with a higher rate of social, medical or legal problems.

Both in 2006 and 2009, in the cases of the children stating there was nobody to take care of them after the migration of their parent/parents, there were records of an increase of the incidence of school problems or problems with the neighbors. One of the differences between 2006 and 2009 is that in the 2009 sample we noted that pupils in such situations also generally have problems with the authorities, family problems or even problems with the remaining parent. Medical problems also occur more often in the cases of children whose parents left to work abroad and did not entrust them to anybody's care. On the other hand, the group of friends seems to be a refuge and a supporter of these pupils, and they present a lower rate of problems with friends than the rest of the sample.

In the 2006 sample there is a converse situation, in the sense that unsupervised pupils consolidate their family relations at the expense of friendships.

However, fortunately only a small percentage of the respondents of the 2009 sample stated that they fought almost all the time or very often with the person who takes care of them. This harmony supports the pupils and the absence of the parent/parents is less felt. But when there are problems with the person who takes care of the child, his/her chances of embracing a deviating behavior increase significantly. Nevertheless, the fact that some parents leave home and go and work abroad presents negative aspects. Children have problems at school, problems with

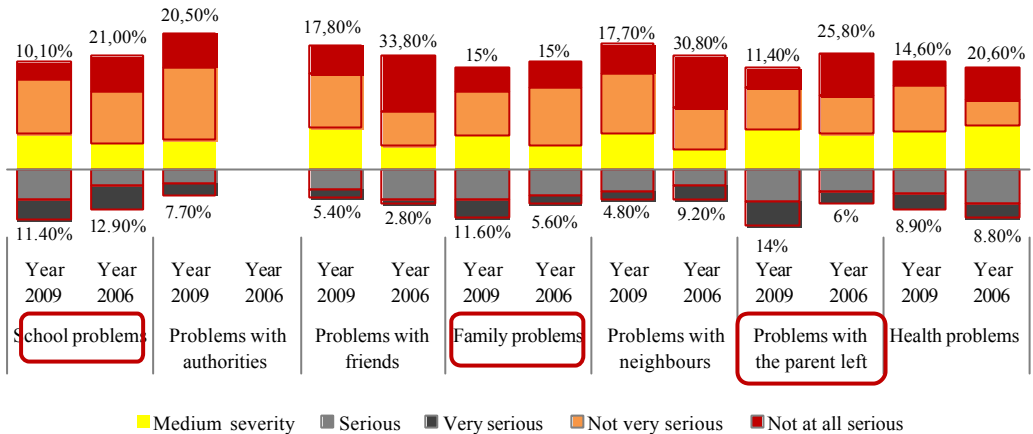
the authorities, with their friends, neighbors, the parent who remained at home or even medical problems. The rate of occurrence of these difficulties had an increasing trend between 2006 and 2009. For instance, there were more children in 2009 who stated that they had problems with their friends, in the family, with the neighbors or with the parent who remained at home. On the other hand, there are less frequent problems at school, and there are less children who state they face difficulties in this sense.

	Sample		Total number of cases where nobody takes care of the child after the parents migrate	
	2006	2009	2006	2009
School problems	24.1%	21.2%	30.6%	31.4%
Problems with the authorities (2009 sample)	-	5.2%	-	8.6%
Problems with friends	8%	17.3%	16.7%	11.4%
Family problems	16.6%	19.8%	13.9%	31.4%
Problems with the neighbors	7%	8.3%	19.4%	8.6%
Problems with the remaining parent	8.3%	15.3%	8.3%	25.7%
Medical problems	4.6%	21.2%	2.8%	37.1%

The link between the emergence of school problems and the parents' migration is proven in other sociological researches such as that of Paula Tufis, *Influenta plecarii parintilor în strainatate asupra rezultatelor scolare*. The author states that good performance at school is partially influenced by the financial, educational, cultural family resources, and the migration of one/both parents may lead to certain problems of the school performance, especially if the functions of the parents are not taken over and fulfilled by somebody else.

When evaluated not by the frequency of their occurrence, but by their seriousness, the most acute problems of the children whose parents left home to work abroad are, in the 2009 study, school problems (class skipping, poor grades, problems with classmates/marginalization, indiscipline, conflicts with the teachers), family problems (more responsibilities than before, fights, lack of communication, lack of affection), as well as problems with the parent who remained at home (lack of understanding, violence, lack of communication).

Seriousness of the problems faces by children after their parents have emigrated, in 2006 and 2009



There is a series of problems that occur more frequently in the cases where the mother is gone, as well as a different series of problems in the cases where the father is gone. Because the mother is no longer there, as it she would normally be, to supervise the family, and because there is not a clear delegation of responsibilities to a person to take care of the child, children often manage to run away from the ‘duties’ specific to their ages. Therefore, school problems – whether class skipping, poor grades or conflict with classmates and teachers – occur more often in cases where the mother migrated.

The mother migrating does not generate only potential problems at school. Because mothers often keep the family together, there is a greater incidence of family problems occurring when the mother chooses to migrate. Thus, we noted both in the 2006 sample and in the 2009 sample that the children with more family problems are those whose mothers migrated.

The migration of the mother also implies more frequent problems with the father who remained at home, because some children have distant relations to their fathers with whom do not communicate. In fact, the degree of communication between children and their parents is an extremely important factor for the severity of the problems occurring. In this sense, when analyzing both samples, we noted that when the migrating parents communicate less frequently with their children, there are more problems confronting the children. Therefore, certain types of problems the children face are an indirect consequence of the migration of the parents. It is certain that when the migrating parent/parents communicate regularly with their children – on the telephone, via e-mails and letters, visits, by sending goods or money – the children are subjected to a lesser degree to the risk of facing problems or even of adopting a deviant behavior.

However, the solving of the problems children face requires the support of other persons as well. Most often, the person in charge with caring for the child and fulfilling some parental functions accomplishes this. Therefore, if the pupil is taken care of by the grandparents, they attempt to eliminate certain risk factors in the child's life. But the pupils who are not directly taken care of sometimes find support with the migrating parent or the school teachers.

Even from a distance, most parents (68.40% in 2006) continue to help their children when asked. The methods they use are financial or material (various goods), moral (advice, discussions with the persons involved in solving the problem), or even symbolic (by merely showing their interest in children's problems). In extreme cases parents will even return home until the situation stabilizes.

The means migrating parents use to help their children vary according to case. They prefer to financially stimulate their children when school problems (especially class skipping!) occur. Financial help is also the preferred means when there are minor health problems. On the other hand, when the children fight with their friends, the migrating parent/parents prefer to just show an interest in the cause of the conflict. However, the migrating parents discuss with the persons involved especially when there are family conflicts. Thus, the migrating parent becomes an objective observer of the parties involved in the family conflict. The situations that led to the temporary return home of the migrating parent were mainly fights with their parents and fights with the parent who remained at home.

As we mentioned above, the migration of one or both parents may lead to a deviant behavior of the child, or may cause him/her to be depressed, anguished, lonely, etc.

Poor school performance is the most frequent consequence of the migration of parents, as well as various conflicts with classmates, class skipping and conflicts with teachers.

In general, the situations/states that occur most often in the life of children whose parent/parents emigrate are: the fear that something bad might happen, loneliness, sadness, mean behavior, nervousness, agitation and a decrease in school performance. Also, most states are more frequent with females, rather than males, except for class skipping and poor grades.

Benefits/shortcomings of the labor migration of parents

The impact of the migration of parents on the children can be evaluated through an analysis of the things children miss most, of their expectations from the family and of the potential benefits from their parents' migration.

The main thing children miss in both samples is the love of their parents and communication with them. However, some of the children state they do not have enough money, care, food, clothing, cleanliness or even education. On

comparing the results of the two samples, in 2009 there is a certain improvement of the situation, especially concerning the affection of the parents and communication with them. Also, there is a larger percentage of the subjects that state that they have everything they need.

We attempted to go deeper into this and find out who the children missing the love from their parents are as well as those who lack money. The lack of affection is felt both by children whose mother migrated and by those whose father migrated. The situation turns problematic when both parents migrated, as there is a higher percentage of the pupils in such a situation declaring they strongly miss their parents' affection. On the other hand, the scarcity of money is mentioned mainly by the children whose fathers migrated and by male children. Male pupils miss their parents financially, and female pupils miss their parents from a sentimental perspective. There is a higher percentage of female pupils declaring they miss communication with their parents.

The results from the two studies confirm the hypothesis that younger pupils miss their parents' love more than before the migration of the parents.

There is a strong relation between what children miss and their communication to the parents: the pupils who stated they often communicate with their parents via telephone, e-mail or visits do not miss as much their parents' love and care.

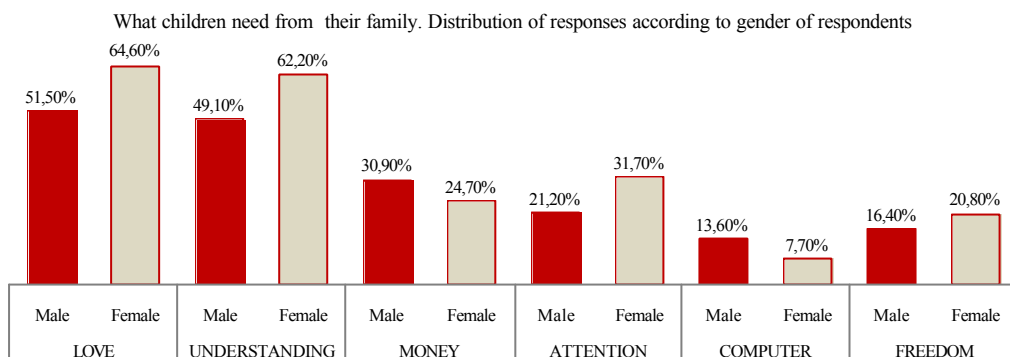
What children miss may turn into genuine frustrations, especially when the lack of parents' affection is involved. The reason is that the love of their parents is extremely important to children (58.90% of the 2006 sample stated they needed their parents to love them), but it is however one of the main shortcomings when one parent or both migrate (63.20% of the 2009 sample stated they needed their parents to love them). The separation from the parent is a type of deprivation of affection both for the child and the adult (Sandu, 2006).

In fact, the 2009 study includes an item that refers to the pupils' necessities towards their own family. According to the results, essential to these children is first of all the love and understanding of the family, for more than half of the respondents stated that these are of primary importance in the relation between parents and children.

The money and material goods the family can provide are not ignored. The respondents' ages mean that they still depend on their parents' resources. When analyzing the need of money in the family according to the respondents' ages, we note this need increases proportionately to age. For instance, only 10.20% of the pupils aged between 10 and 12 stated they needed money from their family, and 37.70% of the pupils aged over 18 expressed this financial necessity.

The need of attention from the family follows mainly a similar trend. Thus, as the age increases, so does the percentage of those who state that they also need the attention of their family.

The necessities of the pupils vary according to gender. There are more female pupils than male pupils with migrating parents who state that they need love and understanding from their family; there are more male pupils than female pupils who state that they need money from their family.



However, the migration of parents should not be viewed only from a shortcomings perspective which translates into problems and needs. According to the respondents interviewed in 2006, the parents' migration has benefits as well. Otherwise, the migration we see today would not take place at such an enormous scale.

The main benefit of this migration is of course financial; 60.40% of the 2006 sample believe their financial capital increased. This type of benefits predominate the benefits stated by the respondents, and children also appreciate the goods their parents send, the accounts created for their education, the elimination of debt, or simply an increase in their standard of living.

The freedom consequent from the migration of parents is considered by 17% to be a benefit, and 5.70% believe that the fact they have the opportunity to control their own lives is a positive aspect of their parents' migration. The pupils valuing this opportunity most are over 14 years old.

Another category of positive aspects is linked to housing and living conditions, as 9.60% appreciate the improvements of their housing. Also, the migration of the parents is associated to the general phrase *a better future*, to a satisfactory job for the parents or to the possibility of traveling to other states.

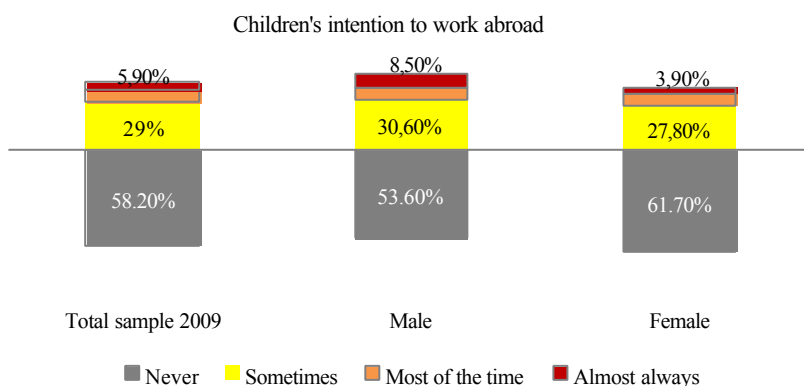
For a part of the interviewed pupils, the migration of their parents did not cause family conflicts, but possibilities to solve them. The idea of emigration as an alternative to solving conflicts is also present in a research by Georgiana Toth, where the author suggests that to some mothers emigration is not only a strategy to improve income, but also to solve a conflicting couple relation.

The intention of children to migrate

We mentioned above the motivation of parents to emigrate, the influence of this on the development of children, the problems and needs children meet, as well as the benefits this can bring. This raises the question what if, despite all the negative aspects of the parents' migration, children intend to follow them and migrate at some point in their life.

According to the 2009 results, 41.80% of the pupils take this into consideration. There are more male pupils stating this, as 46.40% declared they intended to work abroad just like their parents. Thus, despite the problems and needs they face, the children believe that working abroad is better than working in one's country, which legitimizes the decision of the parents. Therefore, we can state that in the case of migration social networks have a very important role, since very often those working abroad influence the decision of the close ones to do the same. Chain migrations exist in other parts of the world as well. Some researchers even suggest that social networks play a more important role than education, various skills or the level of language skills (Brubaker, 1998). If a person's social capital plays a primary role in taking the decision to leave the country, the knowledge of the language of the target country has a strong influence on the adaptation ability of the individual in the target country (Iglincka, 1998).

Pearl Steward shows that in African-American families migration is a long term process where each migrant member supports other relatives to do the same. Migration may be influenced by a person's desire to be close to the individuals sharing the same customs, experience and values, that can give them necessary information and help them integrate in the economic, cultural and political system of the target country (Bauer and Zimmerman, 1997).



The migration phenomenon is closely linked to the economic problems Romanians face. They are driven to work abroad by their wish to earn more money, to have a higher standard of living, to invest in their home and to have a

better job. This happens despite the negative influence their migration can have on their family and especially the children. However, the parents take the risk and opt to migrate at the expense of a united family, which can be understood as simply a means of satisfying, after all, basic needs of themselves and their families. Even if children miss the love and communication with their parents, the increase in economic capital is greatly appreciated. Moreover, almost half of the respondents do not exclude their potential labor migration.

The migration of parents is problematic, yet necessary, and for this reason it becomes accepted first by parents, then by children, and then by the entire society.

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