Are children our future?  
Creative professional activity in social work with families and children in the age of migration

Anna Broka
University of Latvia, Advanced Social and Political Research Institute, Faculty of Social Sciences, researcher in the project "National Identity and Social Human Security" in the national academic research programme „National Identity”, Lomonosova street 1A, LATVIA, Riga, E-mail: broka.anna@gmail.com

The focus of this paper is to encourage the debate on the challenges facing social assistance (or family support assistance) policies in practice targeted at the migrating families and their children left-behind in Latvia.

Keywords – social work, social assistance, children left-behind

Introduction

There is no doubt that children represent a country’s future with regard to promised State’s assistance and support [4]. Like other Central and Eastern European countries, Latvia has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child [1] in 1992, and it became a major instrument for authorities to address the policy awareness towards the well-being and protection of the children.

In my initial research study “The Socioeconomic Impact of Labour Migration on Households in Vidzeme Region” [2], has been recognized the emergency of rather new vulnerable group – the children left-behind by parents. Following research thesis - “The Impacts of Labour Migration on Children Left-Behind in Latvia: The Role of the State” [3] demonstrated the challenge of local authorities to find creative solutions in social work with these children. During my useful work experience in child custody – Orphan’s Court, I realized the exposure and helplessness of local authorities. Social workers had difficulties to convene the target group-children left behind in the early stage of parental migration. The dilemma and sensitivity in the individual case evaluation is to meet the obligations - the children’s rights to social well-being or individual rights of parents. However, when State policies are getting rid of the obligations and welfare reforms are vanishing from the political agenda (in health, education, a child care and protection policy areas), local authorities with an unbelievable enthusiasm are finding new creative
solutions and other financial recourses to provide social assistance in a more extended way.

The synopsis and focus of the paper is to encourage the debate on the challenges facing social assistance (or family support assistance) policies in practice targeted at the migrating families and their children left-behind.

The aim of this paper is to 1) determine a comprehensive comparative social policy analysis within theoretical framework and 2) to analyze the challenges and impact of social assistance (or family support assistance) policies and practices targeted at the migrating families and children left-behind in Latvia.

In order to understand the impact of international labour migration upon the situation of children left-behind in specific objectives are:

(a) to identify the factors, effects and determinants influencing vulnerability and the need for social assistance for the migrating families and children left-behind;

(b) to determine and analyze the responsiveness of social policy and practice upon the needs and well-being of the children left-behind in Latvia.

The main question is: What is the role of the state and policy response to migrating families and children left-behind in Latvia? Sub – questions are: How creative is social assistance (or family support assistance) policies and practices affecting the families and children left-behind in Latvia? What are the challenges of social assistance (or family support assistance) policies and practices affecting the migrating families and children left-behind in the future perspective?

I. Theoretical framework

There is no single coherent theoretical framework in social science literature explaining the impact of migration on children left-behind. However, different theoretical approaches on the process of migration and how to avoid the vulnerability of the families and children may be discussed and verified: within classical theories of migration [5], and transnational discourse [6], human and social capital approach [7], empowerment and capability approach [8], [9], as well as human rights and children centered approach [10]. The main idea of this paper is to introduce theoretical evaluation and verification from the social policy perspective- to see to what extent social policy and social assistance practice is defining/implementing parental responsibility, on the one hand, and state’s responsibility in care provision for children aiming their well-being, on the other.

II. Creative professional activity in social work with families and children

My hope is that theoretical framework applied here is going to give a new comprehensive perspective in relation to the well-being of the vulnerable children left-behind in Latvia. However, my view may be relevant for other Central and Eastern European countries experiencing the similar situation in the age of migration. The evidence-based social policy implementation process and empirical data analysis in the realm of social policy discourse are going to illustrate the challenges meeting the social workers targeted on the migrating families with children in need.

III. Methodology

The methodological approach used for this paper is going to be based on qualitative methods, verification of existing theories and concepts used in migration research discourse as well as in comparative social policy analysis. Literature search strategy is going to be used with the aim to collect relevant data from online databases, academic articles and book chapters covering the topic. Empirical evidence will be based on semi-structured interviews with social workers and other relevant experts working with the families and children.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to provide some recommendations for the future national development strategy defining the children as ‘our future’ and initiate the discussion on implementation of such social work creative empowerment practices targeted at the migrating families with children left-behind on local level.

References


