

8th Congress of the European Society on Family relations  
31st August – 3rd September 2016  
TU Dortmund University, Germany

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

*Dagmar Kutsar, University of Tartu, Estonia*

*Dagmar.kutsar@ut.ee*

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)

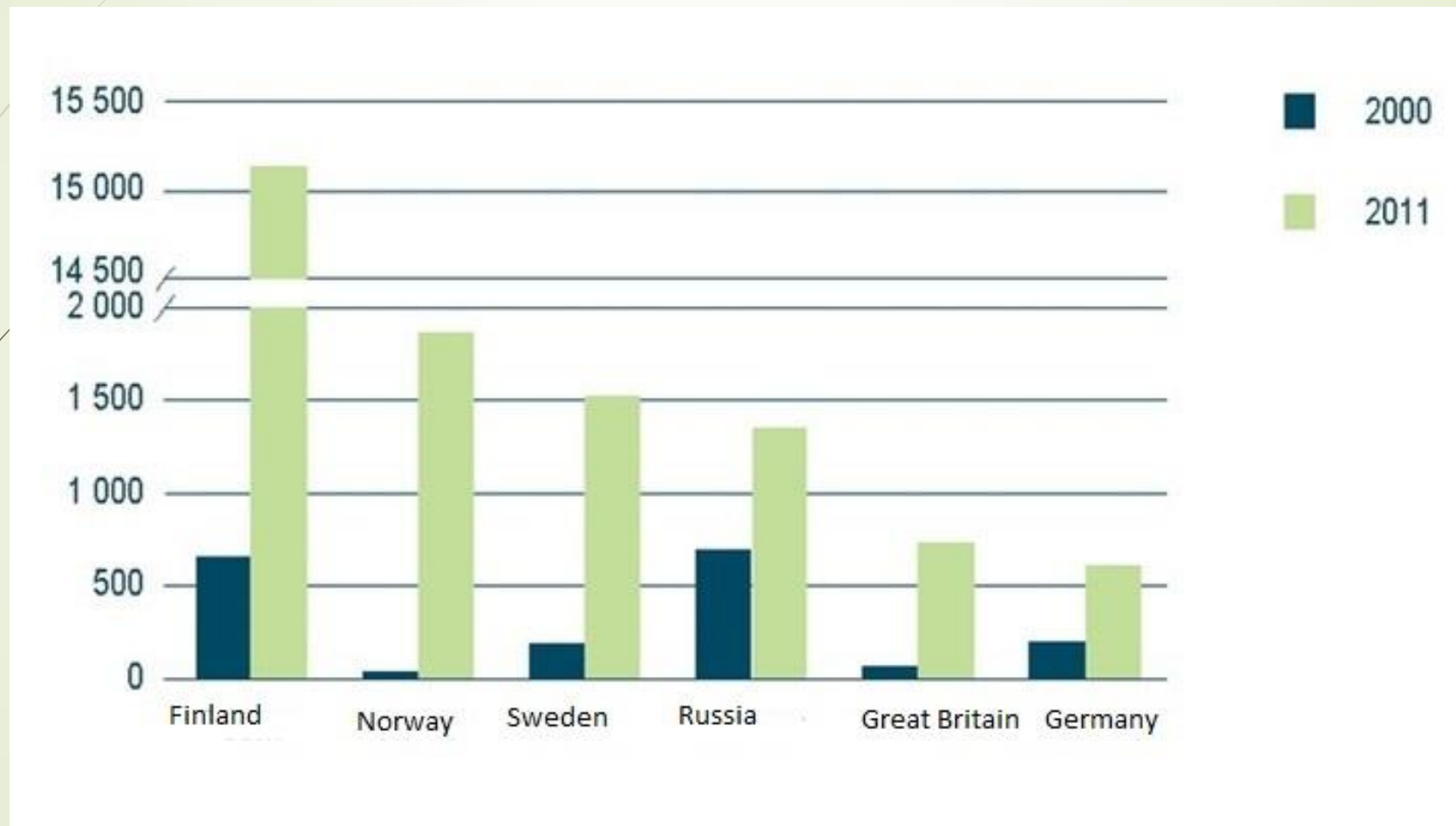
- The whole family migrates
- One of the parents (more often father), children left home
- Lone parent / Both parents, children left behind
  
- 4% of all employed have jobs out of Estonia
  - More often men
- Both parents migrate by job –
  - 822 hh's (3% of those who migrate; 36% M and 64% F; age range 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