

# **HOME ALONE!**

**STUDY MADE IN IASI AREA ON CHILDREN SEPARATED FROM ONE OR BOTH PARENTS AS RESULT TO PARENTS LEAVING TO WORK ABROAD**

This study has been conducted as part of the project “Home Alone” administrated by Alternative Sociale Association in partnership with the Iasi County School Inspectorate, the Iasi County Police Inspectorate and the Iasi Probation Service. The project was financed by the Dutch Embassy in Bucharest through Matra-Kap program. The study was conducted by SC INTROSPEKT SRL Research

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## Table of contents

1. INTRODUCTION .....	3
2. METHODOLOGY.....	4
3. FAMILY PROFILE .....	4
3.1. Socio-demographical characteristics.....	4
3.2. Favoring factors.....	7
3.3. Parental responsibilities.....	9
3.4. The effects of the phenomenon on the family.....	15
4. THE CHILD'S PROFILE.....	16
4.1. Socio-demographical characteristics.....	16
4.2. Children's problems or "children as a problem".....	18
4.4. The child "home alone".....	23
5. SUGGESTIONS FOR A THEORETICAL INTERVENTION MODEL .....	25
6. CONCLUSIONS.....	27

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In Romania, after 1990 the social changes as well as the market economy transition have determined new social factors, some of which with influence on the life quality entering the sphere of social protection.

It's a well known fact that for a part of the population living in poverty, under the decent level of need satisfaction, the life quality is constantly decreasing. The poverty, from a normal social functioning perspective includes "inexistence of those means ensuring for the subject a complete participation to the social life, a complete fulfillment of all attributed roles, participation to minimum training activities that offer the chances to self development" <sup>1</sup>.

The economic analysts have noticed the fact that half of the poor population in Romania are not amongst the social excluded (unemployed, chronically ill persons, persons with disabilities) or semi-excluded (retired persons); they are people with stable jobs but so poorly paid that they cannot cover basic life needs.

The solution found by part of the poor population regarding the increasing of life quality is finding a job on the external labor market. The high interest of Romanians to leave the country (even for a short period of time) in order to find a job is enforced by statistical data. On its activity report for 2005 the Office for Labor Migration shows the total number of workers mediated by this institution was 42.758, out of which 20.246 were men and 22.512 were women aged between 18 and 25 years 8.439 aged between 26 and 35 years 20.097, 36 – 45 years, 11.552 and over 45 years 2.670, and from the above mentioned total 5.675 originated from North-Eastern Romania.

The departure of one or both parents in a family to work abroad is shaped as a social phenomenon. We can see it around us, in our own families or of those next to us, in our working environment where this option is presented in most of the cases as a very easy alternative for solving financial difficulties and the intention – initially good – to change the family economic situation leads with the passage of time to negative effects on the family and children. What specifically determines the family to take a decision like this, how does it influence the family environment, how does the child perceive the changes within the family structure and how do these changes influence the child are just part of the questions we wish to answer with this study.

Part of the "Home Alone" project administrated by Alternative Sociale Association, the present study is preliminary, exploratory and brings under attention a topic recently discovered in the Romanian social field and the child and family protection, separation of the child/children from one or both parents as an effect of external migration, of parents going to work abroad.

<sup>1</sup> Ferreol, G. „Psych-social aspects of poverty”, Ed. Polirom, Iasi 1999, p.232

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The sociologic investigation was conducted from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives following, as much as possible, the unity and complementarities of the approaches and the result presentation combines as well quantitative statistical data with fragments from interviews with professionals involved in child protection.

The scientific process included:

- sociological investigation based on a bi-staged stratified questionnaire applied to a sample of pupils aged 10 to 19 years from urban area (Iasi) and rural area (Raducaneni);
- two focus-groups with child protection specialists from the two areas. The purpose of the scientific process was to identify the following aspects and/or tendencies:
  - shaping the profile of the family where parents going to work abroad have the highest frequency;
  - identifying the favoring factors for parents going to work abroad;
  - the way the child/children perceive the leaving of their parents to work abroad;
  - the external migration effects on the family environment and particularly on the child;
- identification of the new tendencies and prevention of social protection cases: children whose parents have gone to work abroad.

Data gathering was made in two stages:

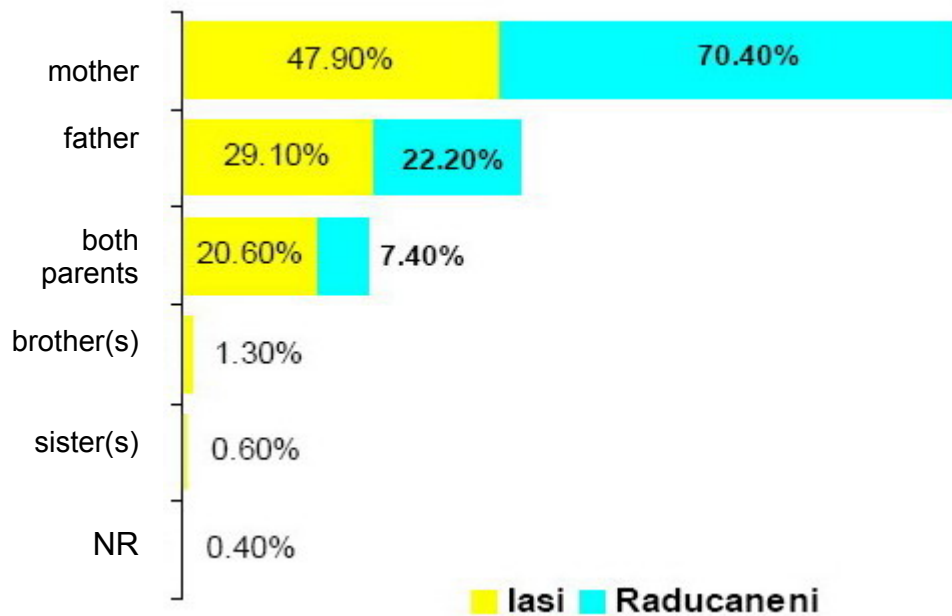
1. identifying the pupils whose parents have gone to work abroad through the application of a selection questionnaire in 95% of the schools and high-schools in Iasi. Following this stage 4156 pupils aged 10 to 19 years have declared that at least one member of their family is gone to work abroad;
2. constructing a bi-staged stratified sample from the 4156 pupils. In the sample were included pupils from Raducaneni. The sample volume is of 734 pupils. The results are representative for the school population in Iasi with an error of  $\pm 3\%$ .

## 3. FAMILY PROFILE

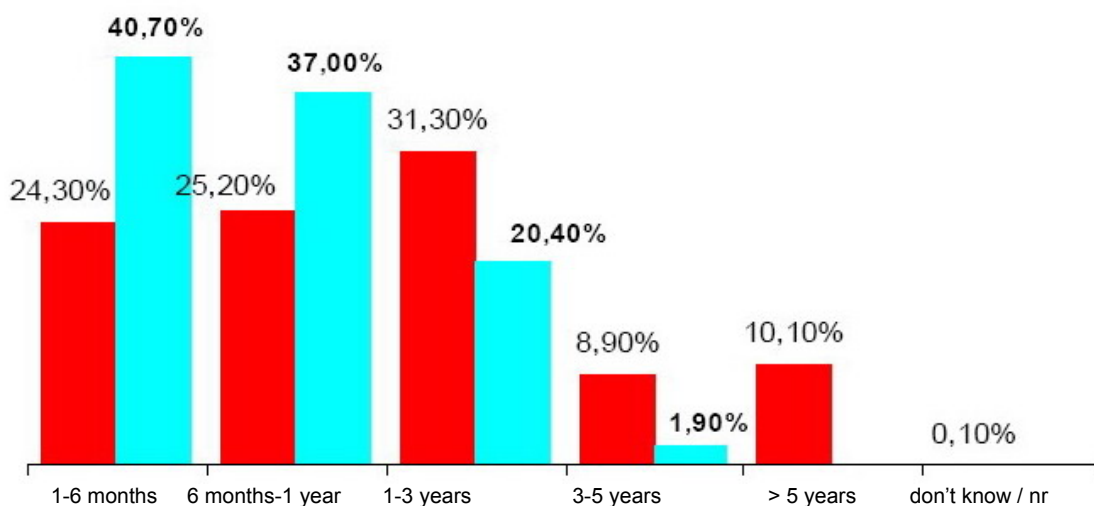
In making the family profile the work frames we tried to identify were: who of the two parents is leaving the family environment choosing to go to work abroad, the departure duration, the reasons for taking this decision and its importance, the effects on the family (positive and negative effects) grouping it into four areas of presentation: socio-demographic characteristics, favoring factors, parental responsibilities and consequences.

### 3.1. Socio-demographical characteristics

In most of the situations, the parent choosing to go to work abroad is the mother, no matter if we're talking about the rural area (70,4%) or the urban area (47,9%) whilst the fathers from the urban area represent 29,1% and those from the rural area a similar proportion.

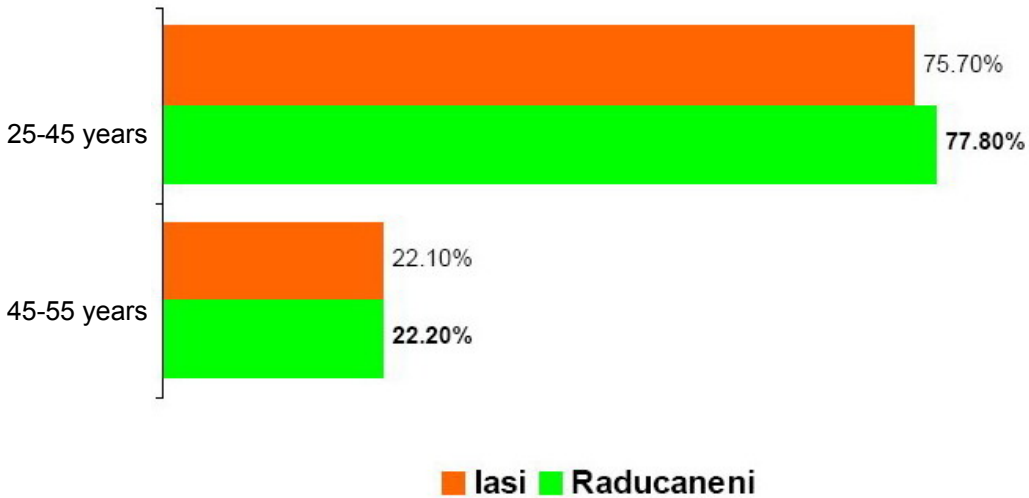


The number of both parents going to work abroad is significantly larger for parents in the urban area (20,6%) unlike the parents in the rural area (7,4%) and the time spent to work abroad is raising in cases where both parents are together abroad. At the time of the measurements significant values are registered in duration of parents absenteeism from the family for intervals from 1 to 6 months (40,7%) and 6 months up to 1 year (37,0%) in rural area. These tendencies can constitute the object of the analysis for a future measurement in case the values will increase.

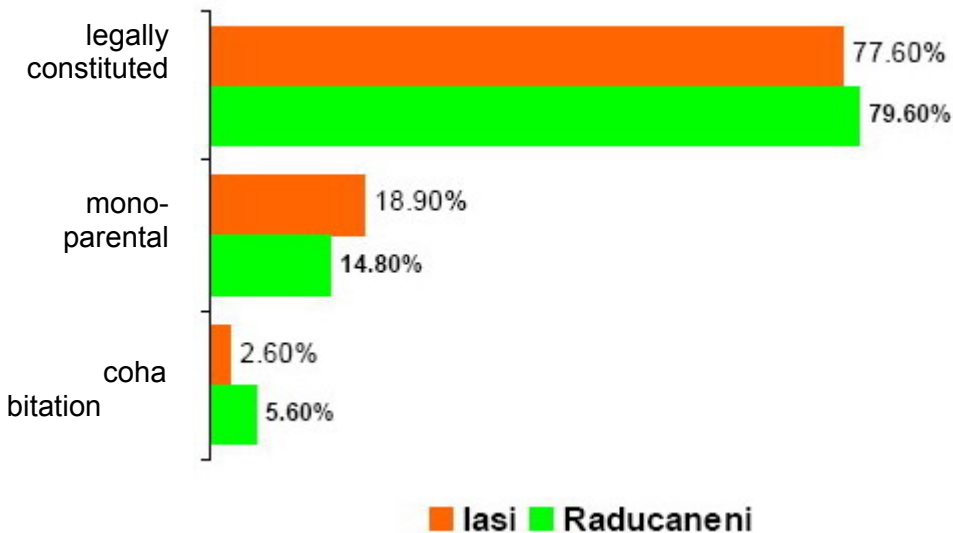


For the urban area significant values are included for 1 – 3 years (31,30%) and for the duration larger than 5 years (10,10%). The larger the duration of absenteeism and, at the same time, more representative for the population investigated, the more “profound” the effects will show (see 3.3. and 3.4).

The parents going to work abroad, no matter of the area they originate, rural or urban, have ages between 25 and 45 years,



forming a family legally constituted and having two, three children, the questioned child being, most often, the first born.

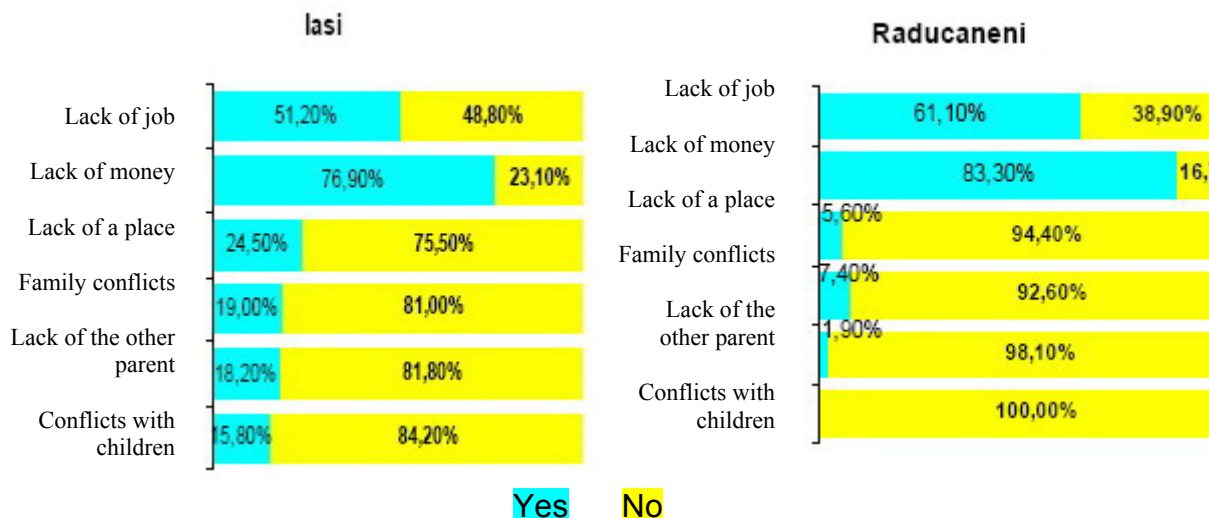


The process of going to work abroad seems to be influenced by the child's sex and age. Therefore the decision for both parents to go and work abroad is more frequent in the families where the daughters attend high-school (68,2%) unlike the families with sons attending the same level of education (31,8%) and the proportion is kept

for children attending gymnasium (66,7%) girls and (33,3%) boys. In the situation where only the mother has left to work abroad in the respective families we meet girls (52%) and boys (48%) – pupils attending school generally and (64,5%) girls and (35,5%) boys pupils attending high-school.

### 3.2. Favoring factors

From the point of view of the investigated population the economic factor is the factor favoring external migration. The children perceive and accept the lack of money as well as their parents' unemployment as the main reason for their going to work abroad.



Factors contributing to parents going abroad to work can be grouped into two categories: economic and social – with direct referral to family environment. The respondents from the urban area (both those attending gymnasium and high-school) indicated as significant the economic factors: unemployment (51,20%), lack of money (76,90%).

We can associate between unemployment representing an important reason to go to work abroad and the positive aspects of the of migration mentioned by the respondents: (49,10%) consider money as a positive aspect of their parents leaving. Like wise are remembered aspects such as the raise of the living standard (13,4%) and a better job for the parents (5,1%). With regards to lack of money as main reason, the tendencies are similar, mentioning as positive aspects the money – 50,5% and, respectively, the raise of the living standards – 13,7%.

Unemployment represents an important reason for going to work abroad in case of families with 2 or 3 children. An increasing tendency is registered according to the number of children in a family: one child – 22,0%, two children – 29,4% and three children – 33,4%. The same pattern is noticed for the case where the lack of money is evoked as main reason for going abroad.

The associations between the respondents' levels of study or parents' age and the appreciation as main factor for migration of unemployment does not present significant values.

With regards to the rural area we notice there are a few differences between the pattern specific to the urban area and the rural area, differences presented synthetically in the graphic above: thinking of the economic factors, the lack of a place to live no longer represents such an important reason in the rural area whilst the importance of the first two increases.

The participants to the focus-group admit that the economic factors favor migration but at the same time they bring into the discussion the social imitation, the relative poverty and the examples of success.

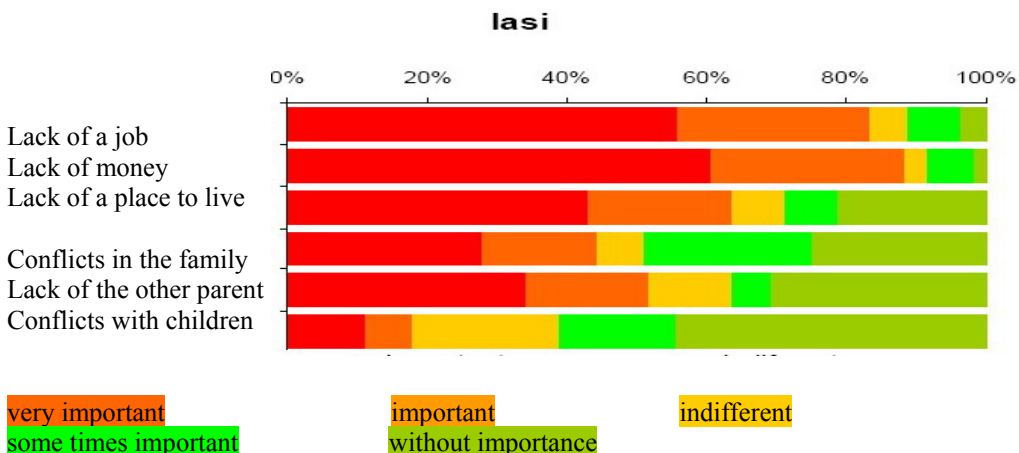
*„(...) as stated, the persons going abroad to work have very low incomes (...) in reality, if you get deeper into the topic you'll see that immediate departure involves certain costs (...)” (Jurist)*

*„the persons choosing to go to work abroad don't live in misery, in absolute poverty (...) we can consider they have an income but wish for more (...) we can speak in this case of relative poverty (...)” (Sociologist)*

*„In the case of people benefiting from social aid, they barely succeed to make a living here. The beneficiaries of social aid represent a different category, they have no income, are marginalized, they live in ghettos and are alcohol consumers and are different than those with low income. Those going to work abroad come from the category of persons with low income.” (Social Worker)*

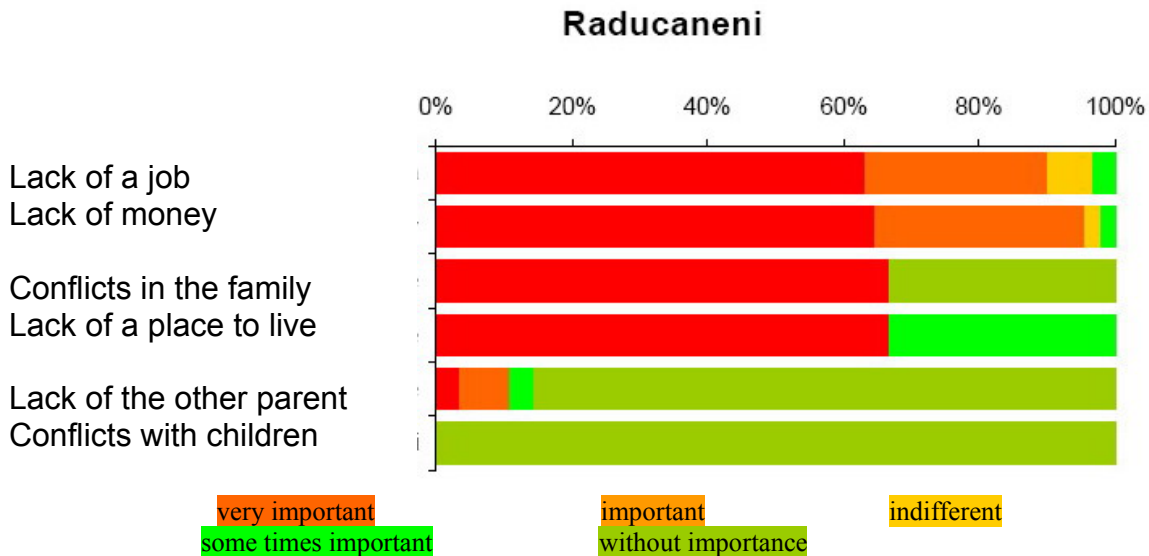
*„another reason is the example offered by others (...) going to work abroad appears to many as a already verified success strategy (...) the social imitation comes into place” (social worker)*

Following the economic factors (lack of money, unemployment, lack of a place to live) considered by the school population as being of major importance, the secondary position is represented by the existence of conflicts within the family, but also the missing of the other parent. Therefore we mustn't consider as effects of external migration poverty or unemployment and ignore the changes faced by the family, changes within the family structure that can in turn lead to the same decision.





Looking from the point of view of the importance it seems the investigated population from the rural area does not differentiate the economic factors from family conflict factors, considering both of high importance in taking the decision to go to work abroad.



The importance respondents give to economic factors as decisive factors (including lack of a place to live) for going to work abroad as increased importance due to conflict family environment is synthetically presented in the above graphic.

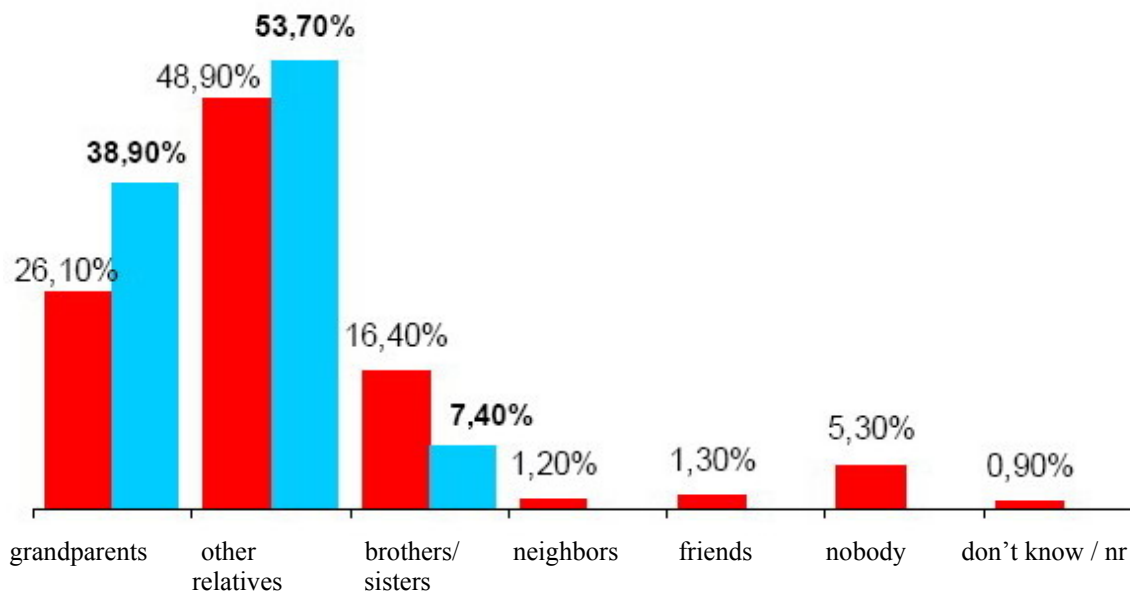
*„In the case where parents decide to break up, one going to work abroad, the specified reason is the financial one although the causes include family conflicts they try to solve in this manner (...) the economic reason is not the only reason; it can be just a cover for the real causes.” (Social Worker)*

*„the family problems existed prior to one parent going to work abroad and they were showing; the problem of divorce as well as the communication issues appeared before one of the parent went abroad” (social worker)*

The economic favoring factors as well as family factors don't act linearly as a cause and aren't independent towards each other. They correlate and belong to a social context, to a communitarian cultural model.

### **3.3. Parental responsibilities**

One of the responsibilities emphasizing the fundamental role of the family in forming its descendents is protection. The way parents went to work abroad exercise this role includes, on one hand, trusting the child to another person to be raised and educated and on another hand the modality chosen by the parent to do so (legally or not).



The parents gone to work abroad both in the urban and the rural areas decide to leave their children to one of the larger family member - grandparents (26,1%, Iasi; 38,9%, Raducaneni) and to other relatives (48,9%, Iasi; 53,7%, Raducaneni).

In the urban area we notice a significant percentage for children that are trusted to nobody for care (5,3%, Iasi) (in the present study by person to whom the child had been trusted for care we understand an adult to whom the parent had trusted his/her child to be raised and educated as a legal or illegal process). Like wise, the children from urban area are left in the care of brothers/sisters which involves tasks overload and role over-demand (16,4%, Iasi).

The duration of parents' absenteeism from the family environment is part of the general tendency – 1-3 years – exception in case of children trusted to other relatives than grandparents and attending gymnasium (6 months – 1 year).

For a duration of the absenteeism 1 – 6 months we notice an increasing tendency for the rural area (48,3%, Răducăneni unlike 26,6%, Iași) in case of children trusted to other relatives . the same tendency is valid for a duration of the absenteeism of 6 months – 1 year (37,9%, Răducăneni unlike 28,1%, Iași).

With regards to legally trusting the children in the care of grandparents we notice a difference according to residency: (18,0%, Iași) unlike (4,8%, Răducăneni). The same tendency is kept in case of entrusting the children to other relatives (8,1%, Iași; 3,4%, Răducăneni).

	Iasi	Percentages	Raducaneni
Yes	10,0%	3,7%	Yes
No	60,0%	74,1%	No
Don't know	28,6%	22,2%	Don't know
NR	1,5%		NR
Total	100,0	100,0	Total

No matter the residency, the general tendency is of not trusting the children by legal means – just 3,7% of the parents from the rural area and 10,0% from the urban area have benefited from legal services.

*„The mandate some of the parents give to care persons (through a legal service) to cash the child’s monthly allowance or to be able to act for the best interest of the child when the situation demands it does not obligate (from a juridical point of view) the person to offer care on a unlimited period of time. (Social Worker)*

*„Those acting this way have learned about these aspects and take this measure only if it is very useful to the child in order to avoid a crisis situation.” (Sociologist)*

*„The parents have no information about this and just leave their children (...) the children becoming a problem for the family or for neighbors.” (Jurist)*

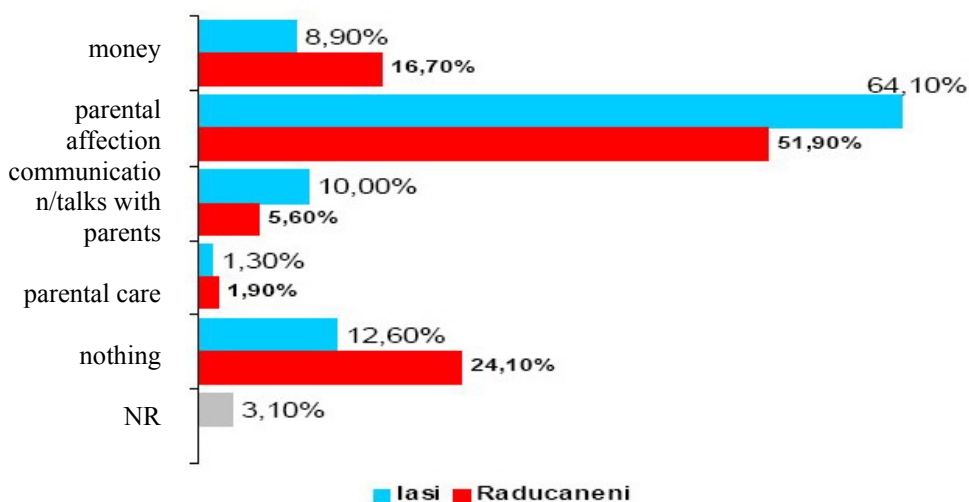
### Ensuring the subsistence

According to the duration of one or both family member absenteeism and to the children’s levels of study we can state that the financial needs of the children attending gymnasium do not present significant differences: 1 – 6 months (13,7%), 1 – 3 years (13,0%) and 3 – 5 years (12,9%), but referring to the financial needs of pupils attending high-school the maximum values correlate with the interval 1 – 6 months (12,9%) and the interval more than 5 years (12,5%).

Positive aspects of parents going abroad (Iasi)	Percentages		Positive aspects of parents going abroad (Raducaneni)
Money	47,4%	33,3%	Money
Place to live/endowing	3,1%	13,0%	Place to live/endowing
Increase of living standards	13,0%	14,8%	Increase of living standards
Money for education	0,7%	-	Money for education
Lack of debts	1,2%	1,9%	Lack of debts
Various received/purchased goods	4,1%	9,3%	Various received/purchased goods

### Maintaining the attachment connection

What do you miss most since your parents have left to work abroad? (choice 1)



The absenteeism duration in case of one or both members of the family can be correlated with a series of problems or with the non-insurance of part of the child's needs. In the case of the investigated population attending gymnasium we can state that with regards to *the need for affection* significant values correspond to the durations of parent(s) absenteeism: 6 months – 1 year (75,5%), 1 – 3 years (69,6%) and 3 – 5 years (77,4%). For pupils attending high-school significant are certain characteristics of the correlation between the duration of the parents absenteeism and certain needs of the children. Therefore the need for affection decreases in accordance with the increasing of the parent(s) absenteeism duration: 6 months – 1 year (67,8%), 1 – 3 years (57,1%), 3 – 5 years (56,7%) and the interval larger than 5 years (42,5%) and gradually is being replaced by the need for communication with parents as can be seen in the following percentages: 6 months – 1 year (8,9%), 1 – 3 years (12,0%), 3 – 5 years (20,0%), and the interval larger than 5 years (27,5%). Referring to affective needs claimed by children left in the care of grandparents are noticeable the differences between residencies: the lack of affection is showing (71,9%) in children from Iasi unlike (47,6%) in children from Răducăneni. The model is similar in case of the children left in the care of other relatives (59,9%, Iași; 51,7%, Răducăneni).

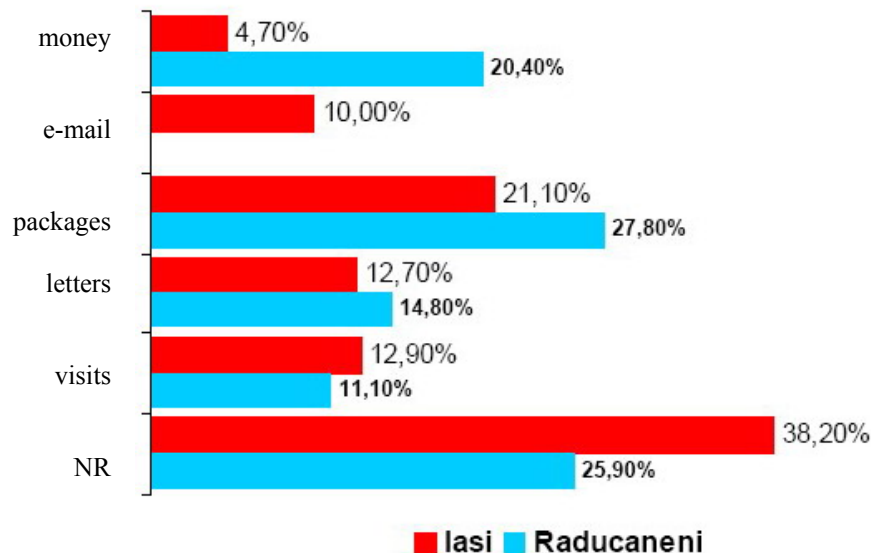
The quality of future social relationships with colleagues, friends, own family depends on the way this affective need is being satisfied. *„what these children miss the most is the lack for affection from the parent gone to work abroad (...) initially the adolescent finds arguments to explain his/her parent missing and is even able to enumerate the benefits (clothing, money) but if the talk goes along they will tell you what they really feel is the lack of their parent”* (school counselor)

### Maintaining the connection with the child

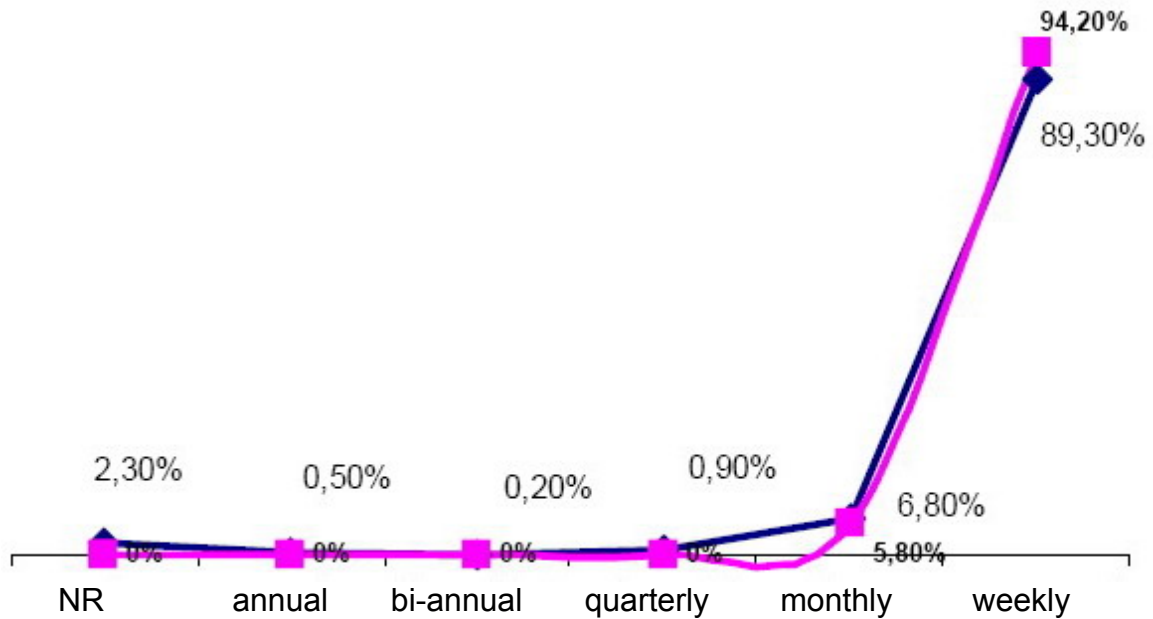
For the question: How did you maintain the connection with your parent(s) after his/her/their leaving to work abroad? – The respondents have stated in most of the cases that the preferred way to communicate is throughout the phone calls.

Iasi	Percentages
phone calls	96,2%
letters	0,4%
e-mail	0,6%
visits	0,1%
packages	0,4%
money	0,4%
no connection maintained	0,9%
NR	0,9%
Total	100

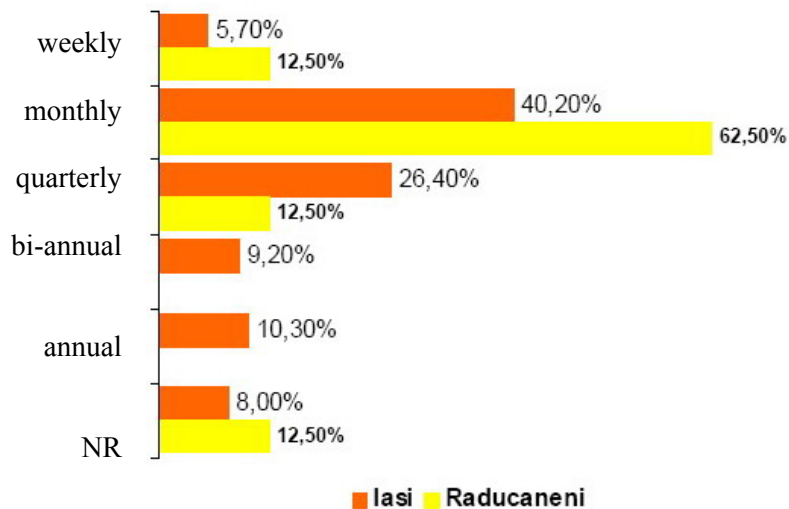
Raducaneni	Percentages
phone calls	96,3%
NR	3,7%
Total	100



Secondary modalities for communication differ from one residency area to another. The respondents from the rural area consider as simple modality of communication with the parent the simple receivable of money and/or of packages, depersonalizing the act of communication even if its absence is acknowledged. The fable electronic system in the rural area makes the e-mail a mean for communication exclusively urban.



The frequency of communication is different from the urban area to the rural area with the exception of weekly phone calls. With regards to the money as “mean of communication” the highest frequency is presented in the rural area (monthly – 81,8%, urban 53,1%). The pupils in Iasi receive packages from family members that went abroad to work on monthly basis (49,3%), whilst the pupils in Raducaneni every three months (18,2%). If in the rural area letters are still preferred (62,5% - monthly), in the urban area the e-mail is used every week (75% - Iași).



### 3.4. The effects of the phenomenon on the family

Positive aspects of parents going to work abroad: (1)	Percentages
money	47,4%
place to live/living conditions/endowing	3,1%
greater freedom	4,5%
increase of living standards	13,0%
better job (for the parents)	3,4%
money for education	0,7%
“life on your own”	0,9%
lack of debts	1,2%
no positive aspect	0,4%
various received/purchased goods	4,1%
“a better future”	2,3%
visits abroad	1,5%
other aspects	3,7%
decrease (lack) of family conflicts	1,8%
NR	12,0%
Total	100,0

Positive aspects of parents going to work abroad: (1)	Percentages
money	33,3%
place to live/living conditions/endowing	13,0%
increase of living standards	14,8%
better job (for the parents)	5,6%
“life on your own”	1,9%
lack of debts	1,9%
no positive aspect	1,9%
various received/purchased goods	9,3%
“a better future”	3,7%
other aspects	11,1%
decrease (lack) of family conflicts	1,9%
NR	1,9%
Total	100,0

For both areas of residency the main positive aspects are the more pragmatic ones justifying the stated reason for going to work abroad. Remains though without cover the needs for better relations that maintains the identified conflict pattern. Like wise, just for the urban area the respondents identified new aspects: money for education (signaled only by children without brothers and sisters) and greater freedom especially met at girls attending high-school (61,1%).

With regards to the age criteria we can mention the fact that the pragmatic positive aspects (money, goods, endowing etc.) no matter of the residency area and education level appear for the age interval 14 – 16 years.

No matter the form of the positive aspect there is a difference according to sex: girls appreciate money, lack of debts, received/purchased goods, increase of the living standard as insurance for a “better future”. There is one exception in boys attending gymnasium and who appreciate freedom.

The focus-group analysis identified the following positive aspects of parents going to work abroad:

- increase of living standards  
“they succeed to improve their financial situation” (social worker)

- modification of family structure

*“family problems don’t appear spontaneously after leaving to work abroad, they appear in the families where these existed prior to going away” (School Counselor)*

*“the separation from the family for a period of 2, 3 years causes a rupture in the family (...) going to work abroad attracts separation, new relations, divorce (...)” (Teacher)*

*“the effects appear in the family also according to the degree of family functioning before the departure. If the family was a dysfunctional one before the departure it may have as a consequence the family dissolution” (social worker)*

*„parents find strategies to administrate the changes related to the family structure” (Psychologist)*

- changes in assuming family roles (role overload, role reversal)

*“in case of children with both parents away it appears the taking over of the parental role by the older child; the older brother must take care of the younger ones, neglecting scholar other formative activities” (Sociologist)*

- cultural exchange

*“parents return but not only with money, they come back with a different mentality, the parents have met a different culture with influence on the family culture. They come back with money and another perspective on life, on the relation with their children, on the child’s education and profession” (Sociologist)*

*“the ones that have been abroad to work returned enriched not necessarily with money but with a different mentality and culture after they had encountered another social model. The effects are noticeable in the child also: on the child’s personality with effects especially on the labor discipline.” (School Counselor)*

*“(...) visiting the parents abroad and benefiting from this cultural exchange. It’s a chance that wouldn’t have been possible under different situations” (Jurist)*

- future model (?)

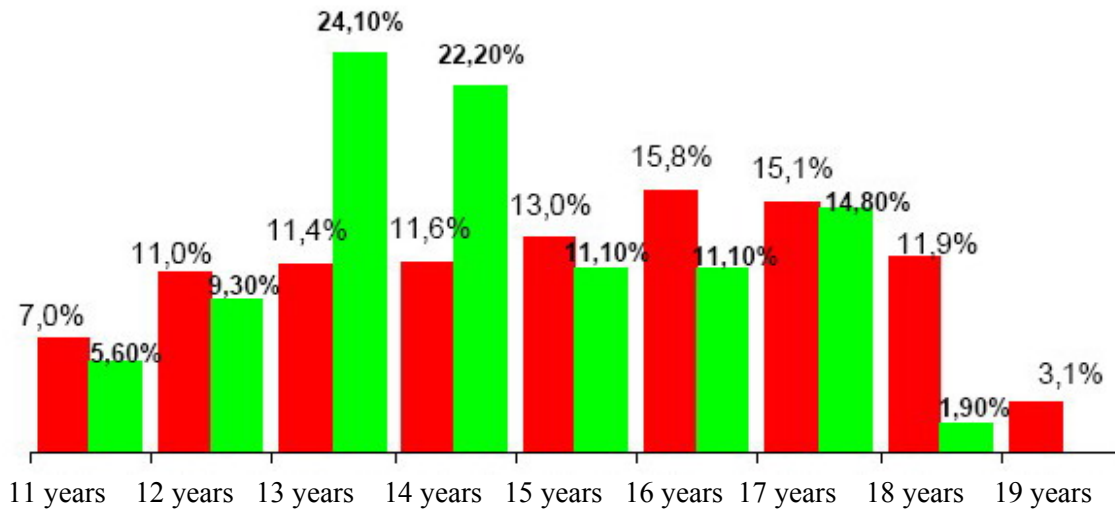
*“Taking over this family model by descendents (...) imitating the new family style” (Sociologist)*

## **4. THE CHILD’S PROFILE**

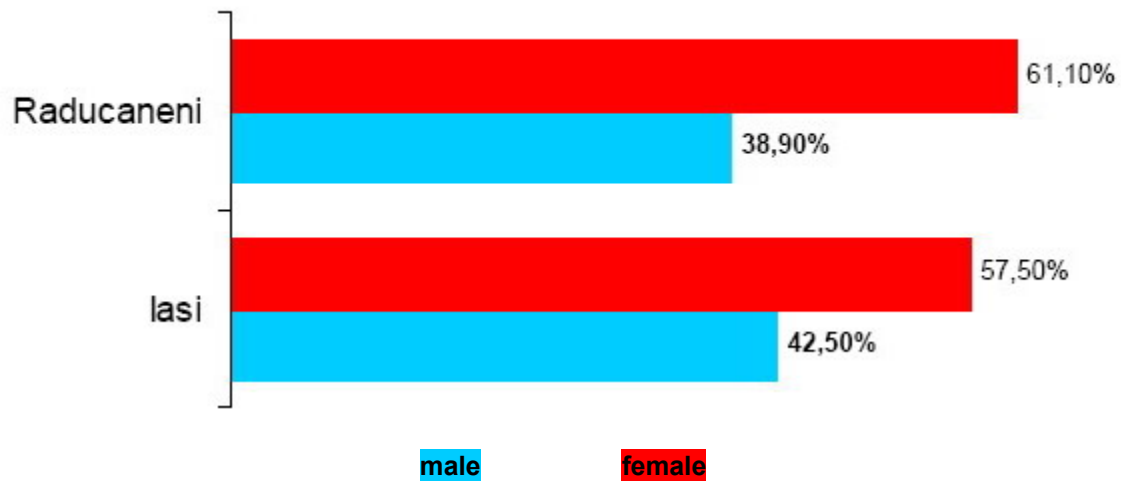
### **4.1. Socio-demographical characteristics**

From what we could extract from the investigated population it results that parents going to work abroad is more frequently met in the families with children aged 13 to 14 years (the rural area) and 16 to 18 years (the urban area). With regards to respondents’ sex in the rural area as well as in the urban area we registered a high frequency to female population.





Child's sex

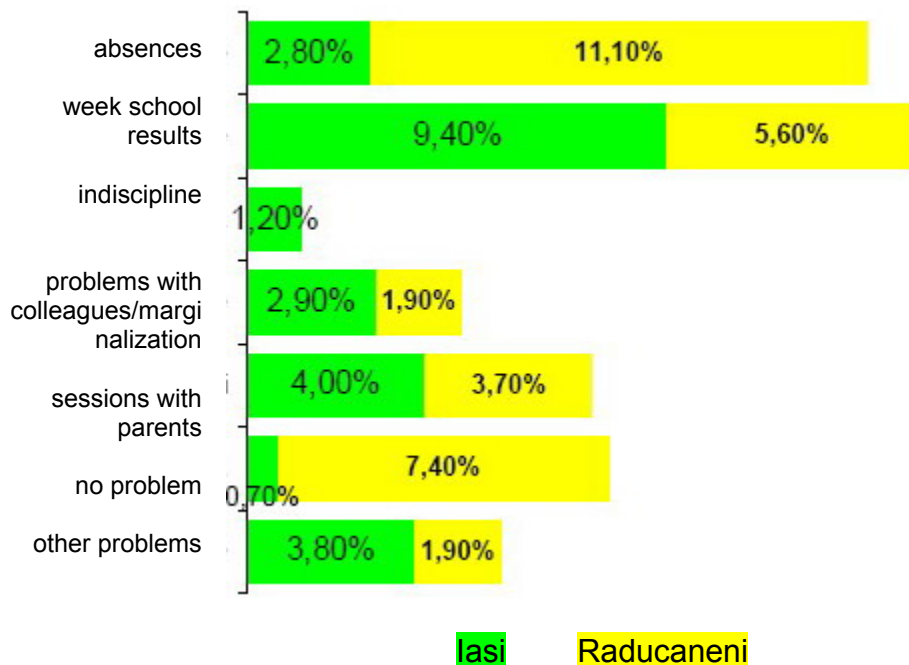


Another characteristic of the children whose parents went to work abroad is the birth rang, an important characteristic if we look over the analysis of both favoring factors and problems signaled after the parents' departure.

Iasi	Percentages	Raducaneni	Percentages
1	53,1%	1	50,0%
2	31,0%	2	22,2%
3	11,0%	3	14,8%
4	2,6%	4	9,3%
5	1,5%	5	3,7%
6	0,3%	Total	100,0
7	0,1%		
9	0,1%		
10	0,1%		
Total	100,0		

#### 4.2. Children's problems or "children as a problem"

After the mother or both parents have gone to work abroad, facing the lack of affection from the missing parent and the lack of supervision the children are confronted with a series of problems of greater or lesser importance in the school environment, within the group of friends, in the community. What are these problems, how do children perceive it and what are the resources they activate in order to solve it?



The main identified problems within the school environment refer to the way children interact and, especially, to how they fulfill their school tasks. As the above graphic

indicates, the absenteeism and the indiscipline (as forms of school deviation) have higher levels for the investigated population in the rural area whilst the week school marks of the children are weaker in the urban area. A higher frequency in the urban area is noticed when it comes to conflicts with colleagues and the tendency for marginalization.

When looked upon the variable "sex" the registered values are not significant to non-fulfillment of school requirements, differences being noticed only with marginalization within the peer group as a characteristic for the girls (40,0%, male, 60,0%, female) and indiscipline (male, 87,5%, female, 12,5% - Iasi), as a characteristic for the boys. For indiscipline is kept the mentioned tendency no matter the level of studies, whilst the marginalization tendency within the group of pupils is higher only for boys attending gymnasium (77,8%, male, 22,2%, female), the same tendencies being valid according to the number of brothers and sisters.

If the values reflecting absenteeism are directly proportional with the birth rang (rang 1 – 36,8%, rang 2 – 42,1%), the characteristic values for school results are indirectly proportional (rang 1 – 67,2%, rang 2 – 23,4%). The indirect proportionality according to the birth rang is kept also in the case of children with problems/marginalization (rang 1 – 35,0%, rang 2 – 30,0%).

No matter the residency or the level of studies, the absenteeism and week school results are signaled in a higher proportion in families legally constituted, whilst the indiscipline is more frequent in children from mono-parental families.

With regards to parents' age high values in signaling the absences, the week school results and the indiscipline we notice in the age interval 25 – 45 years;

No matter the level of studies, in the case of subjects left in the care of grandparents or other relatives higher values are registered for absences and poor school results in the rural area than in the urban area.

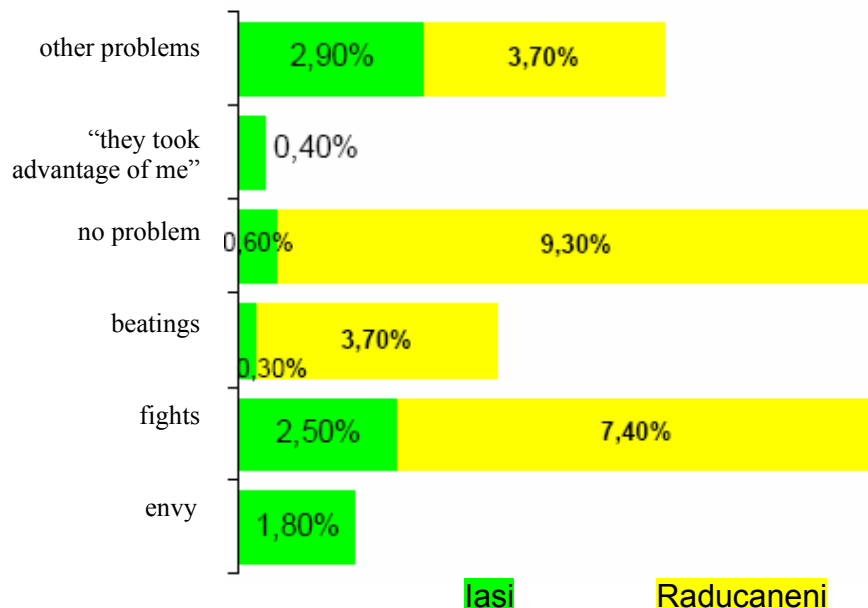
For the pupils attending gymnasium we can state the following: the problems children attending gymnasium face can be associated with the duration of their parents' absenteeism. This aspect will be developed at the level of the main socialization instances, but we can exemplify by establishing a connection between the duration of the absenteeism and the poor school results. If for a duration of 1 – 6 months, (5,3%) of the respondents mentioned poor school results, the values are higher for the intervals 6 months – 1 year (14,7%), 1 – 3 years (13,0%) and, respectively, the interval higher than 5 years (13,3%).

*"The absenteeism and the school drop out caused by lack of parental surveillance represent the first visible effects"* (Teacher)

*"The children with parents that have gone to work abroad shouldn't be reproached for this aspect as it currently happens some times (...)they are reproached that they do not contribute to the classroom funds, for example, although their mother is working abroad. Etiquettes come into place, the children feel they are accused by the decision their parent has taken in order to go to work abroad."* (School Counselor)

Within the peer group, according to the children's residency, we can state the following: in the rural area have been signaled with higher frequency forms of physical and verbal violence whilst in the urban area the violence is more refined

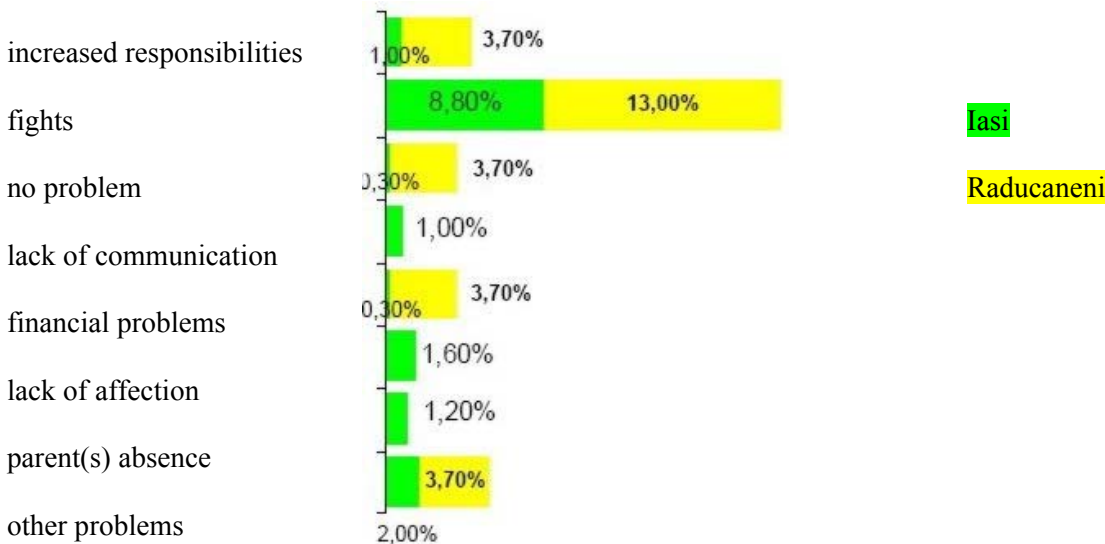
and hard to quantify. Other problems signaled by the subjects include the change of the entourage, of the group of friends and of the way they're being perceived (the change of the financial status – *now I have money*).



*“Initially the child takes the forms of self isolation, then there are the poor school results and than the group of peers is changed.”* (School Counselor)

*“(...) the frustration of the children with lesser possibilities is being felt and have started to show cases where teenagers receiving money from their parents and showing off with it are being robbed by school mates considering it's not fare that as an adolescent you should have so much money”* (Jurist)

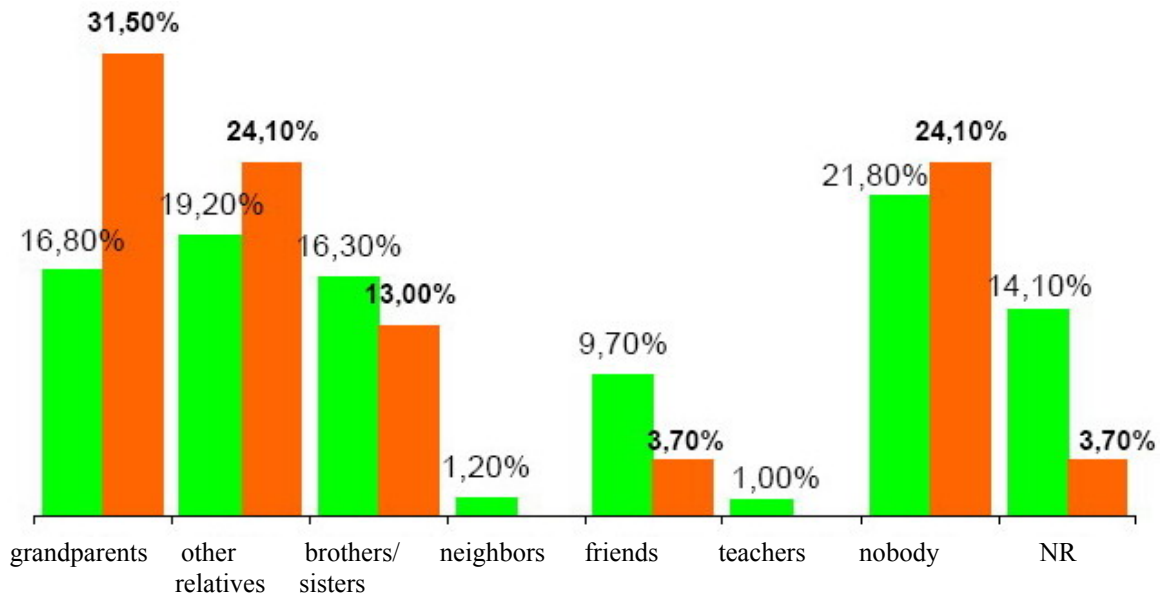
The same with the group of friends, within the family signs of verbal violence appear as response to lack of affection no matter the residency area, mentioning there is no physical violence. In the rural area there is both an increase in the number of responsibilities and in financial problems.



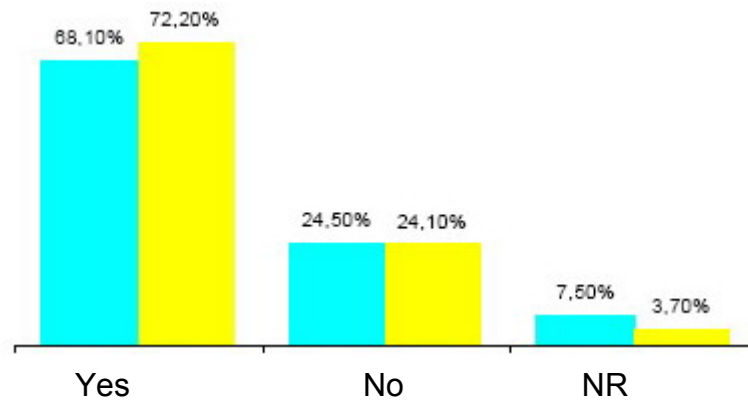
No matter the residency and the level of studies, the verbal violence is being kept at high values and is specific to the girls (26,7%, male, 73,3%, female – Iasi; 100%, female - Răducăneni). We can say that the violence is sustained by the lack of affection that had been claimed acutely by the subjects, no matter their level of studies, initially identified within the family of origin and then found back within the relationship with school colleagues; friends and the person the child had been trusted. In the urban area is noticeable an increase of the values signaling problem existence (the increase of responsibilities, fights and lack of affection) directly proportional with the increase of the number of brothers and sisters in one family. Especially for pupils attending high-school, the lack of communication is signaled as a problem – 42,9%; valid for both areas of residency and for girls attending high-school are the high percentages with regards to the increase of responsibilities and, implicitly, taking over the paternal role in the situation where both parents are abroad and the child is not left in the care of an adult (5,3%) and role overload by taking over a segment of the maternal role (we have already mentioned mothers represent the highest percentage of parents gone to work abroad – 70,4%, Raducaneni; 47,9%, Iasi). The above model is valid also according to the type of the family of origin and parents' age. *“Out of the cases I've met the mothers are gone abroad and the fathers left with the children don't exercise their affective role, they just bring money into the house.”* (Teacher)

*„ (...) the family though is not insensitive to the new problems. Throughout the penal process most of the parents return home, they stay until the problem is fixed and go away again, some even decide to remain (...) it has come to a peak, that child cannot do worse (...) the parents than choose between the financial status they've always dreamed of and the good of the child.”* (jurist)

In solving the problems the investigated population confronts with can activate two resource categories: human (the parent gone to work abroad and/or the person left to take care of the child) and institutional (social services). According to the residency area a high frequency is being registered with regards to grandparents' or care person involvement in solving the problems, but also a high frequency for the situations where the subjects cannot activate resources.



No matter the type of the problem signaled by the child, is noticeable the involvement of the parent(s) gone to work abroad in solving it. With regards to the way the problems are being solved, the moral support is most mentioned, no matter the residency area. The moral support (advices) and talks with the people involved in solving the problems is being made, generally, throughout phone calls.



Ways of helping signaled by the investigated population:

Iasi	Percentages		Raducaneni
material support	0,4%	-	material support
came home and solved the problem	0,6%	-	came home and solved the problem
showing interest	1,6%	5,6%	showing interest
other modalities	2,0%	1,9%	other modalities
talks with persons involved in solving the problem	6,1%	1,9%	talks with persons involved in solving the problem
financial support	9,7%	1,9%	financial support
moral support (advices)	24,5%	29,6%	moral support (advices)
NR	55,1%	59,3%	NR
Total	100,0		Total

No matter the residency area or the average duration of the parent(s) absence from the family environment, accessing the social services by the caring person (1,3% - Iasi; 1,9% - Raducaneni) or by the child (1,6 – Iasi; 1,9% - Raducaneni) is being done in a very low proportion. We can therefore conclude that either the family has found subsistence strategies or there is no need for social services either the caring person is not informed with regards to the existent types of social services in the community. *“the effects on the child are being sensed when the large family no longer represents a support for the child or when the parent gone to work abroad had promised a financial support to the people he/she trusted his/her child to and no longer keeps that promise. The effects are more complex, we can speak of loosing the connection with the child’s own family, remaining in the social protection system as result of lack of a viable family alternative (...) the juridical situation of the child becomes unclear, the adoption procedure cannot begin and also the procedure regarding the fall from parental rights. On the other hand we’ve had situations of parents going back to work abroad and based on the a certain amount of money saved there they’ve asked for the child’s reintegration into the family, but situations like this are very rare.”* (Social worker)

#### 4.4. The child “home alone”

The children’s statements with regards to this experience frequently include terms characterizing the way they perceive their parents going to work abroad: *loneliness, missing, freedom, preoccupations, fun, problems, responsibilities, nothing.*

## **Abandonment (?)**

*“As long as the family, in the way it stays, finds survival strategies so the child wouldn’t be at risk from the point of view of the physical, psychological, emotional health (...) the child cannot be considered abandoned, there is a group, a primary reference group (...) the child is not being abandoned.” (Sociologist)*

- *I was aware that right after my parents will leave nothing will be the same, but I know they do all these for me. We keep in touch. Every day we speak on the phone and the relationship is as strong as it was before.*

- *My life is sad because I miss my mother, but I have my grandparents’ love and they are like my parents.*

*“The child has an identity, he/she knows who he/she is, there is a lack of affection for a period of time, greater or smaller, but the child is but abandoned.” (Social Worker)*

- *Pain, suffering, sadness and negative aspects that cannot be overcome by the positive ones... Money doesn’t bring happiness. I wouldn’t want to stay alone in the house not even for a week.”*

*„From a juridical point of view, the term abandonment no longer exists (...) we no longer speak of abandoned children” (Social Worker)*

*“Another positive aspect would make the children responsible in house chores (...) by one of the family member going to work abroad the family tasks remain the same but they need to be divided to lesser members (...).” (Sociologist)*

- *Is hard for a child to get by on his/her own, but it’s also good because there’s nobody bugging you and you learn to be independent.*

- *It’s good when you grew up with a sense of responsibility and you keep your head on your shoulders and your so parents should trust you*

- *It’s very hard for me to be responsible at this age*

- *It’s a big responsibility especially when you’re the oldest and you’re still a minor*

The children’s reactions are described by professionals as following a very clear pattern. They initially notice the change in the physical appearance, followed by school drop out or absenteeism, changes in the group of friends, and some times committing crimes – all as result of lack of affection. *“immediately after the parent’s going away the child suffers an economical loss until the parent succeeds to work and sends home some money, then the child suffers an affective loss and I think this is the most important for him/her (...) then the surveillance is decreasing and for children aged 10 to 17 years, preadolescence and adolescence – a period of rebellion – the child shows the natural tendency to further him/herself from the adult*



and it's clear the child will join a group of friends and from here problems leading the cases to us, in front of the justice system.” (Jurist)

● *I think it means lack of worries a parent has for his/her child. When you're alone you do whatever you think of. You can drop out school, start hanging around with the wrong crowds.*

● *You're on your own, with no mother and you need to take care of yourself. A small mistake can become a very big one*

*“the effects on the child are obvious: physically, they don't take care of themselves, they no longer pay attention to the way they dress; from a behavioral point of view, they tend to let go, not persevere any more, the other's opinion doesn't interest them, they no longer socialize with their colleagues; from an educational point of view there is a decrease with the school results; emotionally and affectively they create their own world, they become self-isolated (...)the reactions of the children become repeated (...) initially you notice these changes in the child, then you find out his/her parents have gone to work abroad and if the mother is the one who left the changes are more obvious.” (School Counselor)*

● *For me this is a sad moment, I no longer like to go home because I know I no longer have somebody to talk to, nobody awaits me with food, there is more like a depression and sometimes fear intervenes*

*„the children react ( ...) you're free, be happy with it (...) but the children miss their mother and consider they no longer have a family (...) „ (school counselor)*

## 5. SUGGESTIONS FOR A THEORETICAL INTERVENTION MODEL

The participants to the focus-group consider intervention as more efficient if the changes would be made from an eco-systemic perspective. They mention macro-systemic changes proposing the creation of a infrastructure, of new services and optimizing the intervention in a multi-disciplinary team. It is wished an involvement of the socializing bodies (family, school, media, etc.). the changes at a macro level are addressed to a large segment of the population and involve actions in the social context such as:

● *modifying the legislative frame “a juridical formula through which parents that go to work abroad can offer guarantees that there is somebody who can take care of their children. Such a guarantee would be necessary so their children would grow up in normal conditions benefiting from all their rights” (social worker)* ● *special protection measures that would include this category of children “the intervention is more like an intervention in a crisis situation, as an emergency, if not, we cannot speak of efficiency” (social worker)*

- publicizing in the media the risks, the effects, the services *“an information campaign through flyers, folders right from the moment people wish to change their passports or go to the labor agency”* (jurist) *“series of social TV programs and not with just a motto or a video spot. We have the example “the alcohol causes great harm to your health” and there is no decrease in alcohol consumption. There’s need for a message making people aware of the risks and not convincing them not to leave”* (teacher) *“services addressing directly to them, they must be presented, they must know it, and it must be made known to those who leave as well as to the family taking care of the child”* (sociologist) The changes at a mezzo level involve actions at the level of professional groups and for the beneficiaries through the elaboration of programs and offering of services:
  - network of services for the child who’s parent is working abroad, social and school services (Day centers and Educational centers) *“One solution would be for the parents having nobody to trust their child to, to contact the social services that, before the parent would go and with a fee involved, the services would take care of the child for a specific period of time. Many of the extreme situations would therefore be prevented: abuse, neglect, child trafficking, theft, begging.”* (Social worker) *“The day centers and/or the Educational centers should be payable and should exist in all the schools in a neighborhood (...) the fee should be paid by the parents before they go abroad (...) the child should be entitled to lunch and then benefiting from recreational and educational programs until the evening 18:00 –19:00 hours. In this way, after the child arrives home has 1 or 2 hours to spend with his/her family and delinquency can be prevented as well as the risk of committing crimes by a child remained without surveillance (...)”* (teacher) *“this new type of service shouldn’t be perceived as a punishment for the child but as a better alternative to education.”* (Sociologist)
  - family service network (counseling for families with risk, support group, conflict mediation, solving adjusting problems etc.); *“This is a relatively new phenomenon and parents who wish to go to work abroad should be aware of the risks (...) they think in good faith to the positive aspects and miss the negative ones that could come along the way.”* (Social Worker) The micro changes involve the individual intervention through:
    - Making the parents that have not gone to work abroad more responsible in order to prevent the negative effects on the child;
    - optimizing the activity of the professionals through an efficient collaboration in a multi-disciplinary team; the school has an important role (the tutoring teachers and especially the school counselor), the first effects being sensed in this environment and in the rural area the church should be made aware of the phenomenon;
    - forming support groups as resources for supporting the children in similar situations.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Far from exhausting such a complex problem as is the external migration influencing decisively the family structure, dynamics and its functioning we propose for the investigated population the following final considerations:

- The parents wishing to go to work abroad form young families (aged 25 to 45 years) with two or three children and are generally organized;
- There are families confronted with financial problems originating from both urban and rural areas;
- A role exchange is noticeable, the woman being the one to leave because she can easily find a job;
- There are frequent situations where both parents decide to leave leaving their children in the care of other persons;
- The desire for a considerable financial gain makes parents put their children on a secondary level so that united and organized families where every member was fulfilling his/her role in an adequate manner become disorganized and dismembered families;
- Separating the children from one or both parents gone to work abroad for a long period of time generates the feeling of abandonment with repercussions on the children's personality;
- Economic favoring factors and family factors do not act linearly from the "cause" perspective and are not independent from each other. They correlate and belong to a social context to a community cultural model;
- The children perceive and accept the lack of money and the lack of a job as main reasons causing the parent to go to work for a period of time abroad;
- The duration of the absence of one or of both parents can be associated with a series of problems or with the child's deprivation of certain needs;
- The main identified problems in the school environment refer to the way children relate with their colleagues and, especially, to the way they fulfill their school requirements;
- With regards to the parents' age, high values in signaling the absences, week school results, and the indiscipline are registered for the age interval 25 to 45 years;
- In the rural area it had been noticed an increase in the number of responsibilities and high values indicating financial problems;
- The verbal violence is justified by the lack of affection claimed by the subjects, no matter their level of studies, initially identified in the family of origin and afterwards shown within the group of friends, school mates and caring person;
- The children's reactions are described by the professionals as following a clear pattern. They first notice the change in appearance, school drop out and absenteeism, change of the group of friends, peers and some times committing crimes – all as result of lack of affection.

**Proposals for future research:**

- continuing the present study with a qualitative one using as techniques the life story and comprehensive interview with children at risk identified in the present study;
- identifying as social phenomenon of the external migration requires extending the study for the entire North-Eastern area of Romania;
- a comparative study regarding the impact at community level of the external migration between cities that are well developed and the under-developed cities from an economical point of view.