

2024 Project outcome summary

The overall goal of the project was to expand our understanding regarding the impact of parental economic migration on the psychosocial well-being of children 'left-behind'. Firstly, the project aimed to investigate the independent and interactive contributions of potential risk and resilience factors involved in children's psychosocial well-being (internalizing symptoms, externalizing problems, interpersonal relationships with peers, academic performance) following parental migration – Objective 1. In this regard, we proposed: (a) investigating migration-specific contextual factors (for example, financial stress, child care context, involvement of the parent who has gone abroad) that, in the presence of parental migration, can contribute to different pathways of psychological adaptation; (b) investigating the contributions of inter-individual characteristics that, based on previous results concerning factors involved in children's well-being, can constitute risk or resilience factors (emotional regulation strategies, information processing distortions) independently of/ in interaction with migration-specific contextual factors. This objective was attained through a systematic review of empirical studies on the differences between children with parents abroad and children without parents abroad across Europe (Study 1), and by implementing the actual study to investigate the independent and interactive contributions of potential risk and resilience factors involved in the well-being of children aged 10 to 16 (Study 2).

Secondly, using a three-wave longitudinal design, we aimed to (a) investigate the stability over time of children's well-being post-parental migration, and (b) assess the risk for long-term adaptation problems generated by individual and/or migration-specific contextual factors (Objective 2). Importantly, by having repeated measures of contextual changes (for example, parent-child relationships, financial stress, parental responsibilities), we aimed to estimate the dependence of children's well-being on these changes. This objective was materialized through the implementation of a longitudinal study, with re-assessments of well-being indicators and risk and resilience factors involved in children's adaptation to parental migration at 6 and 12 months after the initial evaluation (T2, T3) (Study 3). Additionally, four other complementary studies were conducted (three cross-sectional, one longitudinal) that targeted the relationship between individual and contextual factors in children's socio-emotional functioning.

Summary of results

The project's activities were divided into three stages: Stage 1 (15.05 – 31.12.2022): Performing the scientific synthesis and evaluating the risk and resilience factors involved in the adaptation of children to the economic migration of parents. Stage 2 (2023): Longitudinal evaluation of the risk and resilience factors involved in the adaptation of children to the economic migration of parents. Stage 3 (01.01 – 14.05.2024): Data analysis and dissemination of results.

From a scientific perspective, our studies substantially contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the fields of developmental psychology, family studies, and the literature relevant to the specific context of transnational families. In this regard, the project has facilitated:

- (1) the completion of the first systematic review that provides a comprehensive overview of the well-being of children and adolescents "left behind" in a European context;
- (2) the completion of the first empirical study that investigates the interaction of individual factors and migration-specific factors in predicting the well-being of children with parents who have gone abroad. Through this study, it moves beyond exclusively focusing on the differences between children with parents abroad and those without a migration history, a practice that obscures the considerable degree of variability that exists in children's adaptation;
- (3) the completion of the first longitudinal study aimed at assessing the stability over time of children's well-being post-parental migration, and the evaluation of the risk for long-term adaptation problems caused by individual and/or migration-specific contextual factors.

From an outcome perspective, the studies included in this project provide significant evidence regarding well-being variations in children "left behind", emphasizing the need to approach the subject from a more nuanced perspective. Our studies suggest that the rhetoric associated with the phenomenon of temporary parental migration needs to move beyond portraying it based on media information or studies with economically and culturally unrepresentative populations. Thus, the project's findings demonstrate that:

- (1) Studies conducted at the European level support a much more complex picture of how parental migration influences the well-being of "left-behind" children. Thus, the data do not confirm the existence of severe consequences of parental migration like those previously reported in a

predominantly Chinese population (Fellmeth et al., 2018). Significant differences between children with parents abroad vs. those without a history of migration primarily emerge at the level of anxiety and/or behavioral problems. However, these differences can be modulated by certain migration-specific factors (e.g., duration of migration, the child's relationship with the migrating parent).

(2) when comparing children with parents who have gone abroad and those without a history of parental migration, controlling for factors that may underlie the migration itself (e.g., family's socio-economic status) lead to nonsignificant differences in mental health and well-being between the two groups;

(3) there are factors that increase the likelihood of those with parents abroad showing better post-migration adaptation. These factors can be of an individual nature (adaptive emotional regulation strategies, reduced levels of distorted information processing), and of a migration-specific contextual nature (increased involvement of the parent abroad in child-rearing, high frequency of conversations with the child, lengthy conversations between the two). Understanding these risk/resilience factors in children with parents abroad can facilitate (1) the development of valid tools for assessing the risk of post-migration adaptation problems among children and adolescents; (2) access for children to effective intervention/prevention strategies in cases of temporary separation from parents.

The results of the project are relevant both for researchers in the field of child development, as well as for practitioners and policymakers in the social, health, and education sectors. Firstly, the project brings substantial scientific advancements concerning the influence of parental migration on the psychosocial well-being of children and adolescents by addressing individual socio-cognitive and emotional factors, as well as migration-specific factors in the same longitudinal design. This opens new opportunities for investigating the well-being of children in various contexts of parental separation, establishing starting points for studying (1) the predictive power of individual and contextual characteristics in relation to adaptation to parental separation; (2) the dependence of children's well-being stability on contextual changes.

Secondly, the project informs both practitioners and policymakers regarding children's adaptation to the phenomenon of parental migration. The persistence of a bleak perspective on

children with parents abroad contradicts the empirical evidence, thus calling for a more responsible dialogue concerning transnational families that can accurately inform public opinion and social policies. Children of parents working abroad are not automatically more susceptible to mental health issues or a decline in well-being, as there are factors that modulate the link between parental migration and children's well-being.

Project outcomes

A. Articles published or under review (Web of Science)

- Prodan, N., Ding, X. P., Szekely-Copîndean, R. D., Tănăsescu, A., & Visu-Petra, L. (2023). Socio-cognitive correlates of primary school children's deceptive behavior toward peers in competitive settings. *Acta Psychologica*, 240, 104019. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2023.104019>
- Prodan, N., Moldovan, M., Cacuci, S. A., & Visu-Petra, L. (2022). Interpretive Diversity Understanding, Parental Practices, and Contextual Factors Involved in Primary School-Age Children's Cheating and Lying Behavior. *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*, 12(11), 1621-1643. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe12110114>
- Prodan, N., Ding, X. P., & Visu-Petra, L. (2024). Truthful yet misleading: Elementary second-order deception in school-age children and its sociocognitive correlates. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 237, 105759. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2023.105759>
- Prodan, N., Gavriș, O., & Cheie, L. (under review). Family, interrupted? Well-being influences of parental migration on `left-behind` children and adolescents across Europe: A systematic review.
- Cheie, L., Prodan, N. (under review). Left behind, but not forgotten: Differences and resilience factors in the psychosocial wellbeing of children with parents working abroad - Evidence from Romania.
- Seucan, D. T., Szekely-Copîndean, R. D., & Visu-Petra, L. (under review). Preschoolers' moral judgment and punishment attribution: Longitudinal links to theory of mind and emotion understanding.

B. Conferences and symposia:

- Cheie, L., Visu-Petra, L., & Prodan, N. (2023). Cognitive processing in schoolchildren with high trait anxiety: An investigation of attentional, interpretational, and memory biases. *2023 European Conference on Developmental Psychology (ECDP)*, Turku, Finlanda, 28 August -1 septembre, 2023.
- Prodan, N & Visu-Petra, L. (2023). Lying to familiar and unfamiliar peers, theory of mind, and executive functioning in middle childhood. *2023 Biennial Meeting Society of Research in Child Development*, SUA, 23-25 March 2023.
- Prodan, N., Ding, X.P., & Visu-Petra, L. (2023). Misleading familiar and unfamiliar peers, theory of mind, and executive functioning in primary school children, *The Annual Conferece of the European Association of Psychology and Law 2023*, 4-7 July, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, symposium presentation
- Visu-Petra, L., Prodan N., Xiao Pan Ding (2023). Deceptive behavior towards familiar and unfamiliar peers in relation to theory of mind and executive functions in young children. *14th Dubrovnik Conference on Cognitive Science*, Croatia, 18-21 May 2023.