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Symposium: 'Families in Poverty' – discourses and experiences

Transnational migration by job as a familial poverty alleviation strategy in Estonia: perspectives of children left behind and commuting by job fathers

1

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This presentation is about

- Poverty
- Migration by job
- Research evidences
 - General attitudes of children concerning transnational parenting (a small-scale survey)
 - Wellbeing of children whose parents migrate by job (ISCWeB)
 - In-depth evidences from children left behind by both parents
 - In-depth evidences from fathers separated by job from their family
- Conclusion

- ▶ In 2014, 21.6% of Estonia's population lived in relative poverty and 6.3% in absolute poverty
- ▶ 20% of children live in relative poverty, more often they live in
 - ▶ Hh's with 3+ children
 - ▶ Lone parent hh's
 - ▶ Hh's with unemployed members (Statistics Estonia 2016)

Cumulated effects: lone parent, children, unemployment/low income, no support from the other parent, informal care obligations...

- ▶ *Migration by job – a strategy to relieve poverty?*

SUBJECTIVE ECONOMIC:

- ▶ 27% of 11-15 yrs old children assess their family's economic performance as poor
- ▶ 20% of 11-15 yrs old children assess their living conditions as poor (HBSC Estonia)

PSYCHOLOGICAL:

- ▶ Over a half of children are tired in the mornings before going to school
- ▶ 10% of 13-15 yrs old children have experienced suicidal ideation (HBSC Estonia)
- ▶ Every tenth 12 yrs old child lives with low self confidence and 14% do not believe they can reach personal aims (Hope study: Krass & Kutsar, 2013)

SOCIAL:

- ▶ 37% of children have no sisters or brothers
- ▶ 27% of children live in a lone parent household (Civil Census Estonia 2011)
- ▶ Children are critical how they are treated: listened and their opinions taken seriously (ISCWeB EE 2014)

- The whole family migrates
- One of the parents (more often father), children left home
- Lone parent / Both parents, children left behind

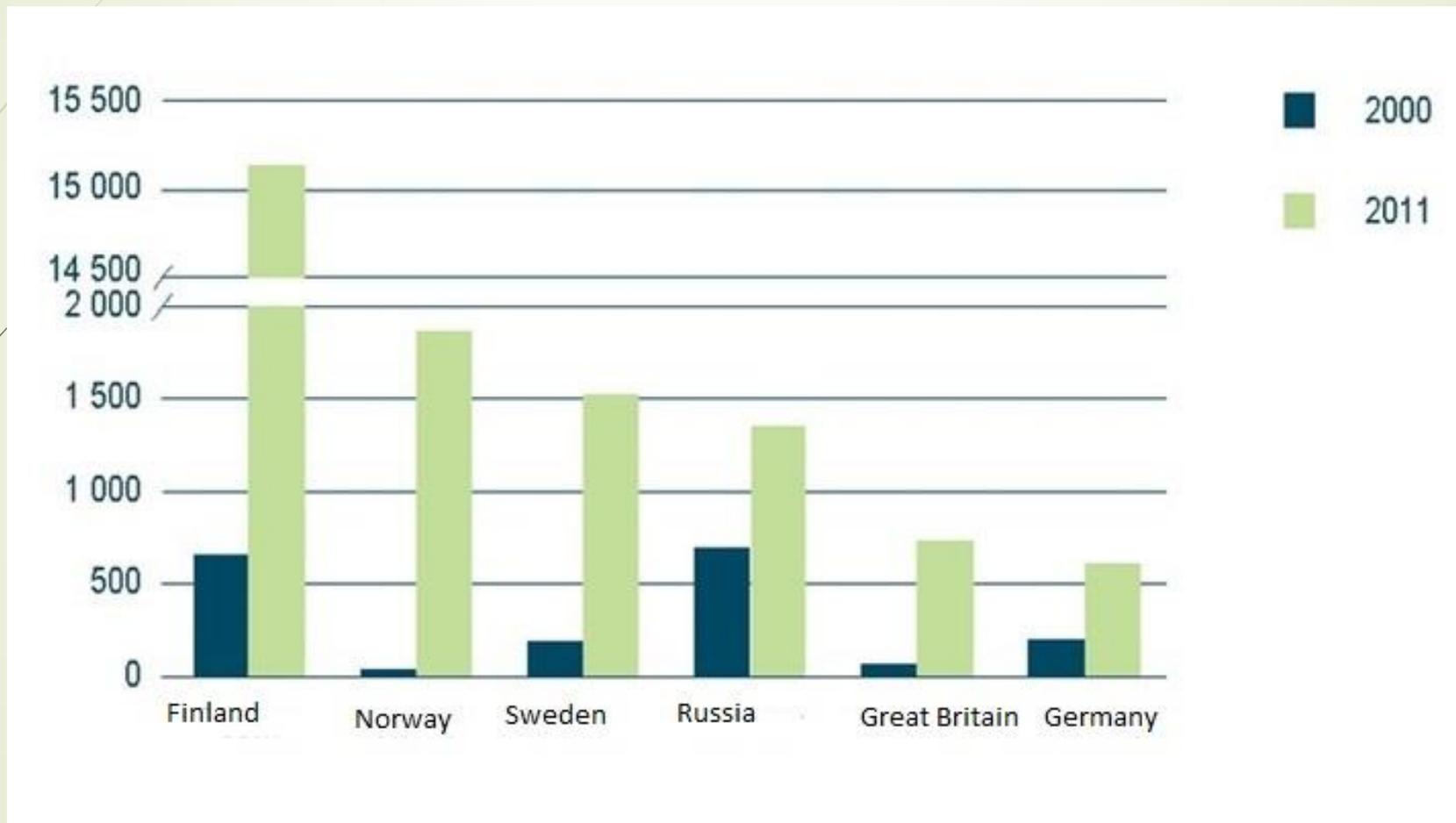
- 4% of all employed have jobs out of Estonia
 - More often men
- Both parents migrate by job –
 - 822 hh's (3% of those who migrate; 36% M and 64% F; age range 35-44 yrs)
 - lone parents (mostly mothers) form 60%
 - 60% - hh's with one child (Civil Census (2011))

Civil Census may under-report the job migrants

Transnational migration by job

- Short / long-term migration
- Pushing forces
 - Unemployment – to (re)start working
 - Income poverty – to increase family income
 - Loans – to pay the loans
 - To give children more opportunities
 - Self- and professional development (more often younger people)
- Not only people with low education but also highly qualified people migrate (e.g. medical doctors to Finland)

Destination countries



Source: Statistics Estonia (Civil Census 2000; 2011), Krusell 2013

General attitudes of children about parental job migration (Kutsar, Darmody & Lahesoo, 2015)

- ▶ 2010 study on 239 sixth grade (12-13yrs old) students' perspectives about parental migration when children are left behind
 - ▶ 83% hold negative opinions on parental migration
 - ▶ 13% who were more likely to accept parental migration preferred to have a father as a 'transnational parent'
 - ▶ Children associate parental migration with negative emotions
 - ▶ Risk of violent or criminal behavior for children
 - ▶ Children see hidden risks of family breakdown as pushing factors to migration
 - ▶ Relative erosion of physical family borders is perceived by children as erosion of the family unity in cases of parental migration
 - ▶ Few positive effects of parental migration:
 - ▶ potential benefit of improved economic circumstances
 - ▶ development of children's agency (more freedom, time for friends, own decision-making)
- ▶ Future perspectives: boys more than girls agree to follow the parental model, especially on economic grounds

Wellbeing of children with transnational parents

(ISCWeB, 2014)

- ▶ 10-year-olds: N=1034, 20% with parent(s) working abroad
- ▶ 12-year-olds: N=1033, 22% with parent(s) working abroad
- ▶ Satisfaction with school and friends (outside home settings) are not significantly affected
- ▶ Less contacts and attention received from adults (especially in the family)
- ▶ Feel less safe in all life spheres
- ▶ Satisfaction with self and one's life in general is especially affected among 12-year-olds
- ▶ Clearly more pessimistic views about the future opportunities ('existential' issues, such as 'my life', 'my future')

In-depth evidences: Children left behind by both parents (Kartau & Kutsar, 2013)

- Interviews with five children in the age of 11-12 years, whose parents are working abroad
 - there are positive and negative effects on children left behind as perceived by children
 - (+; -) Reorganization of everyday life of the child
 - (+) More personal freedom and independence, more obligations (e.g. take care of younger siblings), more responsibility
 - (-) Deprived from everyday face-to-face interactions and shared everyday with parent(s) (symbolic family membership and unity over the real)
 - (-) Secondary neglect: when left with older sibling(s) who are busy with transitions into adulthood
 - (-) Growing distance with parents (esp fathers)
 - (-) Lack of parental support: mother is not always present when needed; grandparent not selected as being confidant

In-depth evidences: Fathering from distance (Raudsepp & Kutsar, 2014)

- ▶ Five semi-structured interviews with commuting fathers, who are working abroad while their children are living in the home country with mother
 - ▶ Father's main objective of working abroad is to guarantee better income to their family, because they feel, that they have to be able to fulfill their role as the breadwinner → revival of traditional family roles
- ▶ Realities
 - ▶ Feeling of not being a part of the family`s everyday (erosion of family unity)
 - ▶ Loss of regular control over family wellbeing
 - ▶ Losing or missing contacts: children will depart emotionally from their fathers
 - ▶ Emotional distress, loneliness
 - ▶ Alcohol, searching adventures
 - ▶ Fathering over borders is challenging to both - fathers and children

Migration by job – a strategy to relieve poverty?

12

- Economic situation of the family improved in 64%, stayed the same in 31% and worsened in 2% of the cases (Pärna, 2008)
- Restoration of an image of being a good father – a good breadwinner
- More life chances for children to build their life careers (hobbies, education, things...)

HOWEVER, multi-layered impact, concerning the individual, the family and the sending community

Generally under-estimated cost job migration imposes on the well-being of family members – those who migrate and those left behind

- Risk to family unity and growth
- Risk of losing closeness with children
- Lower child wellbeing and future perspectives