

# Effects of Parental economical migration on Children “left behind” in Latvia

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Thousands of Adélie penguin chicks starved to death in Antarctica earlier this year, leading conservationists and scientists to call for urgent action.

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Penguin parents were forced to travel farther in search of food as a result of unusually extensive sea ice. The chicks died while waiting for them to return.

Scientists found only two remaining chicks in the colony in Terre Adélie, Antarctica.

*Source: Care2Causes, October, 19, 2017.*



# Terms: *Euroorphan, Child left behind, transnational family*

***Euroorphans-* children, whose parents have emigrated for economical reasons, have left their children behind and are away for at least 6 months.**

Already in 2004 the first teachers reported cases where children who used to be fine suddenly showed a lack of concentration and started to misbehave. It turned out that they no longer had their parents around.

“500,000 children in Europe have at least one parent abroad. Most of them are in Poland and Romania (a result of the size of these countries). N=8000 (LV)

As a percentage of the population, the problem is greater in Lithuania and Latvia.

There might be a considerable number of cases in Estonia and Bulgaria, but the numbers are not known.”

*“Baltic worlds”, 2014.*

# The main aspects – intraeuropean mobility or economical migration

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➤ positive impact on many regional economies. *Top 5 remittance recipients in 2015 (\$US billions): the Russian Federation (\$7.9bn), Croatia (\$2.1bn), Lithuania (\$2.0bn), Latvia (\$1.7bn), Bermuda (\$1.3bn) (WB, 2016).*

➤ Migration can directly contribute to family separation when it takes the form of parental migration

➤ *Children left behind*

➤ Risks of social exclusion

500,000 children in Europe have at least one parent abroad. *“Baltic worlds”, 2014, Södertörn University, Stockholm*



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*“The child should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding” (EC).*



# Methods

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- Normative regulations
- Expert interviews – social workers, school teachers, heads of municipalities.
- Interviews with children/youth aged 11-18, whose parents are abroad for economical reasons
- Interviews with parents working abroad
- Essays – letters to parents abroad
- Documentaries
- Art activities for children left behind

# Family Task Areas

- include basic, developmental and crisis tasks.

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- The basic task area is concerned with the provision of food, money, shelter and other necessities of life.
- The developmental tasks include individual and family stages of growth.
- The family developmental tasks include ... the childbearing family; the family with school age children; the family with teenagers ... and the aging family.
- Crisis tasks are family hardship events such as illness, job loss, accidents, relocation, or death. Families that are able to cope with and adapt to stressful life events and transitions are better able to maintain a healthy family environment.

*(Epstein, 1993)*

# Key Characteristics of Healthy Families

Families that do well in each of these areas have fewer problems and are able to deal more effectively with problems as they arise. On the other hand, families that have difficulty in these areas tend to have more problems that remain unresolved. (Epstein, Bishop, Ryan, Miller, & Keitner, 1993)

**Problem-Solving** is defined as a family's ability to resolve problems on a level that maintains effective family functioning. A problem is an issue without an easy solution that will threaten the family's ability to function if it is not resolved.

**Communication** is defined as the way verbal and nonverbal information is exchanged within a family. Effective family communication depends on several factors, including clear and direct communication between family members. Families who can express their feelings to one another are better equipped to solve problems as they arise. The ability to listen to others and to pay attention to what they say are essential skills for effective family communication.

**Family Roles** Family roles are recurrent patterns of behavior by which family members fulfill family functions. The establishment of clear roles within a family is directly connected to a family's ability to deal with normal and unexpected changes. Healthy families are able to establish clear, yet flexible, roles that enable them to carry out family functions. Deciding work roles inside and outside the home is an important family task.

**Affective Responsiveness** Affective responsiveness is the family's ability to respond emotionally to other family members in an appropriate manner. Families need to be able to share and experience feelings such as love, tenderness, joy, fear, and anger. Families that are unable to respond, for example, with sadness or tenderness, may be restricted or even distorted emotionally.

**Affective Involvement** Affective involvement is how well the family as a whole shows interest in and values the activities and interests of individual family members. Both over-involvement and under-involvement are patterns of behavior that can pose problems for families. Showing interest in and valuing the activities of other family members is essential for healthy family functioning.

**Behavior Control** Behavior control refers to patterns of behavior that the family adopts for dealing with family situations. Some families have flexible behavior patterns while others may have more rigid patterns. Families with flexible behavior patterns are better able to adjust to and cope with changing family circumstances.

# Research on children left behind – gender perspective

“the traditional gender ideology of separate spheres constructs fathers as ‘pillars’ and mothers as ‘lights’” of the home. ‘Pillars’ provide for the family and ‘lights’ nurture the family.

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It is mother who is seen as holding the family together.

When fathers migrate, their children perceive this to be an extension of their breadwinner role. Mothers - forced to work abroad because of poverty.

While migrant mothers develop strategies for nurturing from a distance, migrant fathers do not adjust their fathering practices to accommodate distance but, rather, “perform a heightened version of conventional fathering”, demonstrated through the display of authority, and thus maintain gender-normative views of parenting.

*Source: Parreñas, 2005, 2008.*

# “long-distance mothering”

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"can be seen as an intensive emotional labour which involves activities of ‘multiple burden and sacrifice’, spending ‘quality time’ during brief home visits, and reaffirming the ‘other influence and presence’ through surrogate figures and regular communication with children

“However, despite engaging in these activities, migrant mothers often reported feeling a sense of failure in their performance of this role, especially feeling guilt about not caring for their children while they cared for the children of other women as domestic workers in other countries”. (*Sobritchea, 2007*).

# What is a family for CLB?

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Is that a family together with their biological parents (who are not living with them) or is that a substitute family (grandparent family, foster family, blended family).

The family is their biological family, nobody mentions the substitute family as their own family.

The interviewed 17-year-old teenagers who were left by themselves reported having no family.

If children report having family, there should be a family lifestyle. How does it look like?

# Family lifestyle?

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## ➤ Fragmentary.

They miss any common activities, starting from common meals, common traditions, common everyday discussions. Their communication is fragmented from one communication episode to the next, from one meeting to the next meeting during the summer holidays, from one promise to take a child to the parent's host country to the next promise.

*“my mother promised me to take me to the Ireland next semester. I will have new school there and new friends. There is no sense to learn very hard here because the school there is totally different, they learn differently... Next month I will go to visit my mom. Then a new life will start for me!” (girl, 13).*

# Approaches in relation to parental economical migration:

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- there are negative effects caused by parental economical migration. They interact with children and help them as much as possible.
- there are no negative care effects caused by parental long-term economical migration. They think that there is no difference in the quality of relations and care ensured by parents or grandparents. Some respondents have mentioned that care deficiency only influences older children and teenagers.

*Source: Interviews with substitute families*



## 2 villages and a city



School is closed, 46 pupils, poverty level 60-70%

A basic school, 4 licensed programmes; 92 pupils (21+20+51) from 62 households; poverty level 60-70%, 10% do not receive appropriate support from parents

School bus or travel expenses covered

23 pupils receive free lunches, 12 – from Aaland “Save the children”), 33 – half price).

# Results from the expert interviews:

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- lives of CLB are affected by parental migration
- The carers of children take care of physical needs of children. Insufficient care and raising. Problems of physical safety, risks of violence, increasing smoking, alcohol and drugs use.
- Lack of academic assistance, no control on studies, homeworks.
- Psychological well-being is the biggest problem.
- Changing model of communication between parents and children, fragmented communication.
- Poor funding for the children and youth at risk (decreasing taxes).

# Quality of Life of CLB

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**Having, Loving and Being** (*E.Allardt,1971, 1975, 1993*):

Having – material deprivation,

Loving – individual's social relations,

Being – self-realisation and self-esteem and social perspective

# Reasons of leaving child behind (parents' views)

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- Improving material conditions
- Debts before the crises
- Housing
- Modern clothing for family members
- Buying a car
- Possibilities “to live, not to exist”
- Discipline for adolescence
- Health of a child

Child is far away, blaming

*“he/she does not understand that I work hard for him/her”*

Psychological well-being (analyses of documentaries)

# Material deprivation

*Reasons of leaving child behind (parents' views)*

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Material conditions

Housing

Modern clothing for family members

New car

Possibilities "to live, not to exist"

Discipline for children

Health care

Education

Access to information

Child is far away, blaming "he/she does not understand that I work hard for him/her"

# Material deprivation

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- financial support is provided for the majority of children left behind.
- a few grandparents have reported cases when financial means have not been provided by parents, and they have to survive only on the pension of grandparent. Those households have turned into deeper poverty than before.

# Household responsibilities

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- much bigger than they would be the case if their parents were at home:

*“When other children do homework or go out, I need to do chores like doing laundry and cooking for me and the younger brother. It takes all my leisure time. And my younger brother does not help at all” (girl, 16).*

# Education - academic help

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- Majority of grandparents are capable to help their grandchildren with schoolwork when necessary at the primary school level (grades 1- 4), but they report not being able to help at the level of 5<sup>th</sup> grade and later.
- almost half of children aged 12 and more, reported that their grandparents or substitute family members (except older siblings) are not capable to help them with their schoolwork: *“My grandmother can’t help me with my homework because she has learned the mathematics and other subjects differently. However, she always reminds me to do my homework. My grandmother tells me that I first need to do my homework, then I can play computer or go outside” (boy, 13).*

# Long-term lack of academic help

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Long-term lack of academic help is of concern for the educational outcomes of CLB because adequate academic support is an important input to educational success and achievements of children (*Sheldon and Epstein, 2005*).

According to research child development relies on supportive relationships with adults, particularly parents. Long-term separation from parents can be emotionally distressing and have a negative effect on the mental health of a child. That can be also a case if there are periods when the child and the parent are together, but then leaves again (*Harvard University, National Scientific Council, 2004*).

# Loving dimension

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'loving' reveals that the quality of social relations is of crucial importance for well-being and happiness. Social support gained from our fellows helps us to muddle through periods of low mood and misery.

*"I need to have a close person with whom to discuss intimate and personal matters"*

# Loving dimension:

## What do children expect from parents

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Friendship and love

“children are not a pair of shoes that one can wear for a while and then leave them” (girl, 16)

Emotional support

Listen to children without critics and “clever advices”

“Daddy said he would come home... And mummy said she will be back in two months”

To keep the promises

“Do you think she will come?”

Help to solve the conflicts between a child and peers or adults

“Yes”, she nods but wipes a tear from her eyes.

(girl, 11)

# Loving dimension: Changing communication when family members are apart

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- Successful family functioning is based on instrumental and affective communication
- Includes verbal and nonverbal information exchange between family members.

*(Epstein, 1993)*

Pattern changes between

-spouses

-children and parents

-school and parents.

Verbal communication

# Loving dimension (Essay analyses)

## Behavioural changes:

Child loves parents but feels **angry** that parents have left him behind.

Children **feel anxiety** whether parents still love the child if they have not visited the child; whether they have not left the child forever.

The opposite side of the anxiety is aggressiveness with all its consequences.

Children might **feel guilty**, non-loved and abandoned.

Possible consequences:

- problems at school,
- behavioural problems,
- health problems,
- psychological and social difficulties (expert interviews).

# Loving dimension:

Some children blame themselves:

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*“probably my dad left because I do not always obey him”,*

*“mom sent me to granny for a few days, and then I got to know that she had left for other country and left me with granny. I do not understand whether I have done anything wrong that she left me”.*

In the children’s essays to their parents, children have written that parents have never told them that that parents love them:

*“I do not know whether you love me. You have to tell me whether you love me”.*

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- the dominated perspective is – being alone, without a advise or solution of the problems at school, with friends, at club etc. Another perspective of being alone – missing important part of socialization with parents.
  - After some period of being left behind do not want to discuss their daily activities with their parents because important part of communication is missing:
  - a need to discuss the problem when the problem is there, and does not want to discuss it several hours later when he/she is full with shame, anger, confusion, etc.
  - do not want to discuss their real problems with grandparents or foster parents, uncles and aunts with whom they stay because they do not count them as their family members and because of fragmentarism of the situation in the substitute family.
  - prefer to discuss their problems with their classmates and friends, sometimes with their class teachers.

Experts (report worsening success at school, depression elements, behaviour problems of children left behind.

# Children's views

*„Dad, it is long time since I wanted you to be together with me more often. You know, I have not seen you for more than a year... I feel that I have no real family .....” (boy,11)*

*„The most important thing that I need from parents is love. I want they could never doubt about my love to them” (girl, 13)*

*„...They think that I am happy. But I miss my family. Neither my dad, nor my mom say that they love me....” (girl, 14)*

*„Probably, you work a lot. I meet you so seldom, but there are cases when I need you, noone else. But you are not here! I sit like in a black hole and think – what is that life?” (boy,11)*

*„I have so many things to discuss with my mom, but how can I do that if she is never here. Now I have a feeling that may be I feel shame or afraid to talk to her because, I think, she would not understand me any longer” (girl, 15).*

# How does the communication change?

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Depending on means of communication it occurs once a day or less. Fragmented communication. It is not based on many communication episodes on everyday bases.

In space – visualisation on the screen (skype)

Contents – because it is possible to communicate at certain times, not when there is a need of a talk. It becomes more informative, related with school success, discipline, eating habits, health.

Missing main direct nonverbal communication – touching, kissing, etc.

# “Being” dimension

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positive and significant linkages between social trust and happiness.

“Most people can be trusted *or* you can’t be too careful”;

“Most people try to take advantage of you, or try to be fair”

“Most of the time people are helpful or mostly looking out for themselves”

Short-term approach to main events, temporality – living from episode to other, when they still trust parents.

# In defence of mothers...

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There are various cases where mothers have gone to extraordinary ends to ensure a better life for their families, foremostly for their children and while those choices may not have been easy, they were never selfish.

Clearly financial stability is not the most important aspect of parenting but it is a crucial one, since poverty is often cyclical, passed from generation to generation.

# Parental responsibilities (UN CRC Art.12), EC Rec.(2012)

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recognises the **rights and responsibilities** of parents to provide appropriate direction and guidance to their children, but requires that this should be undertaken in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of children, and to enable the child to exercise his or her rights.

*This Art. is violated in cases of Eurorophans.*

# Changes in normative regulations in Latvia

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- To inform the school of a child about a longterm absence of parents;
- To register and official proxy (letter of attorney) on a person who is responsible about a child (to define terms, conditions and cases when the proxy is valid, the length of the proxy,, etc,).
- To think what will happen to a child ....

# Governmental activities

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“The Plan for the improvement of the situation of those children whose parents have gone abroad” stipulated that one of the tasks would be to establish adequate statistics; this task still is not accomplished.

Programme coordinators have recognized: “the required financial resources were not allocated for the implementation of the programme, and there was insufficient cooperation among public agencies, local governments and other involved parties”. (Ministry of Children and Family Affairs).

In 2014, the government has developed a remigration policy, which proposes a teaching assistant for children.

# Municipal activities

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- Local governments and social services: “these problems are typical not only for those families who have left to work abroad but also for those families where one or both parents have left for employment in other regions of Latvia. In the latter case the separation of children and parents is not so long and it is possible to identify problems and to seek solutions at an earlier stage”.
- Some municipalities have published the rules for parents going abroad and leaving children behind. They mention guidance, what and how parents have to organize the Attorney letter for a person responsible for children, if a child is left for a period less than three months, and guidance, what parents have to do in order to organize the custody if they leave for period longer than 3 months.
- Youth centers for children and youth where they can spend their leisure time

# Other solutions?

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- Key importance of support networks for left-behind families in maintaining resilient family lives in the absence of a parent.
- Transnational families' community networking,
- Probably the role of religious organisations in offering extensive associational ties, as an alternative to family and community ties of the original home area. Religious affiliation can be central to contestation over authority within family life, not only in moral terms, but also in terms of behaviour in general.

# Art project for children and youth

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Liepaja University New Media Arts Programme within Interreg project (R.van Kloppenburg) – involve children in discussions and development of an art project

Discussed issues of their problems, relations in the family.

Children were making a film on issues that are important for them.

Side effect – what happen to children after the project.

# Art project for children and youth

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The qualitative study ends up with the same two conclusions:

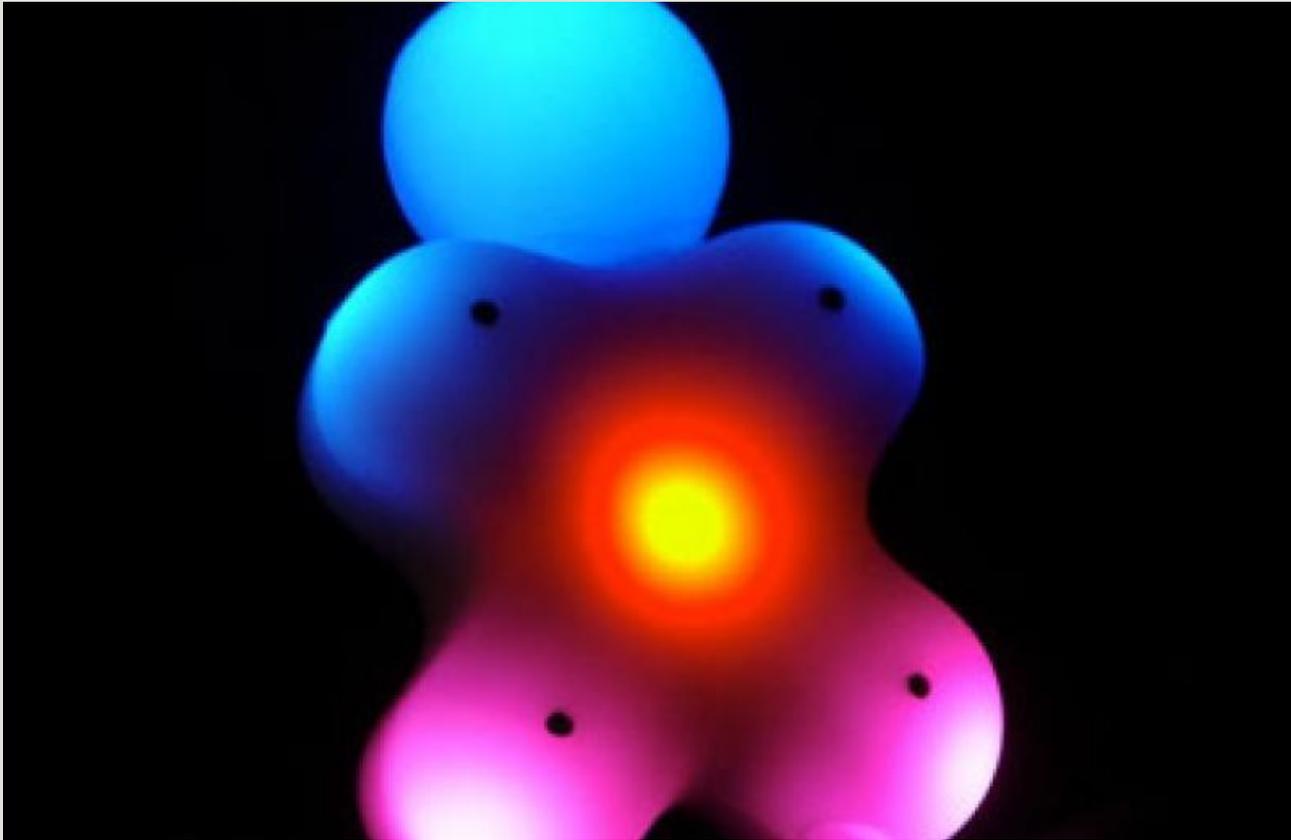
(1) The missing parent leads often to feelings of emotional loneliness and depression.

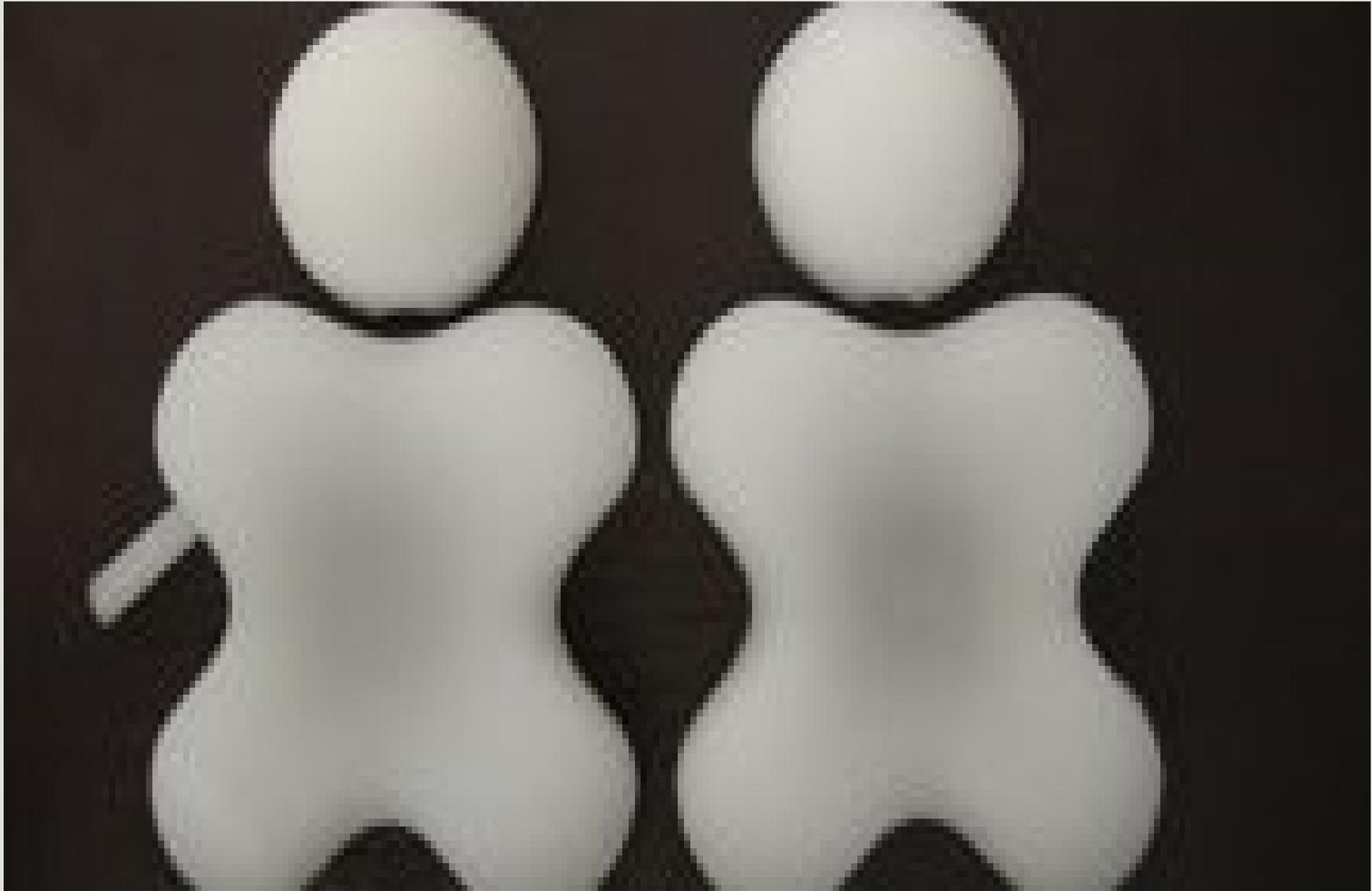
(2) Similarly, the ICT is an important tool in the adolescents' lives, as they are skillful enough to use most functions on both computers and mobile telephones.

The adolescents have a positive view on the technology development, and therefore they show a great interest in using all kind of new communication gadgets that may contribute to a better interaction with their parents.

# Scottie Waag as a substitute to social exclusion in Baltics?

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Questions?

Comments?

Thank you!

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