




**POSITION PAPER**

*International Association  
Civitas Georgica*

<sup>b</sup>  
**LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN IN  
GEORGIA  
RESEARCH FINDINGS AND  
POLICY  
RECOMMENDATIONS**

2026



This report was prepared by the International Association Civitas Georgica within the framework of the project “*Strengthening Left Behind Children (LBC) and Families in Georgia*”, commissioned by the global programme “**Shaping Development-Oriented Migration**” of the **Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH**.

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**Tbilisi, Georgia**



## FOREWORD



*Maia Nasrashvili*

*President, International Association Civitas Georgica*

When I first had the opportunity to review the preliminary findings of the research, one sentence shared during a focus group discussion remained deeply engraved in the hearts of every member of the Civitas Georgica team: *“What difference would it make? I knew my mother would not call me anyway.”*

Labour migration has become one of the defining social and economic realities of modern Georgia. Over the past decades, thousands of citizens have left the country in search of employment, leading to a significant increase in transnational families. While this process has important economic implications, it also creates complex social and psychological challenges, particularly for children who remain in the country without their parents.

Left Behind Childre often represent an invisible group within public policy and institutional support systems. Although they are not traditionally classified among vulnerable groups, their daily experiences are frequently associated with emotional loss, the premature assumption of responsibilities, changes in family structure, and limited access to support systems.

In recent years, the **International Association Civitas Georgica** has been actively working to study this issue and bring it to the public agenda. In order to collect demographic data on children left behind by migrant parents and to explore their experiences, needs, and the challenges they face, two projects were implemented with the financial support of the German Agency for International Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit – GIZ) under the global programme **“Shaping Development-Oriented Migration.”**

I – *“Strengthening Children Left Behind by Migrant Parents (LBC) and Their Families in Georgia”*

II – *“Uniting to Support Left-Behind Children (UNIT LBC)”*

Two large-scale studies conducted within these projects aimed to:

- examine the situation of children left behind by migrant parents in Georgia;
- identify their needs;
- assess existing institutional mechanisms;
- develop policy recommendations.

The studies are based on both quantitative and qualitative data, allowing children’s experiences to be analysed not only through statistical indicators but also through their personal stories and the broader social environment in which they live.

The findings of both studies confirm that children of migrant parents in Georgia represent a high-risk group whose challenges often remain unnoticed at the policy level.

The purpose of this document (Position Paper) is both to consolidate the findings of the two studies and to provide a brief overview of the activities carried out in parallel with the research over the past two years. Accordingly, the document also highlights **good practices** that were developed and piloted during this period.

The combined analysis of the research findings and the practical experience gained through project implementation allows for a clearer understanding of the key challenges faced by these children, as well as the approaches that may serve as effective models of support in the future.

Thus, this document brings together:

- an analysis of the key findings of the two studies;
- a brief overview of practical activities implemented;
- the identification of systemic challenges;
- policy recommendations.

The document is intended for policy makers, professionals in the education and social sectors, researchers, and civil society organisations working in the field of child rights and family support.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all organisations and individuals who approached this research with dedication, sincerity, and professionalism – especially the researchers, our partners, civil society organisations, and above all, the children and families who shared their experiences with us.

The situation of children left behind by migrant parents is not merely a matter of social welfare. It represents an important dimension of child rights, the education system, social protection, and the country's long-term development policy.

For this reason, support for children of migrant parents should not be viewed solely in the context of individual assistance, but rather as a systemic policy priority that requires coordinated action by the state, local authorities, the education system, and civil society.

Respectfully and with gratitude,

*მ. ნუბუაძე*

## OVERVIEW

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Since the second half of the twentieth century, with the rise of globalization, decolonization, and transnational mobility, research on international migration, including labour migration, has developed significantly. These studies increasingly examine the causes of migration and related processes such as economic and social integration, the formation of diasporas, the feminization of migration, identity formation and transformation, remittances, and other related phenomena. However, the phenomenon of **Left Behind Children (LBC)** emerged relatively late in migration research, and knowledge in this area remains limited. The lack of research is particularly evident in certain regions. While studies on Left Behind Children are relatively common in South and Southeast Asia and Latin America, significant knowledge gaps remain in other regions.

In 2020, the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted the resolution *“Impact of Labour Migration on Left-Behind Children.”*<sup>1</sup> The resolution highlights that poverty-driven labour migration can have severe consequences for Left Behind Children, who often remain in their countries of origin without adequate care, protection, and support. In some countries, the scale of this phenomenon is alarming. Nevertheless, Left Behind Children frequently remain invisible both in public discourse and in policy-making processes. An additional challenge is that many countries do not collect systematic statistics on this group, which further complicates effective responses to their needs.

Despite the growing scale of migration, research on migration in Georgia remains relatively limited and fragmented, while studies focusing specifically on Left Behind Children are even scarcer. As Vanore notes, migration is not only the experience of migrants themselves but also of those who remain in the country of origin. Life in transnational families often becomes a “life of enforced longing.” Although modern technologies have significantly transformed communication and made virtual connections within transnational families possible, parental migration still leads to significant changes in the lives of Left Behind Children. These changes can threaten their emotional and social well-being and hinder the full realization of their rights.

Separation from parents is often a deeply distressing experience for Left Behind Children and can negatively affect their development, socialization, and educational trajectories. Addressing these challenges cannot rely solely on temporary measures. In order to maximize the benefits of labour migration while minimizing its potential negative consequences,

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<sup>1</sup> Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (2020). *Impact of Labour Migration on Left-Behind Children*, Resolution 2239.

holistic approaches are required that focus on children’s rights, well-being, and family support, and that are gender-sensitive as well as socially and economically sustainable. The two studies conducted by the International Association Civitas Georgica represent an effort to help fill this knowledge gap. These studies aim to collect data on Left Behind Children (LBC) in Georgia, identify their needs and challenges, and develop recommendations that can contribute both to improving their well-being and to strengthening more effective social and educational policies in the country.

## 1. Methodology

This document is based on two interrelated studies carried out by the International Association Civitas Georgica, both of which applied a mixed-methods research approach. The methodology combined quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as information requested from public institutions and publicly available statistical data. This approach made it possible both to capture the demographic and institutional picture of children left behind and to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences, needs, and challenges.

*The studies were conducted in 2025-2026 and cover data from 2024-2026.*

As part of the first study, a quantitative survey was conducted in public preschool education institutions across Georgia. The survey covered all public kindergartens registered in EMIS (Education Management Information System), excluding the occupied territories, and was administered through a self-completed online questionnaire between May and October 2024. A total of **1,030** public kindergarten administrations participated in the survey, representing approximately **60%** of the total population. The questionnaire explored children’s demographic characteristics, caregiving practices, emotional and behavioural patterns, educational needs, and the response capacities of institutions. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistical methods and weighted according to the number of registered children in Tbilisi and the regions.

Both studies placed strong emphasis on the qualitative component, which enabled an in-depth exploration of the experiences of Left Behind Children, their caregivers, migrant parents, teachers, and other professional groups. In the first study, **21 in-depth interviews and 9 focus group discussions were conducted**, while the second study relied entirely on a qualitative design and included **45 in-depth interviews with children, caregivers, and school personnel**. Respondents were selected from both urban and rural areas, with particular attention to regions where labour migration rates are comparatively high.

The qualitative research was grounded in a child-centred and ethically sensitive approach. Interviews with children were conducted under conditions of informed consent, and in the case of minors, written consent from a legal guardian was obtained in advance. Interviews were conducted both face-to-face and online, using semi-structured tools that allowed participants to speak freely about their own experiences.

In addition, public information was requested from a range of state institutions, including the Prosecutor’s Office, the Public Defender’s Office, education authorities, and the social service

system. However, access to data was limited, and the information received was often not fully disaggregated by age, sex, or parental migration status, which in itself represents an important finding regarding existing institutional gaps.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistical methods, while qualitative data were processed through thematic analysis. The principle of triangulation was applied in the analysis, making it possible to compare the perspectives of children, caregivers, migrant parents, teachers, and other professional groups and to build a more comprehensive picture of the issue.

To strengthen the reliability of the findings, the emerging results and recommendations were discussed during validation meetings with representatives of state institutions, local self-governments, international organisations, the education sector, and field experts. Their feedback was integrated into the final analysis.

The studies also had several important limitations. First, the quantitative component could not include general education schools because the relevant permission was not granted, and as a result, the quantitative data mainly reflect the situation of preschool-aged children. In addition, in some cases kindergarten administrations did not have precise information about the migration status of children's parents, while the assessment of emotional and behavioural indicators was largely based on staff observations. Within the qualitative component, it should also be noted that some children declined to participate due to emotional distress, and in a small number of interviews the presence of a caregiver may have influenced the openness of responses.

Overall, the use of a mixed-methods methodology made it possible to examine both the scale of the issue and its *deeper social, emotional, and institutional dimensions, thereby providing a strong foundation* for the further development of policies and practices supporting Left Behind Children in Georgia.

## 2. Demographic Characteristics of Left-Behind Children and the Migration Profile of Their Parents

According to the research, approximately **4%** of children enrolled in preschool institutions during the academic year have one or both parents in labour migration abroad. While this figure is representative for the preschool institutions included in the study, the interpretation of these data should take into account the issue of access to preschool education.

According to data from the 2021–2022 academic year, **28%** of preschool-aged children did not attend kindergarten, either due to family choice or various barriers limiting access to preschool services. The lack of comparable data across years makes it difficult to assess precise trends; however, it is likely that a considerable proportion of preschool-aged children were also not represented in public kindergartens during the 2023–2024 academic year.

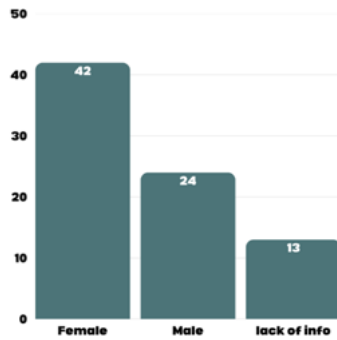


Chart 1.: Parental Migration by Sex

Among preschool-aged children of migrant parents, 42% are girls and 45% are boys, while information could not be collected for 13% of the children. In 8% of cases both parents are in labour migration, in 17% of cases only the mother is in migration, and in 71% of cases only the father is in migration. Among these, 1% of children have their only parent in migration, while information on parental migration experience could not be obtained in 4% of cases( Chart 1).

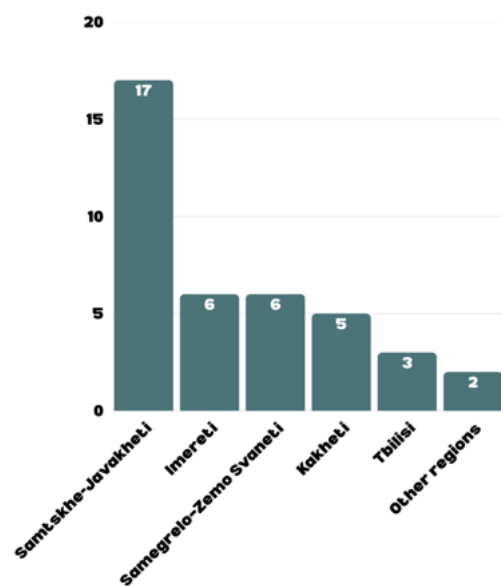
By region, the largest share of children remaining in the country during the 2023–2024 academic year is observed in Samtskhe-Javakheti (17%), followed by Imereti (6%), Samegrelo–Zemo Svaneti (6%), and Kakheti (5%). In Tbilisi and other regions, the share of

children of migrant parents is relatively similar, ranging from about 2% to 3% (Chart 2).

As the quantitative data show, father’s migration is significantly more common than mother’s migration. A study conducted in Georgia in 2011–2012 also indicated a higher rate of fathers’ migration compared to mothers’ migration; however, it should be noted that migration trends have changed considerably since then.

Among children remaining in the country, the share of fathers’ migration is highest in Samtskhe-Javakheti (97%), while the share of mothers’ migration is the lowest (2%) in this region. The lowest share of fathers’ migration is observed in Guria (42%), where the share of mothers’ migration is also the highest (42%). Cases where both parents are in migration are most frequent in Samegrelo–Zemo Svaneti (16%) and Shida Kartli (15%) (Chart 3).

Since it was not possible within the scope of this research to collect statistical data on children remaining in the country from schools, it is difficult to determine whether similar regional differences would appear if the study had included a representative sample of school-aged children. Exploring the possible reasons for these differences would require a deeper socio-economic analysis, which goes beyond the scope of the present research. Nevertheless, these findings may serve as an important basis for developing policies and programs tailored to the needs of children remaining in the country at the municipal level.



Country among Children Enrolled in Institutions by Region, 2023–2024 Academic Year (%)

## 2.1. Psycho-emotional condition of children of migrant parents

Within both the quantitative and qualitative components of the research, representatives of educational institutions, social workers, migrant parents, guardians/caregivers, and the children themselves assessed psycho-emotional manifestations experienced by children in the context of parental migration. These include feelings of melancholy, sadness and loneliness, stress and anxiety, feelings of aggression and aggressive behavior, behavioral disorders, and other emotional responses. According to respondents, prolonged separation from a parent represents a difficult experience for children, which affects their everyday behavior and social relationships.



## Self-harming behavior, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts

Emotional difficulties associated with parental migration in some cases are linked to self-harming behavior, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts. Respondents recalled situations in which children’s mental health significantly deteriorated after the migration of a parent, and in some cases children even attempted suicide. School principals also refer to similar cases, often interpreting them as extreme forms of seeking parental attention, which, among other things, indicates a lack of awareness on the part of principals regarding the child’s psycho-emotional condition.

Within the framework of the research, interviews with children were conducted by child psychologist Ivane Saatashvili, using a carefully designed questionnaire based on principles of high sensitivity and the best interests of the child. In one case, during the interview process, the child’s serious psycho-emotional distress and signs of self-harming behavior were identified.

Ivane Saatashvili,  
Child Psychologist

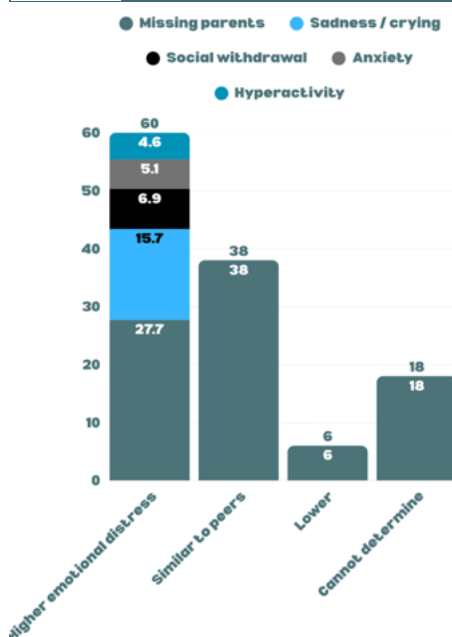
*“I recognized the child’s severe emotional distress from the very beginning of the interview and identified signs of self-harming behavior. Immediately after the interview, I informed the person responsible for child protection referral at Civitas Georgica. We activated the legally established referral procedure and, in parallel, began searching for a psychiatrist and psychotherapist for the child. Civitas ensured the child’s transportation from the region in full compliance with all procedures and provided the necessary services. The child’s condition improved significantly in a short time. The support lasted for about one year, and now the child’s condition is significantly better”.*



“I experience something like nervous distress and become easily irritated. It has been there since childhood, but it intensified after my mother left. That is why I prefer to stay at home. When I get irritated, I either break things, cry, or take it out on myself [self-harming behavior]. At school, I try to calm myself down, but I end up crying even more. Over the past two months, I have experienced this kind of emotional heaviness four or five times.”  
girl, 17 years old.



## Feelings of melancholy, sadness and loneliness, stress and anxiety



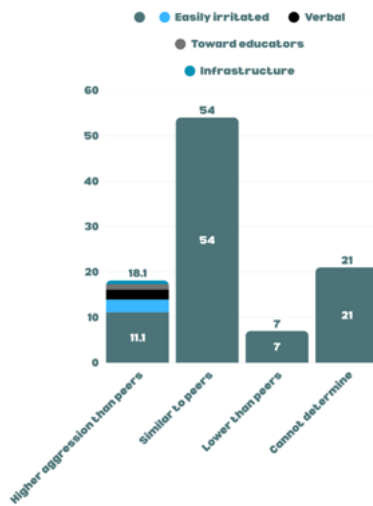
According to observations by preschool teachers, feelings of melancholy, sadness and loneliness, as well as stress and anxiety, are more pronounced among left-behind children of migrant parents compared to their peers in 38% of cases, while in another 38% these feelings appear at a similar level. Cases where these emotional experiences are less frequently observed are relatively rare (6%), while in 18% of cases teachers found it difficult to assess the children’s psycho-emotional condition.

The manifestation of emotional difficulties varies. Children most often speak about missing their parents (60%), appear sad or cry (34%), or become withdrawn and communicate less with peers (15%). Anxiety (11%) and hyperactivity (10%) are also reported,

while sleep and eating disturbances or lack of motivation to participate in activities are observed less frequently.

Children often describe strong feelings of longing, sadness, and living in a constant state of waiting. The argument of improved material well-being cannot replace the child’s need for parental closeness and emotional care.

 **Aggression and behavioral difficulties**



Cases of aggression are mentioned relatively infrequently. According to observations by preschool teachers, aggression among left-behind children is higher than among their peers in only 18% of cases, while in most cases it appears similar to that of their peers (54%). Situations where aggression is observed less frequently are relatively rare (7%), while in 21% of cases teachers found it difficult to determine the level of aggression.

Aggression most commonly manifests as irritability and a tendency to become easily upset (72%). Instances of physical aggression toward peers (18%), verbal insults or bullying (14%), and less frequently similar behavior toward teachers (8%) or damage to institutional infrastructure (5%) are also reported.

**Returned migrant parent, woman, mother of one child** *The school teacher called me and told me that on March 8 the art teacher had asked the children to make drawings, and unfortunately my child damaged several drawings made by other children because they were taking them home for their mothers. At that moment he did not fully realize it, but it was his form of protest.”*

 **Desire for isolation, withdrawal, and loneliness**

<b>Withdrawal and Isolation</b>	Research findings show that after parental migration, children often become withdrawn, reduce communication, and attempt to distance themselves from reality.
<b>Reduced Social Interaction</b>	Children experience difficulties interacting with peers and participate less in shared activities, which negatively affects their socialization.
<b>Behavioral Manifestations of Loneliness</b>	At an early age, this condition is often expressed through playing alone, avoiding communication, and frequent episodes of crying
<b>Particularly Severe Cases</b>	When both parents are in migration, children may become completely withdrawn, stop speaking, or refuse to attend educational institutions.

One respondent recalls a case where a child slipped away from the caregivers and could not be found for several hours. It turned out that the child was sitting alone with their toys, and

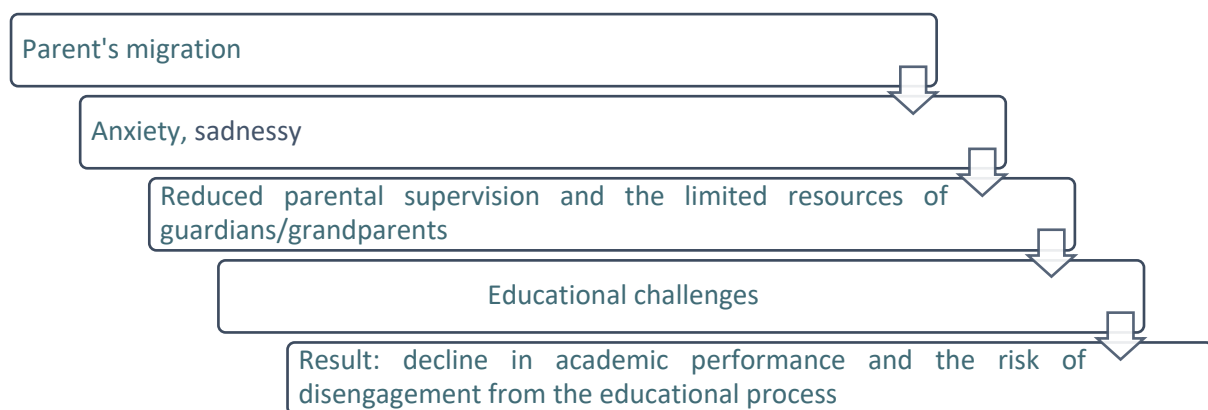
when asked to explain their behavior, the only thing they said was: “My mother wouldn’t have called me anyway.”

“	Guardian	<i>“They find it somewhat difficult, for example, to accept remarks or criticism. They tend to sulk a lot. This stress sometimes later manifests itself as physical pain.”</i>
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The psycho-emotional condition of left-behind children becomes particularly aggravated when institutions organize events involving parental participation, such as parent meetings, celebrations, or similar activities. During such occasions, children experience the absence of their parents especially intensely.

## 2.2. The Impact of Parental Migration on a Child’s Education

The improvement of a family’s economic situation as a result of migration does not always translate into the educational well-being of children. Although remittances increase access to education, the conditions of transnational families create a complex set of social and psycho-emotional factors that significantly affect children’s educational processes.



One of the important findings of the research is the **dual nature of academic motivation**. For some children, studying becomes a way to justify the sacrifice made by their migrating parent and a form of moral obligation. Children often associate academic success with the desire to validate their parent’s decision and to make the parent who is far away feel proud.

However, teachers’ experience shows that such motivation does not always translate into sustainable academic outcomes. The lack of daily parental involvement and supervision often leads to a decline in academic performance, sometimes even a significant one.

Quantitative data indicate that in the majority of cases (60%), left-behind children of migrant parents face educational challenges similar to those of their peers. However, in 10% of cases these difficulties are higher, while in 13% they are relatively lower. In approximately 18% of cases, educators found it difficult to assess such challenges.

The most frequently identified problems include:

- Deficits in attention and concentration (40%)
- Lower participation in developmental activities (22%)

Qualitative data confirm that the psycho-emotional stress caused by parental migration often affects children’s attention and motivation. Emotional stress, longing, and constant concern about the parent’s situation make it difficult for children to fully engage in the learning process.

According to teachers’ observations, parental migration often leads to behavioral changes that eventually affect academic outcomes. For some children, interest in learning decreases, discipline is disrupted, and the frequency of coming to class unprepared increases.

Representatives of educational institutions note that this trend is particularly visible at the basic level of education, where children require greater support and supervision. In some cases, parental migration also increases the risk of partial or complete disengagement from the educational process. This may manifest in refusing to attend kindergarten or school and is often associated with:

- emotional stress and trauma
- protest against the parent’s migration decision
- bullying by peers
- additional responsibilities assigned to the child within the family.

### 2.3. Risk of Coming into Conflict with the Law

According to the United Nations Riyadh Guidelines on the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency, parental migration is considered one of the risk factors for delinquent behavior among adolescents. Data from the Prosecutor General’s Office of Georgia show that in recent years approximately one fifth of juveniles diverted from criminal prosecution are children of migrant parents:

Year	Number of Diverted Juveniles	Children of Migrant Parents (Total)	Percentage
2021	363	69	19%
2022	585	124	21%
2023	544	108	20%

At the same time, according to information from the Public Defender’s Office, in 2024–2025 several cases under its review concerned children of migrant or returned parents and were related to issues such as children’s social rights, violence, psychological impact, and neglect.

### 2.4. Assumption of age- and developmentally inappropriate responsibilities by the child as a result of parental migration (parentification)

Both studies show that parental migration often leads children to assume responsibilities that are not age-appropriate. Children begin to take on adult roles prematurely and partially assume parental functions within the family. In developmental psychology, this phenomenon is known as **parentification**. Older siblings, in particular, frequently take on a caregiving role within the family. They look after younger siblings, carry out household tasks, and even try to provide emotional support to other family members.

“

Girl, 16 years

*“I have developed a greater sense of responsibility toward my siblings... I take care of them like a parent.”*

The study identified cases of both **instrumental** and **emotional parentification**. Children are required not only to perform household tasks and care for younger siblings, but also to take on responsibility for the emotional support of family members. This tendency is particularly common among girls, especially when the mother is the one who has migrated.

The research also shows that increased responsibilities often limit children’s full participation in educational processes and developmental activities. In some cases, children are unable to attend school regularly or participate in after-school activities. As a result, **parentification** becomes one of the significant factors affecting children’s psycho-emotional well-being and educational development.

## 2.5. The Impact of Parental Migration on the Transformation of Family Relationships

- Parental migration significantly changes the structure of the family and the distribution of roles within it.
- Daily care for the child is often transferred to grandparents or other close relatives, who try to manage everyday matters while also filling the emotional gap created by the parent’s absence.
- As a result, caregivers frequently experience psychological and physical overload.
- Parents rarely discuss guardianship arrangements with their children, and decisions are usually made unilaterally.
- Children often prefer to remain in their familiar environment, as changes in living arrangements, combined with separation from parents, can create additional stress.
- Caregivers must maintain a balance between providing emotional support and ensuring discipline.
- According to teachers’ observations, caregivers often avoid strictness in order not to worsen the child’s emotional state, which sometimes makes it difficult to establish discipline and daily routines.
- Family relationships become largely dependent on transnational communication.

“

Guardian

*“The entire responsibility, essentially the role of both mother and father, has fallen entirely on me. It is very difficult.”*

### Gender Distribution in Caregiving

Studies also highlight the critical impact of mothers' migration on childcare arrangements, particularly in countries such as Georgia, where responsibility for child care is largely assumed by mothers.

- In the case of fathers' migration, the mother assumes full responsibility for the children.
- In the case of mothers' migration, care is usually provided by the grandmother or another female relative.
- There are generally low social expectations regarding fathers' caregiving involvement. For example:

*"I left the children with my mother. My husband was there, but a woman is necessary to be with the children."*

- Children often identify their grandmother as the most reliable, caring, and emotionally significant figure in their lives.

### 3. Child Participation in Decision-Making Processes

Research shows that children rarely participate in decision-making related to parental migration and often learn about a parent's departure only a few days before leaving or **even after the parent has already left**. In such cases, separation becomes particularly difficult and sometimes shocking for children, creating strong feelings of abandonment and insecurity.

*left behind child, girl, 16 years old*

*It felt like a bomb explosion for me. For about a week, I think, I could not talk to anyone about it and was extremely defensive and aggressive toward everything related to that topic. It is the kind of subject that is very hard for me to speak about. A mother is the one person you are truly attached to, and without her everything feels like it collapses. When such a person is far away from you and leaves somewhere else, you get the feeling that everything has stopped existing. You may think you have adjusted and that a lot of time has passed, but every time you remember that moment, it feels as if you go back, and the emotion hits you twice as intensely.*

Children's reactions to parental migration often manifest through intense sadness, longing, anger, and despair. They may try to persuade their parents to change their decision and sometimes are even willing to give up their own wishes and needs if it means their parents will not leave.

Over time, children's emotional responses may change. Initial sadness and anger are sometimes replaced by an understanding of the parent's sacrifice and even the idealization of the parent, which can become a psychological mechanism for coping with the traumatic experience.

At the same time, children often develop feelings of guilt and a strong sense of responsibility. As a result, they try to hide their emotions so as not to cause additional stress to their parents living abroad.

## 4. Key Challenges in the Support System for Left-Behind Children of Migrant Parents



### Lack of policy framework and statistical data

One of the key systemic challenges identified is the lack of a unified state policy and reliable statistical data related to left-behind children. In Georgia, there is no specific strategic document or program that directly addresses the needs of children who remain in the country while their parents migrate for work. At the same time, these children are not systematically registered, making it difficult to assess the scale of the problem and to design evidence-based policies.

The absence of statistical data and coordinated policy significantly limits the effective development of support mechanisms at both national and local levels.

According to interviews, nearly all teachers noted that children of migrant parents are present in almost every class. As one teacher explained: “There is hardly a class where I do not have at least one child with a migrant parent.”



### Key Challenges in the Educational System

Research findings indicate several major challenges within the education system in supporting left-behind children:

- **Low sensitivity and stigma** – In some cases, teachers and caregivers do not fully recognize the psycho-emotional difficulties caused by parental migration. Children are sometimes perceived as “spoiled” or “neglected,” which reinforces stigma and creates additional psychological pressure.
- **Unethical behavior and violations of children’s rights** – Cases have been identified involving unethical communication, neglect of bullying incidents, verbal insults, and occasionally physical violence. Responsibility for the child’s difficulties is also frequently shifted entirely onto the family.
- **Lack of professional competencies among staff** – Teachers and caregivers often lack the necessary knowledge and practical tools to work with children experiencing emotional challenges related to parental migration. As a result, responses are frequently intuitive rather than based on professional guidance.
- **Lack of systemic approaches / “institutional blindness”** – Educational institutions do not have unified guidelines or protocols that define standards for identifying and supporting left-behind children. Interviews revealed clear differences between the approaches of public and private schools. This disparity points to a form of institutional “blindness,” where the state system fails to adequately recognize the issue, forcing teachers to intuitively assume the role of therapists in their daily work.
- **Limited access to psychological services** – In many regions, qualified psychologists are not available, while negative attitudes toward seeking psychological support remain prevalent in society.
- **Insufficient use of the violence response referral mechanism** – Although the referral mechanism for responding to violence against children formally exists within the system, it is

rarely used in practice. In many cases, incidents remain unreported or are addressed informally, while monitoring, coordination between institutions, and timely responses remain limited. This reduces the effectiveness of the mechanism in identifying risks and ensuring appropriate protection and support for left-behind children.



### Challenges within the Family Environment

- **Financial instability and limited financial literacy** — Although remittances sent by migrant parents often improve the material conditions of families, the research revealed financial instability and a lack of financial management skills in many households. The study challenges the stereotype that migrant families are always financially secure. Remittances are often irregular, while expenses such as private schooling, tutoring, and healthcare frequently exceed the amount received.
- **Increased responsibility of caregivers** — In the absence of parents, caregivers assume the primary role in raising children. They often have to manage multiple responsibilities simultaneously, which creates additional psychological and practical burdens.
- **Limited institutional support** — Caregivers frequently report insufficient engagement of social services and other support mechanisms that could assist families in addressing the needs of left-behind children.
- **Differences in parenting approaches** — Migrant parents and caregivers who live with the child on a daily basis often have different values and approaches to parenting.
- **Challenges in family communication** — In practice, these challenges often manifest as conflicts among family members. The migration of one family member frequently intensifies existing tensions and misunderstandings, which can further complicate relationships and the child-rearing process within the family.



### Challenges in the Social Protection and Child Welfare System

- **Limited accessibility of social services** — Caregivers consistently report that state support services are either practically unavailable or their use is very limited.
- **Challenges in access to healthcare** — According to respondents, the universal healthcare scheme often fails to cover necessary services, forcing families to rely on expensive private clinics.
- **Lack of psychological support** — Access to professional psychological services for children remains particularly limited, both in schools and in other institutions.
- **Bureaucratic barriers in social assistance** — Accessing social assistance is often associated with complex administrative procedures, which reduces the effectiveness and use of these services.
- **Risks of violence against children** — Respondents note that weak support mechanisms increase children's vulnerability and complicate the timely identification of and response to cases of violence.

- **Lack of informal support and alternative spaces** — Informal education, leisure, and hobby-based services for children are often unavailable, either due to the absence of such services locally or because families cannot afford them.



## Challenges at the Municipal Level

- **Weak local response mechanisms** — Municipal services responsible for child protection often fail to respond adequately to cases of children’s rights violations, including serious allegations such as physical violence.
- **Lack of data and targeted policies** — At the municipal level, there is no systematic data collection or dedicated mechanisms to identify the needs of children of migrant parents and to plan appropriate services.
- **Limited competencies of municipal officials** — Professionals responsible for child rights protection within municipalities often lack the specific competencies required to support children of migrant parents.
- **Weak coordination among local institutions** — Although social services and child protection units operate at the municipal level, cooperation and information exchange between them are frequently insufficient.
- **Limited focus of municipal programs** — Existing programs primarily target economically vulnerable families, which often leaves children of migrant parents outside the scope of support, particularly when their families appear financially stable.
- **Lack of youth and psychosocial services** — Respondents highlight the need for municipal programs that promote cultural, sports, and creative activities, which could strengthen children’s social participation and psychosocial well-being.



## Recommendations

### *I. Child-centred and cross-sectoral coordinated support system*

The research findings show that child support in the context of migration should be based on an **ecosystem approach**, in which responsibilities are shared among the state, municipal services, educational institutions, and family support networks.

In this context, recommendations should be built around two key priorities:

**First** - the establishment of a statistical data system that enables the early identification of children’s needs and supports evidence-based planning of targeted interventions.

**Seconds** - the strengthening of institutional cross-sectoral coordination at both the central and municipal levels, ensuring clearly defined responsibilities and effective provision of support.

## II. *State Level: Data-Driven Policy and Cross-Sectoral Governance*

- Both research demonstrate that one of the key barriers is the absence of statistical data on children of migrant parents. When the system lacks analyzable data, it becomes impossible to identify needs, plan evidence-based policies, and ensure fair allocation of resources. Therefore, it is essential to establish systematic mechanisms for data collection, integrated into the EMIS (Education Management Information System) electronic platform, while ensuring ethical (non-stigmatizing) principles and confidentiality.
- Such data should be used exclusively for planning support and must not create risks of administrative or social segregation.
- A data system is effective only when accompanied by a formalized framework of intersectoral coordination. Both studies show that schools often become the only point of contact, while caregivers and educators perceive themselves as being “outside the system.”
- To address this challenge, coordinated action is required among education, social protection, and, where necessary, healthcare services. Accordingly, it is advisable to develop policies at the central level that facilitate regulated, purpose-driven data sharing and processing across sectors. Without such a framework, data remains merely statistical and cannot be transformed into a basis for support planning.
- Policy documents should be reviewed to ensure that the specific needs and interests of children of migrant parents are systematically reflected in targeted programs and services.
- Cyclical migration cases are also noteworthy, particularly in families where a parent periodically returns and leaves again. The research identifies this context as a source of emotional instability and adaptation challenges. Therefore, it is recommended to consider a dedicated support model for families experiencing cyclical migration, aimed at strengthening support for both the child and the caregiver during periods of departure and return, and ensuring coordinated responses with educational institutions.

## III. *Municipal Level: Family Support and Case Management*

- **Strengthen the functions of municipal social services** so that they are able to monitor family environments and provide support to children whose parents are in migration.
- **Introduce a case management model** that ensures coordinated cooperation between schools, social services, and other relevant institutions. Such a model would support caregivers and families, clearly distribute responsibilities, and enable systematic monitoring of children’s needs, particularly in situations of circular migration.
- **Develop day centres and after-school programs** that provide academic, social, and psychosocial support for children. At both the municipal and school levels, there is a need to expand services that simultaneously promote children’s social integration and reduce the burden on caregivers.
- **Day centres and after-school spaces** can serve as an effective mechanism in this regard, as they combine academic support, motivation for learning, structured and meaningful use of free time, and elements of emotional support. Such spaces reduce the risk of isolation and create a safe environment where children can socialize with peers and receive support from responsible adults.

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## IV. *Educational Institution Level*

- **Introduce specialized guidelines for educational staff** that define common standards for supporting children of migrant parents (such guidelines have been developed by Civitas Georgia).
  - **Provide training for teachers in trauma-sensitive and non-stigmatizing approaches**, enabling them to recognize emotional difficulties at an early stage.
  - **Strengthen psychological support services in schools**, including group-based formats for children with similar experiences.
  - **Implement effective referral mechanisms** to ensure the timely identification of violence or psychosocial problems and referral to appropriate services.
  - **Promote extracurricular programs and activities** that support children’s social participation and emotional well-being.
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**V. *Family Level and Migrant Parents: Strengthening Connections and Preparation***

- Encourage prior communication with the child before migration decisions are made, ensuring that children understand the upcoming changes.
- Select caregivers with careful consideration of the child’s emotional well-being and agree in advance on shared parenting approaches and responsibilities.
- Inform educational institutions before migration and ensure legal guardianship arrangements, so that children can access necessary services without interruption.
- Maintain regular and meaningful communication with children during the migration period, focusing not only on financial support but also on sustaining emotional connection.



## Results Achieved in 2024–2026 and Lessons Learned

The initiative implemented with the support of GIZ during 2024–2026 created practical and knowledge-based resources for supporting children of migrant parents in Georgia. Alongside two large-scale research studies, three professional resources were developed:

- **Protocol for Preschools** – a practical guide describing how children of migrant parents should be identified, supported, and how their needs should be addressed within the daily educational process.
- **Protocol for Schools and Teachers** – a set of tools and recommendations that helps schools and educators better understand the needs of children of migrant parents and introduce appropriate educational practices to support them.
- **Guidelines for Psychologists** – a professional resource that includes assessment tools and practical exercises for providing psychosocial support to children of migrant parents.

At the same time, **training modules for professionals** were developed to strengthen the capacities of social workers, psychologists, teachers, and preschool specialists and to support effective work with children of migrant parents.

*The following trainings were conducted:*

- **Community organizations and social workers** – three four-day trainings with 71 participants
- **School teachers** – two three-day trainings with 38 participants
- **Psychologists** – one training with 21 participants



Training for Social Workers and Service Providers

The **first national conference on supporting children of migrant parents** was organized, bringing together specialists working in the fields of child protection and migration from different regions of Georgia, including social workers, psychologists, teachers, preschool educators, youth workers, and representatives of the academic sector. The conference became an important platform for professional dialogue and policy development.



November, 2025 – First National Conference

**Consultative Body** – A multi-sectoral consultative body was established, bringing together representatives of international organizations, civil society, academia, and practicing specialists. The body coordinates project activities, supports knowledge exchange, and contributes to the development of recommendations aimed at strengthening policies and practices related to the support of children of migrant parents. Over the

two-year period, 32 professionals worked as members of the consultative body together with the Civitas team.

Within the project, **two Training of Trainers (ToT) programs** were implemented with the participation of **40 preschool education specialists** (24 participants in the first phase and 16 in the second phase). After completing the trainings, participants carried out municipal replication activities, which enabled knowledge dissemination across different regions.

- In the **first phase, 24 replication meetings** were conducted with representatives from **71 preschools** from the municipalities of Marneuli, Tianeti, Ozurgeti, Telavi, Tkibuli, Gori, Kobuleti, Batumi, and Akhaltsikhe.
- In the **second phase, 21 municipal meetings and workshops** were organized, training an additional **363 practitioners**, and knowledge dissemination reached **54 preschools** in Dusheti, Bolnisi, Tkibuli, Sagarejo, Kareli, Tbilisi, Sachkhere, Lanchkhuti, Kutaisi, Marneuli, Baghdati, and Kvareli.

Overall, project trainings and replication activities reached **more than 600 preschool practitioners**, covering **21 municipalities and 133 preschool specialists**.



The results of the replication activities, participants' feedback, and their experiences were shared with the public through social media.



Letters from training participant teachers to their whose parents are migrants

Representatives of Civitas also participated in **three local and international conferences** dedicated to the topic of children of migrant parents.

Within two phases, the organization worked to strengthen local community-based organizations on the issue of children of migrant parents, engaging representatives of community organizations from **16 municipalities** (Tkibuli, Gori, Ozurgeti, Tianeti, Batumi, Kobuleti, Kutaisi, Tetritskaro, Marneuli, Tbilisi, Sagarejo, Akhaltsikhe, Borjomi, Khashuri, Lagodekhi, and Telavi).

### Psychological Counseling Services

The project implemented a psychological support component in which specialists were trained in working with children of migrant parents. The program included a professional supervision system, ensuring support for specialists' practical work and quality control.

Within the project, psychological counseling services were provided to approximately 150 children, their caregivers, and migrant parents. Experiences from the counseling process were documented in

the form of case studies, helping specialists share practical knowledge and improve professional approaches. All cases are presented anonymously and fully comply with the highest standards of professional ethics and personal data protection.

### Information and Public Awareness Campaign

The project also implemented a **multi-format awareness campaign** aimed at increasing public understanding of the situation of children of migrant parents.

The campaign included the podcast series “*Asphurtzela Stories*”, which explores the childhood stories of well-known individuals, the experiences of children of migrant parents, and conversations with professionals working on the topic. The podcast aims to highlight the emotional and social dimensions of migration and to engage the wider public in reflecting on the issue.

The campaign also included informational cards and infographics shared on social media, as well as live discussions with experts and practitioners.

To further broaden public outreach, articles were published in online media, and the project and its research findings were covered by national and local television channels through dedicated broadcasts and interviews. These activities significantly contributed to strengthening public discussion about the challenges faced by children of migrant parents

### Who stands behind the scenes?



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