



**9 December 2022**

## **Children Left Behind as Parents Go Abroad for Work: public discussion in Sofia on Monday**

Sofia/Strasbourg, 9 December 2022 – The Ombudsman of Bulgaria Diana Kovacheva and the Joint Programme of the Council of Europe and the European Commission ROMACT are organising the public discussion **“Children left behind: between labour migration, institutional standards and extended family”** on 12 December, Monday, at 9.00 a.m. of Sofia Hotel Balkan.

The event will also be a webcast at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89872705768> and <https://www.ombudsman.bg/bg/p/sabitiya#e20>, with simultaneous interpretation in Bulgarian and English and streamed on the Ombudsman institution’s website.

The focus of the event will be on children whose parents go to work abroad, particularly those living in poor, disadvantaged communities, including marginalized Roma communities. It will start with the presentation of the photo exhibition **“Living without them”** about children left behind in Borovan municipality.

ROMACT report on Children left behind: between labour migration, institutional standards, and extended family, based on a field study conducted in municipalities that participated in the ROMACT Programme, will be presented.

While the phenomenon of “left-behind children” is recognised in various countries in Europe where relevant legislative measures and policies have been developed to address it at national and local level, in Bulgaria, although the problem affects a wide range of children, including those in poor communities, the situation has not been assessed yet, these children are not considered as children at risk, and therefore are not addressees of any targeted policy.

This public discussion aims to raise public and institutional awareness of the vulnerability of such children, their needs and those of their extended families, as well as the need for integrated support and attention. The focus of the discussion will be on active policy-making to reinforce targeted and co-ordinated action on the ground, ensuring protection of children’s rights. Possible solutions related to the introduction of emergency measures to limit the harmful consequences of poverty-induced labour migration on children left behind will be discussed.

**Nadia Klisurska**, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Policy; **Maria Gaydarova**, Deputy Minister of Education; **Teodora Ivanova**, Chairperson of the State Agency for Child Protection and a member of the Steering Committee on the Rights of the Child of the Council of Europe; **Iskren Arabadzhiev and Denitsa Sacheva**, both Deputy Heads of the Committee on Labour and Social and Demographic Policy in the National Assembly; **Viorel Badea**, Rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on children affected by labour migration; **Eleni Tsetsekou**, Head of Roma and Travellers Division of the Council of Europe; **Velina Todorova**, Vice-Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child; **Christina de Bruin**, UNICEF Representative in Bulgaria will address the conference in the opening session. Other high-level representatives from Bulgarian state institutions, parliamentarians, academics and representatives of civil society will participate in the discussion.

## **Background:**

*In 2020, a report of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on the Impact of labour migration on left-behind children, highlighted the fact that "Leaving millions of children without parental care is a mass violation of human rights, and an unnecessary threat to the stability and prosperity of our countries. Targeted ad hoc measures are not enough to improve the situation. To maximise the benefits of labour migration, while eliminating its harmful consequences on children left behind, all countries need to acknowledge the scale of this phenomenon and the long-term damage it creates, and to put into place comprehensive approaches to labour migration, which are child-centred, human-rights based, gender-sensitive and socially and economically sustainable".*

*Based on that Report, in 2021 PACE has adopted the Recommendation 2196 (2021)<sup>1</sup> and Resolution 2366 (2021)<sup>1</sup> addressing the often-underestimated impact of the labour migration, the invisibility of vulnerable left-behind children and underlining their need for attention and care.*

[Background document](#)

[Agenda](#)

[Living without them- Online Exhibition](#)

[Where is my mother? - Short video](#)