

## **MAKING CHILDREN VISIBLE AT THE BRUSSELS GLOBAL FORUM ON MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT, JULY 2007**

Prepared by UNICEF-Innocenti Research Centre, 3 July 2007<sup>i</sup>

### **1. Migration affects children in many ways**

Migration affects families and communities, and therefore affects children. Adult migration results in children either **migrating with parents, or being left behind by one or both parents. In addition, children – especially adolescents – migrate** across borders independently without parents or guardians.

Policies to link migration to development must consider the strong incentives, constraints and tradeoffs within families that affect migration, such as the nurturing and care of young children, the increasing social-economic capacities and agency of older children, and the interest of parents in their children's development and well-being.

### **2. Convention on the Rights of the Child safeguards the rights of children at all times**

The Convention has been ratified almost universally by countries of migrant origin, transit and destination. Under the Convention, **children's rights are borderless**: "States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status" (Article 2).

The Committee on the Rights of the Child monitors implementation, and raises concerns through its 'concluding observations'. **A large number of concluding observations by the Committee on the Rights of the Child are related to migration.**<sup>ii</sup> Many policies and practices of government agencies in contact with migrant children, and their parents, have raised concern as to the consistency with the Convention, including in the principles of best interest of the child and the participation of the child in relevant proceedings. **The forum should promote greater intergovernmental cooperation to safeguard the rights of children in all relevant decisions relating to migration within and across borders.**

### **3. Scale of impact – possibly one child for every three adults**

Global numbers on children affected by migration are unknown. In Moldova, one-in-five children aged 0-14 years has an absent parent because of migration.<sup>iii</sup> Around 7 million children may be left-behind in the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand.<sup>iv</sup> A study conducted over a three month period at five checkpoints on the Nepal-India border counted over 25,000 children migrating with and without parents.<sup>v</sup> UNFPA has reported surveys in Mexico and Central America showing 40 percent of new arrivals at transit points towards the USA are aged 14 to 17 years.<sup>vi</sup> An ILO survey found that 42 percent of migrants across the Cambodian-Thai border were aged under 18 years.<sup>vii</sup> The movement of children across borders is greater into countries with large informal sectors, high degree of child labour and inadequate protection of children trafficked for sexual and labour exploitation.

**The forum should initiate a process to develop a globally agreed estimate of the scale of impact on children.** Without it, there is the widespread perception that international migration affects adults only.

A reasonable ‘rule of thumb’ for discussions at the forum might be that international migration affects one child for every three adults, either because the child migrates with parents, is left behind by parents or migrates independently.

## GLOBAL FORUM THEME 1: HUMAN CAPITAL AND LABOUR MOBILITY

### 4. Brain drain – the child dimension

Children in communities with high migration can face strong incentives to migrate. Continuing education might not be perceived as an alternative, because of low quality or non-existent schooling, and a lack of other opportunities. A World Bank study found that living in a migrant household in Mexico lowers the probability of completing high school by up to 14 percent.<sup>viii</sup> In some places, this may intensify the rural-urban divide in education. A study in China found a negative relationship between out-migration and rural schooling, observing that remittances from migration can fund schooling, but also increase the opportunity cost of staying in school.<sup>ix</sup> Financing education costs is a major motive for migration. Meeting the right to **education of quality for every child** is a central theme in linking international migration to development.

The **loss of service providers** such as teachers, nurses and doctors to migration also affect opportunities for children in countries of origin.

### 5. Temporary labour migration

Temporary worker schemes should include mechanisms to reduce the potential negative consequences for children left-behind by migrating parents. Adverse impacts may include psychosocial impacts, inadequate carers in place of absent parents, children caring for siblings and grandparents, institutionalisation, early marriage, and child labour. A study in Trinidad found that left-behind children were twice as likely to have emotional problems.<sup>x</sup> Parts of Central Asia have seen children increasingly doing the agricultural jobs left vacant by adult out-migration.<sup>xi</sup> Children left-behind may receive little or no remittances, especially in the first year, as migrant parents struggle to find work and repay debts incurred to finance migration, and as a result they may be exposed to deteriorating living conditions.<sup>xii</sup>

Strengthened public services and safety-nets in communities at origin could shift the burden away from children, as could greater policy attention on adults left-behind, because studies have also shown that – in the right contexts – left-behind children may be no worse-off than others.<sup>xiii</sup> The forum should consider ways in which **temporary worker schemes may be tied into programmes of support for children and communities left-behind**, and what form these mechanisms might take in practical terms. Without such investments, migration might simply increase the likelihood of the next generation migrating (as children, or as adults).

## GLOBAL FORUM THEME 2: REMITTANCES AND OTHER DIASPORA RESOURCES

### 6. Intergenerational equity – not just through private remittances

Attention to the distribution of economic benefits from international migration has been mostly cross-sectional, across migrants and non-migrants in countries of origin and destination. An important dimension of equity is across generations. Greater intergenerational equity in the benefits of migration could help **eliminate unmanaged migration within a few generations** by improving social and economic opportunities for future generations in countries of origin.

Children have a right to develop to their full potential, to their own identity, to enjoy their culture, to grow up in a family environment and to not be separated from their parents except in special circumstances.<sup>xiv</sup> The forum should call for investments to strengthen the social and economic conditions to make children’s rights a reality without discrimination of any kind. If international

migration grows in the next quarter century the same as the last quarter century, the World Bank estimates additional global economic benefits of US\$ 674 billion in 2025.<sup>xv</sup> This is immense compared to annual financing shortfalls of US\$ 9 billion for universal primary schooling by 2015, or US\$ 74 billion for all Millennium Development Goals.<sup>xvi</sup>

Children's development has widely-recognised 'public goods' characteristics. Private flows must not be seen as substitutes for public investment in quality services for the benefit of all children in a community. The forum should consider **enhanced global public finance mechanisms to ensure that all children with or without migrant parents have a fair share** in increased global wealth from international migration. Inclusive policies and targeted social investments should be used to ensure that marginal groups of children are given a priority attention, and are not further disadvantaged by the international migration of other people.

### **7. Children as senders of remittances**

Migrant children are sending remittances, and the forum should recognise this and encourage efforts to increase knowledge on this topic.

## **Global Forum Theme 3: Enhancing Institutional and Policy Coherence**

### **8. Invisible children**

Many children are marginalised because of the 'irregular migrant' status of their parents. Research in the USA suggests that having one irregular migrant parent increases the chances of a child living in poverty by 3 times, and having two irregular migrant parents increases it by 7 times.<sup>xvii</sup> Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, **children's rights are not conditional on the legal status of their parents**. The Council of Europe has noted the marked variation across governments in the treatment of migrant children in accessing very basic services in health and education.<sup>xviii</sup> A study in South Africa found that 70 percent of Somali refugee children were not registered in school.<sup>xix</sup>

The work of the forum under theme 3 must pay explicit attention to migrant groups that are discriminated against and under-researched, because these groups contain large numbers of highly vulnerable children. The forum should urge governments to ensure that children of migrants are not criminalised by proxy, and that policies to reduce irregular migration are not implemented in ways that are incompatible with treaty obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### **9. Trafficking and migration are different but often inter-related**

Trafficking is often confused with migration because both involve the movement of children. Trafficking is associated with exploitation of children and adults including for sexual and labour motives. Children also move – either independently, or accompanied by parents, guardians or relatives – in contexts which are not framed by exploitation. Trafficking is a human rights violation and international standards call for its criminalisation. Migration is a movement of persons in search of better living conditions and as such does not constitute a criminal offence. .

The forum should pay attention to the social, economic and political push factors in children's movement, because children affected by migration and victims of trafficking often have similar backgrounds rooted in a lack of opportunities, and migration may turn into situations of exploitation. The forum should consider how strengthening international borders may indirectly contribute to trafficking by driving more children into the informal sector, both in the process of movement and at destination. Safety-nets and protective measures are needed for children at risk. Child migrants may unknowingly find themselves on the wrong side of the law, leaving them more vulnerable to becoming victims of exploitation. The forum should urge governments to safeguard children's rights, not criminalise children affected by movement, and extend them full protection and support.

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- <sup>i</sup> These comments are intended to support UNICEF interventions at the Global Forum on Migration and Development to highlight the integral presence of children in international migration. Information on the forum is based on the document ‘Brief for Participation in the Global Forum on Migration and Development’, produced by UNICEF DPP/GPS
- <sup>ii</sup> One study estimates 70 percent of general comments by the Committee on the Rights of the Child are migration-related – see International Catholic Migration Mission and December 18 (2004). UN Treaty Monitoring Bodies and Migrant Workers. Barcelona
- <sup>iii</sup> UNICEF (2006). Impact of Migration on Children in the CEE/CIS. Discussion Paper 5, UNICEF Regional Office for CEE/CIS, Geneva
- <sup>iv</sup> John Bryant (2005). Children of International Migrants in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines. Innocenti Working Paper 2005-05, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence
- <sup>v</sup> Central Child Welfare Board and Save the Children (2005). Migration of Nepalese Children to India. Katmandu
- <sup>vi</sup> UNFPA (2006) State of World Population 2006. New York
- <sup>vii</sup> ILO (2005). A Cross-border Labour Migration Survey in Banteay Meanchey Province, Cambodia. ILO Mekong Challenge Project, Bangkok
- <sup>viii</sup> David McKenzie and Hillel Rapoport (2006). Can Migration Reduce Education Attainments? Depressing Evidence from Mexico. Policy Research Working Paper 3952, World Bank, Washington DC
- <sup>ix</sup> The study estimated that an increase of ten out-migrants from a village was associated with a 4.9 percent decrease in the probability of a middle school graduate enrolling in high school – see Alan de Brauw and John Giles (2005). Migrant Opportunity and the Educational Attainment of Youth in Rural China. Discussion Paper 2326, Institute for the Study of Labor, Bonn. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=757726>
- <sup>x</sup> Adele Jones, Jacqueline Sharpe and Michele Segren (2004). Children’s Experiences of Separation from Parents as a Consequence of Migration. Caribbean Journal of Social Work, 3, pp.89-109.
- <sup>xi</sup> *Asia News*, 20 July 2004, Children Skip School to Pick Cotton. (Accessed 2 July 2007: <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=1174&geo=47&size=A>)
- <sup>xii</sup> In Moldova, 25 percent of surveyed children received little or no remittances – see UNICEF (2006). Impact of Migration on Children in the CEE/CIS. Discussion Paper 5, UNICEF Regional Office for CEE/CIS, Geneva
- <sup>xiii</sup> John Bryant (2005). Children of International Migrants in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines. Innocenti Working Paper 2005-05, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence
- <sup>xiv</sup> See Articles 7, 8, 9, 10, 18 and 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child
- <sup>xv</sup> Lant Pritchett (2006). Let Their People Come: Breaking the Gridlock on Global Labor Mobility. Centre for Global Development, Washington DC
- <sup>xvi</sup> Enrique Delamonica, Santosh Mehrotra and Jan Vandemoortele (2001). Is EFA Affordable? Estimating the Global Minimum Cost of ‘Education for all’, Innocenti Working Paper 87, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence; UN Millennium Project (2005). Investing in Development: Overview Report, United Nations, New York
- <sup>xvii</sup> Shawn Kanaiaupuni (2000). Child Well-being and the Intergenerational Effects of Undocumented Immigrant Status, Discussion Paper 1210-00, Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin
- <sup>xviii</sup> Council of Europe (2003). Ad-hoc Working Group on Irregular Migrants. Strasbourg Meeting, 17-18 December 2003
- <sup>xix</sup> Global Commission on International Migration (2005). Migration in an Interconnected World: New Directions for Action. Geneva, p.50