

## **Effect of External Labour Migration on Ukrainian Family: “Poisoned Gift” or “Dream Realized”?**

*Alissa Tolstokorova, PhD, Assoc. Prof.*

*Kyiv, Ukraine*

### **Summary**

Current paper examines the effect of external labour mobility in the social reorganization of Ukrainian family over 1990-s - early 2000-s. It traces current changes in family models, examines transformations of consumption patters and household structures; analyses continuity and disruptions of principal family functions. Furthermore, it sheds light on the impact of labour migration on livelihoods of Ukrainian family and identifies both positive and negative consequences of this influence. The comments are based on materials of a number of projects, carried out by different research institutions in Ukraine throughout 2000-2006.

### **Introduction**

In the Soviet Union, separated from the rest of the world by the so-called “iron veil”, a possibility to travel abroad was a great privilege, accessible to only selected few. Yet, starting with years of Gorbachev’s “perestroika” and “glasnost” Soviet borders were becoming more and more transparent for average citizens and larger sections of population could afford international travels. The collapse of socialist system in early 1990-s, break up of the USSR and subsequent transition of post-soviet states to market economy provided for a considerably greater freedom of movement and highly increased mobility of population. According to the Ministry of Interior of Ukraine, while in 1986, i.e. in the beginning of “perestroika”, overall cross-border business trips did not accede 43 000, in 1991 it increased 54 times and reached 2,3 mln per year [19, p. 14]. Yet, if earlier cross-border travels were largely targeted at international cooperation with business, cultural and research partners, tourism and leisure, subsequent years of transition and economic reforms changed the perspective of international journeys to search for income and employment. Thus, external, and later internal, labor migration became a significant factor of socio-economic transformation and an efficient tool in regulation of labor force flows.

### **Background statistics**

Over the last decade economic migration with the purpose of out-of-country employment acquired an overall character in Ukraine. Official statistics reports consistent growth of documented labour emigration from Ukraine. If in 1996 it made 11,800 people, in 1998 it nearly doubled and made 24, 400 people, in 2001 - 36,300 people, and in 2002 – reached 40,683 people [20, p. 177]. Yet, experts in Migration Studies contend that officially documented statistics does not reflect actual situation of labour migration in the country as far as it does not

consider illegal, i.e. undocumented migration, which supposedly outnumbers the administratively documented one. Overall, within the framework of external labour migration flows in Ukraine, national migration specialists identify four principal types, contingent upon legality rate [19, p. 14-15]:

1. Official (documented) labour migration – refers to Ukrainian citizens who officially declare foreign employment as a goal of their travel and who acquire a status of legal labour migrants in recipient countries. It is this category of migrants, who are documented by official statistics.

2. Undocumented legal migration –cross-border travels of Ukrainian citizens, who leave home country with officially declared goal of tourism, family visiting, business trips etc., but who on arrival to destination country secure legal employment and acquire official residence permit; these travellers are not documented as official labour migrants by national statistics, yet in the recipient countries they may acquire a status of legal labour migrants.

3. Successful illegal migration - international travels, related to undocumented, but legal employment, which is officially recognized by legislation of destination countries.

4. Forced migration of victims of criminal gangs - human trafficking and other cases of forced detention of Ukrainian citizens, often in inhuman conditions, with the purpose of enforcement into illegal labour activity abroad Ukraine beyond the will of the victims.

Obviously this classification lacks one more type of migration, which must be recognized, i.e. illegal border crossing, most often to countries, like Poland, Slovakia, Romania and Hungary, either on foot or by air. Although this kind of migration is not as wide-spread as the aforementioned ones, yet, in 2005 the Polish Border Guard arrested 1, 388 citizens of Ukraine (including 888 on the Polish border with EU states) for illegal border crossing [10, p. 91]. This is why illegal border-crossing should be supplemented to this classification as a form of migration which requires closer attention for migration services in terms of its effective control and counteraction.

This classification, 4/5 of which is constituted by undocumented types of migrations, provides grounds for national experts to claim that actual scope of external employment migration considerably outnumbers official statistics, probably in dozens or possibly even hundreds times. Thus, according to the data of sociological research and expert evaluations, obtained in 2001 by the State Committee of Ukraine for Statistics in the course of realization of the project “Life Ways of Ukrainian Population”, actual stock of Ukrainian citizens, temporarily working abroad, makes no less than 1 mln people [32, p. 78] . According to research findings of

the all-nation sociological monitoring, carried out in 2002 by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in the framework of the project “Ukraine on the Threshold of the 21-st Century” 10,2 % of Ukrainian families have experience of temporal employment abroad [21, p. 159]. Taking into account that the overall number of families in Ukraine at that time made 15 mln, it signified that over 1,5 mln people were involved in external labour migration. Furthermore, sociological surveys, carried out by state employment centres by the contract with the Ministry of Ukraine for Labour and Social Policy, allowed to conclude that total stock of labour migrants in Ukraine accedes 2 mln people [26, p. 41], which is in accord with the statistics of the Ministry of Ukraine for Foreign Affairs. Reports on regular monitoring of this issue, carried out by the Office of Ombudsman of Ukraine, highlight that the overall estimated stock of Ukrainian citizen annually working abroad reaches from 5 to 7 mln persons [18]. Evaluations of migration experts provide support to this dramatic statistics, assuming that the stock of Ukrainians leaving the country annually in search for external employment may reach as many as 7 mln [27].

A more detailed picture with consideration of regional specificities in external labour migration was provided by sociological surveys carried out on the materials of questionnaires offered to international travellers in the points of international border transfers. They showed that international travels with the purpose of employment on the one hand and business trade on the other hand, made about 4% and 16% respectively of all cross-border travels at the Western frontier of Ukraine, and 14% and 25% - at the Eastern border [8, p. 26; 11, p.37; 14, p. 79]. Taking into account varying intensity of travel flows in different sections of the state border, experts suggest that Ukrainian citizens transgress state borders with employment purposes around 1,4 mln times per year and with commercial purposes – around 3 mln times per year [24, p. 16].

Over the last decades geography of labour migration from Ukraine significantly expanded, which is explained by development of new trends in the labour market, transparency of state borders, emergence of close family ties and cross-borders community connections [12, p. 45]. Initially the principal target countries in external migration were closest geographical neighbours of Ukraine - Russia and Poland. Yet, as was mentioned in the Report on migration challenges in the European Union Eastern neighbours, prepared by the Polish Centre for Eastern Studies [10, p. 87, 90] other Central European countries “also enjoy such popularity. And recently certain South-Western European countries have joined the list of favoured destinations”. This is accounted by better living conditions in these countries and liberal

immigration legislation towards foreign employees, which allows labour migrants to be more readily legalized. Although currently CEE countries still continue to be the major recipients of Ukrainian migrant workers, the list of target countries expands primarily for the account of industrially developed societies of Western Europe. According to the data of diplomatic missions in Ukraine and Ministry of Ukraine for Foreign Affairs (MUFA), in 2003 Ukrainian citizens constituted such groups of migrant workers: in Poland - 300,000 people<sup>1</sup>, in Portugal - 150,000, in Czech Republic – between 100 000 and 200 000, in Spain - 100,000, in Turkey - 35,000, in USA - 20,000. Official statistics of the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation stated that in 2003 the stock of licensed Ukrainian laborers in Russia amounted 100,000, yet researchers claim that actual number of Ukrainians working in Russia at that time was much higher, over 1 mln people [9], which is in accord with estimates of the Ministry of Ukraine for Foreign Affairs, provided in the Report of the Ombudsman of the Supreme Council of Ukraine for 2003 [18, p.18]. Moreover, the data for the first six months of 2004 showed that the number of Ukrainian irregular migrants in Russia reached 3 mln people [2]. Number of documented migrants to Portugal also considerably increased over last years. Thus, if in 1999 there were only 127 legal migrants in this country, by 2002 total migrant stock increased 400 times and reached 65,500 people [25, p. 194]. The same applies to Italy, where by estimates of Ukrainian embassy in Italy and MUFA in early 1990-s lived only 250 Ukrainians of the 1st wave of migration [17, p. 74]. Yet, in 2003 their stock reached 200 000 [18] and by data of the Parliamentary Committee of Ukraine for Foreign Affairs for 2006 the overall number of documented Ukrainian citizens working in Italy reached 324 000, 90% of which were women, although an actual number of Ukrainian labour migrants in Italy might be twice as high [26].

Employment migration is a significant defining factor in the system of labour relations. It affected all sides of societal life and made a dramatic impact on family as "a fundamental unit of society" [4, p. 1] and one of "major institutions of social reproduction" [34, p. 55-62]. Therefore an adequate view on current situation in Ukrainian family will be impossible without consideration of the impact of labour migration on its major functions.

### **Effect of Labour Migration on Family Functions**

The major criteria of the efficiency of family as a social unit is the efficiency in performance of its principal social functions. Thus, to measure the effect of economic migration

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<sup>1</sup> Polish researchers note that these data are confirmed by estimates of Polish official bodies referring to the stock of Ukrainians, illegally employed in Poland [ 10, p. 90].

on family development it is necessary to analyse first of all its impact on the changes in family functioning and livelihoods.

G. T. Martin defines family as a “universal social group that plays a unique reproductive, socializing and consumption roles in society”. Furthermore, he admits that “it is now the responsibility of the family to provide the emotional connections that citizens lack in their public lives, in which they experience alienation” [15, p.233, p. 325]. In national tradition of Family Studies functions of family are conceptualised more widely, reinforcing the upbringing (pedagogical) potential of family, which is understood as a major contributor to the formation and promotion of fundamental human values, to the establishment of social order in society, as a consolidating factor for its members, ensuring their security, providing them with energy and emotional support, necessary to resist social pressure and instability. National family theory includes numerous classifications of family functions, based on a variety of defining factors. Overall, researchers identify such principal functions of family: reproductive, upbringing (pedagogical), communicative (socializing), economic and existential, spiritually-emotional, recreational, sexual, functions of social protection and of primary social control [1; 7; 5; 16; 28; 29]. All these functions closely correlate with each other, sometimes intersect and overlap. This is why, for the purposes of this paper I find it more advisable to group some family functions and consider them in combination, as they relate to one and the same aspects of family life. On this background, I will regard such functions:

- reproductive function;
- socializing and upbringing functions together with function of primary social control;
- economic and consumption functions;
- recreative and protective functions.

### *Reproductive function*

By **reproductive function** in this paper is understood biological reproduction of population, or in other words, fertility capacity of the family. In terms of impact of labour migration on this family function, research findings showed that labour migration decreases birth-rates and therefore diminishes the reproductive potential of the family. This finding is confirmed by calculations of the number of “unborn children” in families of long-term (over one year) labour migrants, made in the course of the aforementioned project “Life Ways of Ukrainian Population”. Research findings showed that provided long-term labour migrants worked in the place of their permanent residence in Ukraine and had birth-rate equal to the

birth-rate of population of the same age elsewhere over the country, then in 2000 Ukraine could have 4402 more newborns than it actually had [32, p. 18].

### *Economic and consumption functions*

Speaking about the **economic and consumption functions** of the family, it must be admitted that these functions are significantly benefited by economic migration, because via remittances it allows to increase family budget and material well-being. According to sociological surveys of self-assessments of external migrants' households as of 2002, 41,1% of responders reported that emigration allowed them to considerably increase their family welfare, 43,1 % estimated their material and financial situation as "somewhat improved" and only 8,8% of families acknowledged that their well-being did not change at all. 63,4% of families acknowledge that labour migration allowed them to reach high economic status, and only 13% of migrants estimated their material situation to be poor [19, p.19]. Statistics confirms that consumption patterns in labour migrants' families are more varied than in families with similar social and educational status, working in Ukraine. For example, their households are better equipped with modern furniture and electronic equipment, they own more automobiles and consumer goods, etc. Thus, if in 2003 in average over Ukraine there were only 13 videotapes per every 100 families, in families with external migrant members this index increased to 55. Similarly, there were 2 microwaves vs 25 respectively, computers - 2 vs 24, automobiles - 16 vs 36 per every 100 families. Responders, participating in sociological surveys, acknowledged that 55-60% of these goods were purchased for savings from money made thorough irregular labour migration [19, p. 19]. Results of an all-national sociological survey confirmed these findings. It showed that families with migrant members own more modish commodities as compared to other families in such proportions: every-day ware – 2,3 times more, computer equipment - 2,5, stereo and video appliances - 1,8 times more [22].

Some authors consider these data sufficient to claim that external occupation mobility allows Ukrainian families to perform economic and consumption functions better than other categories of families. I find such an estimate to be simplistic and superficial, as it limits these family functions to material and financial well-being of family dependents. Yet, it ignores such components of economic life of the family as joint household management and financial strategizing, division of home labour, provision of economic security to family members etc. These aspects of economic and consumption functions of the family can hardly be successfully performed in conditions of long-term absence of one or more adult members of the family.

Thus, economic stability of the household, ensured by labour migration, has a reverse negative effect as it is marked by management deprivation of the family.

### *Socializing, upbringing and social control functions*

It is commonly acknowledged that family is a central and powerful agent in **socializing children** [3; 6, p. 65; 13, p. 257-296]. Yet, how this function is performed in migrant families is dubious as it can have both positive and negative effects, depending on the situation in the family (whether all family members live together in a recipient country, or one or even both parents are separated from children, and in the latter case whether there are other family members to take care of children staying at home) and character of migration (short-term or long-term). On the one hand, taking into account that economic function of the family may benefit by migration, it is possible to claim that children from such families have better financial opportunities to receive quality education, for example, to attend private schools and colleges, where they have better surrounding and better conditions to learn foreign languages, fine arts and music, to acquire computer and Internet skills, to have access to more intellectual, creative and ambitious setting. Otherwise, even if they study at ordinary schools, children of this category, being financially better off than their coevals, may have higher self-esteem, as they have possibilities, not always accessible to others, like more pocket money, more fashionable commodities, like expensive mobile phones, stylish cloths and accessories, computers, Internet and software, video-cameras, sometimes even their own cars. Teenagers have wider socializing possibilities, as they can afford to attend costly youth gatherings, computer clubs, discotheques or night-clubs, swimming pools and sports centres, which also raises their social status and contributes to higher social capital as compared to other teenagers.

Yet, the reverse side of this socio-economic well-being is that in conditions when one or both parents are missing from home, children lack parental attention, love, support and encouragement and, no less important, guidance and control. It is especially hazardous in cases when children are left behind for the care of distant relatives, older siblings, neighbours or even alone, which is rather widespread in Western regions of Ukraine, where external employment migration is especially large-scale and intensive, especially to Italy. For example, according to a sociological survey of a West-Ukrainian Centre “Women’s Perspectives”, which studied a situation of Ukrainian women-migrants working in Italy, 94% of interviewed women left their children at home in Ukraine. Most often children stay with their fathers, but in cases of single mothers or both parents working abroad, 66% of children are left behind for the care of

grandparents, and 33% stay unattended<sup>2</sup>. In the West of Ukraine circulate a widely used term "Italian children", which stands for children of external labour migrants, who succeeded in securing long-term employment abroad, not always in Italy, but possibly in other West-European countries, and who send back home considerable material and financial support. Yet, being significantly better-off than children of parents working in Ukraine, these "Italian" boys and girls are deprived of natural experience of family socialization, they lack pedagogical guidance, emotional and spiritual support and often get into the category of "problem children".

Therefore, the negative effect of economic migration for family relationship is that it leads to emotional distancing and even aloofness between family members: on the one hand between spouses, on the other hand between generations, i.e. parents and children. In its turn it ruins family connections and often results in divorces and collapse of marriage. Furthermore, it increases the risk of children's social orphanage and may lead to juvenile delinquency and criminalization of children.

#### *Recreative and protective function*

These functions imply that family serves as a source of vital energy for its members, allowing to sustain physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual health of its members. At the same time "in conditions of growing aloofness in relations between people, the family becomes a "safe harbour" for them, a place where they find material and psychological support, where a specific family synergy helps to mitigate economic problems" [23, p. 22]. This function of the family is especially significant for young couples, families of migrants and refugees, vulnerable families and families in crisis, elderly couples and families with disabled members etc.

In terms of external economic mobility, realization of this function also depends on conditions of a concrete family. It works differently for migrant members and for those who stay home. Particularly, as was already mentioned earlier in relation to socializing function, possibilities to have quality leisure and recreation are better for children of migrant parents. It also refers to one of spouses who remain to live in Ukraine. Members of migrant families, who stay home, have better financial opportunities for quality health-care, face lower risk of poverty and have better housing conditions than other categories of families of similar social standing. At the same time possibilities of health-care, recreation and leisure are significantly poorer for those family members who work abroad. Surveys show that short-term or medium-term (one

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<sup>1</sup> Cited by [30, p. 38].

year or less) migrants tend not to spend much time and money on leisure and recreation, because their primary goal is to save as much money as possible to send home. It also refers to their residence conditions: labour migrants tend to choose the cheapest housing possible with the same purpose of saving remittances. Moreover, many of them are used to have very poor housing conditions at home, that is why they estimate positively even overtly inappropriate, sometimes even inhuman housing conditions, significantly behind accepted standards in recipient countries. Health-care is also a challenging area of life for labour migrants, taking into account that the majority of them work abroad illegally and have no health-insurance [24, p. 81-83]. Furthermore, very often migrants, particularly males, work in conditions of high physical pressure, health-hazards and even life-risk, for example, in construction industry, chemical production, sailing, etc. As a result, experts report that overall health condition of Ukrainian migrant workers significantly deteriorates as a result of labour migration [12, p. 48]. For example, Parliamentary Committee of Ukraine in Foreign Affairs reported that Ukrainian women-migrants, upon returning home from their stay in Italy develop a so-called “Italian syndrome”, which refers, but for physical ailments, to paranoia, agoraphobia, aggressiveness, etc. [33].

But most importantly, recreative and protective functions of the family imply first of all a possibility for family members to have joint recreation and leisure, to seek from each other emotional and spiritual support and protection, to rely on one’s dear ones in hardships and crises. This becomes impossible in conditions of long-terms or frequent absence from home of at least one family member working abroad. Therefore, this function of the family may be also considered severely undermined by external employment migration.

### **Conclusions**

To summarize what was said above, it is possible to conclude that labour migration has both positive and negative effects on the status, conditions and functioning of Ukrainian family.

Positive effects of external occupational mobility is primarily in the overall increase of economic security and improvement of quality of life in families with migrant members. Particularly, it contributes to elimination of poverty, promotes financial, material and housing conditions, consumption patterns, possibilities to provide better education for children and quality health-care, recreation and leisure for home-staying family members, etc. Better financial conditions in their turn contribute to social and psychological well-being of family members, raise their self-esteem, accelerate social status and increase social capital in their home country.

Research showed that international mobility enhances social maturity in migrants,

especially in youth. Sociologists report that young people, who have experience of foreign employment, are characterized by more active life position, higher self-reliance and economic self-sufficiency, higher responsibility for their own lives and well-being of their families, than their non-mobile coevals. They are more capable to manage their problems by their own efforts, not relying on help and support of relatives, community of the state. For example, among young Ukrainian rural labour migrants a number of those who refer themselves to this groups was 2,5 times higher than among other categories of youth [24, p. 66]. Furthermore, international experience makes strong impact on the world-view of migrants workers, expands their cultural patterns and intercultural tolerance, increases linguistic competence and communication skills, promotes political literacy and responsibility. Thus, sociological surveys show that Ukrainians who had experience of employment in the Russian Federation tend to vote for politicians whose electoral programs promote the agenda of better integration of Ukraine in CIS and development of close cooperation with Russia, while those who have experience of work in West Europe vote for political parties, aimed at EU integration [24, p. 66].

At the same time negative effects of labour migration on functioning of the family considerably outscore its positive impacts. Specifically, as a result of migration health condition of migrant members deteriorates, reproductive capacities of married couples decrease, possibilities to find in the family emotional and spiritual support, social protection in periods of hardships and crises become next to impossible. Long-term missing from home of one or two parents leads to emotional distancing and even aloofness between spouses on the one hand, and between parents and children on the other hand. It significantly hampers pedagogical and upbringing role of the family. Thus, migration ruins family connections and increases divorces rates. Furthermore, it increases the risk of children's social orphanage and may lead to juvenile delinquency and criminalization of children. Such functions of the family as joint household management and financial strategizing, division of home labour, etc. are also being erased in conditions of long-term absence of one or more adult members of the family. Therefore, economic stability of the family, provided by economic mobility, has its reverse negative side, resulting in overall managerial deprivation of the family.

Thus, the general conclusion is that labour migration, which is sometimes represented as a "remedy", as a "gift of fate" in times of economic hardships, actually turns to be rather a "poisoned gift" than a "dream realized". While it may have positive effect for individual members of the family, or for some aspects of family life, yet for functioning of the family as a single whole, as a joint venture of its members, it has a disintegrating effect, and thus ruins the

family as it is.

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