

# CHILDREN'S EDUCATION IN ROMANIAN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES IN EUROPE

**Gabriela CĂLUȚOIU**

Ph.D. Student, Doctoral School of Social Sciences and Humanities,  
University of Craiova (Romania)  
E-mail: [gaby\\_calutoiu@yahoo.com](mailto:gaby_calutoiu@yahoo.com)

**Abstract:** *In recent years, society has accumulated a multitude of problems related to the moral health of the family, disastrous social and economic conditions, even ecological. The family, as a type of human group, participates in these processes, adapting to changes and modifying their survival strategies. One of the most frequently adopted strategies is labor migration. The phenomenon of migration is one of the aspects of economic globalization, one of the great dramas of modern times. This phenomenon is largely favored by transport possibilities, information flow, social tensions and precarious economic situations. When we talk about parents leaving their children working abroad to ensure a better future, we inevitably believe that having more money, less poverty, a well-paid job, securing rent, with equal opportunities is what it matters most to them, but we do not think about abandonment, sad. The future of abandoned children by their parents for a better material life will be dominated by difficulties arising from: personal and interpersonal development, emotional and cognitive health and physical, behavioral problems, including those related to drugs and other toxic substances, problems related to vocational guidance, vulnerability in relation to human trafficking and other illegal actions, stress, worrisome, the separation of persons who love each other.*

**Keywords:** *economic migration; family; family functioning; communication; emotional involvement*

## 1. Introduction

Romania is a “peasantry country” – more than 47% people live in countryside. The rural Romania is characterized by a high rate of un- and under-employment, survival agriculture, low level of education and health services, informal activities, return migration from urban to rural, less livelihood diversification and poverty.

In official statistics the working population from rural consists of 5.6 millions of people; approximately 4.1 million are people who work in agriculture, 98% from these in private agriculture and just 1% from these are wage earners (80,000 persons). Most of the people in rural Rumania areas are familial unpaid workers. That means that in fact they don't have any kind of financial resources, so they may be considered as belonging to unemployed category.

The lower number of official unemployment, 2.8 % (yearbook, 2002) in official statistics hides a different reality.

On the other hand the rural labor market is unstructured. The State Agency for Labor Force, the private or non-governmental voluntary specialized institutions are poorly represented at villages level. The local mayoralty or the informal agents try hardly to put face to face the work demands and offers.

The rural labor market has a certain informal character. It developed its own rules, its own channels for transmission of information and its own networks and has a profound oral character.

So, a lot of people from rural Romanian areas choose to emigrate.

The specifics of the Romanian transition and the liberalization of the mobility of population, especially in the "European space", have generated a series of both positive and negative phenomena. The strongest phenomenon, involved in almost all fields, being the migration to jobs "from abroad" of very different demographic categories in Romania. The effects are multiple, some target the subjective dimension of personality, especially of "temporarily abandoned" children, but the phenomenon is objective and is part of the logic of transition to another type of civilization and the logic of inter-societal relationships, especially in the case of "metabolism" developed countries - underdeveloped countries or "in transition" countries - (paraphrasing the classical "rural-urban metabolism").

However, the Romanian society was not prepared to bear without risk the shock of such migrations with which it was not accustomed in the decades of the old society. Thus:

- The family is the most affected institution because, as a rule, one of the spouses migrates, which seriously damages the whole of the intra-family relationships and, therefore, the functionality of the basic group of the society;
- Children are the most affected persons both in family relationships and in their school status, in public perception and, especially, in their emotional state (breaking up with a parent causes stress, emotion of deprivation, shock, etc.);
- At the societal level, the belief is formed that ensuring acceptable living conditions in the country is impossible, children in turn aspiring to emigrate. The phenomenon may be included, hypothetically, in the process of globalization or in the natural circulation of persons and goods between countries and continents;
- The chain reaction of migratory flows and the phenomenon of imitation or contagion:
  - ✓ the bravest migrants went to work abroad with all the risks from 1990 to 1991 (no visas, no information from the destination country, with the risk of arrest and immediate expulsion);
  - ✓ "natural selection" highlighted the winners, on the one hand, and the losers, on the other hand, the former managing to stabilize and reunite their family, offering help or jobs to their partner remaining in the country, to others relatives or friends ;
  - ✓ finally, there are real networks of migrants looking for jobs.
- Unfortunately, the social polarization in the communities affected by external migrations is deepening, between the families with migrants, richer (modernized villas or houses, luxury cars, "western" goods) and the families of non-migrants, increasingly poor or undergoing continuous pauperization. Mentally, there has occurred a reaction from non-migrants against migrants, whom they label and devalue. Previous sociological research has highlighted the following results to the question "Why do Romanians go abroad?"

*Table 1. Why do Romanians go abroad?*

To make money	100%
But, from begging	31%
From stealing	39%
From work only	19%
From prostitution	11%

These opinions, of non-migrants, do not represent the reality, but - in sociological terms - it is significant that the public opinion has formed this image about "strawberry pickers", which, in fact, work hard in different sectors of activity.

The most serious problem caused by external migration is the situation of children left home (temporarily abandoned). In this context, the following questions arise: "What happens to temporarily abandoned children?", "Who will help or supervise them to grow up in" normal "conditions?", "Can anyone really replace parents?".

Romanian public opinion reacts almost daily to these matters (mass-media, especially the Internet through social networking websites and television). Some surveys have shown that the role of migrant parents is replaced by relatives, especially grandparents, or, in smaller percentages (estimated at 15-20% of all cases), children have been placed under the protection of extended families or left alone. (Irimescu, 2006: 45)

Finally, migrants who have succeeded and became stable in the destination countries take their children to the new foreign households so that Romania annually loses important echelons of children and, through them, of social values. (Irimescu, 2006: 52)

## **2. Methodology and analysis of data**

This article is based on a study made out of the desire to bring some clarity on a delicate matter of our society, namely the matter of children whose parents had to go to work abroad and leave them alone.

From the beginning we specify that our approach was not a judicial one, with trying to point the finger at these parents and judge their attitude, but it was guided by objective reasons, by the desire to find out the actual situation of these children, which are the problems which they face and indicate, explicitly or implicitly, possible solutions. (Dumitru, 2000: 5)

Given that the questioned subjects were children who have one or both parents abroad, the study addresses the matter from their perspective, by referring to the material, moral, psychological, social effects, and the information that children have about the current situation of the departed parents. We may say that the study provides a perspective of one of the parties involved in the relationship between departed parents and children left in the country, respectively children, lacking (and this is a lack that is characteristic for several researches in the field) the perspective of the second party. At the same time, however, in the course of the research we also had in view the obtaining of data about Romanians who left their children for going abroad to work. (Traian, Iluț, 2006: 277)

Given that the questionnaires were applied to the children in the school unit, the research did not provide conclusive data on early school leaving situations or on

possible acts of juvenile delinquency. The major premise considered in this study is the idea that these children go through a more difficult period of their childhood, accompanied by some shortcomings and suffering, with which they try in one way or another, alone or with the help of those around them, to face them.

The fact that in the case of juvenile delinquency a large part of perpetrators have their parents departed to work abroad is not a sufficient reason to consider that all children who have their parents departed should be viewed with caution. We must keep in mind that the mirage of foreignness attracts both honest persons, eager to earn money in honest ways, and less honest persons, the latter being a model for their children they left in the country and who would have committed the same acts if their parents did not leave. We tried to avoid a reasoning that is analogous to that made by the western states which, considering that a large number of crimes on their territory are committed by Romanians, draw the conclusion that all Romanians are thieves; Italy is an example of such a state.

We wanted to identify both the problems that these children face and the changes in mentality that occur in their case and that of their parents; at the same time, we sought to identify some of the changes that may occur within these families, changes seen from the perspective of children. The dominant perspective of this study is: what do they think about them?

The study had the following objectives:

- ✓ Identifying the determining factors that intervene in making the decision to go to work abroad while leaving the children at home.
- ✓ Identifying children's attitudes towards their parents' departure to work abroad.
- ✓ Determining the ways in which the departure of parents affects children.
- ✓ Identifying the changes that occur in the family life, respectively between children and parents and between parents, following the departure of one or both parents abroad.
- ✓ Determining the changes in mentality, which occur in the departed parents, who are driven by living abroad and the influences exerted in this regard on the children left in the country.
- ✓ Identifying the ways in which children with departed parents project their professional life.

The following working hypotheses guided the research:

- ✓ The motivation for parents to leave is mainly determined by two factors: lack of a job and the desire for a better standard of living.
- ✓ Before leaving, the parents discussed with their children the reasons that determine them to do this, the children having a certain level of understanding.
- ✓ Most of the children were left with either the other parent or the grandparents when both parents departed.
- ✓ Children perceive certain changes both in the relationships between them and their parents and in the relationships between their parents.
- ✓ Children consider that their parents' departure to work abroad is accompanied by higher earnings and the possibility of a better life.
- ✓ The departure of parents affects the children in multiple ways, the children recognizing to a greater or lesser extent this situation.

- ✓ The departure of parents influences the decisions of the children left in the country regarding the choices made for the professional career.

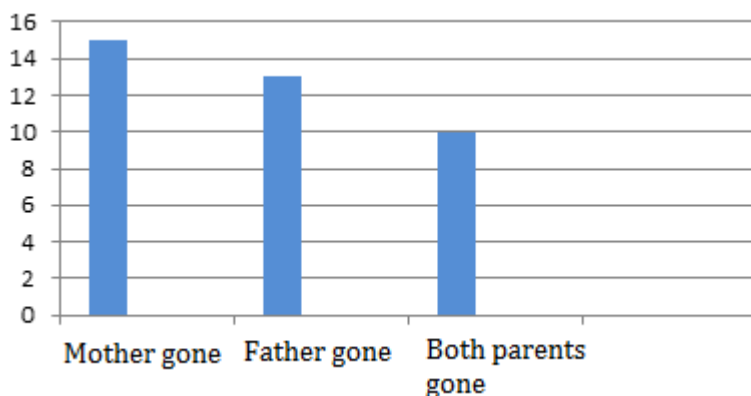
Regarding the methodology, the study had as main research tool the self-completion questionnaire in which we used several types of questions, namely, closed questions and open questions. Given the current situation in the context of the pandemic, the questionnaire was applied online and made using google forms.

The questionnaire was applied to a number of 38 students in the Energy High School in Craiova, children whose parents are working abroad. The students come from both rural and urban areas and are divided as follows: 18 urban area and 20 rural area.

In terms of distribution by gender, 26 were male and 12 female.

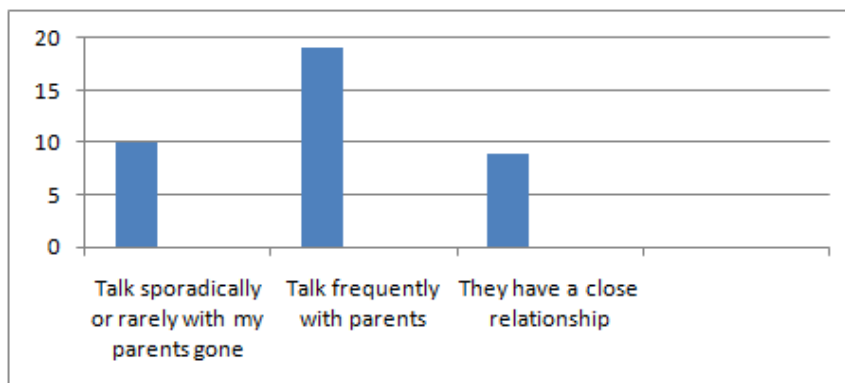
### 3. Analysis of data

**Figure 1. With regard to departed parents, the situation is as follows**



Given the traditional family model, in which mothers play the most important role in raising and educating children, a dominant model in our society, we consider that mothers leave in the same percentage with fathers as a situation that accentuates children's problems; at the same time, this is one of the important factors that contribute to changing the family model. It is obvious that although 10 of the respondents have only one of the parents departed, they live with other persons, the latter not being able to replace the absence of parents and especially of the mother.

The research indicated that 6 of the children state that they were left alone by their parents who went to work abroad. We could also find that 3 of the children who said they were left alone had only their mother departed, which suggests that they could be single-parent families.

**Figure 2. Regarding communication with departed parents**

10 of the children with departed parents stated that they talk sporadically or rarely with their parents who went to work abroad. This situation suggests a strong communication deficit between these children and their parents. Mainly, those who have fathers departed complain of these communication deficiencies, the differences compared to those who have mothers departed being still small. The data indicated that in the case of a permanent communication between the children and their departed parents, the relationships between them remained the same or became closer, while a poor communication deteriorates the relationships between the children and the parents who went to work abroad.

The period elapsed since the parents departed is for 50% of respondents between a few months and one year, which suggests an increase in migration; At the same time, 26 of the respondents have their parents departed for more than 3 years, which makes them more vulnerable to the various changes that occur in the absence of parents.

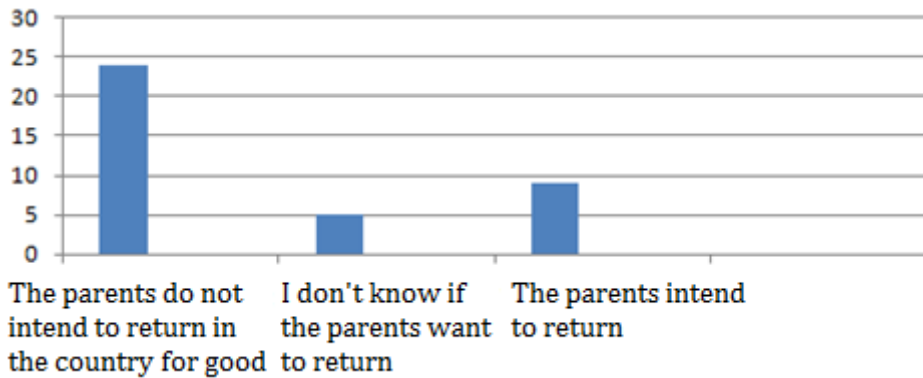
It is also noteworthy that 12 of the children with departed parents stated that they noticed changes in the behavior of others towards them; among the noticed changes in the first place were the fact that the others behave more nicely with them either to protect them or to obtain gifts.

At the emotional level, 30 of the children with parents who went to work abroad stated that they miss their parents very much; it is noted that most of them have their mothers departed, which leads us to consider that the suffering is greater when the mother is departed than when the father is departed; also, girls suffer more than boys from the absence of their parents. In almost half of the cases where children feel that they miss their parents very much, they become aware of their importance and role, while considering themselves closer to their parents, and appreciating that the relationships between them have become closer.

According to children's opinion, in 40% of cases, family relationships (relationships between parents, and between parents and children) are not affected by going to work abroad; 60% of children consider that their relationships with parents working abroad have worsened due to distance and lack of communication and 20% that they have changed, but without becoming closer. At the same time, 18 of the children whose

parents have departed to work abroad consider that the relationships between their parents have deteriorated; it is observed that the departure of mothers to work abroad deteriorates to a greater extent the relationships between the parents than the departure of the fathers.

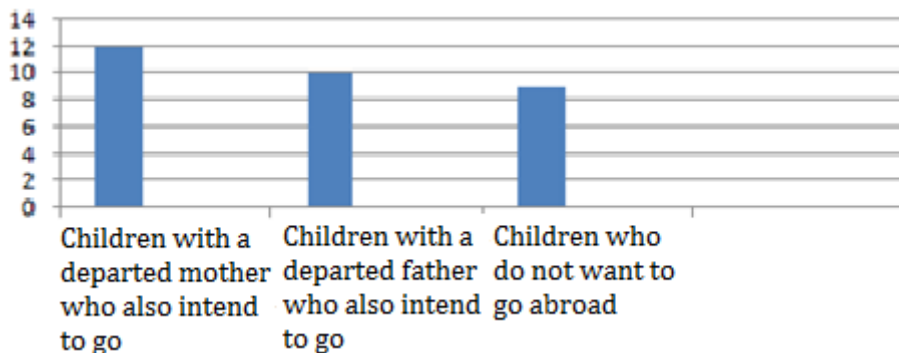
**Figure 3. Future intentions are divided as follows**



24 of the children state that their parents who went to work abroad do not intend to return in the country for good; 5 do not know if their parents want to return and 9 of them claim that their parents want to return in the country for good. The comparative analysis indicates that if only the mother is departed or both parents the percentage of those who think the parents do not want to return is higher than when only the father is departed.

Note the percentage of parents who bought a house 10%, which means, at the same time, that they have reached a certain level of well-being and social integration, but also the possibility that they are more reluctant to return in the country, intending at the same time to take the children with them.

**Figure 4. Regarding future intentions**

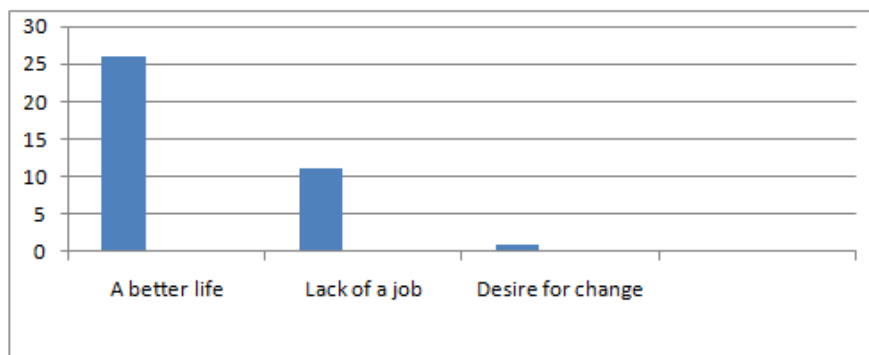


31 of the children with parents who went to work abroad want to go abroad, of which: 30 want to go abroad to work (6 of them would like to leave school), the most significant percentage being made up of students from the Xth and XIth grade

(professional profile), and 2 of these children would like to continue their studies abroad.

One may notice the predominantly positive appreciation by children of the changes that took place in the life of their parents when they went to work abroad, in the first place being the fact that they "earn more money" followed by the fact that "they have a higher standard of living than in Romania", cumulatively these being indicated by 90% of the interviewed youngsters. More than 80% of respondents believe that the departure of their parents to work solves some of the family's pressing problems, respectively covers the subsistence needs and removes family debts. Regarding the personal transformations that children experience with their parents, 23 of the respondents consider that they have changed for the better, 8 consider that they have not changed and 7 believe that they have changed for the worse, without being able to identify at this point what these changes consist of.

**Figure 5. The opinion of children with parents who go to work abroad about the profile of those who leave (and implicitly about the reasons that determined their parents to leave) is divided**



26 believe that the reason is the desire for a better life and 11 consider that the motivation for leaving is given by the situation in the country, being either persons with limited material possibilities or unemployed. We believe that the desire for a better life must be interpreted in a broader sense, obviously including financial achievements but also more than that, such as the level of civilization, which may suggest a negative relationship to the general context in the country.

We believe that the situation of children with parents working abroad becomes more complicated with the increase of anti-Romanian actions both unofficially and, unfortunately, officially. Given that such actions have become more frequent in schools, against Romanian children studying in these states (especially Italy and Spain), it is obvious that the gesture of Romanians working abroad to take children with them becomes an increasingly unattractive option. Mention should also be made of the tendency to reduce labor demand in the destination countries, amid either a saturation of the labor market or an economic recession, which limits the plans for long-term departures which may lead to taking children in these countries, the context being likely to preserve the situation of children remaining in the country for at least an average period of time.



#### 4. Conclusion

When we talk about parents leaving to work abroad in order to ensure a better future for their children, we inevitably think of more money, less poverty, a well-paid job, ensuring a house, equal opportunities, but we do not think to pain, grief, abandonment, stress, upset, worries, emotional deprivation, separation from the loved ones.

Studies on this matter reveal the difficulties that children may encounter in their development, and these are related to: personal and interpersonal development, emotional, cognitive and physical health, behavioral problems, including those related to the use of drugs and other toxic substances, decision-making, matters related to vocational guidance, vulnerability to trafficking in human beings and other illegal actions. (Bumbu, 2003)

Children need support when trying to understand why their parents have to leave so it is recommended that parents prepare their children for the change that will take place in their lives, they need to explain to their children the reasons why they have to leave so that they should not feel guilty because their parents are sacrificing themselves for their sake. It is advisable to notify the competent authorities of the departure abroad, of the person who will be responsible for the child's fate as long as the parents are absent from the country.

It should also be discussed with the child about the person who will take care of him/her, in order to feel at ease, to develop and to be educated as effectively as possible. (Dolbo, 2003: 34)

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