

Social Aspects of the Intra-EU Mobility

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Abstract

The paper presents a topical picture of the intra-EU mobility on the basis of officially published quantitative data. Several social aspects of this type of internal migration are discussed and analyzed, such as: risks for the health, education and socialization of the migrant children; risks for the stability of the migrant families; demographic and social consequences for the EU countries which are reported as the biggest sources of intra-EU mobility. The official statistical data are compared with the results of the authors' study on socialization deficits for the children from so called “transnational families”, where one or both parents are labor migrants and have left their children to the care of relatives in the country of origin. The comparative results serve as a basis of conclusions about the negative social impact of the intra-EU mobility on the migrant families and especially on their children.

Keywords: intra-EU mobility, transnational families (TNF), intra-EU migrant children.

1. Introduction

The enlargement of the EU to the East in the recent decades and the upholding of the European principle of free movement has led to significant migration flows from Eastern to Western Europe. In parallel with the migratory pressure outside the territory of the EU, the problem with the migration within the Union has increased in importance and has put on the agenda a number of sensitive topics such as the migration's impact on migrant families and their children, as well as the social and demographic problems in the countries qualified as the biggest sources of migration.

The current work is focused on the social aspects of the intra-EU migration (mobility) and is based on recent studies and official statistical data about the intra-EU migration of children and the risks for their development. The main observations on this topic are compared with the results from other studies focused on children from so called transnational families – the family units where one or both parents are labor migrants while their children are left in the country of origin to the care of relatives.

1.1 *Intra-EU mobility – theoretical background*

There is a number of studies interpreting concepts closely related to the migration issues. Janta and Harte argue that there is no consensus among the researchers on the definitions of a migrant (Janta & Harte, 2016). Some authors interpret the migrant as an individual born in a country but residing in another, regardless of his/her citizenship. (Tromans et al., 2009: 28-42). This definition is based on the fact that the country of birth cannot be changed while the citizenship can. According to another definition, in order to be qualified as a migrant, an individual must have resided in a foreign country for 12 months or must have been an object of immigration control although not all internal migrants within the EU are subjects of such control (Anderson & Blinder, 2015).

In the context of the EU the migration from one member state to another can be qualified as mobility. As an intra-EU migrant can be interpreted an individual residing in an EU member state which is different from the country of birth regardless of the ethnic origin of this individual (Harte et al., 2016). On the basis of this, the intra-EU migrant-child can be defined as a person under the age of 15, born in one member state but residing in another for a period of at least 12 months (Harte et al., 2016).

In the report “Data on Children in Migration” of the Joint Research Centre to the European Commission (Schumacher et al., 2019) we can also find some definitions of concepts related to the migrant children. Firstly, the concept “child” is defined according to the international law – anyone under the age of 15. On the next place, the concept “children in migration” is defined in the following way: *all third-country children who are forcibly displaced or migrate to the territory of the EU accompanying their extended family or another person who is not from the family (separated children) or are alone regardless of whether they are looking for or not seeking asylum* (Schumacher et al., 2019). It is clear from this definition that the children in migration may be accompanied or unaccompanied, may be subject to voluntary or forced migration, may or may not seek asylum. A noteworthy fact is that the report is not limited to the children outside the EU but also deals with the intra-EU migrant-children.

The definitions above for the children in migration are related to the situations when these children accompany (or do not accompany) their parents. But for the intra-EU mobility the situation where the child of the migrant-parents has been left to the care of relatives in the country of origin is also typical. In this case we can speak about the so-called transnational families whose existence is a reason for a number of significant social problems. The phenomenon of transnational families (TNF) is comparatively new. The migration research has started to pay attention to it since the beginning of the last decade of 20th century. As one of the basic definitions of this phenomenon can be cited the definition of Bryceson and Vuorela (2002), according to which *transnational are those families whose members live for a shorter or longer period apart from each other but maintain common relationships and a spirit of collective welfare and unity even across the borders of individual countries*. In her dissertation titled *Deficits in the socialization of children whose parents work abroad* (2019), Ana Popova presents the following definition of the TNF: *The transnational family is a family unit whose members are positioned in different countries for a shorter or longer period of time, but regardless of geographic distance, they keep their relations and maintain social, cultural, reproductive and financial links across the borders*.

The most widespread form of the existence of the TNF is the transnational parenting, where we have four cases of separate living (Popova, 2019):

- when the mother works abroad and has left her children and the other family members in the country of origin (transnational motherhood);
- when the father-migrant is far from his family (transnational fatherhood);

- when the two parents are migrants, in which case they either live abroad with their child/children or have left them to the care of relatives in the sending country;
- when, most often for reasons of education, the child lives abroad and is far from his/her parents.

In the case of the TNF, the fulfillment of the main family functions – reproductive, educational, economic, recreational, and protective – is modified. The most affected function by the parental absence is the family function for education, socialization and primary control. It raises a number of deficits in the socialization of children from TNF and, hence, risks for the overall development of the children.

2. Method

One of the methods used in this work is a secondary data analysis of the results from the above cited report (Schumacher et al., 2019). These officially published data are compared with the results from two UNICEF studies and an own study of the co-authors in this research where two qualitative methods are combined: in-depth interviews and focus group.

3. Results

3.1 *Negative consequences of the intra-EU mobility on migrant-families and their children – “Data on Children in Migration”*

The report “Data on Children in Migration” of the Joint Research Centre to the European Commission (Schumacher et al., 2019) monitors the situation with the children in migration from 2015 to 2018 and outlines the following facts:

- In 2018 the total number of migrant children is 6.9 million. Most of them, 4.3 million, are citizens of states outside the EU (Afghanistan, Syria and others – 60%). The migrant children from the Balkans make up 15% from all affected.
- About 2.6 million children live in another country within EU (intra-EU mobility) and 45% from these children are Polish or Romanian.
- Nearly 600 000 Romanian children live in other EU country and in the last 5 years they have increased by more than 130,000, putting Romania at the top of the list of children in internal migration. Poland ranks second with the number of Polish children living in another EU country increasing from 157 000 in 2014 to over 240 000 in 2019. The growth is significant also for Bulgaria where the number of children living in another EU country has risen from 79 000 to 134 000 in five years. During the same period the number of children living abroad from Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Croatia and Slovenia has almost doubled.
- While the number of the children affected by intra-EU mobility has increased by approximately 32% between 2014 and 2018, those outside the EU have increased by only 17%, despite the large influx in 2015-2016. The end of the migration crisis is well illustrated by the fact that in 2018 the number of the children migrating from third countries has increased by only 3% (Schumacher et al., 2019: 19-20).

The report also presents data about the most attractive countries for internal migration. They are United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Spain and France, i.e., the old member states of the EU. The total number of intra-EU migrants in 2018 is significant – over 3 million – and the annual growth of the intra-EU mobility is 7-8% between 2014 and 2017. (Schumacher et al., 2019: 19)

Having in mind the number of population under the age of 20 in the concrete EU countries, from the data in the report we can see that Romania ranks first in the list of the internal migration (12.6% of all persons under 20). The countries are then arranged as follows: Bulgaria – 9.3%; Croatia – 7.5%; Estonia – 5.6%; Lithuania – 5%; Latvia – 4.3%; Luxemburg – 4%. All these countries register a significant increase of the intra-EU mobility between 2014 and 2018. The other EU countries maintain sustainable levels of emigration between 0.5 and less than 2%. The great number of migrant children in Luxemburg is probably because of the many European institutions there and the necessary mobility of their servants with their whole families.

On the basis of the report data presented above, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The intra-EU mobility affects a large number of children aged 0-19 years – approximately 2.6 million or 2.7% of the total population in this age group.
- The predominant direction of the intra-EU mobility is from East to West, i.e., from the new member states from Eastern and partially Central Europe to the old ones from Western and Northern Europe.
- The orientation of the migration flows to the most developed countries identifies some of the reasons for intra-EU mobility – seeking for higher incomes, living standard and better long-term perspectives. In some cases, the reasons are connected with the better education of the children.
- The biggest sources of the intra-EU mobility are Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia. The migration to the West causes serious demographic problems for these countries such as: depopulation, population aging and, hence, significant economic problems – shrinking labor market, brain drain and others.

3.2 Risks for the children from migrant-families (transnational families) - Data from two UNICEF studies

The risks for the children from so called transnational families where one or both parents are labor migrants while their children are left to the care of relatives in the country of origin are discussed in two UNICEF studies carried out in Romania and Bulgaria: UNICEF-Bulgaria “Effects on the children left behind by their parents, working and living abroad” (2016) and UNICEF-Romania “National analysis of the phenomenon “children left at home by their parents migrating abroad for employability” (2008). Although covering different periods of time, the studies cited use one and the same methodology and are very close in their final conclusions. That is why the current paper uses the data collected in the two studies for a secondary analysis and, applying the comparative method, looks for similarities and differences in the identified effects and consequences for the children from transnational families.

The data from the Bulgarian UNICEF study indicate that at least one parent of every fifth child in Bulgaria is abroad. By information of the National Statistical Institute all children in Bulgaria aged 0 to 19 years (as of 31.12.2012) are 1,325,511. One fifth of them is **265,102** but another study calculates their number at **271,782**. The Bulgarian UNICEF study indicates also a break from the classic nuclear family with children and two parents. The transnational families whose members live in different countries are 26% from all Bulgarian families as in 3% of cases both parents are abroad. Most of the children with both parents abroad are raised by their grandmother – 65.5%; 13.7% live with relatives, and 5.1% live in foster families (Kabakchieva et al., 2016).

At national level in Romania, it is estimated that the phenomenon “alone at home” involves around 350,000 children (about 7% of the total population aged 0-18 years), having at

least one parent abroad. Approximately 126,000 of these children have two parents abroad and more than a half of all children live in rural areas.

For all young people aged 0-18 years, another approximately 400,000 children have experienced the absence of one of the parents as a result of his/her labor migration. This means that almost **750,000** children, out of approximately 5 million children in Romania have been suffering by their parents' migration (Toth et al., 2008).

If we compare the children affected by the phenomenon of transnational families on the basis of the aforementioned numbers, we can argue that it causes negative consequences for about **20% of the children in Bulgaria and 15% of the children in Romania.**

3.3 Socialization deficits for the children from migrant-families (transnational families) – data from an own study of the co-authors

An additional picture of the problems of the transnational families (TNF) in Bulgaria and the consequences for their children is presented in other two studies – a National representative study carried out in 2018 (Mantarova et al.) including one of the co-authors and an own study of the same co-author (Popova, 2019).

On the basis of the empirical data in the **National representative study** a profile of the TNF in Bulgaria is constructed, as follows:

- * Most often, the representatives of the TNF are Bulgarians from smaller towns or villages, who have left the country in search of jobs and better incomes;
- * Most of them have completed their secondary education;
- * The women prevail among the representatives of the Bulgarian TNF.
- * Typically, the representatives of such families leave their children in the care of their grandparents;

Among the main reasons for the emergence of the TNF in Bulgaria are: low incomes, poverty, the inability to meet the basic needs of the family, dissatisfaction with the available job opportunities, and lack of perspective. As a result of the disruption of socialization and primary control functions in the TNF, their children experience deficits in the socialization process, which turn into risks for their overall development.

This thesis is empirically confirmed in a large-scale work of Ana Popova (2020) which is focused on the socialization deficits in children from TNF in Bulgaria. The study proves that the children from TNF, left in Bulgaria to the care of relatives while their migrant parents work abroad, experience serious deficits in the socialization process, causing negative effects on their physiological, cognitive, mental and emotional development, and in many cases – deviant behavior and delinquent manifestations. The conclusions in this study are based on a combination of in-depth interviews and focus group.

The total number of in-depth interviews is 34 and they were conducted in September 2018 with individuals (grandmothers, grandfathers and other relatives) from North Central region of Bulgaria. All these people were taking care of children with parents working abroad. The focus group included 7 experts from social and educational institutions in Ruse district (a district with population of about 200,000 people).

The data give information about the children from transnational families, their number, age, educational, physiological, emotional status and risks for their development.

The **total number** of children with parents working abroad reported in the interviews is 58. The **age** at which these children were left in Bulgaria because of the departure of their parent/s is, as follows: 0-3 years – 11 children; 4-7 years – 11 children; 8-12 years – 13 children; 13-18 years – 4 children; over 18 years – 1 child, unborn at the time of departure – 1 child; for 2 children the parents travel continuously between Bulgaria and Italy with them; not specified age – in 15 cases, 5 of which are raised in institution up to 3 years of age.

In relation to the issue **whether the child left behind is alone or has other brothers and sisters**, the picture is the following: in 16 cases – there is only one child in the family; 12 cases – 2 children; 6 cases – 3 children.

Most of the children left in Bulgaria are **covered by the educational system**. In 16 of the cases the children go regularly to school; in 3 cases the children attend a day nursery or kindergarten but the other 2 children cannot be enrolled due to the absence of one parent and insufficient number of points for child's admission; in 10 of the cases the children attend school/kindergarten but irregularly (mainly children from Roma families).

The in-depth interviews also give information about the **health and emotional status** of the children left in Bulgaria, their **success and behavior at school** and their **orientation toward deviant behavior**.

Only in 4 of the cases the respondents report about children's good health. In 13 cases the respondents don't share such information but in 17 cases they indicate health problems: dreaming of nightmares, enuresis (bed wetting), stuttering, depressions, withdrawal and others.

Another significant part of the data from the in-depth interviews is the information about the emotional state of the children with migrant parents. In most of the cases – 13 – the children feel sad and cry for their parents; in 5 cases the respondents report about alienation from the parents; in 6 cases the children experience withdrawal; in 3 cases they experience difficulties; some of the children neglect their appearance.

The data from the in-depth interviews about the **children's success and behavior at school** indicate the following: in 5 of the cases the children are doing very well thanks to the support of the caregivers; in 6 of the cases the children are managing but without outstanding achievements; in 3 cases the children go to school unwillingly; in 4 cases the respondents report about poor success and absenteeism; 5 cases describe regular skipping of school; in 4 cases children with problematic behavior or difficulties experienced at school are reported.

The experts involved in the focus group relate the success of the children left behind to the family status and the capacity of the caregivers to support and control them. They think that more support and control is given by the families with higher social status, whereas in more uneducated families, such as those from the Roma ethnic group, the education is not valued and the children often drop out of the educational system. But the experts also think that if the child is motivated to change his/her social environment, he or she does this regardless of the family status.

The experts draw attention to the fact that when children with problems or at risk, such as those with parents abroad, enter the protection system, they make progress in their development but drop out of the educational system again at the slightest disruption.

The data from the in-depth interviews about the **children's behavior** indicate only 4 cases of non-problematic behavior. In all other cases the respondents share information about different negative manifestations due to the parental absence: confinement, depression, unwillingness to share, feeling of sadness – 8 cases, in 1 case the child feels like an outsider, in 6 cases the child is aggressive, in 5 cases the child is with criminal behavior; there are 8 other cases in which the child imitates inappropriate friends and this causes deviations in his behavior.

The interviews also provide information whether the children with migrant parents smoke, drink alcohol or take drugs. With the exception of 14 cases with children under 12 years of age, in 10 of the remaining 20 cases it is reported that the children have such deviations. The main reason for this deviant behavior is the lack of everyday care, resulting in the deformation of children's value system and diminished control on their socialization.

4. Discussion

All data presented above about the intra-EU migrant children accompanying their migrant-parents and the children from transnational families left to the care of relatives in the country of origin indicate serious social problems and risks for these children.

The most significant problem for the intra-EU migrant children is the **uneven access to protection measures and resettlement opportunities**. The migration services focus on the migration control rather than on children's rights and needs. Such children also have a **limited access to health services**. It is known from a UNICEF report that only 8 countries members of the EU guarantee the same health care for the migrant children without documents as for those from their own country. 6 countries restrict the health care only to the cases of emergency and 12 countries restrict the access to specialist services. These children have **unequal opportunities for education**. Only 10 countries members of the EU explicitly declare the right of education of the children without documents. The intra-EU migrant children have problems with their performance at school, they often drop out from school and hence become potential NEETs (Not in Employment, Education and Training) in a near future. (Harte et al., 2016) Other negative consequences for such children are the potential **social exclusion and xenophobia** in the host countries.

The UNICEF studies about Bulgaria and Romania cited above try to draw the public attention to the fact that children from transnational families (TNF) have infringed rights and **are children at risk**. Four out of the 5 characteristics of the concept "children at risk" can be identified for these children. They are the following:

1. **The children from TNF are left without the care of their parents.** The absence of one or both parents causes a sense of loneliness, anxiety, social isolation and self-closure. For example, the Romanian study shows that 10% of these children have become more reserved and have started spending more time in front of the TV or computer (Toth et al., 2008). When in trouble, the children from TNF are trying to cope alone. On the one hand, this fact is positive, as it contributes to the development of qualities such as independence and self-confidence, but on the other hand, such children feel like outsiders and often fall into isolation from their peers. The disturbed communication with the parents abroad forces these children to share with friends, which sometimes prompts the risk of falling into unfavorable influence. In the Romanian study it is pointed out that in the cases described, the child's right not to be separated from his/her parents, formulated in the Convention on the rights of the child (1990) is infringed. An additional argument is the fact that the cases of divorce in the TNF are very common (in 43% of such families) and they cause a mental trauma in the children.

2. **For the children from TNF exists the danger of harming their physical, mental, moral, intellectual and social development.** The children with parents abroad have unsatisfactory health status and need psychological support to overcome the deprivation and mental disorders. However, it is necessary to emphasize the more serious risks for such children, connected with the alcohol abuse, smoking, drug abuse, early onset of sexual life and the development of deviant or criminogenic behavior. For example, in the Bulgarian study it is presented that 60% of the children with two parents abroad smoke in comparison with 39% smokers among the children with two parents at home. The same is valid for the alcohol abuse –

72% of the children with two parents abroad drink, compared to an average of 59.6%. The children themselves report that they use the alcohol as a means of coping with the tension. 25% of the children with two parents abroad have tried marijuana compared to 13% of the children with parents at home. The children from TNF also have more liberated views about sexual life. On the question “Who can be your eventual sexual partner”, 30% of the children with two partners abroad have answered “Everyone I like” (Kabakchieva et al., 2016). The alcohol and drug abuse often lead to deviant behavior and problems with the police. As it is argued in the Bulgarian study, this puts the children with parents abroad at a greater risk to be stigmatized as individuals with antisocial behavior, as juvenile delinquents. In the Romanian study it is pointed out that the cases of negative effects on the children from TNF described demonstrate an infringed children’s right to an adequate standard of living and right to health which explicitly puts them in the group of children at risk.

3. For the children from TNF there exists a serious risk of dropping out from school. As was mentioned above, there is a downgrading of their success at school, repetition of the class and hidden drop-out in the cases of seasonal migration. The Romanian study presents data from a representative study in which more than 60% of the respondents think that the children with parents abroad perform worse than their peers at school and miss many classes. This means an infringed right to education of these children.

4. For the children from TNF there is a risk of being abused and exploited. Both the Bulgarian and the Romanian study report many cases of such risks for the children left without parental control and raised in the country of origin by relatives: risk of sexual abuse and harassment, trafficking and prostitution, exploitation at work and others. (Popova, 2018)

The results from the co-authors’ own study show that in the prevailing number of cases the children from THF left in Bulgaria while their parents work abroad, have health problems. The main reason for them is the **deficit of everyday competent care and attention** to the child’s state, as well as the untimely search for specialized help. The stress experienced by the children also has a negative impact on their immune system and thus, on their health status.

As much as they are trying to raise their grandchildren, the grandparents or other relatives cannot replace the parents because of generation differences, lack of capacity, health problems, etc. This is valid especially in the cases when the child needs advice connected with his/her physiological status.

The emotional state of the children from TNF is unstable, characterized with anxiety, withdrawal and sometimes with depressions, which require the intervention of a specialist. The main reason for the emotional problems of such children is the **deficit of emotional attachment** – the children feel abandoned by their parents, grieving for them and in many cases permanently alienated from them, which undermines the value of the family in these children’s development. At the same time, this emotional state is a background against which the various socializing impacts are difficult and incomplete and their results are unsatisfactory.

Most of the children with migrant parents have problems with their success and behavior at school. The main reason for this is the **deficit of support and control** not only by the parents abroad but also by caregivers in the country of origin. For the confused and disoriented child, the education ceases to be a value and, in many cases, the most normal reaction is his/her rebellion against the unfavorable circumstances demonstrated in deviant manifestations.

Most of the children from TNF manifest deviant behavior which indicate the **deficit of authority and role model to be followed up**. Because of the diminished control and lack of parental authority, the child with parents abroad can easily fall into an inappropriate environment which motivates him or her to use and subsequently develop dependence on alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs, or to have criminal behavior.

As a rule, this child has not received an early support from the institutions and becomes the object of intervention after his/her registering in the police or a signal about his/her situation.

The data from the in-depth interviews allow us to draw conclusions about one socialization deficit with key importance for the children from TNF – the **deficit of values**. Firstly, when the child is growing up without one or both parents, he/she suffers from the insufficient socializing impact of the family values – gathering around the dinner table or celebrating holidays, sharing problems, mutual help, distribution of the family roles, etc. Such a child develops selfishness and consumerism, perceiving his parents mainly as a source of finances and material benefits. Many participants in the in-depth interviews report about similar attitudes. Other respondents report about cases where the child uses the hard-earned money from his parents for gambling, alcohol or drugs and this is an even more severe deformation of the child's value system.

For some of the children with migrant parents the education is not a value. The illustration for this is their bad success at school and their unwillingness to attend the lessons but all this causes problems in children's cognitive development.

The parental residing in a foreign country and the better living conditions there, in comparison with the country of origin, can lead to problems with children's identity and their affiliation to their own ethnocultural group and nation. In such situation, it is difficult for the children from TNF to form national cultural values, pride and a strong sense of belonging to the native culture.

Last but not least, the absence of the parents also impedes the proper formation of such socially approved instrumental values as industriousness, perseverance, commitment, tolerance and others, mainly due to the lack of role models.

The indicated deficits in the socialization of children from TNF are caused by the dysfunctions of such families in the context of social transformation and migration. As it was noted above in the empirical data, the disturbed function of socialization and primary control has a very serious negative impact on the children's cognitive, psychological and emotional state, which can be qualified as risks for the children's development.

5. Conclusions

On the basis of the data above we can conclude that the intra-EU mobility and the THF as one of the main types of its existence cause very serious social problems for the countries which are the largest sources of migration to the West within the EU – Romania, Bulgaria and other Eastern member states. These problems are for the society, for the family as a social institute and for the children from such families. Some of them can be summarized, as follows:

- First of all, the society suffers from the migration processes by reducing the natural growth, population aging, brain drain and so on.
- The negative effects for the members of the intra-EU migrant families and the TNF are: changes in the social hierarchy of the couple, disintegration of the family, insufficient capacity of the grandparents in taking responsibilities for the children left behind.
- The most serious negative effects are for the children from the families indicated above. They experience deficits in their socialization and risks for their further development: deficits of communication, support, care, control; deficits in their cognitive, emotional and psychological development, lack of relevant model of behavior. All these deficits affect the

socialization process and cause risks for the overall development of such children and their adaptation to the contemporary societies.

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