

# Measures regarding the protection of children from transnational families in Romania

Ana-Maria Teleoacă<sup>1,2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> National Scientific Research Institute for Labour and Social Protection (INCSMPS), Department of Social Policies, 6-8, Povernei Street, 030167 Bucharest, Romania

<sup>2</sup> School of Advanced Studies of the Romanian Academy (SCOSAAR), Research Institute for Quality of Life, 13 Septembrie Way, No. 13, 050711, Bucharest, Romania

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## ABSTRACT

Among vulnerable groups, the most important social category, from the point of view of the evolution of the human species and society, is that of children. This paper examines the measures for protecting children from transnational families in Romania through the analysis of national legislative and policy documents, along with relevant European strategic frameworks, and a longitudinal descriptive analysis of statistical data from 2015–2023. The qualitative component evaluates the coherence between Romanian policies and EU objectives, while the quantitative analysis highlights trends and territorial disparities in the number of children with parents working abroad. The findings indicate a general decrease in reported cases but also persistent data gaps, uneven implementation across regions, and limited institutional capacity. The study concludes that improving data collection practices, strengthening interinstitutional coordination, and developing targeted interventions - especially in high-risk areas - are essential for enhancing the protection and well-being of children in transnational families. These measures would help close the gap between legislation and practice and contribute to more effective and sustainable future policies.

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\* Corresponding author, contact address: [ana.teleoaca@incsmips.ro](mailto:ana.teleoaca@incsmips.ro) (A.M Teleoacă).

## 1. Introduction

For the harmonious functioning of a society, it is necessary to take care of the vulnerable groups that compose it. Among these, the most important social category, from the point of view of the evolution of the human species and society, is that of children. The main influencing factor in a child's development is the family. The family can be defined as the basic cell of society, the first environment in which an individual develops, who will later enter society and influence it. For this reason, it is necessary for society to pay increased attention to a child's family environment, to the conditions in which he or she lives, and, where necessary, to intervene with appropriate measures to facilitate a more harmonious development of the child.

The problems faced by children from Romanian transnational families represent a current and highly relevant concern in the field of public policy, requiring continuous development in order to respond to the real needs of these families, especially those of children. Children whose parents are working abroad share a similar profile to those living in single-parent families as a result of parental separation or the death of one parent. "This shows that although going to work is temporary, the effects on children can be similar to those of a long-term or permanent separation." (Toth et al. 2007, 9)

The study uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive approach and to facilitate a comparison between the legislative and official framework and the actual situation of children. The qualitative component involves social document analysis, with a focus on the impact of Government Decision No. 691/2015 for the approval of the Procedure for Monitoring the Care and Upbringing of Children with Parents Working Abroad and the Services They May Benefit From, the measures outlined in the Romania's National Strategy for Sustainable Development, as well as their alignment with broader European objectives related to children's rights, social inclusion, and the protection of vulnerable groups. The quantitative component consisted of a longitudinal analysis of statistical data, offering an empirical basis for understanding recent trends and informing subsequent recommendations. The main purpose of the article is to identify existing gaps in current policies regarding the protection of children from transnational families. It also aims to propose directions for strengthening

future public policies through more coherent implementation and closer convergence with relevant European practices and priorities.

## **2. Literature Review**

In today's Western society, the family has begun to change its traditional structure, and new types of families have emerged, that can create imbalances in a child's development. One of these phenomena, which in Romania began to gain momentum with the country's adherence to the European Union (EU) – a process that facilitated migration through the free movement of persons within the EU – is the transnational family (Munteanu and Tudor 2007).

Interest in children's rights emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the first movement concerned with child development appeared, advocating for the protection of children against neglect, exploitation, and violence. Romania drew inspiration from the United Nations Convention on Human Rights when drafting Law No. 272/2004 on the Protection and Promotion of Children's Rights, which introduced a new vision of childhood in Romania. Parental migration for work abroad can lead to the violation of certain rights of the children left behind in the country. (Vilcu 2015)

Transmigrants can be defined as "immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are shaped in relation to more than one nation-state". (Schiller, Basch and Blanc 1995, 48)

Thus, the transnational family can be defined as "the family group whose members live separately, across national borders for a period of time, but still have a sense of unity" (Nistor 2021, 36)

Within the literature, the concept "transnational parenting" is distinguished. Marian Pîslariu (2023) defines it as a "two-dimensional construct, which involves the relationship between child and parent in the context of separation arising as a result of the emigration of the parent/parents. The concept of transnational parenting presents a diversity of distinct characteristics, influenced by the socio-cultural and political environment that can be seen as an ever-changing 'kaleidoscope'." (Pîslariu 2023)

According to the OECD definition (1995, cited in Vrăsmaş 2008), "risk situation" refers to the category of children who cannot rely on a suitable family and who live in a social environment that is unfavorable to their development.

When one parent or both parents leave to work abroad, a relevant aspect to consider in order to avoid child neglect and potential dysfunctional development is the person or persons responsible for the child's care. Even if only one parent is absent, imbalances in the child's development may still occur. A significant problem that may arise in the development process of a child who grows up with only one parent or a single caregiver is the lack of a gender role model - female or male. This situation can lead to a misperception of the absent parent's gender role, problems related to self-identity, and other difficulties. This issue may persist even when there are two caregivers, as long as both belong to the same gender. Furthermore, the child may experience premature maturation, by attempting to take over the responsibilities, roles, and functions of the absent parent. The temporary relocation of a family member abroad leads to changes in roles and functions within the family. (Nicola 2021; Cozma 2022; Matei, Ghentă et al. 2022)

Research on children left behind by migrating parents highlights that factors such as remittance patterns, the gender of the migrating parent, and the frequency of communication significantly influence children's health, education, economic well-being, and psychosocial development. These outcomes are shaped by variables including the child's age, gender, and abilities; household characteristics such as structure, income, and education; as well as broader societal factors, including access to services, social support, and cultural values. (Matei and Crivoi 2022)

To enhance the effectiveness of measures aimed at children from transnational families, such measures should be developed at multiple levels. Some authors argue that effective responses to the negative effects of parental migration should address the "individual, household, community, region and country, while in case of children, measures responding to the needs of different age groups should also be taken into account. Another aspect that should be considered by policymakers is the gender of the migrant parent, as well the involvement of schools in implementing different support programmes." (Yeoh & Lam 2006 cited in Matei, Ghentă et al. 2022, 55)

### 3. Previous Researches

Toth et al. (2007) conducted one of the first studies on the social protection of children left behind in Romania. Following the study, the authors identified a number of positive and negative effects associated with belonging to a transnational family. Among the positive effects, they mention an increase in the standard of living from an economic perspective, as well as greater opportunities for travel abroad. According to the study results, 34% of children with both parents working abroad had travelled outside the country, compared to only 14% of non-migrant children. Among the negative effects identified were the deterioration of the relationship between the child and the parent remaining at home, insufficient support with school-related problems, depression, and a greater tendency towards deviant behaviour.

One of the most recent studies evaluating the situation of Romanian children whose parents are working abroad is that conducted by the Save the Children organization (2023). The study was based on a nationally representative sample and was carried out between July 25 and September 15, 2022. Some of the findings show that, in Romania, up to the time of the study, almost a quarter of children currently aged 0-17 had or still have at least one parent who went to work abroad. In 2021-2022, 13.8% of children had at least one parent working abroad during the previous year, which, according to estimates, corresponds to approximately 536,000 children who, between June 2021 and June 2022, had at least one parent working abroad, of whom 184,000 were completely deprived of direct parental care. These figures differ significantly from those reported by the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption (NAPCRA), which, as of 31 December 2021, registered 76,170 children with parents working abroad (Save the children 2023).

The main reason why parents go to work abroad, as noted in the Save the Children study (2023), is the insufficiency of material resources. The questionnaire categories with the highest share of responses regarding the reasons for parental departure included: insufficient income to meet the family's needs (32-36%), the desire to improve the family's financial situation (26-33%), the need for additional financial support for children's education (5-11%), and the inability to find a job in Romania (14%). The money earned by

parents abroad is primarily used to meet the family's basic needs, with a smaller portion allocated to savings or secondary needs.

Marian Pislariu (2023), when discussing the reasons why mothers go to work abroad, also identifies economic factors as the primary cause. The categories identified in his study regarding the reasons for mothers' departure, include improving the family's financial situation, increasing living standards, and supporting children's access to education

Among children whose parents migrate for work, those with both parents working abroad, as well as children from families in which the sole breadwinner has left the country, are at greater risk. In Romania, the regions most affected by migration and, implicitly, with a higher number of children left behind are the North-East and South-East regions. In the North-East region, in 2020, there were 27,031 children from transnational families, followed by the South-East region, with 11,574 children. (Matei and Ghența 2024)

The main driver for parental migration for work abroad remains the family's financial insufficiency. The areas most affected by migration in Romania, namely the North-East and South-East, are also among those with the highest relative poverty rates, according to the National Institute of Statistics (NIS). Specifically, in 2020, the North-East region recorded the highest relative poverty rate at 35.6%, while the South-East region ranked third, with a rate of 32.6%, being surpassed only by the South-West Oltenia region, with 32.7% (National Institute of Statistics 2021).

The same regions - the North-East and South-East - also record the highest rates of early school leaving "registering a level almost four times higher than that of the Bucharest-Ilfov region, at 23.6% and 22.4%, respectively, compared to 5.5% in 2017." (Romania's National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030 2020, 38)

#### **4. Strategic framework for the protection of children left at home**

In order to meet the needs of children left at home, institutions in Romania have developed various social policies and adopted a legislative framework aimed at their protection. Following the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Romania adopted Law 272/2004 on the Protection and

Promotion of the Rights of the Child. From the perspective of Law 272/2004, children whose parents are working abroad and who are not left in the care of an adult responsible for meeting the child's growth and development needs are considered neglected children. Luca (2007, 57) states that "neglect occurs in the situation in which both parents who have gone to work abroad leave the children at home in the care of their brother, older sister or another person who does not fulfill caregiving responsibilities."

In order to protect children in situations of neglect, among others, the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights issued Ministerial Order No. 219 of June 15, 2006, regarding the identification, intervention and monitoring activities for children deprived of parental care during the period in which their parents are working abroad. The purpose of adopting this normative act was the "responsabilization of institutions with responsibilities in the field of child protection and their active involvement in identifying children whose parents are working abroad and in providing support services for them, namely the Public Social Assistance Services at the level of each administrative-territorial unit and the General Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection at county or sector level" (Munteanu and Tudor 2007, 36).

The 2006 Order was amended on August 19, 2015, under the Decision No. 691/2015, entitled *Procedure for monitoring the way of raising and caring for the child with parents who went to work abroad and the services they can benefit from.*

In 2023, further amendments were introduced to Law 272/2004 in the section addressing children from transnational families. One of the additions concerns the allocation of funding sources (state or local budget and EU funds) for institutions seeking to initiate projects for children whose parents have gone to work abroad and for the people responsible for their upbringing and care during parental absence. Another addition refers to the areas in which different institutions are entitled to initiate and manage projects financed through EU funds, such as:

- educational and psychological support services, recreational activities, children's camps;
- vocational assessment and counselling activities;
- material support to facilitate acces to quality educational services;
- parental education and counseling programmes for caregivers;

- organisation of local intervention networks providing inter-institutional services to children;
- support for vulnerable children and their families, based on case management;
- studies and research related to migration and child development in the context of parental labour mobility;
- provision of integrated packages of complementary educational and recreational measures, combined with family and caregiver support (Art. 108<sup>1</sup> of Law 239/2023) .

Various non-gouvernmental organisations (NGO's), such as Save the Children, the Soros Foundation Romania and the Social Alternatives Association, have conducted studies and implemented programmes aimed at supporting children left at home, as well as assisting public authorities in monitoring these children. In 2023, Save the Children organised a range of activities within the local programmes implemented in the counties of Argeş, Braşov, Caraş-Severin, Constanţa, Dâmboviţa, Dolj, Galaţi, Hunedoara, Iaşi, Mureş, Neamţ, Olt, Suceava, Timiş, Tulcea, Vaslui, Vâlcea, Vrancea and the municipality of Bucharest. These activities included the provision of psychosocial counselling, educational support, material assistance, and the organisation of recreational and socialisation activities, such as summer camps, outdoor educational activities, and sightseeing programmes (Save the Children 2023).

Romania, as a member of the international community and, in particular, as a member of the European Union, has committed to implementing the principles of Sustainable Development at national level. Romania's first Sustainable Development Strategy was adopted in 1999. Following the Romania's accession to the EU in 2007, national priorities were adjusted through the Sustainable Development Strategy Horizons 2013-2020-2030, approved by the Government of Romania on 12 November 2008. The strategy states that by 2030 Romania aims to become “a member state of a strong European Union, in which disparities between countries are reduced and citizens are able to live in a country where the state serves the needs of every citizen in a fair and efficient manner, while maintaining constant concern for environmental protection” (Romania’s National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030 2020, 18).

Romania's Sustainable Development Strategy includes 17 development goals. Among these, the goals most relevant to improving the situation of children whose parents have gone abroad to work are Sustainable Development Goal 1 (No poverty), Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality education), Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions).

## 5. Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the situation of children from transnational families and to facilitate a comparison between legislative frameworks, official policies, and the actual circumstances of these children. The qualitative component consisted of social document analysis, while the quantitative component involved longitudinal statistical analysis. Document analysis was used to examine legislative and policy frameworks at both national and European levels, whereas the longitudinal analysis of statistical data provided empirical insight into trends in the number of children left behind due to parental migration, serving as a basis for subsequent recommendations. The data provided by National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption (NAPCRA) offer a perspective on the scale and impact of parental migration on children left behind, an essential category in the analysis of transnational families.

Document analysis was chosen as a primary research method due to its relevance in evaluating existing strategies, policies, and regulations concerning children from transnational families. The social documents collected, processed, and analysed in this research are textual in nature and consist of both public and official documents. According to the specialised literature, document analysis is “a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents (...) Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge” (Corbin and Strauss 2008 cited in Bowen 2009, 27). To strengthen the findings and provide a broader perspective, this method is complemented

by a longitudinal statistical data analysis, which allows for tracking the numerical evolution of the phenomenon over time.

The social documents that were examined in this study include:

- Legislative documents: Ministerial Order No. 219/2006; Decision No. 691/2015; Law No. 272/2004, Section IV - Child Protection for children with parents working abroad;
- Social policy documents: Romania's National Strategy for Sustainable Development;
- European policies and best practices: European Commission Communication on the Protection of Children in Migration; Council of Europe recommendations concerning children left behind; the EU Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and relevant Sustainable Development Goals; EU research networks and initiatives; best practices identified in Italy, Sweden and Spain.

The longitudinal analysis of statistical data was selected as a complementary research method alongside document analysis. This method enables the identification of trends and patterns over time, providing valuable insights into the evolution of the phenomenon. According to specialised literature, longitudinal research is particularly useful in social studies, as it "allows us to better examine the evolution of the studied phenomena over time" (Şandor 2013, 56)

The statistical data used in the longitudinal analysis were collected from the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption (NAPCRA) for the period 2015-2023, based on the December statistical bulletins of each year. For the years 2020-2023, all statistical bulletins provided by NAPCRA were analysed, namely those for March, June, September, December. This time frame was selected based on data availability. For the period 2015-2019, access was available only to December data. For analytical purposes, two additional categories were constructed: "children completely deprived of parental care" - defined as the sum of the categories "with both parents gone" and "with the only supporter gone" - and "percentage of children completely deprived of parental care".

The research addresses the following questions:

1. How does existing legislation protect children from transnational families, and what potential gaps can be identified?

2. What is the distribution of children left behind due to parental migration during the analysed period, based on whether one parent, both parents, or the sole caregiver has migrated?
3. Are there additional measures considered to reduce the number of children left behind?

By integrating both national and EU legal frameworks, social policies, and quantitative data, this methodology provides a multilevel and comparative perspective on the phenomenon of children left behind, linking empirical trends with legislative and policy analysis.

## **6. Results and Analysis**

### ***6.1 European Policies and Practices for Children in Transnational Families***

At EU level, the protection of children in transnational families is addressed only indirectly, as no specific EU legislation regulates the situation of children left behind by migrating parents or the broader dynamics of transnational family life. Instead, the EU framework is composed of general child-rights instruments that touch upon aspects relevant to these children without providing explicit or operational guidance (Topouzova et al. 2020; Evans et al. 2024).

One of the most relevant EU documents is the European Commission Communication on the Protection of Children in Migration (2017), which sets out principles for safeguarding children affected by migration. However, this Communication primarily targets children who migrate themselves, including asylum seekers and refugees, rather than children who remain in their country of origin while their parents migrate for work (Topouzova et al. 2020). Broader child rights frameworks, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the European Social Charter, are also invoked by the Council of Europe to encourage Member States to ensure access to education, healthcare, psychosocial support, and protection from abuse. Nevertheless, these instruments remain general in scope and do not provide concrete standards specifically addressing the situation of children in transnational families (Badea 2020). In addition, the EU and its Member States have committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes relevant targets related to poverty and inequality reduction,

education, health, gender equality, child protection, and elimination of the worst forms of child labour (Topouzova et al. 2020). While these objectives are relevant to children left behind, they do not explicitly recognise them as a distinct vulnerable group, nor do they outline specific intervention mechanisms.

Approaches among EU Member States vary depending on national welfare models. Spain ensures equal access to education and healthcare for all children, regardless of parental migration status, and relies heavily on community and family-based support structures (Evans et al. 2024). Sweden, through its universal welfare model, provides high-quality social services, parental leave schemes, and integration measures that indirectly benefit children affected by parental migration (Evans et al. 2024). Italy has developed community-based services and day centres aimed at reducing vulnerability and social exclusion among children left behind (Badea 2020). These examples illustrate national level best practices within EU Member States rather than a unified European policy approach.

Research networks also play an important role in connecting empirical evidence to policy development. The Transnational Family Dynamics in Europe network, funded through COST Action CA21143, contributes to a deeper understanding of transnational family dynamics by linking research initiatives across Europe and facilitating dialogue between researchers and policymakers (Transnational Family Dynamics in Europe 2025). During discussions surrounding the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum (European Commission 2024), this research network highlighted the importance of the family dimension of migration, drawing attention to the challenges faced by refugee children and families, including the effects of family separation, institutional care, and limited access to education on children's well-being.

Overall, the EU framework addressing children in transnational families remains fragmented. It relies primarily on general child-rights standards, soft-law instruments, and national interpretations, rather than on concrete, binding legislation or dedicated policy tools specifically designed to respond to the needs of children left behind by parental migration.

## ***6.2 The Protection of Children from Transnational Families in Romania: Mechanisms and Possible Gaps***

The analysed legislative framework provides several measures that should be implemented by the designated institutions with the aim of protecting the children left at home from situations of risk. The first step in adopting appropriate measures for these children is the establishment of a monitoring mechanism. The first normative act aimed at monitoring children from transnational families in Romania was Ministerial Order No. 219/2006. According to this Order, public social assistance services are required to identify cases of children whose parents are working abroad within three months of its publication. Once the identification process is completed, an initial assessments report is prepared for each child. If, following the assessment, a child is identified as being in a risk situation, the public social assistance services must develop a service plan aimed at preventing the separation of the child from his or her family. This service plan must include measures to maintain the child's personal relationships with the parents, as well as the provision of psychological counselling where necessary.

Article 104 of Law No. 272/2004 introduced an additional monitoring measure, requiring Romanian citizens who exercise parental authority alone and intend to work abroad to notify the Public Social Assistance Services or the local town hall of their departure. They are also required to designate a person responsible for the care and maintenance of the child during their absence. However, the legislation does not impose a similar notification obligation on two-parent families, regardless of whether one or both parents migrate for work. This legislative gap may lead to situations of child neglect, as authorities remain unaware of these cases and are therefore unable to monitor the child's situation or intervene when necessary.

Ministerial Order No. 219/2006 was amended on 19 August 2015 by Government Decision No. 691/2015, entitled *Procedure for monitoring the upbringing and care of children with parents working abroad and the services they may benefit from*. Compared to the 2006 Order, the 2015 regulation introduced several forms of support for children, parents, and designated caregivers during the period of parental migration. Another important change concerns institutional responsibilities: while the identification of such cases was

primarily assigned to social assistance services under the 2006 Order, the 2015 regulation transferred much of this responsibility to educational institutions.

As a result, the monitoring of transnational families is carried out by local authorities based on the lists provided by schools at the beginning of each year or semester. This monitoring approach can be effective in identifying certain cases, but it does not offer a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon. Children under the age of six or seven are excluded from this system, as are children who are not enrolled in education or who have dropped out of school, leading to a loss of institutional contact. Consequently, the exact number of children in this situation remains unknown. According to a study conducted by Save the Children (2023), 37% of respondents stated that they did not notify their child's school, kindergarten, or nursery about the parent's departure abroad. Moreover, discrepancies exist between data collected by the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption (NAPCRA) and other institutions, such as the Ministry of Education. As noted by Save the Children (2020), data reported by schools indicate significantly higher numbers than those recorded by NAPCRA, although these figures are also incomplete.

According to Government Decision No. 691/2015, once information on children with parents working abroad is received, the public social assistance services are required to conduct a home visit to verify whether the child's rights, as stipulated in Law No. 272/2004, are being respected. Following the initial assessment, home visits are conducted every two months and subsequently on a semi-annual basis in order to monitor the child's situation. Social workers assess various aspects, including the maintenance of the child-parent relationship, school performance, and physical and mental health. In certain cases, psychological counselling may be recommended.

As discussed in the literature review, when one or both parents migrate for work, a critical factor in preventing neglect and dysfunctional development is the availability of a responsible caregiver. The delegation of parental authority during the period of parental absence is temporary and may not exceed one year. According to Article 105 of Law No. 272/2004, following a court decision on the delegation of parental rights, the designated caregiver is required to participate in a counselling programme aimed at preventing conflict, maladaptation, or negligence in relation to the child.

These counselling services are provided by public social assistance services at the local level for a period of six months.

Effective monitoring and support for children left behind require adequate human and material resources. In rural areas, the implementation of these measures is often hindered by a shortage of social workers and psychologists. Only 38% of general education schools in Romania employ a psychologist, with a pronounced urban-rural disparity: in 86% of rural schools and in approximately half of small and medium-sized urban schools, this position remains vacant (Toth et al. 2007, 15).

In an attempt to address this issue, the Senate adopted a law in 2020 recognising independent professional activity for psychologists as seniority. Additionally, starting with the 2021–2022 school year, the recommended number of students assigned to a school counsellor was reduced from 800 to 600, and from 400 to 300 for preschool children. In practice, however, these measures were not fully implemented due to the persistent shortage of school psychologists. According to a World Bank study (2023), during the 2022–2023 school year, a single counsellor was responsible for an average of 966 students and preschoolers, with some cases reaching up to 1,500 beneficiaries (Save Romania Union 2022).

Beyond counselling services, Government Decision No. 691/2015 also provides for the establishment of day centre services. These services may offer material support when caregivers are unable to meet children's needs or lack sufficient time for childcare, particularly in households where caregivers are still employed. Day centres may also provide temporary protection in cases where parents have ceased contact with their children.

Finally, according to Government Decision No. 691/2015, support for families caring for children with parents working abroad includes parental education programmes for caregivers, as well as measures aimed at facilitating and monitoring the maintenance of the relationship between children and their parents.

### 6.3 The Situation of Children Left Behind Due to Parental Migration: Analysis by Family Categories

**Table 1. Number of children with parents who went to work by category for December 2015-2023**

Year	Total	With one parent left	With both parents left	With the only supporting parent left	Completely deprived of parental care	Enter the special protection system	% children without parental care
2023	64936	46792	9758	8386	18144	2066	28%
2022	72627	51799	11969	8859	20828	2781	29%
2021	76170	55146	12286	8738	21024	2848	28%
2020	75136	52474	13253	9409	22662	3047	30%
2019	86263	59262	15858	11143	27001	3500	31%
2018	92027	62890	16331	12806	29137	3659	32%
2017	94896	64701	17425	12770	30195	3730	32%
2016	95308	62978	18646	13684	32330	3870	34%
2015	85194	53507	21610	10077	31687	4227	37%

*Source: National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption (2015-2023)*

The data presented in Table 1 can be divided into two analytical sub-periods: a first phase characterized by an increasing trend (2015–2016) and a second phase marked by a general decline (2017–2023). Between 2015 and 2016, the total number of children with parents working abroad increased from 85,194 to 95,308. During this period, increases were recorded in the categories of children with one parent left, children with the only supporting parent left, and children completely deprived of parental care. In contrast, a decrease was observed in the number of children with both parents left, from 21,610 in 2015 to 18,646 in 2016, as well as in the number of children entering the special protection system, which declined from 4,227 to 3,870.

From 2017 to 2023, a decreasing trend is observed across almost all categories. Exceptions include the year 2021, when the total number of children increased slightly due to a rise in the number of children with one parent left; the year 2018, when a marginal increase was recorded in the category of children with the only supporting parent left (from 12,770 in 2017 to 12,806 in 2018); and the year 2022, which registered a similar minor increase in the same category. In both 2018 and 2022, these increases were limited to a single category and did not significantly affect the overall total. As a result, the total number of children with parents working abroad decreased from 94,896 in 2017 to 64,936 in 2023.

The proportion of children completely deprived of parental care - defined as children with both parents left and children whose the only supporting parent left - also declined during the analysed period, from 37% in 2015 to 28% in 2023. The only exception occurred in 2022, when this percentage increased by one percentage point.

Additionally, a progressive and substantial decline can be observed in the number of children entering the special protection system, from 4,227 in 2015 to 2,066 in 2023, indicating a reduction in the most severe forms of vulnerability captured by official statistics.

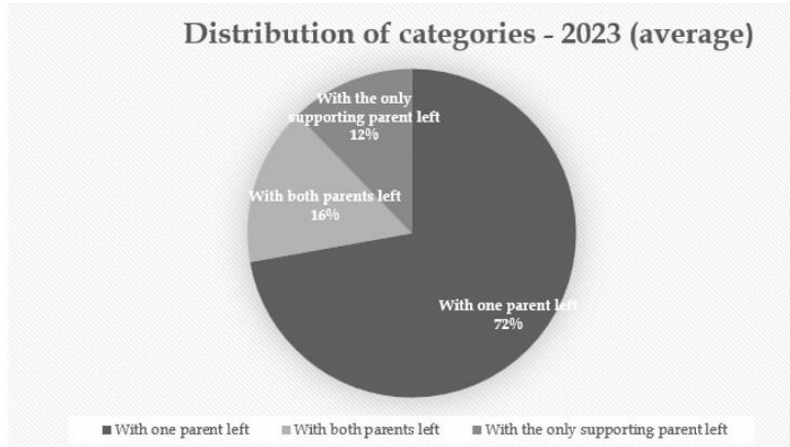
**Table 2. Number of children with parents who went to work by categories for the months of March, June, September, December for the years 2020-2023 and the average for one year.**

Year	Total	With one parent left	With both parents left	With the only supporting parent left	Completely deprived of parental care	Enter the special protection system	% children without parental care
2023 avg	69281	50007	10786	8487	19273	2400	28%
2023 marcl	72902	52636	11656	8610	20266	2736	28%
2023 june	71152	51305	11149	8698	19847	2427	28%
2023 sept	68133	49296	10581	8256	18837	2374	28%
2023 dec	64936	46792	9758	8386	18144	2066	28%
2022 avg	74153	52866	12231	9055	21287	2866	29%
2022 marcl	74349	53331	11946	9072	21018	2851	28%
2022 june	75769	53743	12706	9320	22026	2979	29%
2022 sept	73868	52592	12305	8971	21276	2852	29%
2022 dec	72627	51799	11969	8859	20828	2781	29%
2021 avg	75478	54078	12489	8911	21400	3042	28%
2021 marcl	76551	54444	12669	9438	22107	3155	29%
2021 june	75803	54201	12664	8938	21602	3275	28%
2021 sept	73387	52520	12339	8528	20867	2889	28%
2021 dec	76170	55146	12286	8738	21024	2848	28%
2020 avg	78507	54393	14230	9884	24114	3314	31%
2020 marcl	81274	56458	14519	10297	24816	3324	31%
2020 june	79638	54938	14766	9934	24700	3531	31%
2020 sept	77978	53702	14382	9894	24276	3353	31%
2020 dec	75136	52474	13253	9409	22662	3047	30%

*Source: National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption (2020-2023)*

An analysis of annual averages for the period 2020–2023 shows a decrease in the number of children with parents working abroad across all categories, with one exception. The category of children whose only supporting parent left recorded a slight increase in 2022, reaching 9,055 children compared to 8,911 in 2021. Overall, the percentage of children completely deprived of parental care declined by three percentage points, from 31% in 2020 to 28% in 2023. During this period, March consistently registered the highest number of children with parents working abroad, with the exception of 2022, when June recorded the highest values. This seasonal variation may reflect temporary migration patterns or reporting practices, although further research would be required to clarify these dynamics.

**Fig. 1. Percentage of categories of children with parents who have left**



*Source: National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption (2023)*

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of children with parents working abroad in 2023, based on the categories defined by NAPCRA. Children with one parent left represent the majority, accounting for 72% of the total. This is followed by children with both parents left (16%) and children whose only supporting parent left (12%). Together, these categories constitute 100% of the recorded cases.

Based on data presented in the SDG 4 section of Romania's National Sustainable Development Strategy, children from transnational families face an increased risk of school dropout and low educational performance, primarily due to reduced parental supervision, limited emotional support, and, in some cases, insufficient material resources. The North-East and South-East regions record the highest rates of early school leaving, at 23.6% and 22.4% respectively, compared to 5.5% in the Bucharest-Ilfov region in 2017. As shown earlier in this paper, these regions also report the highest numbers of children with parents working abroad.

Parental migration is therefore associated with heightened educational vulnerability. Moreover, the monitoring and support mechanisms for children from transnational families rely heavily on information provided by educational institutions at the beginning of each school year or semester. Consequently, school dropout or non-enrolment may result in situations where children are no longer identified by the system, making institutional support either difficult or impossible to provide (Romania's National Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 2020).

**Table 3. Number of children with parents left abroad by area of residence**

Data sent from CJRAE	Number of cases in school unit	
	Rural	Urban
Dâmbovița	3351	976
Hunedoara	333	2653
Iași	5136	6437
Satu Mare	2991	568
Vaslui	2787	3556

Source: Institute of Educational Sciences (ISE), based on data provided by the County Centres for Resources and Educational Assistance (CJRAE)

Beyond national trends, regional data collected by the County Centres for Resources and Educational Assistance (CJRAE) and reported by the Institute of Educational Sciences offer additional insight into the territorial distribution of children with parents working abroad. Although limited to selected counties and a single school year (2017–2018), these data highlight notable rural-urban differences. In counties such as Dâmbovița and Satu Mare, most affected children reside in rural areas, while in Hunedoara a higher concentration is observed in urban settings. These findings complement national statistics by providing a more nuanced understanding of the geographic patterns associated with parental migration (National Institute of Statistics 2018).

#### ***6.4 Future measures that may reduce the number of children left at home due to parental migration***

Within Romania’s National Sustainable Development Strategy, several objectives - particularly SDG 1, SDG 4, and SDG 16 - are closely related to the situation of children whose parents have gone to work abroad. Achieving these objectives may contribute to reducing the number of parents who choose labour migration as a survival strategy.

SDG 1 focuses on ensuring common prosperity, a basic standard of living, and access to social protection benefits for all citizens. Its aim is to reduce both severe and relative poverty in all its dimensions and to strengthen the social protection and assistance system. In the context of transnational families, the lack of material resources represents the primary reason why parents decide to work abroad. Ensuring a decent standard of living could therefore reduce the pressure on parents to migrate. Moreover, some children from transnational families continue to face economic instability despite receiving remittances from parents working abroad. Providing adequate

material support tailored to the needs of these children could improve their chances of balanced and harmonious development.

SDG 4 is one of the objectives most directly aligned with the situation of children whose parents work abroad. Access to quality education, including personalised support programmes, can play a key role in ensuring their educational and social development. The strategy emphasises access to early, inclusive, and quality education, as well as targeted support programmes for vulnerable children. As highlighted by the OECD, student well-being represents an essential variable in the educational process. Beyond academic instruction, school constitutes a child's first structured interaction with society, and this experience has a significant influence on attitudes, behaviour, and long-term development (Romania's National Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 2020, 37).

SDG 16 envisages the strengthening of social capital, the promotion of tolerance, the reduction of all forms of violence - particularly violence against children - and the development of efficient, transparent institutions capable of protecting vulnerable groups, including children. Ensuring children's access to legal protection and effective public services is essential. Children from transnational families require consistent monitoring and institutional support in order to prevent situations of abuse, neglect, or exploitation. At present, as previously noted, discrepancies exist between the data provided by different institutions - such as the Ministry of Education, NAPCRA, and non-governmental organisations like Save the Children - regarding the number of children whose parents have migrated for work. In this context, SDG 16 can facilitate improved inter-institutional cooperation and data harmonisation, contributing to more effective monitoring, coordination, and intervention in the case of children from transnational families.

## **7. Discussions**

This paper provides a clear and detailed presentation of the existing measures for the protection of children from transnational families, accompanied by a critical analysis of their implementation. The main objective was to identify existing gaps and to formulate recommendations aimed at improving future

public policies in this field. The analysis of statistical data was used to provide an empirical basis for subsequent policy-oriented recommendations.

This study has several limitations that must be acknowledged from the outset. First, the statistical data used offer only a general overview of the phenomenon and do not provide detailed information on the material, educational, or psychological situation of children left at home, nor on the concrete effects of Order No. 691/2015 on their well-being. In addition, the data do not allow for an assessment of the duration of parental absence, which represents an important variable in understanding the impact of migration on children. Another limitation is related to data availability: as mentioned in the methodology section, statistical bulletins for the months of March, June, and September are not available for the entire 2015–2020 period. The absence of complete monthly data limits the possibility of identifying seasonal patterns in parental migration and may obscure periods when departures are more frequent.

Despite these limitations, the longitudinal data analysis suggests a general decreasing trend in the number of children left at home following the implementation of Order No. 691/2015, particularly between 2016 and 2023. Specifically, the percentage of children completely deprived of parental care decreased from 37% in 2015 to 28% in 2023. However, these figures likely underestimate the true scale of the phenomenon, as they include only children who attend school and whose parents notified the authorities of their departure. Data from regions with high early school leaving rates, such as the North-East and South-East, indicate that a substantial number of children remain unmonitored and therefore absent from official records. Moreover, evidence from non-governmental organisations shows that a significant proportion of families - approximately 37%, according to Save the Children (2023) - did not notify educational institutions about parental migration. These factors point to important coverage gaps and limit the extent to which statistical trends alone can be used to assess policy effectiveness.

Consequently, while the observed decrease may suggest a positive influence of Order No. 691/2015, it is not possible to establish a direct causal relationship between the adoption of this normative act and the reduction in the number of children left at home. The trends identified may also be influenced by other factors, such as broader socio-economic changes,

variations in school reporting practices, or the presence of informal caregiving arrangements within families and communities.

Regional disparities further complicate the picture. Data associated with SDG 4 highlight significant differences between regions, with the North-East and South-East registering early school leaving rates of 23.6% and 22.4%, respectively. These figures suggest that many children in these regions are not included in official monitoring mechanisms. Urban-rural differences are also evident. While counties such as Dâmbovița and Satu Mare report higher numbers of left-behind children in rural areas, others, such as Hunedoara, record higher concentrations in urban settings. These patterns underline the importance of considering local socio-economic and demographic contexts when designing and implementing child protection policies.

A comparison between the Romanian framework and European approaches offers additional insights. At the EU level, no specific legislation directly targets children in transnational families. Instead, relevant issues are addressed through broader instruments such as the European Commission's Communication on the Protection of Children in Migration (2017), Council of Europe recommendations, and the Sustainable Development Strategy, which promote general principles related to children's rights, access to education and healthcare, family unity, and protection from abuse and exploitation (Topouzova et al. 2020; Badea 2020). National practices in countries such as Spain, Sweden, and Italy illustrate diverse implementation models, ranging from reliance on community and family support networks to universal welfare systems and integrated community-based services (Evans et al. 2024; Badea 2020).

In contrast, Romania has developed a specific legislative framework aimed at monitoring children from transnational families and providing counselling and social support services. However, the practical application of these measures remains uneven. As shown by the data, although monitoring exists, it is incomplete due to limited school coverage, insufficient parental reporting, and shortages of specialised human resources – particularly school psychologists and social workers. As a result, despite clear legal provisions, many children do not benefit from the intended support, revealing a persistent gap between formal legislation and practice. In this respect, Romania could draw on European examples, particularly those emphasising

integrated service provision and guaranteed access to education, health, and social services regardless of parental status, as observed in Sweden or Italy.

Based on these findings, several recommendations emerge. First, strengthening the implementation capacity of existing legislation is essential, particularly through increasing the number of school psychologists, social workers, and specialised support staff, especially in rural and high-migration areas. Second, the introduction of a digital platform for parental departure could improve monitoring and facilitate timely interventions. Third, targeted support measures, such as after-school programs and psychosocial support in high-migration regions, could mitigate the negative impacts of parental absence. Finally, strengthening cooperation between schools, local authorities, and civil society organizations could help reduce monitoring gaps and improve service delivery, in line with European and international policy principles.

Overall, while Romania's legislative framework provides a formal basis for the protection of children from transnational families, the main challenges relate to implementation rather than legal design. Improving data quality, institutional capacity, and inter-institutional coordination appears more urgent than further legislative amendments. Moreover, the data provided by the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption (NAPCRA) offer only a partial picture of the situation. Supplementing this data with additional information - such as the duration of parents' absence, the child's age during the absence, residential environment, family income, and the gender of the parent who left - would allow for a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon and support the development of more effective and targeted policy interventions.

## **8. Conclusions**

The phenomenon of children left at home while their parents work abroad has profound effects on children's development, affecting not only their material conditions but also their emotional and psychosocial well-being. Although institutions in Romania have begun to monitor this situation, the circumstances of many children whose parents have migrated for work remain unknown.

While Romania has developed specific legislative measures, such as Order 691/2015, to monitor and support these children, implementation challenges - including limited resources, incomplete monitoring, and insufficient access to psychological counseling - significantly reduce their effectiveness. Statistical data highlight both national trends and persistent regional disparities, including higher rates of school dropout in certain areas and differences between urban and rural settings.

Comparisons with European practices indicate that, although the EU and its Member States promote child protection principles through general frameworks such as Council of Europe recommendations and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, there is no specific European legislation targeting children from transnational families. This gap highlights both the potential for Romania to learn from European best practices - such as more comprehensive public services, systematic family support, and coordinated research-policy networks - and the need to strengthen the local implementation of existing national legislation.

Future efforts should focus on improving data collection, ensuring adequate human and financial resources for implementation, enhancing coordination among educational, social, and health institutions, and expanding targeted interventions that address the specific needs of children left behind. Moreover, further research is needed to examine the psychosocial, educational, and developmental outcomes of these children, including the duration of parental absence, family dynamics, and caregiving arrangements. Such measures and research would contribute to closing the gap between legislation and practice and to better supporting the development and well-being of children in transnational families.

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