

### 2.3.1 Migrants with left-behind children in Hungary

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According to a comprehensive report (EC, 2012) of the organisation *Children Left Behind* ([www.childrenleftbehind.eu](http://www.childrenleftbehind.eu)) it is estimated that at the beginning of the 2010s, some half a million children lived left behind by one or more abroad-working parents in the European Union. The majority of these children lived in Romania and Poland, but from other sources it is known that Bulgaria, as well as some countries outside the EU, such as Moldova are also seriously affected (Blaskó, 2016). Although the number of emigrants in Hungary does not reach a level as high as in the countries just mentioned, the increase in emigration here makes the examination of this issue undoubtedly relevant. Studies pointing at significant detriments to the child's well-being (as measured for example by progress in school or state of health) associated with the absence of the parents underline the importance of the problem.<sup>1</sup> These detriments occur notwithstanding the positive income effect of the remittances enjoyed by the households. Negative impacts on the children can not only appear in the absence of the mother: some of the studies do not even differentiate as to which parent is abroad; while other studies are looking at the impacts of the father's absence.

Our brief analysis presents some first estimations on the extent of emigration with left-behind children in Hungary based on Population Census data from 2011.<sup>2</sup> Following to the logic of the Census, we distinguish between two cases: when parents (one or both) are away temporarily or permanently. In the first case, families raising chil-

dren younger than 18 were considered as affected when it was clear that either one of the parents or both of them were (*temporarily*) living abroad. In these cases it was possible to identify single-parent families (when even this only parent was abroad), looking at a relatively wide range of information on the individuals concerned. In the case of *permanent* residence abroad (lasting over a year), strict assumptions had to be applied, as in their cases the census only contains dwelling-level data not broken down by individual. Therefore, a family was considered as having left-behind child(ren) due to permanent migration of one parent if they lived in a dwelling from which at least one individual was living abroad, while the family affected had only one parent present, and the marital status of this parent was "in partnership". We considered a family to have two parents resident abroad permanently if an individual under the age of 18 was living in the household with no parent (but possible with other relatives or other non-related grown-up persons) and the dwelling had at least two individuals resident abroad. It is possible however that the individuals attached to the dwelling but living abroad are in fact not the parents of the child in the household; therefore our figures concerning permanent absence of the parents in two-parent families should be considered as an upper estimate.

Our analysis is therefore focusing on families raising one child or more under 18 living in Hungary: a total of 1,056,674 families in 2011. According to our estimates 11,064 of these were missing one or both parents due to temporary residence abroad (a maximum of one year as reported by the respondents). Besides, the number of families (or households) with at least one parent permanently (for over a year) abroad was estimated at 2,947.

SEEMIG survey. As we have shown elsewhere (Blaskó, 2015), the data from the LFS–SEEMIG dataset is for the most part similar to the census; however, somewhat higher. Since these estimates are more uncertain, they are not presented here.

1 See for example Giannelli–Mangiavacchi (2010), Mazzucato–Schans (2011), Antman (2013), Gréen (2014), Mastrorillo–Fagiolo (2015), Botezat–Pfeiffer (2014), Sorensen–Vammen (2014) – Hungarian language summary: Blaskó (2016).

2 We currently have access to two data sources at our disposal for the study of left-behind children in Hungary: one is the 2011 Population Census; the other is the CSO's Labour Force Survey (LFS) for the first quarter of 2013, supplemented by data from the

Most of the affected families are two-parent families with the father working abroad (in 10,002 cases temporarily; in 2,391 permanently). All in all, only 413 two-parent families were identified, where the mother was engaged in temporary foreign employment, and a further 211 in which the mother was permanently abroad. The number of families raising children under the age of 18 in which both parents reside abroad was 530. We also found a relatively small number of cases in which a single parent went abroad for work.<sup>3</sup>

The number of children affected by parental migration is obviously higher than the number of affected families. In total, 18 thousand children aged

18 or younger had one or both of their parents temporarily abroad at the time of the 2011 Census. Out of this, 16,721 children had their father and 1063 their mother abroad, while 245 children were missing both of their parents. Of the children affected, 36 per cent had not yet reached school age (2.3.1.1. table). A total of 296 children aged six years or younger had a mother living abroad either alone or together with the father (single mothers included). Considering also the number of children with one or two parents permanently abroad (4,361) we can estimate that in Hungary altogether approximately 22 thousand children are potentially affected by consequences of parental migration.

**Table 2.3.1.1: The number of families / households raising children in Hungary and the number of children by parents' migration status**

	Families	Children aged		
		0-6 years	0-14 years	0-18 years
Both parents live with the family	811,017	559,977	1,137,743	1,393,252
One-parent family, parent lives in the household	231,991	93,845	256,365	347,818
Two-parent family, the father lives temporarily abroad	10,002	6,164	13,321	16,556
Two-parent family, the mother lives temporarily abroad	413	147	435	611
Both parents live temporarily abroad	185	67	152	245
One-parent family, father only, who lives temporarily abroad	124	48	96	165
One-parent family, mother only, who lives temporarily abroad	340	82	268	452
Two-parent family, father lives permanently abroad	2,391	1,128	2,942	3,641
Two-parent family, mother lives permanently abroad	211	61	197	296
Two-parent family, both parents live permanently abroad*	345	na.	na.	424
Total	1,057,019**	661,519	1,411,519	1,763,460

\* Households living with children under the age of 18, without parents, in which at least two individuals from the home are residing abroad.

\*\* Dwellings and households included.

Source: 2011 Census.

3 We concluded that the number of parents who were temporarily abroad was significantly higher than the number of those permanently abroad. This could be a sign that the parents do not accept work that would mean leaving their children behind for over a year. However it is also possible that because the “temporarily abroad” census category is somewhat vaguely defined, those who are drawn to choosing it might be those who want to see their family as a unit despite one parent being away. Although in general the census does not reliably “capture” those permanently abroad, in our case is not a real issue as the analysis here focuses on families and households having strong bonds with Hungary.

Families opting for parental migration are not evenly distributed across the country (Figure K2.3.1.1). Compared to the national average, the proportion of two-parent families choosing to work abroad (for one or both parents) is considerably higher in Tolna county (1.6 per cent), but it is also relatively high in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Veszprém and Baranya. Considering the number of cases, the highest figure can also be found in Borsod (the poorest county in Hungary), where more than 1,600 families live geographically separated by migration. The lowest rates were observed in Pest county and Győr-Moson-

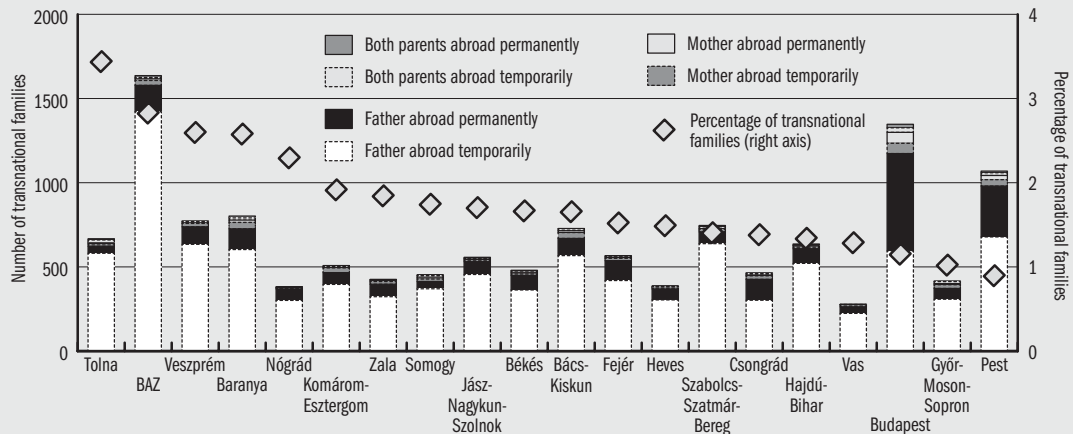
Sopron – both among the economically most developed counties in the country. Interestingly, only Budapest had essentially the same number of fathers being temporarily and permanently absent.<sup>4</sup>

Data on individual characteristics is only available for the temporarily absents. Our results confirm

<sup>4</sup> Information on one-parent families is not presented here due to limitations of space.

earlier findings from the literature: migration that leaves a family behind is almost without exception motivated by employment. The employment rate of fathers from two-parent families in our sample is 99 per cent, while the same figure for mothers is 87 per cent. It is noteworthy that a large majority of fathers – almost two thirds (64 per cent) – have vocational training.

Figure 2.3.1.1: The number of different types of transnational two-parent families broken down by county, in order of decreasing proportion



Source: 2011 Census.

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