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The Impact of Parental External Labour Migration on the Social Sustainability of the Next Generation in Developing Countries

Iasmina Iosim ¹, Patricia Runcan ², Remus Runcan ³ , Cristina Jomiru ⁴ and Mihaela Gavrilă-Ardelean ^{3,*} 

¹ Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism, Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "King Mihai I of Romania" from Timisoara, 300645 Timisoara, Romania; iasminaiosim@usab-tm.ro

² Faculty of Sociology and Psychology, West University of Timișoara, 300223 Timișoara, Romania; patricia.runcan@e-uvr.ro

³ Faculty of Educational Sciences, Psychology and Social Work, Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad, 310130 Arad, Romania; remus.runcan@uav.ro

⁴ Faculty of Social Work, Divitia Gratiae University from Chișinău, D-2001 Chișinău, Moldova; jomirucristina@gmail.com

* Correspondence: miha.gavrila@yahoo.com; Tel.: +40-740640912

Abstract: Migration is a frequent phenomenon in the current European context. It is culturally differentiated according to every country, and it has a major role in the social sustainability of families and the next generation. This paper aimed to determine the impact of parents leaving to work abroad on the lives of their left-at-home children. This gives rise to a new phenomenon of "social orphans". This research was carried out with the participation of eight adults who, during their childhood, had a parent who went to work abroad for a period of more than one month. The research tool used was the semi-structured interview guide. The research found that the main reason for parents leaving was the precarious financial situation of their families and their need to support their children (materially, educationally, and financially). The research results showed that the resulting greater financial stability did not guarantee that family ties would develop in a positive direction. More than half of the respondents reported a worsening of relationships with family members and experienced major psycho-emotional deprivation. The family has been negatively impacted in the social sustainability of the next generation.

Keywords: external migration; parents; social orphans; impact; social sustainability of families in developing countries



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1. Introduction

Children left behind, children of migrants left at home, EU orphan, Euro-orphans, migrants' children left behind in their home country, migration orphans, social orphan, and white orphan are all phrases designating children left behind by one parent (mainly mothers) or by both parents migrating for seasonal or permanent work abroad. "Left behind" most often means "alone", "lonely" [1], or "home alone" [2]. These children are "left out" by entire systems—particularly by social policy planning—that have yet to adequately and fully recognize and appreciate the considerable contribution to the country's income made by their parents. Démurger [3] argued that there is a single pro ("Remittances can reduce the need for child labour and increase children's schooling, notably for girls in developing countries") and a single con ("The absence of the main caregiver can increase children's probability of dropping out of school and delay school progression") regarding children being left behind when parents migrate abroad for work.

These children are said to be deprived of their rights (availability of parental care, development, parent-child communication, involvement with the family as the primary duty-bearer, protection, survival—health, the provision of guidance and care—budget for the child, visits to the doctor or dentist), to be inclined towards deviant behaviour

(because of less supervision at home), to be more subject to abuse, to have problems making progress at school (absenteeism, dropping out of school), to have various physical problems (unintentional injury), and to have various psychological problems (aggression, anxiety, arrogance, lack of closeness, confusion, feeling of abandonment, feeling of betrayal, feeling of unhappiness, Internet addiction, lack of discipline, lack of respect for others, low self-esteem, social marginalisation, substance use, substance abuse, reduced well-being) [2,4–22]. It is for this reason that most researchers have studied the impact of migration on various measures of child health: physical health (infectious diseases), child economic activities and the possible risks of child labour, daily life (food and domestic work), human capital formation (i.e., educational attainment), intra-family roles, lack of parental care, mental health (anxiety disorder, behavioural disorders, depressive disorder, self-harm, suicide), nutrition (anaemia, low birthweight, overweight and obesity, stunting, underweight, wasting), self-concept, and social intercourse (cultural practices, sense of identity, values) [2–4,9,10,12,17,23–32]. The families of these children are far from being sustainable families.

According to the definition of the Oxford Institute for Sustainable Development (OISD, 2009) of the concept of social sustainability, the operationality of this notion includes actions in all key social thematic areas [33]. The theoretical concept of sustainability becomes active by being applied in social practice—from the macrosocial level (by eliminating inequities and favouring equal opportunities) to the microsocial level (individual and family)—where it can be calculated by measuring the quality of life of the individual. Here, we need to find the levers for the proper functioning of the family by satisfying the needs of the individuals who compose it. The social sustainability of the family and of the individual is based not only on material needs: it includes intellectual, emotional, and social needs—communication, belonging, safety, and valorisation of the individual. The perception of one's own value expressed through social utility is the measure of the quality of life of the individual according to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory [34,35].

Literature mentions studies based on mediatisation theories [36,37], for instance, the empirical study conducted in Romania during the COVID-19 lockdown period. It showed that media coverage is based on a few defining aspects of social sustainability. The analysis of social events in the period of major annual celebrations showed that there are four “social worlds” (Tudor, Benea and Bratosin, 2021) [38]. Each of these is conceptually defined by the transformative aspects they induce in human capital:

1. The world of media coverage—induced by social media;
2. The world of the pandemic—induced by the COVID-19 crisis;
3. The world of spirituality—induced by religion;
4. The world of national culture—induced by the national cultural heritage.

From the left-behind children's perspective, they consider themselves better off in terms of education (40%), extra-curricular activities (38%), health (36%), future (30%), acceptance by peers (29%), participation in family decisions (27%), and happy family life (23%)—i.e., significantly worse off—compared with children whose mother/father/parents do not work abroad [39].

Most often, migrants' children are cared for by the grandparents' generation (who are frail, old, subject to illness, uneducated, and who focus on material aspects to the detriment of the child's educational development), by the parents' generation, by someone from the same generation (Lu, 2011, 51–52), or through official guardianship arrangements. The choice depends on a geographically convenient (close to a school) location (preferably the children's home) and on potential guardians' ability to keep the children (girls in particular) safe and their behaviour under control. However, research results show that “the vacuum left by the mothers' departure is simply not filled by caregivers” [9].

Migrant parents continue to fulfil their function of bringing up their children by using modern means of communication—Internet, landline telephone, mobile phones [40], and the postal service—attempting to cultivate a sense of involvement and family closeness and to maintain emotional contact with their children. The modalities of parental care

at a distance may also differ significantly; the choice of one or another depends on the level (sometimes higher for one side than for the other) of access to modern means of communication (with implicit risks when some social networks are involved [41–43], the context of migration (the kind of work the parents do, their working hours), the history of the family before the migration, the parents' relationship with the guardians, various external factors (for example, differences in time zones), and so on.

Those who have carried out research into children left behind include caregivers, children themselves at a later date, experts, government field staff, guardians, NGOs, parents, psychologists, religious leaders, school teachers, and social mentors. Interesting research has been carried out into the children's perspective on the use of mobile phones [40] and into their attitude towards their mothers' migration [44].

Qualitative studies have been carried out in both Asia and Europe involving the main developing and less developed countries from which migrant workers come: Albania, China, India, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Moldova, Nepal, the Philippines, Poland, Romania, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Vietnam [4,5,9,10,17,20,24,28–31,39,44–47].

A small number of research papers have analysed the situation of migrant parents—children left behind in developing countries. Thus, Salah analysed the impact of migration on children in Moldova: migration trends, the impact of migration on communities, families and children left behind (impact of migration and remittances on child care, perception of children about their parents' departure, children's adaptation to their new life, impact of remittances on the relationship between left-behind children and their neighbours, impact of parents' absence on children's education, health, and protection), policies regulating migration and the assistance provided to children left behind in Moldova, and policy recommendations to better protect and assist these children. The author's conclusion was that migration has both positive and negative implications [24]. The 2008 UNICEF report on migration and the rights of children in Moldova focused on the reasons people migrate, on who migrates, on the impact of migration on children (economic, educational, health, social and emotional development) and families (economic, family structure), and on the protection of the migrants' children's rights. The conclusion of the report was that temporary migration has fewer deleterious effects on the social sustainability of children and families than long-term migration [39]. Gassmann et al. carried out a quantitative study on the impact of migration on children left behind in Moldova (education and early childhood development, nutrition, physical health, material living standards, social protection, information and communication, and emotional well-being). The authors' findings suggest that the children's age makes a significant difference to their well-being in various ways and across different dimensions and that children in households with migration experiences do not suffer from many of the problems associated with caregiver absence when compared with other children [48]. Luecke and Stoehr (2013) carried out a quantitative study on the effects of migration in Moldova on children left behind (determinants of child emotional well-being, physical health, and education). The authors' conclusion was that, with few exceptions, labour migration does not put the welfare of children at risk in a systematic way [49]. Cojocar, Islam, and Timofte analysed the effects of parental migration on children left at home, with a focus on the use of ad-hoc research to raise moral panic in Romania and the Republic of Moldova, and came to the conclusion that a number of ad hoc research studies carried out by various NGOs that run intervention programs in the area of migration had focused mainly on the negative aspects of parents' migration abroad to work, thereby maintaining and raising moral panic; thus, the rhetoric concerning these parents takes on a moral angle [50]. Yanovich focused on the impact of labour migration on children left behind in Moldova and Ukraine (adverse effects, care deficit, financial implications, and gendered implications) and concluded that left-behind children are a group of increasing concern [13]. Gassmann et al. focused on the relationship between parental migration and child well-being in Moldova (communication access, education, emotional health, housing conditions, physical health, and protection), concluding that, in this country, migration does not appear to be correlated with to any positive or negative wellbeing outcomes [48].

A US Department of Labour study from 2018 analysed the worst forms of child labour in Moldova. Findings indicated that child trafficking, particularly of children suffering from familial neglect, continues to be a concern in Moldova and Transnistria, that the number of children left behind by migrant parents is increasing in both regions, and that victims from the Turkic-speaking autonomous territorial region of Gagauzia were also likely to be trafficked to Turkey for commercial sexual exploitation [51,52].

Children left behind have also been considerably impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, which has brought with it rules for fighting the virus (handwashing and hygiene practices at home and in schools and social distancing), the lockdown of places of work (which means unemployment or reduced wages for their parents), restricted movement at home and abroad (with the consequent impossibility of meeting their parents and/or spending Easter and summer holidays together), and remote learning (with the never-ending issues of ICTs).

The phenomenon of migration is universally known and present in all countries and regions of the world. In Europe, it is especially prevalent in Eastern European developing countries. In the Republic of Moldova, as in Romania, this demographic phenomenon started increasing in scale after 1991. Up to that point, leaving the country was limited and strictly controlled because of the harsh rules imposed by the communist regime. After the collapse of the Iron Curtain, the citizens of the post-communist countries were faced with an unexpected phenomenon: free movement to any country or continent. Regrettably, this phenomenon brought with it political instability and an acute financial crisis, leading to people from developing countries needing to emigrate to support themselves. In the process, it was the family, as a social entity, that suffered the most. Many families were “dismembered” and “deformed” due to one or more members having to go and work abroad for an extended period. These people either face a difficult return to their families after decades of separation or in fact never return, founding new families in the country to which they emigrated.

Although more than three decades have passed since the Republic of Moldova and Romania gained their independence, the economic situation is in ongoing crisis and unemployment remains a major problem, especially in rural areas. Lack of sufficient income is the main cause of external migration, with about 35% of the country’s young people going abroad in search of a job or a decent living.

The subject chosen for this research is closely related to the phenomenon of external migration of the workforce and directly related to the departure to work abroad of one or both parents in a family. Migration has become a pressing issue for Eastern European society, which is why a direct approach is needed.

According to the National Office of Statistics, one in every three people is working abroad and almost three out of every five emigrants are married, both women (59%) and men (56%) [53]. The main causes of migration are the country’s poor socio-economic level, the growth rate of the population, and the distribution of the labour force across the country, among others [54].

The main reason for the migration of the 20–45 age group to work abroad is the need to materially support their families and provide a better future for the children they are raising. In its 2012 study, the National Office of Statistics concluded that every sixth person aged 15–64 had been affected by the phenomenon of labour migration [53]. Unfortunately, the situation did not improve over the six years from 2012 to 2018, nor has it improved since then; rather, the phenomenon is constantly gathering pace.

Primary reasons for working abroad are:

- lack of job or only badly paid work, especially in rural areas;
- the need for financial resources to support children or to provide for the material needs of the family (home, car, etc.);
- the desire to make more money, to start a small family business in order to be able to return to the country;

- better educational opportunities and so the possibility of gaining better employment in the future;
- financial independence and a higher standard of living.

Generally, parents go to work abroad because of their inability to provide for their family's needs. According to the statistics, they are mainly people from rural areas. Migration for employment chiefly affects men from this environment. Two out of three of the left/returned people are men (67.6% men versus 32.4% women), and three out of four of these people are from rural areas (75.0%). This is most often encountered in families with average or slightly above average incomes. Their aim is to improve their living standards and be able to give their children something "better".

Given that the largest group of migrants, 32.7% of the total, are aged between 25 and 34, it is easy to conclude that a substantial proportion of children born in the 1990s and 2000s must have been partially or totally deprived of parental care. Structured by age, the second group covers people aged 35–44 (24.2%), followed by those aged 15–24 (19.4%) and 45–54 (18.8%). The 55–64 age group represents only 4.7% of the total. From the data presented above, it can be inferred that most of the children left behind must be either in the care of a single parent, or under the tutelage of grandparents or other older relatives, who are retired or will soon reach retirement age. In some cases, they even end up in the care of neighbours or family friends [53].

Migration of parents directly impacts the family, especially the children. In recent years they have been known as "social orphans". For these reasons, over time, the Republic of Moldova has come to be labelled "a small country without parents", with many households headed by children and, therefore, with many "abandoned children"—a country of "social orphans" [55].

Parents who go to work abroad manage to cover only the basic material needs of their children, while the needs found on the higher levels of Maslow's pyramid—safety, love and belonging, esteem, and personal development—remain unsatisfied. Children need fulfilment both of their physiological needs (food, water, sleep, health, and shelter) and of their psycho-emotional, social, and spiritual needs to develop properly. In their pursuit of prosperity and financial stability, parents end up delivering only the material part, depriving their children of emotional care during their period of growth. Thus, they become strangers to their own children.

Family represents the centre of a child's universe, all of a child's feelings and experiences being determined in correlation with this constant. "Family exerts, through socialization, a strong influence on the level of physical, intellectual and moral development of children and young people, hence strengthening the values and models of the younger generation." [56]. By interacting with family members, a child can become conscious of their identity and develop their communication and relationship skills [57]. In the case of social orphans, this sense of family belonging is often missing: the children close themselves off and stop communicating with others. Often, these children are isolated and live in solitude [58]. The problem of isolation may also arise because the extended family does not exist or is far away, and the child feels abandoned. There are also other problems of deterioration of health, strained relationships with classmates or peers, the appearance of special needs or concerning extreme behaviours without rules—aggressiveness, outbursts of anger, anxiety, etc. [59]. In such cases, specialist intervention (by a psychologist, spiritual counsellor, social worker, or psychiatrist) is needed, depending on the case. Literature results reveal that the guardians of children left behind seem to prefer informal social support to government-run groups, while professionals value all support groups. Specialists see social mentoring (a new form of social service and social support in which adolescents without parental care or with insufficient support from their family adults are prepared for independent living from the points of view of career guidance, health, Internet safety, nutrition, personal safety, self-awareness) as an effective form of support for adolescents; social workers and social mentoring programmes match the mentoring (mentor-mentee)

pairs [47]. However, this does not diminish the importance of social workers, despite the view that children have become invisible in child protection work [60].

2. Materials and Methods

The idea of this study started from the evidence of the transformations of social roles in the contemporary family. We wanted to evaluate the repercussions of demographic and economic factors on the social sustainability of the next generation, from the perspective of those directly involved in migration from developing countries.

The purpose of the study was to determine the reasons parents leave, the impact on family relationships, and the emotional stability of the children concerned (left behind).

2.1. Research Aim

This research aimed at identifying and assessing the impact of parents going to work abroad on the lives of children left behind.

2.2. Research Objectives

1. Discovering the reasons why the parents took the decision to leave for work abroad, with the aim of identifying the causes of this social phenomenon.
2. Impact assessment on children left at home.
3. Evaluation of the effects of the demographic phenomenon of migration, by determining the degree to which the needs of the family were met after the parents emigrated for employment, from the perspective of the past and current situation of the families in the study, and the effect on social sustainability.

2.3. Study Group

The research involved eight adults who, during their childhood (up to 18, the age of majority), had one or both parents working abroad. All subjects have reached the age of majority and agreed to participate in the research.

Sometime in the past, their parents (or one parent) emigrated for a period longer than one month, during which the respondents, children at the time, remained at home. The subjects were chosen non-probabilistically, using the snowball method. Their current ages are between 18 and 37; four are men and four are women. All interviewees live in the Republic of Moldova and Romania. Two of the seven respondents want to leave the country, one wants to emigrate with their entire family, and another one is planning to go into higher education.

2.4. Research Methodology

The design of the study is qualitative in nature. The research was carried out in March 2019. Subjects were studied in their natural environment, with their daily activities being observed from a sociological point of view [61]. The research method consisted in an interview using as tool a semi-structured face-to-face interview. This work tool was chosen in order not to limit the degree of freedom either of the interviewee or of the researcher conducting the interview. The interview was structured in four parts, each composed of four or five questions, in accordance with the objectives of the research. Research questions were:

What were the reasons/needs that led to your parent/parents leaving to work abroad?

What impact did their going to work abroad have on family relationships and on your psycho-emotional development? What were the advantages and disadvantages?

What is your personal position on how the family was impacted by this labour migration?

The qualitative research of the study is reported in accordance with the Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ) checklist [62,63].

3. Results and Discussion

The responses obtained by applying the sociological interview are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of the results of the sociological interview.

No.	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Gender (F-1/M-2)	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	1
Current age (years)	19	21	33	28	18	21	37	26
Child's age when the parent left (years)	0	1	16	15	0	7	12	15
Number of children in the family	5	3	2	4	5	5	4	1
Gender of the emigrating parent (F-1/M-2)	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	2
Duration of emigration (years)	20	18	15	13	18	14	4	10
Degree of emotional impact on the child: 1 (slight)–10 (very great)	5	10	3	9	8	7	5	5

Source: authors' work.

Of the eight respondents, four were men (SD, 33; JN, 18; TD, 21; DI, 37) and four were women (DJ, 19; CD, 21; EC, 28; SI, 26). Child respondents' age range when their parent(s) left was between 0 and 16 years. There were between one and five children in the family at the time the respondents were children. Of the eight parents who left to work abroad, five were women and three were men. The duration of the emigration was between 4 and 20 years.

Below are the responses of the eight subjects.

Q1 What were the reasons/needs that led to your parent/parents leaving to work abroad?

A1 The needs/reasons that led subjects' parent/parents leaving to work abroad were: supporting one's family financially (all respondents) (CD, 21: "Dad helped, but not really. That was, basically, the only advantage—financial aid."), paying higher education tuition fees (SD), and studying abroad and purchasing a flat (SI).

Q2 What impact did their going to work abroad have on family relationships and on your psycho-emotional development? What were the advantages and disadvantages?

A1 The parent's/parents' going to work abroad had both advantages—improving family's financial situation (DJ and EC), constant relationship with one's mother (SD and EC), constant relationship with one's parents (SD and EC), positive family relationships (DJ), good grandfather—grandson relationship (TD), completing studies abroad (SI), and purchasing a flat (SI)—and disadvantages—father's absence (DJ, CD, TD, DI) (DJ, 19: "Most of all I felt my father's absence when I saw my mother in trouble and hardship, and I knew that I could not help her with anything."), mother's absence (SD, EC) (EC, 28: "The hardest thing was that I didn't have my mom by my side, I had a hard time talking to my father."), loneliness (SD, EC) (SD, 33: "After my mother left, my sister helped me, I was in her care. Then, 9 months later, my sister left and I was left alone. There was no one to take care of me, I was alone."), too many responsibilities (JN, DI) (DI, 37: "I longed very much for my mother, I had a hard time caring for the household and siblings alone."), lack of confidence in adults (CD) (CD, 21: "I got this 'hatred' of men, I thought they were all like my dad . . . "), tensed relationship with one's father (CD), broken family (EC), drastic change of father—children relationship (EC), tensed relationship between parents (EC), lack of self-confidence (JN, 18: "I miss my father's impact a lot, especially on my development and when I have something to do physically. Heavier household chores cannot be performed without the father."), being on one's own (TD, 21: "When he returned home, it was obvious that he had no authority over us, we were accustomed to his absence."), and estrangement from others (TD, 21: "My father's departure turned me into an outsider.").

Q3 What is your personal position on how the family was impacted by this labour migration?

A3 Respondents' personal position on how their families were impacted by their parent's/parents' labour migration point to closer relationships between family members (DJ, JN) (DJ, 19: "We talk a lot (with dad) through social media, almost daily. But in case of problems or if I need help, I usually turn to my mother because she is always closer."), important financial support for the family (DJ, SI) (SI, 26: "But if I hadn't been able to go abroad, they couldn't have supported

me financially. My desire to learn in France was not going to come true . . . ”), *risk of family break-up* (CD, EC, DI) (EC, 28: “an unhappy, divided family”), *lack of constant father influence* (DJ), *no improvement of family’s financial situation* (CD), *risk of abandoning one’s children* (CD), *partial recovery of family’s financial situation* (SD), *increased vigilance in one’s relationships with other people* (EC), and *traumatic experience* (TD).

As for the degree of emotional impact on the child, respondents were asked to assess it on a scale from 1 (slight) to 10 (very great). These are the results: DJ—5, CD—10, SD—3, EC—9, JN—8, TD—7, DI—5, and SI—5. Results demonstrated clearly that the emotional impact on a child whose parents work abroad, as a subjective perception, became all the greater as the period of parental absence was extended (EC, JN, TD). The younger the child was at the time his/her parent(s) emigrated, the greater the emotional impact (CD and JN).

Literature shows that the emotional impact is subjective and can be shaped by family education factors, which, over time, are determinants of the mental health of the child [64]. Case S1 is a good example in this regard.

The most common reason why the parents concerned went to work abroad was economic in nature.

The analysis of responses given by respondents in the flexible semi-open interview shows that their perceptions of life, family, and social status have been changed by their experiences. They want to live their lives differently, and this is derived from their negative experiences of parental absence.

The major emotional impact is also reflected in the subjects’ answers:

The most touching thoughts about parent’s/parents’ leaving their child/children home are the following: “[. . .] a life with parents is the most expensive thing you could afford (have). Parental guidance cannot be replaced by any wealth” (DJ, 19), “[. . .] what I always wanted was neither clothes nor money, but to see there is peace in the family and love. My desire was to have a close-knit family that would live together. More modest, but together.” (CD, 21), “[. . .] to have my family with me, that’s the greatest happiness.” (SD, 33), “[. . .] the most beautiful moments were those spent together with the family, when the light went out and we all sat together, ate seeds and talked.” (EC, 28), “[. . .] life with parents is more precious than the goods that come with the money. If I ever had to leave the country, I would take my whole family with me. But I hope I won’t have to leave” (JN, 18), “I prefer to stay in my country and be with my mother and younger siblings. For me, it’s more important to be with them.” (TD, 21), “What I know for sure, is that I will never go abroad and leave the family, just to continue building the house, the fence, the cellar . . . My priority is to be with my family.” (DI, 37), and “I went abroad, so that I could have a job, so that I could be near my children and be able to rest, not just work. So, I would say, that I have placed my life like this so that I do not have to go away from my family.” (SI, 26).

All the respondents stated that they had tried to find a person who could “replace the parental figure”. Most of them turned to brothers and sisters, grandparents, or friends in search of the affection and advice they were deprived of at home. Seven of the respondents said they felt the lack of parental presence relatively strongly, giving it a score of five or above out of ten. In seven cases out of eight, the length of the parent’s stay abroad had been much extended, to more than 10 years, with an average of 13 years. Thus, it can be inferred that the period of migration usually turns out to be longer than planned by the family members, and emotional damage increases as the years go by. The greatest regret of those interviewed is that their parents were not there to watch them growing up.

4. Conclusions

The phenomenon of parents going to work abroad is caused by their families’ financial needs. The economic support that these parents provide to their households is very important, especially in large families with more than five children. However, the emotional impact on the children left behind is major and long-term. These aspects affected the social sustainability of the family micro-group. Nevertheless, this can be compensated for by

frequent visits home by the absent parent and by positive intra-family relationships [65] that provide the child with a secure framework of psycho-affective development in the extended family. All respondents agreed that the greatest benefit of their parents leaving to work abroad was an improvement in their financial situation and opportunities. They also noted that, along with these changes, family spending increased. The financial problem was not permanently solved, but at least their living conditions were improved.

The study confirmed that financial well-being covers only the basic level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs without meeting higher-level human needs: affection, sense of protection and belonging, safety, love, and personal development. Five of the eight respondents reported that family relationships worsened after a parent left for abroad, and the behaviour of fathers who remained at home deteriorated [66]. They emotionally detached themselves from their children and abandoned their work and responsibilities. In these families, children claim to have experienced a double psycho-emotional trauma, being in practice deprived of both parents at the same time. Thus, the meaning of the phrase "social orphans" can be extended to "socio-emotional orphans" with direct effect on the social sustainability of family. In conclusion, the family requires total dedication and active presence for long-lasting sustainability. A child does not need money or objects but love and parental involvement. For families in the Republic of Moldova and Romania to benefit, the country needs to be politically and economically stabilised and to develop a pro-social legislative framework so that its people can have well-paid jobs or other opportunities to support themselves, such as through small family businesses or agricultural activities. If no changes are made, the percentage of labour migration will continue to increase, and the country will move from a financial crisis to a demographic one. The conclusion of the research is that the material benefit gained is insufficient to compensate for the emotional loss suffered by the interviewees. The only solution for the families included in the study is the development of the economic environment and the political stabilisation of their developing country of origin by the opening of new opportunities for those who want to work. If no changes are made, the percentage of labour migration will continue to increase, and the country will enter a demographic and economic crisis, which will directly and negatively affect social sustainability.

5. Limitations of the Research

Because of the very limited size of the study sample and the subjective nature of the information collected through interviews, it cannot be claimed that this paper is representative of the entire research field; however, it can contribute towards an understanding of the wider international context, given that the aspects investigated here and those investigated in the literature overlap. The researchers' aim was to present the phenomenon of labour migration from a personal perspective, with the aim of seeing if it was possible to identify common features among the cases studied. The results and conclusions of the study pave the way for extensive future research, which may assist in the development of social family support policies.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from the subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The recorded interviews can be offered in the Romanian language.

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