



CASTLE

CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND BY
LABOUR MIGRATION ●●●●

**Children left behind
by labour migration**

DID PARENTS GO ABROAD AND CHILDREN STAY AT HOME?

Answers for specialists



A BROCHURE FOR SPECIALISTS WORKING WITH CHILDREN WHOSE FAMILIES INVOLVED IN LABOR MIGRATION IN THE EU COUNTRIES

The project "CASTLE: Children left behind by labour migration: supporting Moldovan and Ukrainian transnational families in the EU",
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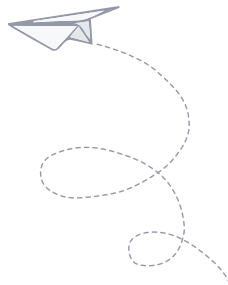
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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of migration is well known to the population of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Going abroad to work is associated mainly with the desire of **adults to satisfy their needs related to home, family, health, upbringing and development of children**. Some adults are more concerned about the well-being of their families, while others are looking for opportunities to gain experience and professional growth. The reasons for migration are very diverse. **Going to work abroad can be short-term, for a certain period, or long-term, for an indefinite period.**

The decision to move abroad is a kind of challenge, sometimes a risky one, involving costs and gains, unawareness and change. In most cases, **parents do not have the opportunity to take their children abroad with them right away**. Or they do not even consider this option because they intend to return home. Thus, **children remain in the care of grandparents, close relatives or other persons**.

In this brochure, we address child protection professionals and provide guidance on actions to **ensure the protection and safety of children**, whose parents intend to or have already gone abroad to work.

Knowing the needs and vulnerabilities associated with parental absence is the way to find the best individualized solutions in each situation. The following information is intended to help professionals better understand the situation of a child whose parents have left and to take action for the benefit of that child. Professionals can ensure the protection of children whose parents have gone abroad to work only by working as a team.

DEFINITION

We call **transnational families** families in which at least one of the parents has gone abroad and the child has stayed at home.

Brochure «Children left behind by labour migration. Did parents go abroad and children stay at home? Answers for specialists» was created within the framework of the project «CASTLE - Children left behind by labour migration: supporting Moldovan and Ukrainian transnational families in the EU», co-funded by the European Union, contracted by the International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) through the Migration Partnership Facility (MPF) - ICMPD/2021/MPF-357-004.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WHOSE PARENTS HAVE GONE ABROAD?

Migration is a phenomenon that leads to change, and change requires some adaptation efforts. The consequences of migration were not long in coming. Children and families face negative outcomes, but the positive effects of migration should not be neglected.



EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE EFFECTS OF MIGRATION FOR CHILDREN	EXAMPLES OF NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF MIGRATION FOR CHILDREN
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• improving the living conditions of family members who have been left behind;• purchase of items necessary for a decent life;• ensuring children’s education;• raising the level of literacy in the field of information technology;• acquisition of independent living skills;• treatment and health maintenance, etc;• traveling and vacations abroad.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• lower school performance and absenteeism;• appetite disorders, headache, abdominal pain, insomnia;• a sense of loneliness;• difficulties with integration into peer groups and interaction with children/ adults;• depression and negative emotional states caused by lack of care;• the presence of unrealistic aspirations for the future;• formation of a mixed identity;• higher risk of alcohol and tobacco consumption;• an increase in the prevalence of deviant behavior;• aggressive behavior towards one or both parents;• deterioration of the relationship between the child and the parent/ caregiver who remained at home.

To better understand children left behind and their experiences, specialists are advised to consider the following aspects:

- A child, young or older, is not at all to blame for the circumstances that forced his or her parents to go abroad to work.
- Children are not responsible for their parents' decision to leave.
- Children do not have sufficiently developed psychosocial skills to cope with the flurry of emotions associated with the departure of their parents, to organize their daily lives, to take on responsibilities that are beyond their physical and mental capacity. Therefore, children often use psycho-traumatic or maladaptive reactions to stress, such as dropping out of school, social isolation, aggressive or eccentric behavior, etc.
- Each child suffers from the absence of parents in their own way. Some become sad and detached, others become angry, irritable, agitated, and others rebel against others.
- Regardless of the age and gender of the child, children are desperate and perceive the absence of parents as a problem that affects their early adulthood.
- Many children of parents who have left experience a sense of insecurity.
- Many children have mixed feelings about their parents who have left. They feel longing and sadness during the period of separation, they are very happy when their parents come home, and at the same time they cannot wait for them to finally leave. In such situations, parents are often perceived as a source of discomfort and control.
- Children need to be treated individually and at the same time comprehensively. A child's emotional and behavioral reactions depend on a number of factors: age at the time of departure, level of emotional and cognitive maturity, quality of the relationship with the parents before they left, how the child was prepared before departure, period of separation, and the child's relationship with the caregiver with whom the child remains.

MYTHS ABOUT CHILDREN WHOSE PARENTS HAVE GONE ABROAD

Children whose parents have gone abroad have formed a new category of children for whom society feels pity, especially for young children, and intolerance, mostly for adult children who somehow (in the eyes of society) receive more material goods.

These children are often described as: "abandoned", "poor", "without emotions", "with material desires", "seeing nothing but instant gratification", "lacking the ability to empathize", "used to everything ready-made", "throwing money away".



"Children whose parents went to work abroad are abandoned children"

The situation of children whose parents went abroad to work is not an abandonment of the children, as they have tried to give them a better life and a better future while being at a distance. Moreover, most parents intend to take their children with them or return to the country after some time. Most parents who have left live with the guilt of not being able to be with their children, and one of their goals is to do everything possible to be together.

From conversations with children...

« I was 10 years old when my parents decided to move abroad to make things better for us.. The bad thing is that they have never returned since then, only visiting for a short time. The good thing is that I have not felt abandoned for a single moment during these almost 8 years since they left. In my opinion, abandoned children are the ones who are left in the trash, sent to orphanages. Physical presence is extremely important, I agree, but I never felt for a moment that my parents had abandoned me. They listened to me with understanding when I needed it.»

"Spoiled, ill-mannered, naughty children"

Limited parent-child communication, lack of attachment, and a dysfunctional family model have affected the behavior of many children. However, children cannot be "ill-mannered" and "naughty" because they want to be. Without the direct care and supervision of their parents, children have picked up examples of less than positive social behavior and communication. Children cannot educate themselves without sensitive guidance, without learning about rules and boundaries, and how to follow them.

"Parents sacrifice their lives for the sake of their children by going abroad to work, and their children do not show them a single bit of respect."

Experience shows that the relationship between the parents who left and the children who left behind, in many cases, becomes colder. Respect and honor are cultivated through love. If there is no love, all the joys of life disappear. Parents who went abroad try to regain love by offering material goods and things unconditionally, without developing a respectful attitude.

"Children without childhood, who jump through adolescence and go straight to adulthood"

The departure of parents abroad has accelerated the process of growing up for many children, who are burdened with the chores and responsibilities of adults (cooking, laundry, paying monthly bills, etc.), caring for and raising younger siblings. In this situation, there is a risk of child labor exploitation either by the parent in whose care the child remains or by the caregiver. There is also a risk that children will not want to start their own families.

At the same time, most children noted positive aspects related to the experience of being responsible for younger siblings and managing the household. Some children say that this experience has made them more responsible, more organized, independent, and has helped them develop life skills.

From conversations with children...

"It is very difficult to take care of yourself when your mother is not around. It was hard for me to get used to the new situation. But I had my grandmother by my side, and she never left me alone with my difficulties. Gradually, I realized that if my mother was able to make an important decision at her age, I could too. I decided to study hard so that I could go to the same university as my mother."

"Children who grew up without parents cannot become normal adults"

The fact that parents have moved abroad does not mean that a child cannot become a successful adult. Among the country's youth and adults, there are many who speak of their past without parents as a difficult experience, and at the same time are full of gratitude for the useful life lessons they learned.

It is the responsibility of protection professionals to overcome prejudice and analyze each case individually, trying to identify the reasons for certain behaviors and to understand the risks to which children are exposed:

- Psychological violence from parents and other community members;
- Overburdening with tasks – taking on adult responsibilities;
- Discrimination and exclusion from the social environment;
- Lack of skills to lead an independent life;
- Sexual violence, child trafficking;
- Restrictions on children's access to medical services, education and social benefits;
- Diseases – depression, psychosomatic problems, eating, sleeping, behavioral disorders, etc.

Once such signs are identified, it is necessary to start working with parents, caregivers, and other professionals to provide the necessary support and protection to the child.

THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND BY ONE OR BOTH PARENTS:

- The need to feel safe and protected
- The need for love and hugs
- The need for commitment
- The need to communicate with parents, grandparents, and caregivers
- The need for approval and acceptance
- Need for encouragement and respect
- The need for family
- The need for information about parents' departure



PROBLEMATIC BEHAVIOR THAT MAY INDICATE UNMET NEEDS:

- | | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • isolation; • verbal or physical aggression; • decreased motivation; • frequent illnesses; • unreasonable absence; • depressive states; • lack of interest in their appearance; | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eccentric behavior; • conflict behavior; • decreased ability to concentrate; • irritability; • frequent feelings of despair and anger; • hostility towards others; • fears and strong anxiety; • etc. |
|--|--|

Meeting the needs of a child is the responsibility of every adult. A child whose needs are met becomes a balanced, confident, responsible, respectful, and competent adult who can effectively perform his or her functions and roles.

WHAT ACTIONS SHOULD PROTECTION SPECIALISTS TAKE BEFORE PARENTS LEAVE ABROAD?

Specialists in the field of child protection include social workers, educators, psychologists, family doctors, police officers, and local child welfare authorities. These professionals fulfill a noble mission of promoting the rights of children and protecting them from inevitable risks and threats.

In the context of migration, each individual professional is responsible for responding when it becomes known that one of the parents intends to go abroad to work.



The actions of professionals whose responsibilities include child protection are regulated by legal norms:

- Family Code of Ukraine, version of 19.02.2022.
- The Procedure for Ensuring Social Protection of Children in Difficult Life Circumstances, including Children Victims of Cruelty (Resolution No. 585 of June 01, 2020).
- The Procedure for Conducting Activities Related to the Protection of Children's Rights by Custody Authorities (Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 866 of September 24, 2008)
- Article 17 of the Law of Ukraine "On Social Work with Families, Children and Youth" of June 21, 2001, No. 2558-III
- The Law of Ukraine "On External Labor Migration" of 05.11.2015 No. 761-VIII
- The Rules of Custody, approved by the joint order of the State Committee of Ukraine for Family and Youth Affairs, the Ministry of Education of Ukraine, the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy of Ukraine of 26.05.1999, No. 34/166/131/88

Assessment of the situation of parents who intend to travel abroad

How can a specialist intervene?

- First of all, proceed from the premise that most adults who have decided to go abroad to work have done so at a difficult time in their lives, finding themselves in an unfavorable situation with a shaky emotional state. **Not all those who wish to go abroad to work realize the risks and side effects associated with it.**
- Discuss parent's intention to go abroad to work without judgment, frankly and with empathy with your father or mother
- Evaluate the family situation: how many children are in the family, what age they are, and what educational institution they attend.
- Discuss with the parents the reasons that prompted them to make such a decision, realistic employment opportunities, who provides support, and determine the extent to which the parents are aware of the changes that may occur.
- Discuss plans related to the children: who will take care of them, how the parents envision their relationship with the children in the future and at a distance.

The specialist builds further communication based on an assessment of the family situation:

- The younger the children, the more often it is recommended to convince parents, especially the mother, of the importance of her physical and emotional presence in the child's upbringing and care.

In order for a child to feel safe and develop a sense of security in the future, it is absolutely essential that his or her family create an environment that provides this emotional security. In the first years of life, parents are responsible for forming a relationship based on strong attachment, giving the child the love and respect he or she needs by being there for them, opening up to their needs and responding to them sincerely, especially in critical situations. In this way, the child knows that no matter what the situation, the parents will be there to support or protect him or her, and he or she will receive the attention he or she needs. Departure and separation in early childhood can lead to more serious disorders in adulthood.

- If a parent speaks incoherently, is inconsistent in his/her explanations, is excited and emotional, if you doubt the correctness of his/her words, try to be understanding and at the same time, without insisting, try to convince him/her that it would be better to get as much information about the place of work as possible before leaving. Let a parent know that you can offer to help him or her find out more about the job abroad. That is, do not forbid them to go, but at the same time make it clear that it is risky to go without preparation and detailed information.
- If the children are at least of school age, and the parent has specific information about the place of work, if the family has openly discussed the parent's intention to leave, the specialist's intervention is limited to ensuring the protection of the child: who will look after him/her, establishing custody, where the child will live, registering him/her, and providing recommendations for maintaining the child-parent relationship.
- Before a parent leaves, a specialist should assess the degree of psycho-emotional and moral readiness of the parent and child.

It is recommended that a family in which a decision is made for one or both parents to go abroad to work for a short or long period of time should seek the help of psychologists, teachers, school psychologists, or community social workers to learn about ways to prepare children for the departure in order to minimize the potential traumatic risks associated with such a life event.

Parental responsibility includes duties and rights to care for the child. **Going abroad to work does not limit or reduce parental responsibility.**

Child protection professionals should discuss the following points with the father or mother/parents who intend to go abroad to work:

- reliability of the workplace in the country where he/she is going;
- the need to establish custody, which will represent the child and take care of him/her during the absence of the parent(s);
- a person under whose care the child will remain;
- rights and obligations of the caregiver;
- Future plans related to the child (visits, family reunification);
- possible risks to the parent-child relationship, so as not to build illusions or expectations;

- Children’s needs and difficulties that will be exacerbated after the departure of the parent(s);
- ways to communicate and maintain positive long-distance relationships between parents and children;
- the need to participate in the child’s life from a distance;
- the need to establish contacts with teachers, family doctors, social work specialists, and district police officers.

Establishment of custody

Any specialist, upon learning of the intention of the parent(s) to go abroad, should explain to them why it is important and necessary from a legal point of view to establish custody of the child.

ADVANTAGES OF ESTABLISHING CUSTODY	RISKS OF NOT ESTABLISHING CUSTODY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring the care, upbringing and normal development of children out of sight; • protection of children’s rights; • prevention of risk situations for the child; • monitoring the situation at the school; • providing medical care; • expressing consent or disagreement to participate in school activities (e.g., field trips); • emotional support in the absence of parents; • assistance in the distribution of the money received. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • risks associated with the child’s health; • the child is not protected from bad influences; • the child’s physical well-being is not ensured; • the safety of the child is not guaranteed; • the risk of failure to prevent and/or intervene in the event of a danger to the premises where the child lives (apartment, house, household); • the child may become attached to young/adult people who will have a bad influence.

Criteria for choosing a caregiver

A person in whose custody a child remains:

- must be reliable;
- demonstrate appropriate behavior and a positive attitude towards the child;
- be familiar to the child for a long time;
- the child must want to remain under the supervision of this person;
- the relationship between the child and this person and their children must be good;
- the child should receive proper attention, care and understanding;
- the child should be able to discuss other things with this person besides food and school.

The quality of the relationship with the trusted person is extremely important for the emotional well-being of the child who stays at home. A good relationship with the caregiver means emotional support, encouragement, guidance, protection and security for the child, which will help him or her to overcome the negative effects of change more easily.

Caregiver:

- has the right and obligation to raise the child under his/her custody, to take care of the child's health and physical, mental, spiritual and moral development;
- taking into account the child's opinion, can choose an educational institution and form of education for the child, ensuring that the child attends school;
- has no right to interfere with the child's communication with relatives, except when such contacts are contrary to the child's interests;
- is obliged to provide the custody authority with information on the child's health, care and upbringing, as well as on changes of residence.

Attention!

Custody performs the functions of parental substitution, but this does not mean that the rights and obligations of a caregiver towards a minor are identical to natural parental obligations. They are only similar, since the establishment of custody does not transfer the rights and obligations of parents to the caregiver, as is the case with adoption. The circle of parental care through custody over a minor becomes narrower.

What actions should professionals take after parents go abroad?

Functions of child protection professionals in promoting and protecting the rights of the child: *Regardless of* the child's situation, regardless of the reasons for the parents' departure abroad, the CHILD MUST BE PROTECTED. All child protection professionals assume the role of providing quality services.

When interacting with children, particularly those whose parents have moved abroad, professionals should:

- treat all children equally;
- ensure that in all their actions regarding children, the best interests of the child are a priority;
- take into account the child's age and maturity;
- to ensure that the child is able to freely express his or her opinion on any issue that concerns him or her;
- support children in realizing their right to education that will enable them to develop their abilities and personality in a non-discriminatory environment;
- to promote the rights of children to the best possible state of health and use of medical services;
- ensure that the child's right to protection from any form of violence, neglect, exploitation and trafficking is respected;
- support children in realizing their right to participate in recreational, cultural, artistic and sports activities in the community by informing local governments about the need for such services (places for games, sports clubs, cinemas, theaters, libraries, etc.);
- receive information about the child's condition from other specialists so that the overall picture of the situation of the child who remains at home is objective and as complete as possible.

Every professional whose duties include child protection must adhere to several **principles of work when dealing** with children whose parents have gone abroad to work.

Recommended:

- During each visit to the child, inform him or her about the purpose of the visit and the conversation;
- Explain to the child that the goal of each specialist is to provide support and assistance to the child in the absence of the parent(s), to help maintain relationships with them, and to find solutions to create a reliable and optimal environment for the child's development;
- Reassure the child that your intention is not to control his or her family or him or her;
- Reassure the child that he or she will not be taken away from the family/home (some children are afraid of being removed from the family);
- Reassure and convince the child that he or she is not at all to blame for the decision of the parent(s) to go abroad;
- Assess the problems faced by the child and determine the best solutions, depending on the complexity of the problem;
- Assess the quality of the child's relationship with the caregiver and intervene if necessary.

Conversations with the child should take place in an open, friendly, supportive atmosphere based on respect and trust.



All professionals are obliged to immediately notify the local or territorial custody authority in case of suspicion of a situation of child abuse or neglect. If there are reasonable grounds to suspect that the life and safety of a child is at risk, representatives of the protection sector have the right to visit children at their place of residence and see how they are cared for, their health and physical development, education and training, and provide the necessary guidance, if necessary.

MAINTAINING CONFIDENTIALITY OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

Confidentiality provides a higher level of protection for the child and family. Children and parents, knowing that professionals respect confidentiality, will be more open to seeking help and cooperate more readily.

Specialists in the field of child protection (custody authority, social work specialist, doctor, police officer, teacher, educator, psychologist, etc.) are **obliged to** maintain confidentiality of data and information about persons receiving social assistance, so that information about the beneficiary (child, father/mother, parents) is not disclosed or disclosed without the consent of the person concerned.

Professionals must ensure the confidentiality of the child (including parents) during the case management process. They will not disclose any information obtained during the assistance provided, as well as documents drawn up or provided to them by the child, parents/caregivers during the case management process, even after they cease to perform their function, unless the law provides otherwise.

Exceptions to the privacy policy

There are several situations in which confidential information may be disclosed to a third party. Child protection professionals should inform the child, the child's parents, and the child's caregiver of these exceptions. This information can be presented both orally and in the form of a document. Failure to do so is not necessarily unethical, but rather can lead to potential problems.

Exceptions to the general rule of confidentiality are those situations where a breach of confidentiality is necessary:

- to protect the health of children;
- to prevent an imminent threat to the child;
- to prevent the commission of a criminal act or to prevent the occurrence of the result of such an act or to eliminate the consequences of damage caused by such an act;
- in cases of child abuse.

Legislative links and other useful resources:

The Law of Ukraine «On External Labor Migration» of 05.11.2015 No. 761-VIII.

According to part 4 of Article 8 of the Law of Ukraine «On External Labor Migration» of 05.11.2015 No. 761-VIII, care for children of labor migrants and other members of their families who are dependent on them and remain in Ukraine is carried out in accordance with the legislation and international treaties of Ukraine, ratified by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.

The Procedure for Ensuring Social Protection of Children in Difficult Life Circumstances, including Children Victims of Cruelty Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of 01.06.2020 No. 585)

This Procedure defines the mechanism of interaction between state authorities, local self-government bodies, educational, healthcare, social protection and other institutions and agencies in ensuring social protection of children in difficult life circumstances, including children who have suffered from cruel treatment, in identifying, reviewing appeals and reports about such children, ensuring their safety, and providing the necessary assistance based on their needs.

The Procedure for Conducting Activities Related to the Protection of Children's Rights by Custody Authorities (Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 866 of September 24, 2008.

Pursuant to paragraph 3, the custody and trusteeship authorities are district, district in the cities of Kyiv and Sevastopol state administrations, executive bodies of city, district in cities, village, settlement councils, including united territorial communities.

Pursuant to paragraph 4, persons who become aware of the fact of leaving a child without parental care are obliged to immediately notify the children's service at the place where the child was found. Among the reasons for establishing custody, the law provides for their establishment in cases where parents have moved abroad for permanent residence or permanent work or are on a long-term business trip. In this case, institutions or persons, in particular, close relatives or other persons who become aware of minors left without parental care, must immediately notify the custody authorities at the actual location of the children subject to custody or the children's service at the place of detection of the child

Pursuant to clause 13, children left without parental care are registered by the children's service at the place of residence of the child's parents or one of them with whom the child lived before the circumstances in which the child was left without parental care occurred, regardless of the place where the child was found, and orphans and children deprived of parental care are registered by the children's service at the place of origin of the child.

Pursuant to clause 14, information about a child left without parental care is collected by the children's service within 10 days after receipt of a report about such a child. The said period may be extended by decision of the head of the service for children, but not more than for 25 days.

Information about a child who is registered for initial registration is entered into the unified electronic database of orphans and children deprived of parental care and families of potential adoptive parents, caregivers, custodians, foster parents, and foster parents (clause 15).

The Rules of Custody, approved by the joint order of the State Committee of Ukraine for Family and Youth Affairs, the Ministry of Education of Ukraine, the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy of Ukraine of 26.05.1999, No. 34/166/131/88.

For support or other details

Research findings on how transnational families ensure the rights of children left behind through digital communication

[Access and learn more](#)

Website of the Research Center for the Study of Transnational Families (CASTLE) based at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Languages: Romanian and English

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About the CASTLE project

THE PROJECT "CASTLE: CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND BY LABOUR MIGRATION: SUPPORTING MOLDOVAN AND UKRAINIAN TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES IN THE EU" IS CO-FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION, CONTRACTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR MIGRATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT (ICMPD) THROUGH THE MIGRATION PARTNERSHIP FACILITY (MPF) – ICMPD/2021/MPF-357-004.

THE PROJECT IS BEING IMPLEMENTED BY THE BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH TERRE DES HOMMES ROMANIA, TERRE DES HOMMES MOLDOVA, TERRE DES HOMMES UKRAINE, THE UKRAINIAN INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH NAMED AFTER OLEKSANDR YAREMENKO AND THE ACADEMY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES OF MOLDOVA.

THE MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THIS PROJECT IS TO SUPPORT THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AND UKRAINE IN IMPROVING THEIR CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS, AS WELL AS THEIR MIGRATION AND MOBILITY POLICIES, WITH A FOCUS ON THE SOCIAL AND LEGAL IMPACT OF LABOR MIGRATION ON TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES.

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Terre des hommes

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