

BACKGROUND

While migration has moved up in the international policy agenda, its wide-ranging implications for children have received little attention.

Children are affected by migration when they are left behind by one or both migrating parents, migrating with parents (or born abroad), or migrating alone. The impact of migration on children and adolescents must be seen in the broader context of poverty and conflict, and within the perspectives of vulnerability and resilience, gender relations and children's rights.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) protects every child, regardless of nationality or immigration status. States have obligations to respect the provisions of the Convention in their policies and actions toward each and every child within their jurisdiction. These provisions include the right to citizenship, physical integrity, health and education as well as the right to be free from discrimination, exploitation, and abuse. The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers reaffirms these rights set forth in the CRC.

Policies should protect children's rights by enhancing access to the potential benefits created by migration, while also providing protection for those who are vulnerable to its negative consequences. Effective migration policies need to be accompanied by additional investments in health, education and social protection to address the risks faced by children and adolescents who are migrating or left behind (R. Cortes).

IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON CHILDREN

In order to formulate policy recommendations that enhance children's welfare, there is a need for reliable data that allow the assessment of positive and negative effects of migration. UNICEF, in collaboration with UNDP and the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation (SU-SSC), has initiated policy research and operational work in six countries (Ecuador, Albania, Moldova, Philippines, Mexico, Morocco) on the impact of migration on women and children left behind. Some preliminary results from country-level studies and a review of current literature highlight the magnitude of the impact of migration on families.

- Around 1 million Sri Lankan children are left behind by their mothers, who migrate in search of work (Save the Children, 2006)
- In the Philippines, it is estimated that between 8.8 and 9 million children, or around 27% of all minors in the country, live separated from one or both parents (Kakammpi, in Parrenas, 2005)
- In Moldova, a study estimated that 31% of children aged 0-14 have been left behind by one parent and 5.4% by both parents (UNICEF Moldova / SU-SSC, 2006)
- In 2002, 13% of Mexican and almost 22% of Salvadoran immigrants living in the U.S had children left behind in their home countries. (Cortina & de la Garza, 2004)

Impact on children left behind

- In labour sending countries, a growing number of children is left behind by one or both parents. Since 2000, about 300,000 children and adolescents have been left behind by one or both parents in Ecuador. Data from Moldova, El Salvador, Jamaica and Albania show similar trends.
- Results from case studies conducted by UNICEF and SU-SSC indicate that the absence of fathers often results in increased household responsibilities for women and children left behind. Adolescents from left-behind households may face pressure to become labour migrants as part of their transition to adulthood.
- UNICEF country studies suggest that children and adolescents left behind may be at greater risk to drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, psychosocial problems and violent behaviour.
- UNICEF's research conducted in Moldova suggested that the increase of the juvenile crime rate between 1993 and 2000 is positively correlated to a rise in the number of left behind children, who accounted for nearly 60% of the offenders.

Impact on Children in Host Countries

Children of migrants face challenges in adapting to host societies:

- Greater risk of dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy and juvenile crime.
- Incomplete citizenship rights
- Difficult access to social services
- Danger of social exclusion

UNICEF'S RESEARCH FINDINGS

- In Mexico, household surveys conducted in Jalisco, Michoacan and Zacatecas suggested that remittances contribute to improvements in infant health, reducing post-partum malnutrition by 5.4 % and infant mortality by 3%. They also increase the probability of professional care in childbirth by 30% (UNICEF Mexico / SU-SSC, 2006)
- In Moldova, school performance of children left behind is often compromised by increased household responsibilities and obligations to care for their younger siblings (UNICEF Moldova / SU-SSC, 2006)
- There are differing views in labour sending countries on how remittances affect the image of children left behind in their home communities. Some studies highlight the stigmatizing effects of the absence of parents. (R. Cortes, UNICEF, Remittances and Children)
- In Mexico, the father's absence was associated with behavioural problems: 61% of children left behind suffered from psychological problems and felt abandoned. (UNICEF-UNDP Survey, 2006).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Children and adolescents must matter in migration policies and debates. Children and adolescents affected by migration are particularly vulnerable and should receive special protection.
- To increase the visibility of children in policy agendas, more research and comparable global data on how children are affected by migration are needed.
- Policy and programme interventions should aim at maximizing the benefits of remittances and limiting the negative effects of migration on children and families left behind.
- Governments, international organizations, and civil society stakeholders must collaborate (1) to advocate for the rights of children and women affected by migration, (2) to monitor and gather information on the well-being of children in migrant communities and (3) to promote awareness in sending and host societies so that the risks of discrimination and social exclusion are reduced.

Table 1: Effects of Migration on Children

Children Migrating with Family	
Domestic & Regional Migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health/educational benefits and disadvantages • Children as Family Labourers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poor and hazardous conditions; - Social exclusion • Children seek informal employment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At risk on the street - Poor and hazardous conditions - Social exclusion
International Migration / Asylum Seekers & Refugees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Access to Education/health care ▪ Discrimination/Identity/Psychosocial problems ▪ Intergenerational Tensions ▪ Transnational Families/Staggered and Chain Migration
Children Left Behind	
When fathers migrate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Female headed households and poverty; ▪ Effects on children's education and/or wellbeing; ▪ Household vulnerability ▪ Remittances role in livelihoods
When mothers migrate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Psycho-social effects on children ▪ Health and education of children ▪ Abuse of children ▪ Effects on domestic Gender Division of ▪ Family break up
When both parents migrate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effects on children's well-being; health and education ▪ Burden on grandparents/relatives

Adapted by R. Cortes from Whitehead and Hashim (2005)