

The book cover features a light green background with a repeating geometric pattern of squares and stars. The spine on the left is decorated with horizontal bands of orange, green, and white. A black cord with several colorful beads (purple, green, brown, and white) is attached to the spine.

**MY CHILD**  
**IS HOME ALONE**



# MY CHILD IS HOME ALONE

**“My child is home alone”** is a booklet for parents who, just like you, had to go abroad seeking for a job, and leave their children behind. It proposes counseling for maintaining a tighter relationship with your children, as well as for trying to reduce the burden of separation.

This publication has been produced in the framework of the project « Support to parents and children in migration », **with the assistance of the European Union through the EC-UN Joint Migration and Development Initiative.** [www.migration4development.org](http://www.migration4development.org)

The contents of this publication can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union, IOM or the United Nations, including UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR and ILO, or those of their member states'.

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## **PREFACE**

People migrate for various reasons including further studies, business and leisure, and in search of greener pastures. The prevailing unfavourable socio-economic condition in Nigeria makes most people travel in order to eke out a better livelihood abroad, and support their families back home.

Notwithstanding the language barrier, France has been identified as one of those key European countries that some Nigerian migrants travel to especially for job opportunities. This informed the collaboration between ALC (France) and CAFSO-WRAG for Development (Nigeria) on the project sensitising migrant parents on the challenges of migration.

Whatever their motive behind migrating, some migrants do not consider some challenges they have to face bordering on getting enough money for fare, on their country of destination, on their psyche, on their families left behind especially the children and the aged parents.

In most cases, many migrants are too much in a hurry to travel to the extent that they do not make solid arrangement for their loved ones left behind.

When the migrants are able to surmount the problems of relocation abroad and getting good jobs with good pay (in reality, not all migrants get good jobs coupled with good pay abroad), they still have to contend with the problem of the children left behind.

This booklet therefore would serve the purpose of creating awareness on the imperative of making solid arrangement at home before embarking on a journey abroad. It proposes counselling for parents in order to help them to better keep in contact with their children and make separation less difficult.

This booklet is a must read for all. For more information, contact CAFSO-WRAG and ALC (addresses are at the end of the guide).

## INTRODUCTION

When you were at home, you did not have a job or you used to get a salary which hardly allowed you to make both ends meet, in terms of expenses related to your household. As there were no alternatives in your case, you made up your mind to go abroad with the purpose of ensuring a better future for your family. It was a very brave decision and definitely, not an easy one to make, nevertheless, it can subsequently affect your children.

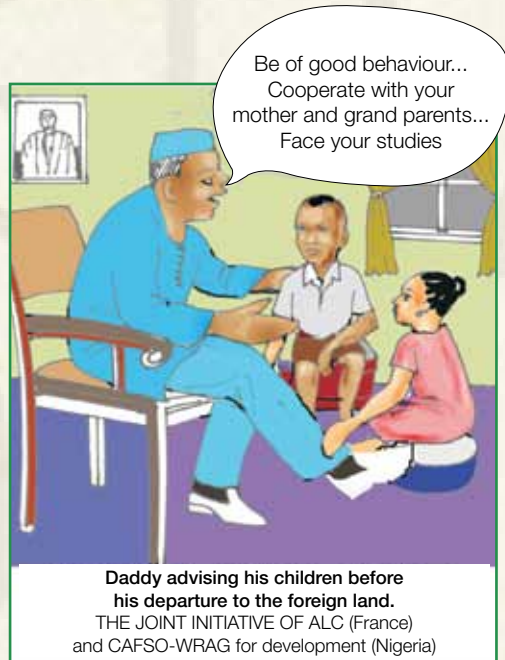
### The change

Going abroad represents a radical change both in your life and that of your children.

**Changes can trigger anxiety and stress** and that is because the references we usually have recourse to will no longer be available. For that reason, being aware of an upcoming change we prepare for it in various ways, we imagine and organize it. We ought to make some additional efforts in order to ease the adaptation to the new situations.

**Confronted with a change in his/her usual lifestyle, the child's reactions are different**, depending on his/her age and character, the external circumstances or the support you can provide him/her.

Your children can be overwhelmed by the feeling of lack of security. They will wonder what their life will be like after your departure.



Some children feel guilty for their parents' departure, they perceive this change as a punishment for a "bad thing" they have done.

**It is important to be able to listen to them in order to help them to get a better understanding of the situation.**

Your children might suffer a lot as a result of the separation and you want to protect them. How can you support your children? How can you explain to them the reasons for your departure?

## **PREPARE YOUR DEPARTURE BEFOREHAND: AVOID THE SILENCE**

**Talk to your children about your intention to go abroad.**

It is obvious that you do not want to cause them any pain, and perhaps you are afraid of the reaction they might have. Nevertheless, knowing what is going on can help children to understand better the given situation, it can help them to calm down and get ready for the change.

Sometimes, you will have the impression that they do not want to hear anything about this subject or that they are too little to understand it. Go on discussing with your relatives about your plans, as well as the way they unfold in the children's presence, even if they are very small.

This might help them to prepare for the new circumstances.

**Explain to your children the reasons for which you must go abroad.**

**Listen** attentively to and answer their possible questions about **the way they will live without having you by their side**. So, you will be able to understand what they feel as a result of this change.

Listen to and respond to all the questions your children might have about **your new life abroad**.

Show them on a map where lie both the country and the city you will live in, talk to them about the means of transportation that you will use to get there (by plane, by car, by bus...). Inform them about the departure date and the estimated length of your stay.

**It is important not to overwhelm children with details, but in the same time, avoid hiding things that are indispensable to them. In case you do not know what kind of job you will have abroad, or if you cannot talk to your children about this, it would be wise to tell them, for instance: "I suppose things will happen this way...".**



Things are not easy here in Nigeria...  
In order to give you better future there  
is need for me to travel abroad  
to make some money...



**Mother discussing the imperative of her traveling abroad**

THE JOINT INITIATIVE OF ALC (France)  
and CAFSO-WRAG for development (Nigeria)

Your reason for going abroad is the hope to find a well paid job, which will enable you to ensure a better future to your family. But explain to your children that they are not responsible for your departure.

Take seriously the consequences that your departure might have on your children's life. Try not to minimize their worries and sadness. **Always listen to them when they have something to share with you.**

## HELP YOUR CHILDREN IDENTIFY THE REFERENCES REQUIRED TO ORGANIZE THEIR LIFE WITHOUT YOU BY THEIR SIDE

Tackle with your children those subjects that could help them to adapt easier to the life without their parents: assure them that you will have regular phone talks, involve them in the process of choosing their caregiver, and encourage them to become more independent.

Depending on children's age and needs help them manage their daily life.

Do not hesitate telling your children that you trust them and you are proud of them, for example when they achieve good results at school.

Teach them to respect authority, especially with regards to teachers and caregivers.

Encourage them to take part in various cultural and sporting activities... thus children will be able to develop their capacities and talents, to make friends with other children and adults.

Involve your children, as much as possible, in the decision making process, namely when these decisions concern them directly.

Encourage your children to seek for your help when needed, even if it's on the phone.

Leave to your children or their caregiver the doctor's address and telephone numbers, in case of problems.



## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOUR CHILDREN AND THE CAREGIVER

When you leave for another country, you entrust your children to another person, a family member, as a rule: your husband/wife, your mother, your sister or some of your relatives...

As far as possible, allow your children to choose the person in whose care they will be left.

Regardless of the choice, it is indispensable that your children find themselves in a familiar environment.

**It is important that the person designated as your children's caregiver is able to take care of your children:** he/she should not be too young or too old, in good health...

The caregiver must:

- take care of your children's health and welfare,
- meet their basic needs,
- make sure they attend school

The caregiver must also be able to provide to your children moral support whenever they find themselves in a difficult situation or feel alone.

**The relationships between your children and their caregiver are sometimes likely to get complicated, resulting in misunderstandings and even conflicts.**



**Aged parents discussing the fate of their grand child**  
THE JOINT INITIATIVE OF ALC (France)  
and CAFSO-WRAG for development (Nigeria)

If such an issue occurs, try to talk to both the children and the caregiver in order to understand its reason better and to intervene properly.

The relationships between your children and their caregiver are sometimes likely to get complicated, resulting in misunderstandings and even conflicts.

If such an issue occurs, try to talk to both the children and the caregiver in order to understand its reason better and to intervene properly.

**An adaptation period required by everybody.** As a result of your departure children experience various moments of anxiety and suffering they have to cope with. In the same time, they have to adapt to a new lifestyle, which includes accepting certain rules and traditions at the caregiver's place.

You go through a difficult period, as well, trying to get used to a new way of living, in France.

## **THE GIFTS YOU MAKE TO YOUR CHILDREN**

When you send presents to your children: try to send them, preferably, useful gifts, the ones aiming at your children's development or the ones that will enable you to maintain your relation with them, for instance mobile phone...

**Honor your promises.** A broken promise is a real disappointment for your child. Nevertheless, if you fail to keep your promise, explain to them the reason for that.

But keep in mind one thing: **avoid, as much as possible, to compensate your absence with plenty of presents.**

## THE PHONE, THE LETTERS AND THE INTERNET CAN HELP YOU MAINTAIN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CHILDREN

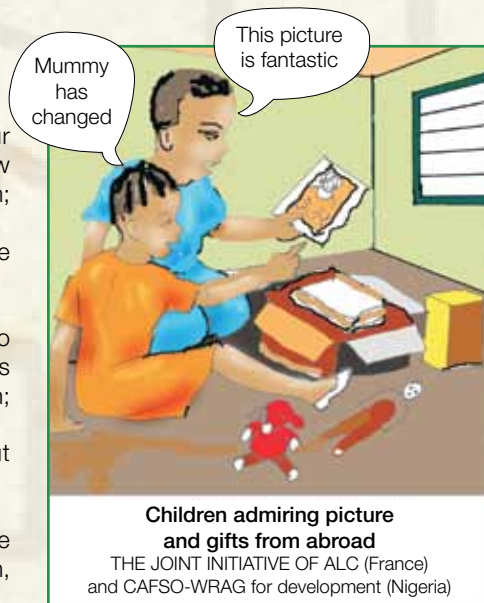
Regardless of their age, it is indispensable for children to know that, although you are far away, you keep thinking of them all the time. Your voice at the other side of the line or the messages you send them can comfort and encourage your children. This is an adequate way of maintaining your relationship with your children.

During the phone calls:

- Express through simple words your love for your children; let them know that you have thought about them;
- Listen to your children: try to be aware of their needs and mood state;
- In case you have some remarks to make with respect to your children's behavior, opt for a positive approach;
- Don't be afraid to talk to them about yourself;
- If you have more children, find time for everyone and talk to each of them, even if they are very small.

Being able to talk to your children is a very important thing.

Phone calls, letters, e-mails, post cards, as well as some sweet words that will reach your children thanks to a neighbor or an acquaintance returning home... these are the available ways through which you can make your children feel you closer in their life.



Ask them about their activities both at school and at home, about their relationships with their friends, about their activities.

The image that you keep of your children corresponds to the moment of separation. But during your absence children change, they develop both physically and mentally, they grow up and become more independent. In order to keep up with the situation you **should exchange pictures with them.**

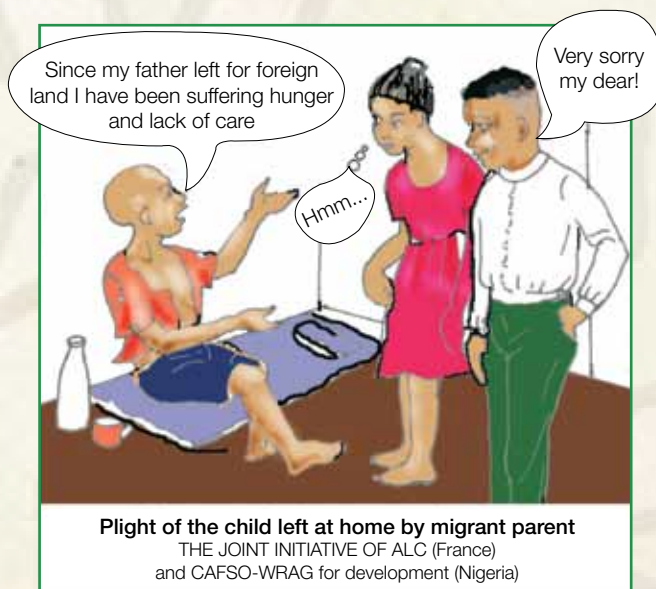
## THE MONEY YOU SEND HOME

Do not promise too much money for your family at home. **Focus on a realistic amount** deriving from your children's needs, as well as your own expenses here in Europe.

The money can trigger issues, even conflicts between your children, the caregiver and you.

- The caregiver might insist on spending the money you send as he/she wishes, depending on the amount you send and its frequency.
- The caregiver could also spend the money you send differently from what has been previously agreed on, or try to control excessively the way your children spend their money.
- The caregiver could ask for additional sums of money. Try to hold as many discussions with your children's caregiver as possible, describe him/her the conditions of life in Europe, explain him/her that you have significant expenses, as well, due to the fact that life is expensive, involving greater costs than at home. You might also ask a third party to get involved as a mediator between the caregiver and you: for example, a different family member.

**There are organizations in your country which could intervene in similar situations. The professionals of these institutions have the required experience to provide help to people affected by the migration and the consequences of this phenomenon, including to children. You will find their coordinates at the end of this book.**



## Life in Europe is expensive

Although the average salary in Europe is higher than in your country of origin, the expenses involved are higher as well.

For instance, the minimum salary in Europe could be about 900 € a month, for a fulltime job. This salary might seem rather high, in comparison to the one you get in your country.

Nevertheless, it is important to know that, if you live in Europe, you will have significant expenses, too.

These costs refer to:

- The rent of a one room flat goes up to 500 €, 700 €, depending on the region and the country...
- The electricity and heating bills.
- Food:

For example

1 quart of milk costs 1,5 €

1 kg of potatoes costs 1 €

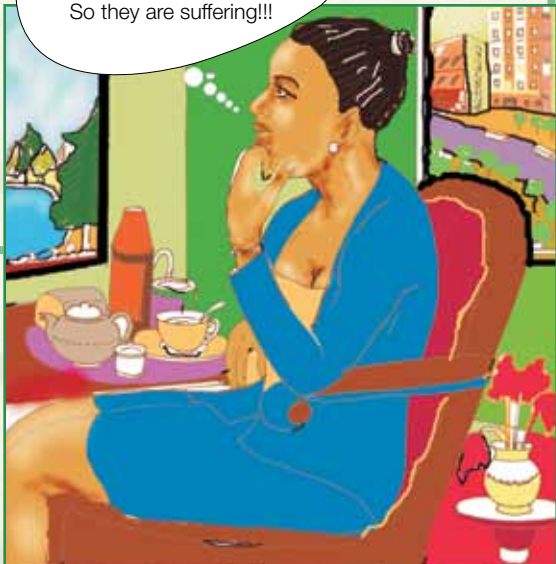
1 kg of rice costs 3 €

One loaf of bread costs 1,5 €...

- The tickets that you will need in order to go to work by bus or by Metro (from 1 € to 1,50 € a ticket, depending on the city you live in), etc...

In case you find it hard to send money home, for various reasons, for instance as a result of the job loss, your children's welfare might be at risk. Try to explain your real situation to the caregiver and don't hesitate to ask the assistance of a third party to act as a mediator between the caregiver and you.

How manage? Does it mean they have not been receiving the money since all these days!! So they are suffering!!!



**The migrant lady ruminating on the problems of the children she left at home.**

THE JOINT INITIATIVE OF ALC (France)  
and CAFSO-WRAG for development (Nigeria)

## **MEETING CHILDREN AFTER A PERIOD OF SEPARATION**

When you get to meet your children, either thanks to your return home on holidays, or because children have the opportunity to join you in France, be ready to face changes.

Your children have grown up. They have developed physically (body, voice, hair...). Their behavior, habits and even lifestyle is likely to change in your absence. For example, you might discover at your return that your children have adopted the caregiver's habits... In Europe you learnt to live alone, to manage your life in accordance with your own needs.

**You could even get the feeling that your own children have become strangers when you meet them again.**

Even if you are very happy to see your children after the separation, it is vital for you to adjust your rhythm of life to your children's needs.

Try to perceive these things as an absolutely normal and obvious reaction, arising as a result of the separation.

Do not attempt to impose your authority, do not ask your children to change their behavior immediately. You should be aware that it will take time to get to know each other again and to restore parent/child relationship".

You wish your children could join you in Europe. Keep in mind that the rules concerning the family reunification are generally very severe. You must fulfil administrative, economic and housing conditions, which are supposed to ensure the well-being of your children.

**It is extremely important to prepare meticulously their departure, their arrival to Europe, as well as their new life here.**



## RISKY SITUATIONS

Either in Europe, or in any other foreign country, you could find yourself caught in difficult situations: instability, vulnerability or even exploitation.

- If you are forced to work against your will
- If you are not paid for your work
- If you are forced into prostitution
- If you are compelled to act as beggars or thieves
- If you are threatened or aggressed to perform all the above mentioned things
- If someone has deprived you of your passport or identity card

Ask for assistance to be protected.

In all the above mentioned cases, you are afraid for the security of your children and relatives.

Social workers can help you for a risks assessment. They can also help you to contact the local organizations which are close to the place where your children live in order to provide them support.

## **USEFUL ADDRESSES**

### **IN NIGERIA**

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Opp. New Gbagi International Market, Off Old Ife Road,  
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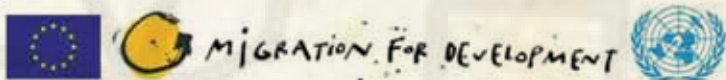
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CAFISO-WRAG  
For Development

« **My child is home alone** » is a guide for parents who have gone abroad for working and who have left their children back home.

It aims at avoiding the silence on negative impacts of migration on families, especially on children. It proposes counselling for parents in order to help them to better keep in contact with their children and make separation less difficult.

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