



*In
Collaboration
with*



LEFT BEHIND

The impact of economic migration on children left behind and their families

Brussels, 2 March 2011

Free movement of workers is a fundamental principle of the European Union. Following recent EU enlargements migration flows have significantly increased East-West driven by the prospect of better employment opportunities and a higher standard of living. While countries of origin are concerned by the brain drain and loss of human capital, several western EU countries have actively sought to recruit outside their borders to fill labour shortages.

Workers mobility can help to address skills gaps and contribute to economic growth. Nonetheless a short-term focus on economic benefits can obscure the human and social costs that may produce economic costs in the longer-term. Far too little attention is given to the impact of economic migration on children, even though it can seriously affect their well-being and life chances.

So far **the phenomenon of “children left behind” due to their parents’ migration has been neglected in migration policies.** Very often parents intend a temporary departure but it becomes a long-term migration. Children can be left with extended family members or friends for several years. The experience can have heavy consequences for children such as increasing their risk of school drop-out or lower performance, neglect, inadequate access to sanitation, hygiene, proper clothing, and difficulties in their emotional and relational development.

Recommendations to the European Commission:

In **March 2009 the European Parliament voted a Resolution (B6-0112/2009) on migrant children left behind in the country of origin.** In this resolution the EP highlighted the need of action and (a) calls on the Commission to undertake a study to assess the extent, at EU level, of the phenomenon [...]; (b) [...]propose to all interested parties the adequate application of the already existing means to help migrants and their children who remain in the country of origin; (c) calls on the Commission and the Member States to actively involve the social partners and NGOs in actions targeting the improvement of migrants’ children;

1. Having consistent data at EU level is fundamental to a better understanding of the issue and elaboration of appropriate policies. Without data action is likely to remain reactive and sporadic. We therefore call on the Commission to urgently launch **the study to assess the extent of this phenomenon at EU level indicated in the Resolution as soon as possible.**
2. Workers mobility is at the heart of the Europe 2020 strategy. However, pursuing growth alone can have perverse effects with long-term social and economic costs. In order to reduce the exposure of children to these risks, we call on the Commission to ensure the Europe 2020 strategy adopts a balanced approach to social inclusion and economic and employment growth

3. The European Commission and Member States have policies on protection of children's rights and social policy in favor of families and children, but they do not consider these specific, and new, types of families, often because they are still unknown and underestimated. **For this reason, we call on the Commission to** give visibility to this issue and facilitate EU cooperation to exchange policy and practice. Forums and consultation with NGOs and social partners and a thematic year on migration and integration of migrants could be promoted under the Platform against poverty and social exclusion.

Recommendation to the EP:

The European Parliament has shown strong interest on this topic and voted a Resolution. However, the debate around this issue needs to be raised and explored also from different perspectives and EP agendas.

1. It is important to analyse and understand the phenomenon from the children's rights perspective, within the **LIBE Committee with respect to follow-up to EC Communication on children's rights** which has been launched on 15 February 2011. The Communication is the basis for the strategy for children's rights of 2011 – 2014. Despite the importance of this phenomenon, the issue of children left behind has not been included in the Communication. We call on the European Parliament to point out the necessity of the inclusion of such an important issue for Europe.
2. Social policies are at the core of interventions in favor of children left behind and their families. In the framework on Europe 2020, in December 2010 in the Communication on the **European Platform Against Poverty**, the European Commission committed to prepare a **Recommendation on child poverty and well being**. Poverty is often the cause of migration and at the same time an effect on children left behind, in terms of emotional deprivation and lack of parental care. We call on the **EMPL Committee to underline this and follow up accordingly the development of the EC Recommendation**.
3. One of the **main effects of parents migration**, that can be seen also on the short term, is linked to the **social and educational development of children** who are left behind. Increase of early school leavers, low attendance and performance. We call on the **EDUC Committee** to bear in mind difficulties of these children in the efforts to reduce early school leaving and to promote early education and care, in the Committee and in relation with Member States.

For further reading : [conference website and Children Left Behind network](#)

Albero della Vita Avenue des Arts 1-2, B-1210 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32 (0)2 201 22 25 - info@childrenleftbehind.eu - www.childrenleftbehind.eu