



# EU-CHINA CIVIL SOCIETY DIALOGUE ON LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN IN EUROPE AND CHINA

20-22 February 2012



## Practitioners and academics explore policy solutions to the problem of left-behind children in Europe and China

### The EU-China Civil Society Dialogue on Left-Behind Children allowed participants to engage in conference-based learning

64 participants from Chinese and European NGOs, universities, and supporting organisations engaged in information exchange and joint action planning

Keynote speakers Dr Bernadette Robinson (Honorary Professor, School of Education, University of Nottingham) and Dr Lin Zhibin (Independent Researcher and Practitioner) reflected on Left-Behind Children in International Perspective ('Left-Behind Children: Who Are They?') and Left-Behind Children in the PR China ('Stories Of Left-Behind Children And Their Families')

Practitioners Mr Gheorge Pascaru (Sociologist, Alternative Social Association, Romania), Ms Inete Ielite (Children's Forum of Latvia), and Ms Fan

Tongyang (Save the Children, China) shared best practices from Romania, Latvia and China

Europeans participants from Italy, Latvia, Romania, Belgium, UK, Germany and France engaged in three days of networking with Chinese counterparts from Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Ningbo, Hangzhou, Wenzhou, Ruian, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Yunnan, and Zunyi

The dialogue forum was facilitated by 15 student volunteers providing personal interpreting services and acting as student ambassadors of the dialogue forum

Mobile journalists from the student association NUTS China conducted nine in-depth video interviews with dialogue participants and will produce three video reports

Two follow-up projects have been identified which will strengthen the cooperation

between European and Chinese civil society organizations in the field of research and awareness raising on Left-Behind Children in Europe and China

Dr Rosaria Franco (Lecturer in Modern European History, University of Nottingham Ningbo China) is the Follow-up Action Teams (FACTS) Coordinator for the two chosen action plans "Closing Gaps" and "Eyes on Me". She can be reached by Email: [Rosaria.Franco@nottingham.edu.cn](mailto:Rosaria.Franco@nottingham.edu.cn)

### UPCOMING EVENTS

**The 1st International Conference on Civil Society Contributions to Policy Innovation in the PR China will take place in Beijing from 9-10 May 2012**

For more information please contact Ms Wang Lu from the China Association for NGO Cooperation ([wanglu@cango.org](mailto:wanglu@cango.org)).

**The 5th EU-China Civil Society Dialogue on Social Entrepreneurship will be held in Ningbo from 11-13 July 2012.**



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A project implemented by the University of Nottingham and its consortium members

# Left-Behind Children Problems and Solutions

By Dr Rosaria Franco

Left-behind children (LBC) seem to have been ‘discovered’ relatively recently. This intrigued me since the start, when I selected a topic in the area of child welfare that could unite China and the EU. In China, the issue has been acknowledged since the mid-2000s. In the EU, in turn, we are only at the start of the process, although last year a number of NGO managed to interest the European Parliament in this problem. Academic research seems also to be in the early stages, although Chinese scholars are well ahead.

Yet, migration has always existed. As one participant in our Dialogue explained: ‘Take rural China: it was not uncommon 50-60 years ago to have rural workers to move from one area to another for seasonal work leaving their families behind’. In Europe, in turn, there is no single country that has not experienced migration, and occasionally separate families. So what’s new?



The problem certainly originates from the changing nature of economic migration. Nowadays, migrants may move ‘temporarily’ for work, but in fact they leave their families behind for lengthy periods of time and even for years. Our participants showed great awareness of some of the key causes of the problem and I will let them ‘speak’ in a moment. Before then, though, I feel the need to point out that while migrants, as well as the children they left behind, belong to many social groups (including professionals and expats), concerns are raised especially when the impulse for migration raises from poverty.

## The dialogue

The 4th EU-China Dialogue was an intense dialogue between academics and practitioners.

Organizations ranged from grassroots/village-based organizations from rural China to INGOs with global experience (IOM, UNICEF, Save the Children, and Ford Foundation). We were also lucky to as as key speaker Honorary Professor Bernadette Robinson of the University of Nottingham, who has worked many years on issues of education in Gansu province.

The participation of practitioners from the EU brought fresh perspective to the debate. Not only did we learn of what is going on in Romania and Latvia, with Mr Gheorghe Pascaru from NGO Alternative Sociale Association and Ms Inete Ielite, from Children’s Forum of Latvia, respectively, but we also discovered that there are already transnational forms of cooperation between China and Italy, with COSPE, an Italian NGO (represented by Ms Maria Omodeo) working closely with both Chinese migrant parents in Italy and their LBC (or returning migrant children) now studying in schools of the Zhejiang.

## Day 1: Issues of concern

Our Dialogue consisted of 2 full days of intense discussion. The mix of people proved truly effective and at the end of the first World Café section participants had identified a wide range of problems affecting LBC.

1. The socio-economic context and specifically the uneven economic development between regions/countries sending out migrants and regions/countries receiving them and the resulting social polarization. For China the problem of the urban-rural divide and social polarization was also touched upon.

2. How the change of residence that comes with migration entails lack, loss, or the reduction of citizen rights and often community exclusion. For example, in China all rights, including social rights, are linked to the right of residence (hukou), but migrants cannot move it easily. This has inevitably an impact on welfare provisions. The EU is not in a better place though, as migrants may be given limited rights but never raise from the level of mere ‘denizens’ to full citizenship. Education is a case in point.

3. Education certainly ranges high in the list of problematic social rights. Migrant parents, in turn, attribute to education the greatest importance and often migrate precisely to increase the educational opportunities of their children.

For LBC educational provisions may be inadequate. For example, our Chinese participants estimated Chinese village schools are universally underfunded and lack key educational resources.

Across the territory EU things would appear a bit better for the compulsory education for migrant children, but, as EU participants from Italy later pointed out, migrant children may experience underachievement and all sorts of problems adjusting to host societies, even when access to education is actually granted to them. Meanwhile, LBC in Latvia and Romania experience great emotional distress that impairs their performance at school.

4. The emotional distress of the LBC was indeed another major issue acknowledged both by both Chinese and EU participants. Those working closely with LBC reported psychological problems, often weakening educational achievement, and occasionally child abuse suffered at the hands of relatives or strangers.

5. As for the family, parental choices lead to LBC being often burdened with the responsibility of looking after elderly grandparents and vice versa. As a result, children have to mature early, while grandparents are finding themselves (and found to be) badly-equipped to address the needs of adolescents. Concerns about parental lifestyle and choices were also voiced, but not investigated, with the case migrant single parents, a reality more common in European countries such Latvia than in China, considered most problematic.

6. As most participants belonged to NGOs it was also interesting to hear what are the issues that concern them as major providers of assistance to LBC. The need of greater information to be collected and distributed, advancing research, and raising awareness of LBC issues was considered a priority.

### **Day 2: Issues and Opportunities**

Moving from the issues to strategies to address them, that is comparing best practices with practices that needs improving, in the second of three Open Space sections of the Dialogue we heard a variety of current projects and proposals for new ones. It's very difficult to do justice to the variety of these reflections and proposals, so I will pick a few hopefully representative samples, one looking at the Chinese national situation and the other with a marked international perspective.

The first example regards how education of the LBC is currently addressed in rural villages in China. Poor conditions and poor quality of teachers were again emphasized. However, China-based NGOs showed some concern with the alternative path followed currently by the government, to close them down and replacing them with bigger boarding schools, not less problematic. The children themselves are reportedly disliking them. Yet, it was also acknowledged that it is very difficult to bring good teachers to villages (unless one manages to interest volunteer teachers). As a way forward it was suggested to

introduce child-centred practices in both environments, by caring not just for teaching, but also for the generally well-being of children in the village schools, while also fostering community spirit in boarding schools. So, one would conclude, centralization cannot solve all problems and children still need personalized attention and not to be separated by their remaining relatives. This indicates the need for specialized services provided by non-governmental organisations in China.

The second example touched upon the need to raise international awareness and cooperation to help LBC. The discussion evolved in a very interesting plan of action, on which I will come back shortly. What I want to emphasize here is that, this group discussion highlighted the general lack of knowledge of the situation in different countries and how online information and database could help to make progress in this direction.

The latter example allows me to raise a third major theme raised in the Dialogue, that is the opinion shared by both academics and some practitioners that more participatory research could move things forward. This again raises the issue that not enough is known about LBC and the impact on migration on them.

### **Day 3: Project Planning**

As in the previous Dialogues, the intense exchange of ideas of our participants led to actual 6 proposals to change things, but only two could receive the available 2 x 10.000 Euro Follow-Up funding. Eventually the decision of a dedicate committee was to develop the action plans 'Eyes on me' and 'Closing Gaps' further.

#### *Project 1: 'Eyes on Me'*

'Eyes on Me' is a project to collect children's voices as a way to raise international awareness. This, in turn, is envisaged as the first step to put the LBC on national and international policy agenda (national governments, the EU, and international agencies). It has also a strong children's rights basis and a commitment to support LBC's agency

#### *Project 2: 'Closing Gaps'*

This project is a comparative study of LBC resulting from internal migration (Gansu to Zhejiang) and transnational migration (Zhejiang to Italy). It focuses on education and aims at raising the awareness of migrant parents, LBC's substitute carers, and educators.

While this is a purely research project, it has the strength of creating synergies between researchers (in the field of child psychology and education) and practitioners (teachers and NGO) of both the EU and China.

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# ‘This event is an education for our youth, in the future I cannot allow my children to become left behind’

By Kang Hui

This conference is funded by the European Union and the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office and aims at fostering EU-China dialogue and cooperation and took place from 20 February to 22 February 2012 at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China. Including the deputy from the EU delegation in China and the deputy from British Embassy in China as well as representatives of NGOs at home and abroad, about 60 guests attended this meeting. We discussed the general impact of migration on children in China and Europe and especially the impact of parents’ migration for work on left-behind children.

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conference became a capacity building of probing good methods to help these vulnerable groups in whole society.

## Reflection on our achievements

This conference has allowed us to discuss the problems of left-behind children from the perspectives of different nations, which not only set up a communication platform for academics, practitioners from NGOs, but also formulated efficient programs aimed to the issue of left behind children. It is really an effective and efficient conference which accelerated the problem solving process of this issue. From the arrangement of whole agenda to the implementation of the programs, I learned a lot.

First of all, I learned some approaches to organize a 60-people conference. One is named “World Café”, which means creating a relaxed atmosphere for participants to discuss and to get to know more friends. The other one is called “Open Space”. The facilitators shared very interesting principles such as the “two feet”



On the 1st day workshop, we discussed what are the causes problems experienced by children of migrants and left-behind children; what is currently done by governments and NGOs in China and Europe EU to address these problems; and what can be done further to improve these children’s life. On the 2nd day and 3rd day, we explored the problems and solutions. Through exchanging ideas and practical experience among academics, practitioners and NGO representatives, this

principle which allows participants to go around and act as “busy bees ” or “beautiful butterflies”, instead of acting like “giraffes”. These images made participants remember the principles very quickly and acted as required; under fair voting system, in the section of planning output, participants from different countries and different organizations discussed solutions aimed at this issue according to three principles (timeliness, consistency, influence).

Secondly, the dialogue forum broadened my horizon. Left-behind children is not only a problem in China, but is also a worldwide problem (just in different forms). Especially with the development of globalization, more immigration results in more children to become the left behind ones. Such as in Wenzhou, “the hometown for Chinese”, parents go abroad to earn money for children’s better life, but actually impose huge negative impacts on children.

Thirdly, I have become more conscious of the seriousness of the problem of left-behind children. After several days of communication, I realised that the problem of left-behind children is not only a contemporary issue, more importantly, it is a future problem, which even will affect the development of several generations as well as the progress of human society as a whole. Undoubtedly, to solve this problem is an immediate urgency.

Fourthly, there are some implications I got from the performance of collaborators and participants. Every participant was outstanding. After several days of communication and observation, I learned some ways of expressing and communication, which will help me in my future personal development. For example, the principal of the Children’s Hope Foundation distributed her business card actively, on the one hand, to know more friends and acquire more resources, on the other hand, to publicize her organization.

Another lecturer from a German university spoke Chinese very well. She has been working as a journalist in China for quite a long time. During the group discussion, though she was not a coordinator, she actively controlled the time of every participant’s statement, to ensure everyone has his/her voice heard and to ensure that there was no language barrier in communication; the coordinator, who was kind, serious and humor, was also a good example for me to follow.

### Action planning

In order to solve the problem of left behind children, different organisations should work together, meanwhile, every individual need to make contribution, so I will expound the action plan from the vantage point of Zigen.

Until now, Zigen has already done some projects related to left behind children, such as making investigation on left behind children and setting up activity center for children, etc. Besides, we made some plans focusing on three aspects, one is aimed at children aged 3-6, to establish kindergartens in the village, and to provide knowledge training for guardians. Another one is aimed at boarding primary school, to pay more attention to left behind

children and offer teachers knowledge training, and the third one is aimed at young children, especially the left behind children, to provide them specialized adolescent education and tell them how to improve self-protection awareness .

Personally, I was greatly affected by the activities aimed at left behind children organized by student volunteers at that time. Then, a volunteer shared his own feeling about the activity and said: 'This event is an education for our youth, in the future I cannot allow my children to become left behind children.' Therefore, I often remind myself that don't allow my own children to be left behind ones. At the same time, I also want to tell other mothers, try not to let children to be left behind ones, and to company them as often as you can.



### Deliberation

In recent years, both the Chinese government and civil society have carried out various activities and a number of policies for left behind children, such as family phone, home for left behind children, making pairs, but many problems are still not resolved. For example, the rate of telephone sets and utilisation is very low, there are not enough teachers in kindergartens, many left-behind children activity center are idle, to name just a few unresolved problems. So we should draw lessons from the past timely, take relevance, sustainability and impact of projects into account and work for better solutions more effectively.

*Mrs Kang Hui works for the Zigen Rural Education and Development Promotion Association in Beijing, China. More information about Child Welfare in Europe and China are available from the dialogue's online reader <http://www.scoop.it/t/children-left-behind>*

# Allowing us to discover, to think and to practice, all by ourselves

By Lan Shuai

In short three days, this conference made me re-examine my organisation and our work, and re-adjust my plans and working status of original work. I really appreciate the opportunity of attending this EU-China dialogue workshop, which allows us to complete three-day brainstorming, learning, exchanging, and sharing in such a relaxing and open atmosphere.

Thanks to the workshop, with familiar friends and co-workers who are dedicated working with left behind children and migrant children, we can not only learn from each other but also, under mutual company, confirm our own characteristics and see our own appearance more clearly. Be more directly: We are also worried that the work we did is not enough, that our thoughts are not deep enough, and that ourselves are not plain enough, thus, letting everybody down would be the greatest regret. Since we treasure the fate, so we enjoy the tacit agreement and happiness when working with like-minded people.

When comparing the issue of left behind children caused by migration in Europe with the same issue caused by the massive labour migration within China we realised that there exist some fundamental differences. At the same time we also realised a lot of common problems, e.g. in our families, schools, and society at large. We also recognised many similarities, from which, we can learn from each other. Between left behind children and migrant children, we are looking for organic links and common points. Of course, this workshop has led us to compare and contrast the issue of left behind children and the issue of migrant children, offered opportunities for practitioners

from different countries, different places and different organisations to share and exchange their ideas, integrate and reflect on resources and programs. The overwhelming urgent requirement for serving this particular group was put forward by Mr. He Jin from the Ford Foundation. This allowed me to remind myself that the essence of social work is to meet the need of target group; in-depth research in rural area conducted by Dr. Lin Zhibin and her analysis on the relationship and mutual effect between students and families have made me have a better understanding on left behind children.

The nature of education is to help everyone to discover him- or herself, and to be him- or herself. Education also is a process of waiting, to trust and to love children and to give children chances to make mistakes in order to help him/her to grow up. This workshop allowed us to discover, to think and to practice, all by ourselves. At the same time, it has taught us to be patient to serve our target group, with our own unique feature toward the selected goal. I also can have more trust and patience, less consumption and requirements when I face to the target group I should serve.

At last, I greatly appreciate the invitation and considerate arrangement and services offered by organizing committee, and really look forward to meet you again.

*Mr Lan Shuai works for Yinghuo Zhuxue, a non-profit organisation based in Chengdu, China. <http://www.yinghuo.org/portal.php>*







## Chinese grassroots NGOs meet their international counterparts from Europe

By Dr Lin Zhibin

What I like the most about this dialogue forum is the Open Space, where each participant is empowered and encouraged to raise one's issue and to call for a group discussion. I have enjoyed in all four discussion groups I managed to join and learned a lot.

This dialogue has provided a great opportunity for NGOs who concern on similar issues to get to know each other, which is a good basis for possible further communication and co-operation. I am especially inspired by the invitation of a NGO from township level to be part of the event. Civil society dialogue should also avoid a top down approach, where NGOs from national level or higher level position themselves as leading organizations without full understanding and knowledge of what happens at the grassroots level.

This dialogue has also provided a great opportunity for scholars, NGO staff from China and Europe to meet and share experiences and views. I personally enjoyed an Open Space discussion group on research methodology, when I also got to know a few scholars from Europe, with whom I share common research values. Because of such mutual understand and trust developed in the course of the dialogue, Prof. Robinson and I have decided to work on a joint paper for the forthcoming International Conference on Civil Society Contributions to Policy Innovations in the People's Republic of China in Beijing. I also feel fortunate to meet Daniele from Italy, who, I find, has deep insights on China's past and current stage of development. An editor from a Chinese publisher asks me whether I know any foreigner who is capable of writing his/her views and insight on China, I think of Daniele. Daniele and I are currently discussing this possibility.

I am impressed by the campus atmosphere at Nottingham University. I was not able to get to know more about the university day-to-day teaching and activities, but

some contacts with the student volunteers gave me deep and good impressions. I was invited to do an exchange with a student volunteer organization, more than 20 students joined the exchange. I was told that the students were given free space to organize their activities. The teaching and academic environment, and rich international exchanges have provided many students good opportunities to gain exposures to a wider world.

I am also very impressed by our kind host and organizers, who have thought through every detail to welcome us, for instance: cups with our names, group photos before our departure, easy lunch and nice evening meals, etc.

Thank you all.

### VIDEO REPORT ON LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN

*What are the causes and consequences of the phenomenon of left-behind children in China? Independent researcher Lin Zhibin shares stories from left-behind children. She reflects on the societal and policy changes which need to take place in order to protect the dignity and well-being of migrating families. Recorded by citizen journalists Hermann Aubie, Kanako Kuramitsu, Ning Ninghu, and Dragon Film Factory during the EU-China Civil Society Dialogue on Left-Behind Children. This three day dialogue forum organised by the University of Nottingham Ningbo China and the University of Nottingham, UK took place in Ningbo from 20-22 February 2012 and involved 64 participants from European and Chinese civil society, government, think tanks, academia, and media. Disclaimer: The contents of this video are the sole responsibility of the University of Nottingham and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union or the British Foreign & Commonwealth Office.*

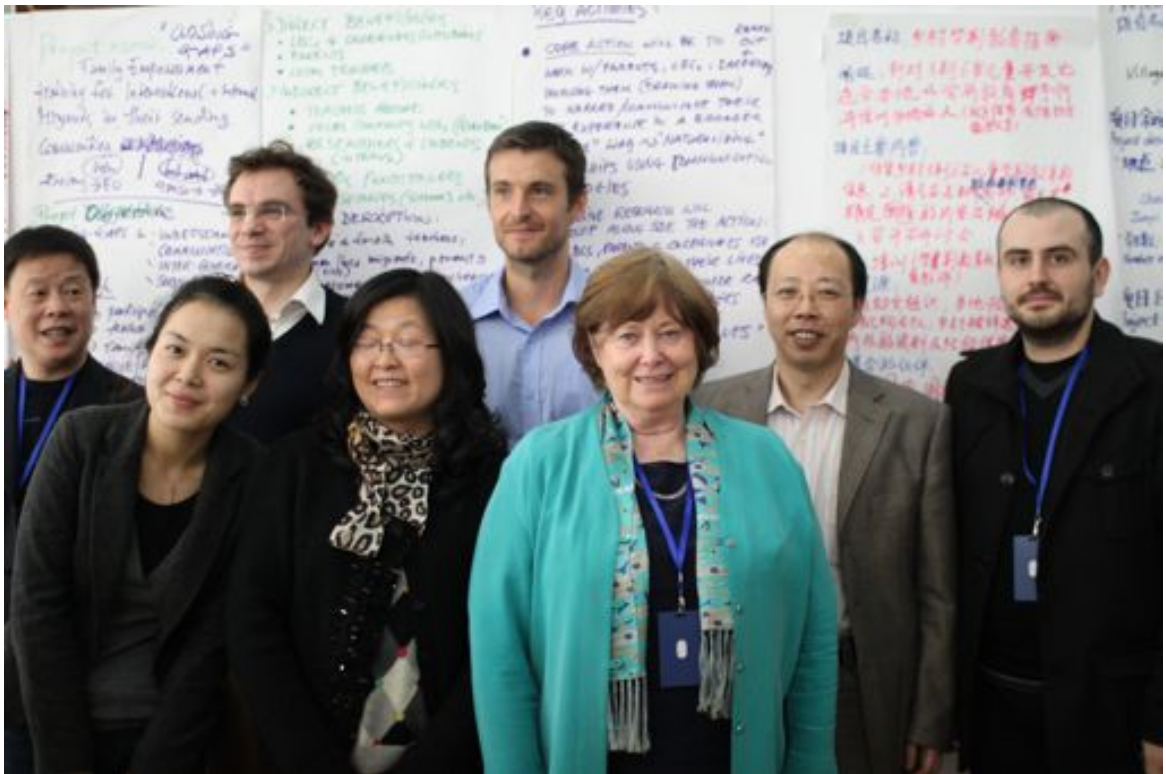
<https://vimeo.com/38688657>

# Sharing the Alternative Sociale Association experience with China

By Gheorghe Pascaru

Left-behind children were the focus of the fourth EU-China Civil society Dialogue held from 20-22 February 2012 in Ningbo, China. During three days academics, NGO practitioners, public institution representatives, international organizations members and other key stakeholders were involved in a process of networking, debate and exchange of experiences from EU and China on migration and its effects on family cohesion.

one or both parents gone to work abroad for a long time can lead to feelings of abandonment. These feelings most often have repercussions on the development of the personality. The length of the absence can be associated with a series of problems, with lack of caring and providing for the needs of the child. In the school environment, the main issues refer to the way the child relates to his colleagues and to the way school requirements are fulfilled.



My primary interest was to have discussions and debates with Chinese counterparts on the psychological effects on the children affected by the migration of the parents. Of course there are a lot of similarities (patterns of migration, coping mechanism and psychological effects etc.) and a lot of differences (cultural implications, legal framework, scale of migration etc.).

The first thing that naturally emerged in the discussions on World Café and raised on several discussions during Open Space conference is that the similarities are striking. Lack of parental care is a cause for deviant behaviors, for school low performances, for degradation in the physical and emotional state of the child. All these are caused by lack of control, lack of education and positive models as well as by communication problems, coping difficulties, caring deficiencies, task overburden etc. The separation of the child from

Europe and China share the same pattern: especially in the rural area, the children are overburden with responsibilities and they have to face situations where financial problems are not solved by their parents going to work.

The fact parents go to work abroad does not automatically involve problems described above. Some parents leave only after making a “plan” to protect their children and only after they make sure there will be “help” needed and replacing their absence. With the departure of parents, children take their roles not only in household maintenance but also as caregivers for their brothers and sisters. The natural dynamics of the family system is disturbed by the departure of a parent. The family must reorganize and adapt, lengthy process that may take several months. This period of crisis is considered the most difficult time. The child feels the lack of information and participation in the



decision in a negative way, with consequences on his attitude and behavior in the absence of the parents. Many children assume the "failure" of the family, considering that they are to blame for their parents absence. They tend to be held themselves responsible for the situation.

My biggest contribution to the Dialogue, in my view, was to share Alternative Sociale Association experience on the matter in Romania. Since 2005 we developed "home alone" program for children left behind in Romania by migrating parents in the EU states.

### Research

Our first concern on the issue was to investigate the scale, characteristics and dynamics of the phenomenon. We initiated, developed and take part on several surveys and studies that delivered overwhelming results that set the guiding lines for future actions.

### Campaigns

We initiated campaigns for raising awareness on the matter and inform the general public and some specific target groups: parents and caregivers, professionals working with left behind children. [www.singuracasa.ro](http://www.singuracasa.ro) is a resource website with information: research reports, methodologies, legislation, advice, (discussions, forum) for children, parents, caregivers and professionals.

### Social services and training

Children left behind need help and those responsible with social care needed capacity building. We developed a training program for social workers, psychologists, pedagogues, police workers, youth workers and peer educators. In the last 5 years we assisted over 900 children left behind by migrating parents. All our actions are based on working together with stakeholders at local, regional and cross border level (Romania and Republic of Moldova)

### Resources

Being a relatively a new topic and issue for stakeholders there was a great need for support and information. We made it available by guides, handbooks and other sources for parents, teachers and social workers involved is social care for children left behind. We developed a methodology for professionals working with children or assisting families or caregivers. This resource was made available at national level and was adopted as a working tool in the field of children left behind.

Our main focus today is to lobby for legal provisions and standards for practice. Efforts are

made for a greater involvement of public institutions for the assistance of left behind children. The main focus is on strategic partnerships and collaborations for bringing the issue to the attention of Romanian parents abroad, to the attention of European institutions and for assessing the European dimension of the phenomenon. As part of this effort Alternative Sociale Association is member of the European network Children Left Behind: <http://www.childrenleftbehind.eu>



The EU-China Dialogue offered a space for discussions and an opportunity for connections. Future actions will follow as networking is a resource that both sides can benefit from it. A lot of great ideas were drafted in the last day, as collaborations were initiated on several levels. From raising awareness on the issue to research and document key points of interest, teams of participants worked to draft the first collaboration plans between EU and China civil society representatives. As the biggest migration in the history of the world is undergoing at this moment in China and EU faces the same type of problems in terms of effects on the families of migrants, there are good premises for joint efforts to tackle the negative effects of migration.

*Mr Gheorghe Pascaru is Sociologist and works for Alternative Sociale Association in Iasi, Romania.*

*[www.alternativesociale.ro](http://www.alternativesociale.ro)*

*[www.singuracasa.ro](http://www.singuracasa.ro)*



# How UNICEF China addresses the challenges of left-behind children

By Zhang Yali

## Key facts and figures

Challenges faced by migrant children (27 million) are unequal access to basic services including health care and education; lack of policy support to registration: migrant children are virtually “invisible” to city authorities who are expected to allocate resources to meet their needs for basic services; and discrimination: They encounter difficulties in social integration and face identity issues

Challenges faced by left-behind children (55 million) are the lack of emotional attachment with their parents, nutrition status for young children affected; being in the custody of care givers with low education level and poor parenting skills, social support system including weak ECD services; and management of boarding schools in rural areas which is used as main approach by the government

Migration affects 82 million children in China, one quarter of the country’s population of children. Children who migrate with their parents may face challenges accessing social benefits. Public services in China are not portable. Rather, they are linked to household registration. For rural children migrating to urban areas, registration-dependent benefits, like public school and health care, are either unattainable, or of inferior quality, to those enjoyed by official urban residents.

Children left behind by parents who migrate to find work lose the security and protection that parents provide. Left-behind children often live with grandparents who may lack the energy, know-how, finances or awareness to provide necessary care and supervision. These children also have much higher risks of injury than children who live with their parents.

On indicators of health and well-being, left-behind children are often at a disadvantage. Migrant mothers, for example, breastfeed significantly less than mothers who do not migrate, with attendant health and nutritional consequences for the children of migrant mothers. Some recent study reveals that both in general and poor rural areas, stunting prevalence of left-behind children whose mothers migrated to cities for jobs is 20-30% higher than others of the same age.

## What We Are Doing

UNICEF China works to help children affected by migration enjoy the full range of protection and care, and public service benefits, to which they are entitled. We are supporting a pilot program to deliver community-based support and services to migrant children and their families, and to promote integration of migrant children into the communities where they live. We are also developing life skills education opportunities and promoting literacy and

good reading habits among migrant children. For left-behind children, we are piloting projects to provide parenting skills training to caregivers we are also developing programming to foster better communications and more frequent interaction between left-behind children and their migrant parent or parents.

## UNICEF Delivers Results

UNICEF China has contributed to significant improvements in the situation of children affected by migration. We initiated a pilot project to register migrant children in urban areas where their parents work, thereby improving the children’s access to good quality public health care and educational services. After we successfully demonstrated the benefits of this approach, the migrant children registration pilot have been replicated in 5 cities in China. Up to now, about 1.16 million migrant children have been registered in the system. At the policy level, the registration of migrant children has been included in the National Plan of Action for Children (2011-2020) which was issued in July 2011. This implies that the model of registration of migrant children as a means to ensure their access to quality social services supported by UNICEF will be scaled up by the government across the country.

We have also assisted left behind children and migrant children through the establishment of Child Friendly Spaces. These community centers provide life skills education, health information, sports opportunities and psycho-social support for left-behind children.

## Main Challenges

Children affected by migration are forced to move constantly and swing between being migrant & left-behind because of examination system for higher learning and unstable status of their parents. New issues such as fair access to high schools/universities or employment opportunities after compulsory education for migrant children is posing serious new challenges to the Chinese education system as huge numbers of migrant children reach this age group.

Difficulties to conduct reform of the Hukou system which is the foundational cause of the main constraints of migrant children. Even the de-linking of Hukou and social benefits for all children which could be the first step for Hukou reformation would be a long-term challenge for the authority.

Lack of coordination between sending and receiving areas mean children may fall between the cracks and do not have full access to health and education services.

*Mrs Zhang Yali works for UNICEF China.*



The fourth consortium board meeting was held on 22 February in Ningbo.

Participants from left to right: Kristin Kupfer, Rosaria Franco, Karen Lim, Wang Lu, Li Fan, Mark Pixley, Christine Ding, Andreas Fulda.



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